

# Public Good E-Newsletter

*Engaging campus and community for the public good.*

Spring Quarter - 2008

Issue 1



## Director's Note

By: Eric Fretz, Director, Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (CCESL)

A curious reader might wonder about the need for a newsletter from CCESL. It's a fair question, and we've got a clear answer:

DU faculty members are becoming increasingly interested in incorporating community-based learning (CBL) and public good scholarship into their teaching and research. To meet this increasing need and interest we will publish this newsletter at the beginning of each quarter in order to:

1. Provide resources for faculty interested in, or already, teaching community-based learning courses or engaging in public good research projects.
2. Highlight faculty, students and community partners who are accomplishing innovative community-based work.

You might wonder what an innovative community-based learning project really looks like. What are the challenges and the rewards? What are the logistical considerations, and research and writing opportunities when engaging in CBL?

Each issue of the Public Good E-Newsletter will highlight public good work that incorporates faculty, students and community partners, answering your questions and hopefully inspiring your work in the community. For our premier issue the faculty spotlight is on Dr. Kate Willink from the Department of Human Communications, read below to find out more.

## Faculty Spotlight: Kate Willink

By: Eric Fretz, CCESL Director

**Kate Willink is not afraid to put her students on the street.**

In the fall of 2007, Dr. Kate Willink, from the Department of Human Communication Studies, received a CCESL grant to develop a strategic partnership with El Centro Humanitario (ECH). ECH is a Denver-based organization committed to defending the human rights of day laborers.

In their effort to open a day labor center in Aurora, ECH met resistance from City administrators and officials. ECH wanted to find out where the resistance was coming from and how to create positive working relationships with Aurora residents and legislators who were struggling with the situation.

In November 2007, Willink began meeting with ECH director, Minsun Ji, and together, they developed a set of research questions and tasks. The initial outcome of these conversations was a graduate level Human Communication course on immigration and intercultural communication taught by Willink during the 2008 winter quarter.

Over the course of the quarter, Willink's students operationalized the research questions identified by Ji and developed and implemented two projects that addressed the strategic needs of ECH.

**DU students provided meaningful and much needed community-based research for ECH, contributing to the University's commitment to the public good.**



*Our mission is to educate, engage, and equip the campus community to accomplish tangible, public work that improves the lives of people in our communities.*

## Announcements

### Public Good Celebration:

April 3, 5-7:30 pm, in the Community Room of Craig Hall. Join us as we celebrate the public good work of DU faculty and students. \*RSVP

### Public Good Lecture:

April 4, 11:30-1:30 pm, in the Community Room of Craig Hall. Dr. Scobey will present on "Making Use of All Our Faculties: The Intellectual Generativity of Public Work." \*RSVP

### Public Good Fund Proposal Prep Session:

May 19, 4pm-6pm, in the Garden Room of The Women's College. Interested in writing a Public Good Fund proposal? Join us for a session to learn best practices for writing a successful Public Good grant, and network with CCESL community partners. \*RSVP

### Service-Learning Pods:

Contact us if you are interested in joining a small group of your colleagues who are pursuing a variety of discipline-based and interdisciplinary questions around CBL teaching, learning and research.

The first student group identified local business owners, government officials, council members, residents and local community-based organizations that had a stake in the development of a day labor center in Aurora. Subsequently, they designed and implemented a one-on-one interview process to gather the multiple perspectives of these community members. After they analyzed the data, the students worked with ECH administrators and established a broad-based community dialogue that brought stakeholders together to discuss their concerns, and to learn how to work together. Over 50 Aurora residents participated in the dialogue, and as a result of the process, ECH learned that community support for the day labor center was more enthusiastic than City officials had previously imagined.



Another group of Willink's students wrote a research report that has been used by ECH to further strategize the development of the center. The report examined the roots of resistance to the day labor center. In addition to traditional research, students interviewed City Council members, City administrators, business owners, people who hire day laborers, and day laborers themselves. The research report examined the "communication phenomenon" around the negotiations of the development of the center and contextualized the problem within the immigration history of the City of Aurora. Also included in the report was an analysis of recent economic development initiatives in the City and how those initiatives were affecting residents' perceptions of the new center.

### **Why would Dr. Willink, a first-year professor on a tenure track, take the time and effort to offer this course?**

For Willink, community-based learning (CBL) is a powerful teaching tool that provides her students with learning opportunities that cannot be achieved in a traditional classroom. Through their work with ECH, students produced knowledge that built common understanding and social capital networks around a controversial and polarizing issue.



This course was important to Willink because it gave her students an opportunity to see themselves as actors on a public stage, by opening opportunities for students to act as cultural workers and to create knowledge that brought people together around common issues and concerns.

### **While the rewards outweighed the challenges, Willink admits that community-based learning can be demanding.**

Willink defines the rewards of the quarter as the impact her students' work had on a community organization and an important community issue. At the same time, she is not shy about listing the challenges. CBL takes more of Willink's time inside and outside of the classroom because she has to develop and nurture partnerships in the community, as well as, help students adjust to a way of learning that is different from their traditional expectations.

CBL courses like Willink's provide opportunities for students to apply academic theories to real world problems and they bring the university's intellectual and human resources into partnership with the needs of community organizations. Such courses help our students develop a capacity for civic action within an academic context, and they result in the production of knowledge that makes our communities more livable for everyone.

Interested in developing a CBL course? Contact us and we'll match you with some of our amazing community partners who have a need for your expertise: [engage@du.edu](mailto:engage@du.edu) or 202.871.3706

### **Service-Learning Faculty Scholars Program:**

This program is designed to increase community-based learning capacity on campus by giving faculty an opportunity to examine recent scholarship in the field, develop a set of best practices, and be part of a faculty team interested in connecting their teaching and research to critical community issues.

*\*For all events please RSVP to [engage@du.edu](mailto:engage@du.edu), or x13706 at least one week in advance.*

If you have story ideas for the Public Good E-Newsletter please contact:

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