

THE SERVICE LEARNING NEWSLETTER

Fall 2008
Issue #8

Student
Issue

Academics with Service build stronger communities

Student Voices: Why Service Learning Works

This issue of the *Service Learning Newsletter* is dedicated to those individuals for whom service learning should have the most impact - our students. Service learning connects curriculum with purposeful community service related to students' discipline of study. In this issue, we showcase students from four departments that all share one theme in common - the impact service experiences have on student learning and their participation in the community. We hope you will find these stories as inspiring as we did.

Ais Hang, Psychology (Child Development)

This spring, 2008, I had the pleasure of being a part of the Service Learning course, *CDEV 3550: Early Intervention with High Risk Children* with Dr. Jennifer Henk. Through this class, I had first hand experience in providing early intervention services to children and their families. In collaboration with the community agency, Parent Resource Center, home visits were made to children in the community that were believed to be at risk for future developmental problems. With a partner, I made home visits to two families twice weekly. Each week we would bring a book or a toy to model for the parents on how to interact with the child.

As I reflect upon my community service learning, I am amazed with the wealth of knowledge that I acquired from this one small experience. This small experience has given me another outlook on the needs of the young children in our society. I have been impacted deeply, and I will continue to make a difference in the lives of children.

From this course, I have developed more empathy than ever for early intervention, young children, and volunteers. Before this course, I felt sorry for the child living in low



Ais Hang
Psychology

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socioeconomic areas. Now, I see and understand how strong-willed the children are and what kind of interventions are helpful for them. I know that I can make a difference in these young lives. I know that with the support of programs like Parent Child Home Program, young children at high risk will succeed in life and increase their abilities to the fullest.

The service learning experience was a great way to learn. By having first hand experiences, I was able to grasp more easily the course objectives and gain concrete understanding of the population that we served. The experience also re-enforced what I learned in class, which made the learning more profound and meaningful.

This experience has been challenging to me, but I believe in positive ways. Personally, I am challenging myself to volunteer more and to continue to advocate for early intervention for young children. The most difficult part of this challenge is finding the time between working full time and going to school full time. The experience has also challenged my ideals and philosophies in working with children. Before being a home visitor, I used encouragement, instead of praise to acknowledge children's achievements and actions. During my service learning experiences, I learned to praise, but in a more effective manner. For example, instead of just saying "good job," I would say,

"The service learning experience re-enforced what I learned in class, which made the learning more profound and meaningful."

Ais Hang,
Psychology

"Angelica, I heard you say orange. That is an orange block. Good job." It was difficult to do this consistently, but over time, I naturally did it.

It was very rewarding to help children in need. It is even more rewarding when I see the smiling faces of the children as I visited their homes. Their smiles showed me that they valued my time and investment in their future. I am satisfied with my work with the home visits. It was very sad to have to say farewell and part with the families.

The most important change that has happened to me from being a part of this service learning experience is that I have started to advocate for children's needs and programs. I also have started to do some research on what the local community has to offer children and what resources the community still lacks. I will continue to advocate for children that need my voice to improve their lives! I hope that more individuals will be involved in early intervention.

Jessica Censoplano, Criminal Justice

I am a student majoring in Criminal Justice at CSU Stanislaus. While taking *CJ 4230: Juvenile Justice* in the fall 2007, under the direction of Dr. Timothy Helfer, I was introduced to the Mentor Program. This program, led by Mr. Gil Ogden, Superintendent of the Turlock Unified School District, and the Office of Service Learning, allows CSU Stanislaus students the opportunity to mentor at-risk youth in Turlock. At-risk youth includes those who suffer from hunger anxiety, have affiliations with gang activity, or have been involved in the juvenile court system. Our fall program included about 15 mentors. Most mentors received two protégées from Roselawn High School. I visited two girls I was assigned separately at their school twice a week for eight weeks. As I built a rapport with the girls, they were able to open up to me in order to discuss academic progress, as well as discuss long and short term goals.



Jessica Censoplano

Criminal Justice
(Center with high school protégées)

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The purpose of this program was to influence the youth in a positive manner, and show them there are opportunities and assistance available to them, including higher education.

As a part of the program, I decided to organize a "Mentor Social." This event was designed to inform the junior and senior protégées about CSU Stanislaus and the support that is available to help them enter college. I arranged two guest speakers, food and beverages, a DJ, as well as raffle prizes. The event was a success, and I definitely couldn't have accomplished my goal without the help of Dr. Timothy Helfer, Julie Fox and Brett Forray with the Office of Service Learning, the Criminal Justice Club, Mami Trussell, and the Student Outreach Office here at CSU Stanislaus.

The Mentor Program is a wonderful opportunity to help youth in our community who might not otherwise see the possibilities in front of them. My hope was that sharing my experiences and struggles would empower the younger students. What I wasn't prepared for was the impact it was going to have on me. Many people associate the criminal justice system with its measures of prosecution. My class allowed me to see the other side of the criminal justice system that strives to prevent crimes from occurring through community outreach programs like the Mentor Program. Two months after the conclusion of the program, I maintain contact with my two protégées and since then I have adopted two more girls! Because of my experience in the Mentor Program I believe the juvenile justice system is the most important aspect of our judicial process. There are not words to explain my desire to help make a difference in a child's life.

"I wasn't prepared for the impact (the service learning course) was going to have on me. My class allowed me to see the community outreach programs like the Mentor Program."

Jessica Censoplano,
Criminal Justice

Jan Tucker, Sociology

In the past two years I have had multiple opportunities to participate in the service learning program at CSU Stanislaus. I worked for three semesters with the local homeless population which is served by the C.A.R.E.S. Resource Center. Sociology courses on mental illness, poverty and hunger, and the internship program, all of which were taught by Dr. Tamara Sniezek, provided me with the opportunity to participate in the service learning program. The service learning experience allowed me to work with individuals that were experiencing the social issues that I was learning about in the classroom. Initially, my participation in the program was required coursework; however, I developed a relationship with the members of the homeless community, which led me to enroll in additional service learning classes and to complete my internship hours at the C.A.R.E.S. Resource Center. Participation in service learning has enriched my educational experience and



Jan Tucker

Sociology

(Jan holds the "C. Wright Mills Award" for her innovative work in Sociology at the university-sponsored C.A.R.E.S. Resource Center)

allowed me to form relationships with other service providers, which will be helpful in obtaining employment in my professional field. I have had the opportunity to attend and participate in the Community Collaborative, Parole And Corrections Team, and Turlock Against Gangs meetings. These meetings have given me the opportunity to interact with diverse populations as well as providing introductions to the people responsible for administering these programs. I have also gained a heightened awareness of the role of city government, both in addressing the needs and creating additional tribulations for marginalized populations. The temporary cold weather shelter issue has been a catalyst to my involvement in city government proceedings.

The homeless community is an underserved and complex population. My service learning experience has raised my awareness of homeless community members as individuals with unique personalities and interests. The homeless issue becomes much more personal when those who are living on the streets become individuals and not just the

“homeless.” The biggest challenge that I faced when working with this population was gaining their trust. They are used to people coming in and out of their lives with little or no continuity, and are reluctant to bond with people outside of their community. Once they realized that I was committed to working toward bettering their situation and sincerely cared about them as individuals they openly welcomed me into their community. The personal growth and professional opportunities that I have attained through the service learning program will have a positive impact on my future endeavors.



“Participation in service learning has allowed me to form relationships with service providers, which will be helpful to obtain employment in my professional field.”

Jan Tucker,
Sociology

Carole Swan, Sociology



Carole Swan

Sociology
(left with husband)

During my senior year at CSU Stanislaus, I first became acquainted with the C.A.R.E.S. Resource Center, a University sponsored referral and resource center for the homeless. I was searching for a class in my major, Sociology, when I came upon a course entitled *SOCL 3500: Sociology of Poverty and Hunger* taught by Dr. Tamara Sniezek. The university catalog explained that it was a service-learning course, which, at the time, meant nothing to me. As my sociological interest had often led me to explore those who “have” and those who “have not” in society, a class examining poverty and hunger seemed a perfect fit for me. What I didn’t realize at the time was that the C.A.R.E.S. Resource Center would also be a perfect fit.

As part of the class, I was to complete two hours per week during the semester at the center. From the moment

I stepped across the threshold, I knew this was a place and a population that would encompass my heart. Each week I looked forward to my time at C.A.R.E.S.: working with the homeless, hearing their stories, and sharing their secrets. The semester ended all too soon and my time at C.A.R.E.S. also ended. Before my final days at the center, I

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“Without the service learning class, I may never have realized that my purpose was to work with and advocate for those people whose daily struggle was just to find life’s basic necessities.”

Carole Swan,
Sociology

explained to the staff that I was entering the Masters of Social Work program and that, if possible, I would like very much to do my internship at the center.

I did become the C.A.R.E.S. intern and worked with a population that has little or no voice in their community. However, I did discover that the staff at C.A.R.E.S. seeks tirelessly to see to it that the homeless do have a say in what happens in their lives. The staff works together to effect positive changes within the homeless community while empowering that community to realize its full potential. Additionally, they recognize that this center can be the catalyst for the much-needed changes that must occur within the larger Turlock community.

Working at C.A.R.E.S. has afforded me an in-depth look into the lives of the homeless. One of the first things I must do as a social worker is to choose a specialty. If I choose to work with the homeless population, and my passion informs me that I will, my responsibilities will be two fold: first, to meet and service the needs of the homeless who are struggling to cope with life and, secondly, to raise the issue which few choose to consider. It would be my responsibility to discuss and advocate for the requirements of decent housing, basic medical care, and the dignity that all

humans who walk on this green earth should be afforded.

My internship at the C.A.R.E.S. Resource Center has come to an end. That part of my master’s program may be over; however, my admiration continues for the staff at the center. To see a few dedicated people who believe in the ideals of social justice, that is, striving for equality of all people is commendable and worthy of praise. I have learned a great deal and forged friendships which, I trust, will endure. I will not forget those about who too little is known and who have been all too often forgotten. My introduction into the world of the oppressed was the class on Poverty and Hunger. Without this service learning class, I may never have realized that my purpose was to work with and advocate for those people whose daily struggle was just to find life’s most basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter. I would encourage all students to seek out service learning classes and, perhaps, they too will find their passion.

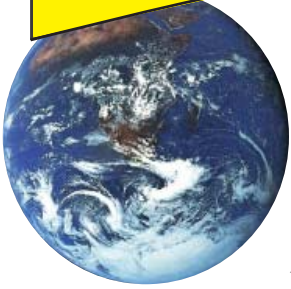
GEOG 4350: Urban Geography students tour the airport neighborhood community in Modesto, Ca.



Students in GEOG 4350: Urban Geography

During the 2008 spring semester, geography students in Dr. Jennifer Helzer’s *GEOG 4350: Urban Geography* class worked with community leaders at Airport Neighbors United, Inc. and Habitat for Humanity in Stanislaus County to assist residents in Modesto’s airport neighborhood community. The Geography students interviewed local businesses, took bus trips throughout the neighborhood, and conducted archival research to create an asset map diagramming the strengths and challenges faced by residents in this underserved community using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping technology. The students’ detailed map highlighted strengths and challenges faced by this community. At the end of the semester, students presented the asset map to airport neighborhood residents, Habitat for Humanity, and educational and law enforcement officials.

Below, students shared the following reflections on their experiences as a result of this service learning project.



Tatiana Khobiar, Social Science, History

The service learning experience and the learning objectives in my Urban Geography class went hand in hand to make this course so successful. If the point of sitting in a classroom is to learn, and urban geography is supposed to explore urban settings, then our service learning project completely satisfied the requirements for both. Rather than reading about underdeveloped neighborhoods, looking at maps, and researching the effect a city can have on its community, we as a class visited a neglected neighborhood and made our own GIS map and graph, met with community members and heard their stories first hand. We as a class got more out of this course due to the service learning project than we would have by merely reading books and viewing slides.

Jayme Greer, Geography

Our Airport Neighborhood project was the highlight of my semester and maybe of my entire college career. It is always refreshing to have the opportunity to work outside the classroom. While working with the airport neighborhood community, our class actually made a contribution to the lives of a community. This was the first time in which I utilized by geographical skills for something truly worthwhile.

Josh Hollinger, Geography

A student can only learn so much within a classroom. A student will truly understand concepts if they can apply them outside of the classroom, otherwise those concepts will not have a wider meaning. We have said time and again in class that the airport neighborhood community is a unique place. Talking about these issues in class only brings them to the student's attention. Working with community members at Airport Neighbors United, Inc. has been an enlightening and rewarding experience. Working as a class to help a community in need is worth more than the letter grade we will receive at the end of the semester. Knowing that people in the airport neighborhood can benefit from our work is reward enough for the work we put into this project. The response that the GIS asset map got from the airport neighborhood community was encouraging, as well.

Leticia Barrios, Social Science, Urban & Community Studies

The service experience was directly connected with the class because, as geographers, an asset map allows us to see how community resources are spread out, how they should be spread out, and how they are not spread out. The class really made the connection between the importance of urban politics, public administration, and geography. It also made me realize how important it is to get involved with the community.

"A student can only learn so much within a classroom. A student will truly understand concepts if they can apply them outside of the classroom, otherwise those concepts will not have a wider meaning."

Josh Hollinger,
Geography

Andy Morgan, Geography

The Office of Service Learning played a major role in preparing us for this project. It is great to see a project that actually makes a difference. I have done many projects in my career at CSU Stanislaus, but none that have had a direct effect on a community of people. Service learning projects put classroom work into real life situations.

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