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Linking Academic Excellence and Social Justice through Community-Based Participatory Research

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Naomi Yavneh Klos poses two questions for the NCHC community in her essay, "Thinking Critically, Acting Justly," which appears in this issue of *JNCHC*: (1) how honors pedagogy/curriculum can engage the highest-ability and most motivated students in questions of social justice; and (2) how the honors curriculum can serve as a place of access, equity, and excellence in higher education. The University Honors Program (UHP) at Loyola University New Orleans has recently implemented several honors social justice seminars that have been experimenting with various approaches to these pedagogical, curricular, and programmatic questions. Violence and Democracy, an honors sociology/criminology seminar, not only focuses on social justice thematically but adopts social justice pedagogy (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Pedagogy of Hope*; Adams, "Social" and "Pedagogical"; Bell). Accordingly, social justice is both a goal and a process, representing the integration of disciplinary theoretical knowledge and analytical tools

with experiential learning and applications that involve students, faculty, and community partners doing justice work together. The premise for this holistic approach is that students, particularly high-ability and highly motivated students, personally engage in questions of social justice when they are challenged by real-life social injustices and that they realize the relevance of their knowledge and skills in a learning environment that models social justice values and principles.

DISCIPLINARY AND THEMATIC FOCUS

Using the perspective and analytical tools of social science, Violence and Democracy, from here on referred to as the seminar, provides a broad, interdisciplinary understanding of the complexities and controversies surrounding the problem of violence in democratic societies, with special emphasis on the antithetical relationship between violence and democracy (Keane). The seminar engages students in an examination of the overarching relationship between violence and the violation of democratic principles and also in deliberating the possibility of effectively reducing violence through a greater commitment to democratic values (Perrin) that would include equality, freedom, social justice, the preservation of human rights, and a demonstrative preference for non-violence.

The purpose of the seminar is not only to serve as a vehicle for imparting disciplinary skills and knowledge about expressions of violence but also to engage its students, faculty, and community partners in collaborative justice work. The collaborative work fosters a critical understanding of social justice issues, calls for responsible social action, and serves as a catalyst in the development or reinforcement of students' commitment to lifelong learning and lifelong service.

A thematically relevant community-based participatory research project is the main seminar activity. The project focuses on a particular form of structural violence and injustice such that faculty and students work alongside community partners to address the actual research needs of a community service provider. The project suggests the potential role of social science in reducing violence (Dvoskin et al.) and plays a facilitative role in making students more aware of social justice issues in real-life contexts and of their own potential to contribute to the community by assisting a service agency with its justice work.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

To maximize individual and collective engagement in the process of learning, the seminar is experiential and collaborative, representing a community of learners/scholars among whom information and experiences are shared, assertions questioned, hypotheses tested, issues debated, conclusions analyzed, cultural critical analysis practiced, and reflection encouraged both individually and collectively. Members of the seminar work together as a team on in-class activities as well as an off-campus, community-based, participatory research project.

The seminar is organized around four sets of student learning objectives (SLOs):

1. Enhance understanding and appreciation of social science perspectives and scientifically constructed knowledge, including the ability to critically analyze data/information, apply learned research skills in a real-life setting, and transport applications to other thematic/subject areas and social contexts;

2. Encourage professionalism and teamwork in synthesizing and producing social science information by developing the ability to (a) conduct comprehensive literature searches and critical reviews; (b) articulate orally and in writing the strengths and weaknesses of theories/research related to violence, social injustice, and human rights violations; (c) work collaboratively and empathetically with community partners as co-investigators, designing and conducting research following the scientific method and ethical principles; (d) document actual cases of structural violence and injustices; (e) perform quantitative/qualitative analyses and draw conclusions; and (f) effectively communicate orally and in writing the findings/results of the research project.

3. Advance meta-level thinking concepts and skills including cultural critical consciousness (awareness of structural violence in society, patterns of inequality, and violations of human rights); cultural literacy (ability to identify community needs as well as recognize community capacity to address problems); enhanced self-awareness (ability to critically reflect on one's own understandings of social justice issues with seminar materials and community applications); and community-based critical participatory inquiry (ability to collaborate with seminar members and community partners with humility and mutual

respect for diversity, equality, and inclusivity as well as to engage in critical dialogue and participatory analysis).

4. Increase engagement with social justice issues and foster hope in effecting change (recognize the importance of critical awareness, knowledge, skills, and community-based participatory practice in realizing change); heighten appreciation of the relevance of educational experience to other areas of study (draw connections between seminar materials and experiences with other courses across the honors curriculum tying educational excellence with social justice); and enhance students' self efficacy (expand their self-confidence as researchers who know how to achieve social justice and social change through collaborative social justice/social action research).

SOCIAL JUSTICE PEDAGOGY

The seminar's set of values and methods for teaching/learning about poverty, oppression, and social justice has been inspired by the Ignatian vision of education (Loyola; Kammer), Paulo Freire's articulation of critical pedagogy, and the principles and values associated with social justice education including social justice pedagogy (e.g., Adams, "Social" and "Pedagogical"; Bell; Brookfield & Holst; Young; Zajda et al.; Goodman; Sandoval). These three influences share a number of conceptual elements and underpinnings.

The Ignatian vision of education represents a 500-year global educational tradition that welcomes students of diverse backgrounds and prepares them to lead meaningful lives with and for others, to pursue truth, wisdom, and virtue, and to work for a more just world. A key tenet of the Ignatian vision of education is "cura personalis" or care of the whole person (intellectual, moral, spiritual, physical, and social); forming competence, conscience, and compassion; and fostering lifelong learning and lifelong service (Loyola Core). Among its educational ideals are the pursuit of excellence; respect for the world, its history and mystery; learning from experience; contemplative vision formed by hope; development of personal potential; critical thinking and effective communication; commitment to service; special concern for the poor and oppressed; linking faith with justice; and discerning mindset (Loyola University; Kammer).

Paulo Freire's vision of liberation education or critical pedagogy (also referred to as Freirean pedagogy), which overlaps with a number of the Ignatian ideals, is more process-oriented with a focus on the formation of critical

consciousness through student-centered dialogue rooted in everyday life as well as academic and disciplinary subject matter. The following descriptive values may encapsulate Freirean pedagogy: participatory (interactive and co-operative); situated (personally related to a student's thoughts, language, and social conditions); critically conscious (focused on awakening students' critical consciousness and encouraging critical reflection on their own knowledge and language, subject matter, quality of the learning environment, and the relationship of knowledge to society); democratic (accessible to students, encouraging participation, expression of ideas, and the right to negotiate curriculum and evaluate curriculum); dialogic (based on problem-oriented dialogue); desocializing (desocializing students from passive roles and authority dependence as well as desocializing teachers from domineering roles and teacher-talk); activist (interactive, co-operative and participatory, seeking action outcomes from inquiries and raising question from actions); affective (involving the mind, heart, and emotions); and research-oriented (engagement in community research where students are critical researchers inquiring into routine experiences, society and social patterns, social justice issues, and the interplay of academic material) (Shor). Even though Freire is generally critical of the notion of value-neutral education and research, which often reproduce and reinforce structural domination patterns and inequalities, he does leave open the possibility for democratic knowledge production and the radical potential emanating from participatory social-action research or public research. In his *Pedagogy of Oppression*, Freire writes:

> For apart from inquiry, apart from praxis, individuals can not be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other. (10)

Social justice pedagogy (SJP) is premised on the idea that optimal learning is "experiential, participant-centered, inclusive, collaborative, and democratic" (Adams, *Pedagogical* 29). SJP forms learning communities in class and off-campus where participants share and learn from one another, engage in inquiry-based dialogue among equals, and collaborate in community justice work, leading to greater critical self-awareness and deeper understanding of lived experiences. Awareness of the patterns of violence, oppression, and social injustice generate new meanings of self and society and ultimately new hope in community efficacy and the possibility of improvement.

In the framework of SJP, providing opportunities for developing cultural critical consciousness in and out of class and facilitating collective- and self-reflection (Gay; Gay & Kirkland; Morley) are pedagogically essential. For instance, routine collective- and self-reflections help students process what they have learned, how their knowledge and skills have been applied, and what value the seminar has had on their ability to identify community needs and engage with social justice issues (e.g., Diejarz; Gibbs). Realizing the relevancy of knowledge/skills applications in the context of working with and for others in solidarity with the community (Honors Consortium) is important in enhancing learning and strengthening commitment to a continuous process of improvement (Gee; Kolb; Eyler).

SJP integrates learning goals with holistic pedagogical processes that bring together theoretical and experiential domains to make a real difference in the world. According to social justice pedagogy, the goal is "to affirm, model, and sustain socially just learning environments for all participants and, by so modeling, to offer hope that equitable relations and social structures can be achieved in the broader society" (Bell 3). To achieve this goal, the pedagogical process must be "democratic and participatory, respectful of human diversity and group differences, inclusive and affirmative of human agency and capacity for working collaboratively with others to create change" (Bell 3). In the context of SJP, what students learn and how they learn must be integrated, coherent, and compatible.

SEMINAR STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

The seminar is designed to model social justice pedagogy, and it incorporates five main components: 1. participant presentations/lectures and inquiry-based dialogue/discussions, 2. planned readings and in-class activities, 3. planned off-campus community-based participatory research project, 4. seminar resources, and 5. assessment.

Component 1—Participant Presentations/Lectures and Inquiry-Based Dialogue/Discussions

Participant presentations/lectures and associated inquiry-led dialogues and discussions primarily function to communicate disciplinary content and foundational social science skills as well as necessary information and a tool kit to inform the community-based research project. Typically, the seminar enrolls ten to fifteen student participants, who represent various disciplinary

majors. As a result, the introductory foundation-building component of the seminar engenders a learning environment that gives everyone in the class equal access to relevant new knowledge and tools as well as opportunities for class members to share their own experiences and areas of strengths. The disciplinary diversity of class members contributes a positive, synergistic effect that enlivens discussions and demonstrates how students' different areas of study may inform seminar discussions. Furthermore, the broad diversity represented by the participants—e.g., multi-social identities based on race, ethnicity, family income levels, gender, and residence—creates a base of common knowledge, shared concepts, vocabulary, critical analysis, and research skills that facilitates dialogue, encouraging all participants to take ownership of seminar content.

Seminar content is organized in seven units:

- Definition of key concepts of violence and democracy, including the democratic values of equality and the preservation of social justice and human rights;
- Social construction of violence, oppression, and social injustice;
- Mediated patterns of violence and justice: public perceptions and common myths vs. scientific evidence;
- Official measurement and the scientific study of violence and justice;
- Review of levels and types of interpersonal, institutional, and structural violence and associated social responses;
- Major theoretical paradigms, associated research evidence, and critical analysis of strengths and weaknesses; and
- Community justice advocacy and responsible social action: making a difference through social action research.

Information related to the community-based research project and consideration of social justice issues run across all units, which expose underlying assumptions of stock knowledge, conscious and unconscious influences on mainstream constructions of social reality, and why social justice matters (Barry). The critical discourse facilitates development of new knowledge and skills that challenge the common understandings of violence and the patterns of oppression and injustice, giving hope for meaningful change.

Even though all class members have some prior knowledge related to violence in society, what they know is typically based on mediated perceptions

and myths, not necessarily on scientific information (Voigt et al.; Iadicola & Shupe). Seminar presentations and critical dialogue debunk popular myths and demonstrate the cultural and scientific ambiguity surrounding violence and justice. For example, the term "violence" typically refers to legal violations as defined by the criminal law, such as homicide, rape, robbery, and assault, which are stereotypically represented as interpersonal or individual problems found in homes, workplaces, schools, places of worship, and communities. What is less commonly understood is how violence is associated with institutional- or structural-level harms and evidence of patterns of social injustices and violation of human rights (Keane). People often ignore, rationalize, and accept social injustices related to public policies, homelessness, mass incarceration, or forced migration that lead to human rights violations based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, and social class and that affect the health and wellbeing of many generations of people. Class discussions of such difficult issues develop critical thinking skills and create a "troubled common sense" in the class (Fine). With students' realization of the complexity and often contradictory forms of violence, in contrast to social myths and responses, comes discomfort, which provides a powerful motivation to engage with social justice issues and get involved in responsible social activism.

Instructional materials and discussions lead students to analyze and reflect on uncomfortable everyday realities and to see how the concept of violence is used to categorize certain behaviors, types of people, and communities rather than to describe concrete phenomena. Reflecting on how the concept of violence contributes to pejorative labeling, serving mainly as an intensifier of emotions or judgments, students see how the concept leads to mistrust and fear of others. Given its conceptual lack of specificity and function as a symbolic intensifier, students see that the concept of violence has lent itself to being politically exploited, and they are challenged to consider the ways that violence labels are applied based on class, race, ethnicity, and gender identity and lead to human rights violations such as restricting people from certain zones in the city or denial of voting rights.

By challenging students to go beyond narrow depictions of violence to a broader study of violence, especially in the context of democratic values, their understanding extends beyond criminal violence at the interpersonal level to institutional and structural forms of violence (Iadicola & Shupe; Bufacchi; Keane). In-class discussions about these issues play a vital role in preparing students for their community-based research project as well as preparing them to be more critically aware of their own values, perceptions, interactions, and interpretations of social reality. In the process of questioning

taken-for-granted social constructions of reality, such as stereotypical representations of social justice in terms of "normalized injustice" (Fine), the seminar examines official public responses such as legislative acts or public policies that fail to acknowledge social injustices and human rights violations.

Component 2—Planned Readings and In-Class Activities

The required readings include journal articles and books associated with disciplinary content, e.g., *Why Violence?* by Voigt et al. and Perrin's *American Democracy*), as well as journal articles, national reports, and books related to the community-based project. For instance, if the theme of the research project is homelessness, the required readings include Beckett & Herbert's *Banished*; Desmond's *Evicted*; *Housing First* by Padgett et al., and *The State of Homelessness in America* published by the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

Each assignment aligns with particular learning objectives and corresponds with a learning/performance/process/evaluation rubric. A sample set of in-class seminar assignments (using homelessness as the theme for illustrative purposes where appropriate) includes the following:

- *Participation in a class debate and completion of a position paper*. Predicated on an assigned reading, each class member is responsible for submitting a position paper (5–8 pages) in addition to participating in a class debate on a selected structural violence/social justice topic. For instance, based on a critical analysis of a book related to the community-based research project (e.g., Padgett et al.), students produce individual position papers following a set of questions and guidelines. On the assignment due date, students come to class prepared to participate on a randomly assigned team to debate the advantages and disadvantages of the Housing First approach to end homelessness.

- *Critical book review*. Following a list of questions and guidelines, students submit a written critical review (5–8 pages) of a selected book that is relevant to the specific community-based research project, e.g., Beckett & Herbert or Desmond. On the day the book reviews are due, class members discuss the relative scientific merits of the books' key arguments and how they might help inform the students' community work.

- *In-class presentations*. Teams of two or three students are assigned to consider the individual, institutional, and structural levels of a specific

topic, e.g., homelessness and mental illness, homelessness and substance abuse, the criminalization of homelessness, homeless children and families, homelessness among military veterans, and homelessness among college students. Team members work together in conducting a comprehensive literature review on the topic and in preparing a class presentation, using presentation software, that follows a pre-set outline and list of questions to facilitate discussions. Class presentations are approximately twenty minutes long. In addition, students post presentation slides with citations, notes, and a bibliography on the class *Blackboard* site. All presentations are followed by a Q&A session and class discussion.

Component 3—Planned Community-Based Participatory Research Project

A semester prior to the seminar, the Office of Community Engaged Learning, Teaching and Scholarship (CELTS) emails, on behalf of the seminar professor, a request for proposals (RFP) along with the seminar syllabus to a list of social service agencies working with victims of violence or problems related to structural violence. The RFP specifically focuses on agency research needs. Proposal submissions are evaluated with respect to their appropriateness for a semester-long research project, relevance to the seminar's social justice learning goals and objectives, and mutual benefits for all participants.

Students then engage in a semester-long research project that supports the selected social service agency's justice work. Students work collaboratively with community partners to plan the steps of the project, determine the deliverables and projected timetable, and implement the project. As part of the activities, students visit the partner agency and share progress reports and reflections on their experiences. At the end of the semester, students collectively prepare a written report of 10–12 pages and *PowerPoint* presentation of 30–45 minutes on their project, including a literature review, research methods, findings, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations. The presentations occur at an end-of-year gathering with all community partners, campus partners, and other guests in attendance. In addition, each student submits a written summative reflective analysis (approximately 3–5 pages) linking relevant seminar content and materials with community experiences. See Box 1 for an illustration of a community-based participatory research project conducted in the fall of 2015.

Box 1. Community-Based Participatory Research Project: An Illustration

Project Title: Comparative Study of the Cost of Chronic Homelessness vs. the Cost of Permanent Supportive Housing

Seminar Date: Fall 2015

Community Partner: Harry Tompson Center (HTC), a community resource center serving the homeless population in New Orleans, LA

HTC/Loyola Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): Developed collaboratively including members from HTC, seminar students and faculty, and the Office of Community Engaged Learning, Teaching and Scholarship (CELTS)

1. Conduct a comprehensive research literature search on Housing First or the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) program initiatives, including related national standard metrics for estimating program costs, program evaluation and success measures, and best practices;
2. Code and input inventory data results in a Google spreadsheet file based on the *Vulnerability Index Services Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool* (VI-SPDAT), which was administered by the Loyola Poverty Law Center to a random sample of approximately 250 homeless people in New Orleans;
3. Based on results gathered from the VI-SPDAT inventory, identify the chronic homeless population and the occasional homeless population;
4. Using selected items on VI-SPDAT (agreed on by seminar members including faculty, students, and community partners) calculate the costs associated with the consequences related to ignoring the needs of chronic and occasional homeless individuals (based on respondents' self-reported crisis incidents such as police arrests and detainment, court appearances, imprisonment, drug rehabilitation, ambulance trips, emergency care, and hospitalization); and calculate the costs associated with the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) program (i.e., standard costs related to providing a stable residence paired with services that address individual needs);
5. Conduct a cost efficiency study considering the following: (a) average cost of PSH (i.e., rental assistance and case management services) for one homeless person and the total cost for 250 people over a six month period; (b) the average cost of unassisted street homelessness for one person and for 250 persons for the same time period; and (c) compare total PSH costs with total unassisted street homelessness costs.

Project Results: The cost efficiency study related to a comparison of the costs of the PSH program vs. ignoring the needs of the homeless strongly suggests that the PSH program is far *less expensive* and a great deal more humanitarian. As a follow-up, the HTC has successfully used the students' research project findings in several proposal requests for funding, which subsequently have impacted the expansion of the PSH approach and a significant reduction of homelessness in New Orleans.

Component 4—Seminar Resources

In addition to seminar students and the faculty member, community partners and campus partners represent critical resources in the learning process and play essential supportive roles:

- Community partners work collaboratively with members of the seminar to develop the project description, i.e., memorandum of understanding (MOU). They also come to class to discuss elements of the project; host agency visits for students; provide relevant background data/information; give access to agency information, personnel, and resources; and make themselves available to respond to class needs and questions. Typically, only one agency is involved, but occasionally two or more agencies work collaboratively.

- Campus partners typically include the office of community engaged learning and research; the university library; the university honors program (UHP); and other campus offices and experts when needed.

  – The office of community engaged learning and research provides general support of the community-based participatory research project: e.g., identifying community agencies/partners; facilitating partner meetings and development of MOUs; ensuring compliance with the university risk management policy; arranging transportation to and from the community agency; troubleshooting problems; tracking community service hours; and making sure that students get transcript credit/notations for their community service work.

  – A university library liaison ensures that students and partners have access to all library resources and maximum support related to the use of information technologies. For example, the library liaison offers instructional demonstrations on setting-up project spreadsheets on Google, tracking data, and running summary statistics and graphic representations of results. The library liaison also assists in literature and document searches.

  – The university honors program (UHP) supports Social Justice Seminars by organizing and hosting topically oriented co-curricular special events, guest lectures, roundtable discussions, and field trips. The UHP also plays a valuable facilitative role in identifying resources, providing training opportunities, bringing in experts,

and assisting with networking in the community both on and off campus. The UHP director demonstrates support of the SJ seminars by attending invited class and community meetings.

– Other participants include campus offices, classes, and faculty/staff experts across campus and relevant other off-campus agencies. For instance, in a project that involved a partnership with a community organization's efforts to address public safety concerns within the Latino/a community in a New Orleans neighborhood, students collaborated with members of the organization to develop a survey of residents' satisfaction with police performance and to ascertain their ability to voice safety concerns. To ensure a representative inventory sample, this project necessitated partnering with faculty/students in a Spanish language class so that interview questions could be translated and administered in Spanish and then, after the results were gathered, translated back into English. In support of the project, the class members also met with a campus faculty expert on public opinion polling and visited a local police agency in order to learn how public opinion poll results are used to inform police strategies.

At the end of the semester, all participants come together to share highlights of the project, to express thanks for everyone's contributions, and to celebrate accomplishments.

The learning resources include materials such as content-related and skills-related *PowerPoint* slides and written reports/notes associated with faculty presentations; student and partner presentations; special tutorials on, for instance, the social science research process and guidelines for data collection and analysis; class handouts; extended bibliographies; and numerous internet and library links to national reports, key studies, and e-journal articles posted on *Blackboard*. The *Blackboard* site also includes a seminar discussion board, which provides space for seminar members to coordinate activities and for all partners to post resources and draft documents as well as share their ideas and concerns.

Component 5—Assessment

Based on the idea that we must measure what we treasure, assessment plays a key role in the educational process, particularly in the context of social justice pedagogy. Accordingly, assessment is instrumental in establishing

clarity and communicating what content knowledge, skills, processes, practices, and cultural and personal awareness are considered valuable (Adams, "Pedagogical"; Eberly Center; McNiff).

Noted higher education expert Alexander Astin observes that "good assessment is really good research, and the ultimate aim of such research should be to help us make better choices and better decisions in running our educational programs and institutions" (xii). To this end, all the seminar's planned assignments and activities align with the social justice learning objectives and the comprehensive, multi-level assessment plan that informs future improvement. Four levels of assessment are built into the seminar:

- *Individual-level assessment* of student learning/performance includes a clear statement of purpose, detailed description and guidelines, grading rubric, and a point system associated with each assignment/activity. Students' self-reflections and self-assessments of learning for each assignment/activity represent important elements of the individual-level process. Assignments that have a team component include collective reflections and evaluations of collaborative effectiveness in completing tasks as well as reflective evaluation of inclusiveness, fairness, and justice relationships.

- *Seminar-level assessment* includes gathering and analyzing aggregated-level data based on all seminar input/output with emphasis on social justice learning and process objectives:

  – Review of the results of periodic polls administered by the professor, asking students to provide their opinions of the effectiveness and value of various elements of the seminar including presentations/lectures and learning materials;

  – Review of students' overall performance on assignments, i.e., aggregated outcomes;

  – Review of students' aggregated summation of the seminar based on self-assessments, team assessments, and reflective reports; and

  – Review of qualitative interaction indicators gathered during the semester, i.e., record of both positive interactions and problems.

  These results are holistically evaluated in order to implement improvements. Moreover, CELTS conducts end-of-term student

course evaluations that provide aggregated information regarding what worked and what did not in the context of the community-engaged project, which also informs seminar-level modifications and improvements.

- *Community partner-level assessment* is based on a survey, administered by CELTS, designed to gather information from community partners, students, and faculty on seminar effectiveness in meeting the conditions of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) and general level of satisfaction of all participants.
- *Curricular-level assessment* is conducted by the university honors program (UHP) based on data gathered from all honors courses and includes both student and faculty input. This level of assessment is mainly focused on measuring programmatic congruence and success with respect to the mission and goals of the UHP. The assessment comprises information and data obtained in annual electronic surveys and senior exit interviews.

CHALLENGES: RECONCILING THE IDEAL WITH THE MESSY

No matter how well designed and organized, the social justice seminar presents some challenges due to its participatory nature and its emphasis on community engagement. Simply put, things do not always work out the way they were planned and can get messy. It helps to get all participants to agree to a memorandum of understanding in which expectations for everyone's responsibilities, deliverables, and timeline are clearly delineated. The unexpected, however, is always possible, and in this event, engaging all participants in creative problem-solving is important. Learning takes place during times of adversity, and such teaching moments can turn out to be valuable.

One example of the unexpected occurred in a recent seminar that focused on mass incarceration with special emphasis on the process of post-prison community re-entry. The community-based project got off to a late start due to problems on the community partner's side. To accommodate this partner, the class schedule shuffled around some activities. Over halfway into the seminar but well before students' observations and collection of data were completed, the partner informed the class that funding for his re-entry service agency had been discontinued and that the agency had been shuttered;

further, he indicated that he would be unable to continue with the community-based research project. Disappointment loomed over the class. The first response of seminar members was to meet with the community partner to thank him and to express genuine concern over the difficult situation. During the meeting with the community partner, the class explored alternative options and developed a list of other agencies and key contacts.

Then class members began a process of considering what they most needed to know about the process of re-entry and the experiences of re-entry clients. Based on newly formed learning goals, class members brainstormed together and planned outreach strategies and data-gathering field trips. The first step was designing an exploratory study that would capture the early experiences and paths of re-entry clients. Second, the class partnered with another class and traveled to the state penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana. At the prison, members of the class met with prisoners who were preparing for release and re-entry. Third, class members contacted a re-entry judge and got authorization to visit several re-entry court sessions. Fourth, they followed up with other community agencies that provide re-entry services and explored the possibility of attending focus group meetings with some re-entry clients, promising that they would share the results of the project.

In the presence of adversity, the students did not give up but rather persevered and exhibited a high level of enthusiasm and resourcefulness. All participants—students, faculty, community partner, and campus partners—assisted in making the seminar experience unforgettable. The final assessment results turned out to be among the best. After sharing the project results with recent re-entry clients, the students shared a list of community resources that they had prepared based on needs that they perceived during their attendance at focus group meetings and in information gathering. The re-entry clients expressed great appreciation to the students for their insightful, helpful report and resource brochure, which from all accounts is still used by new re-entry clients.

CONCLUSION

Social justice education is most effective in an educational environment where social justice learning goals and processes are consistently modeled across institutional, programmatic, and curricular levels. Reflecting Loyola's and the UHP's mission, the honors seminar Violence and Democracy attempts to connect educational excellence with social justice through

engagement with the community, solidarity with the needs of community members, and advocacy of social justice and human rights.

Beyond the seminar, these honors students are given the option to participate in full-circle experiential, professional, learning, and research opportunities. For instance, seminar students have been invited to develop presentation proposals based on their community-based research project for conferences of national organizations such as the American Society of Criminology, the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, and the Southern Social Science History Association. The opportunity to participate in professional conferences gives undergraduate honors students a unique glimpse into the development and sharing of knowledge at a professional level.

In the fall of 2016, for instance, a student cohort that worked with the Harry Thompson Center (HTC) participated in a national conference where they described their research project (see Box 1 above). They provided an overview of their experience, including a brief description of their literature review, research methods and results, and error analysis; they also showed that the results of their comparative cost efficiency study of unassisted homelessness versus the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) approach contributed to the expansion of the PSH program and ultimately a reduction of homelessness in New Orleans. They then discussed the pedagogical elements of their seminar, including student learning outcomes, and finally they discussed how their seminar experience enhanced their self-efficacy as social action researchers and expanded their understanding of ways to achieve social change, particularly the value of teaming up with community partners.

In a follow-up study, a new cohort of seminar participants two years later partnered again with the Harry Thompson Center to conduct a study on the effectiveness of the PSH program two years out as indicated by the retention rate and the vulnerability index, especially with respect to the incidence of crisis events such as medical emergencies and law enforcement interactions. The evaluation project results, which are included in grant renewal reports, provide evidence that the PSH program is working: a 97% retention rate, a homeless veteran rate of zero, a significantly lower rate of crisis events, and a generally higher level of client satisfaction.

Recent evidence indicates the seminar's pathway into capstone projects and honors theses on related topics as well as, based on alumni survey results, continuing post-baccalaureate commitment to learning and service related to the seminar experience. The seminar illustrates that learning can transform lives when knowledge and community-based applications are relevant to the

real world and when student work makes a positive difference in addressing social injustices in the community.

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