



Faculty and staff hop on the bandwagon for service-learning

by Megan Prosen

This October, several members of St. Kate's faculty and staff, as well as the St. Joseph Worker Program, hopped on the bandwagon (also known as one of the college-owned 12-passenger vans) and set off for a tour of some of St. Paul's and Minneapolis' most prominent community organizations for advocacy in the Latino community.

The fast-paced field trip included quick informational site visits to the Resource Center of the Americas; the Plaza Latina, which houses Casa de Esperanza's Information and Resource Center; and the Guadalupe Alternative Program. Although the evening's agenda was crunched into a three-hour session, there did remain some time to grab authentic tacos and tortas to complete the experience. Some of the goals of the event were to enable faculty and staff to have a more tangible idea of what service learning could look like in their field through direct interaction with the personnel and locale of these various sites and to

strengthen the partnerships between the community and the College of St. Catherine.

Attendees were able to see first-hand the types and models of volunteer and service-learning opportunities throughout the area in order to better conceptualize the types of community engagement that could be incorporated into Latino or Spanish focused courses. Examples of possible service learning community positions include: advising workers and discussing current issues in the Labor Rights Center at the Resource Center of the Americas, helping with childcare and organizing educational activities for the children at Casa de Esperanza, or teaching ESL classes at Guadalupe Alternative Program.

If you are interested in these or any of the other great opportunities to be involved in the Latino community in the Twin Cities, please contact Megan Prosen, Spanish service-learning volunteer coordinator, at the Center for Community Work and Learning: CdC 233, americareads@stkate.edu, or 651-690-6842.

Professors Jack Flynn, Geography Department, and Spanish faculty members Hilda Kachmar and Kristina Bonsager, as well as members from the Center for Community Work and Learning, listen to the volunteer opportunities available at Casa de Esperanza.



Quick Facts:

Casa de Esperanza

Mission: Mobilize Latinas and Latino communities to end domestic violence.

Resource Center of the Americas

Mission: Informs, educates and organizes to promote human rights, democratic participation, economic justice and cross-cultural understanding in the context of globalization in the Americas.

Guadalupe Alternative Programs (GAP)

About: A non-profit human service agency that has a 30-year history of educating young people and adults on the West Side of St. Paul.

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Let's Talk About Race forum leaves lasting impact

by Tiffany Tolliver

The *Let's Talk About Race* forums, held at the Minneapolis Urban League, involved the participation of twenty-nine African-American teenage girls who volunteered with the permission of their parents. The goal of the forums was to educate these girls about what racism is, the different types of racism and how to overcome it. Forum coordinator Chi Ellis put together the *Let's Talk About Race* forum, which took place in the months of April and May of 2006 for four weeks. As an African-American student, I was made aware of the race forums through Martha Malinski and my role as a student worker in the Center for Community Work and Learning. My role working with the forums was to record the girls' statements and I also helped pass out and collect evaluation forms. After the forums were over I was responsible for interviewing five randomly selected girls about their experience and how they felt it helped them to recognize and cope with racism.

Through my work with the forum, I was able to meet and work with such strong women like Chi, who supervised me, Professor Maggie Dexheimer Pharris and Professor LaVonne Moore from the St. Kate's Nursing Department. These women encouraged me during the forum process. My experience with the Race forums was a powerful one; I really did not know what to expect when I decided to become a part of this program. It has been more emotional than I thought it would be because of the strong emotions of everyone involved. There is something liberating about being in a room with people who share such a strong and common bond. At times it felt overwhelming, but it was a feeling I embraced and believe had a positive effect on me. I had a sense of pride and responsibility because I was representing St. Kate's, and as Maggie would remind me, I was a role model. I wanted to be a good influence on the girls as the forum went on. This was an opportunity of a lifetime to work so closely with African-American teenage girls and record their views on such a powerful subject.

Working with the girls was a refreshing experience because, along with recording information for the forum, I was able to hear their honest comments and give them my feedback. As the weeks passed by we all became more comfortable with each other and I valued these honest, candid conversations where the girls shared past experiences in situations they felt were racist. I was also able to read the evaluations and see what they had felt at the moment the forums took place. Later, when we did the post evaluations, it was very rewarding to be able to see such a significant difference in the girls' responses to questions such as how often they experienced racism. The results were bittersweet because while I was so thrilled that more girls learned how to recognize racism, it alarmed me how often they were encountering it.

At the end of the forum, five girls were randomly selected for me to interview. I initially expected the interview process to be

easy, which seems naïve now, but I did not anticipate what a challenge it would be to schedule meetings with five teenage girls during the beginning of summer vacation. It was frustrating at times, but the interviews were successfully completed. The interviews were enjoyable because the girls trusted me and didn't hold back on giving their opinions.

The girls conveyed that the forum accomplished its goal and helped them feel a sense of pride in learning more about how to define racism and ways they could cope. The experience has touched my life because it has made me more concerned about our youth in the African-American community and what they are being taught about race in America. I believe that a separate forum with people of all races should be put together; it would be valuable to the St. Kate's community. A forum such as this one could also become widespread over the Twin Cities so that a bigger impact can be made. There would be so many benefits to having a forum take place each semester where we not only talk about racism, but also try to dismantle stereotypes. What the forum has given these girls is immeasurable and something I could see in their eyes. Racism is not often talked about in schools and even when it is, it usually only focuses on one type. With more series of *Let's Talk About Race* forums, the community would put African-American children in a better position to handle themselves in the real world. I am grateful to have been a part of this forum and its legacy of teaching African-American girls the foundation of racism and giving them the tools for survival in a racist world.

America Reads corner



On October 21st, America Reads coordinators Megan Prosen and Annie Watkins presented "Communicating Across Barriers" as a topic session for current America Reads tutors. This session was in preparation for the SCALE Read. Write. Act. National Conference held at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill on November 3rd-4th where they gave their presentation to fellow college students involved in campus-based literacy programs. Keep posted for a wrap-up of the conference in the December newsletter.

Service-learning component enriches sociology course

by Hillary Spreizer

This semester, Community Work and Learning partnered with the SOCI/CRST 386 “Urban Social Problems” course to include a service-learning component in the class curriculum. Professor Hui Wilcox reviewed her syllabus to include service-learning through a faculty development grant this past summer. As the fall semester began, all sixteen students from the class began working at a variety of community organizations in an effort to connect classroom theory with community experience.

As Professor Wilcox’s syllabus began to take shape, Community Work and Learning sought out a variety of community organizations that best connected with the class objectives. An information session was held as an opportunity for the community sites, Professor Wilcox and Community Work and Learning to discuss class objectives, expectations from students and organizations and answer any questions about the service-learning process. When the class began in the fall, organizations were given the opportunity to present their project(s) to the class. These connections allowed for clear channels of communication and a transparent understanding of expectations. It also created an opportunity for students and organizations to partner in a way that benefited each other. Thirteen organizations connected with students and each varied greatly. They included: The Sanctuary CDC, MN Housing Partnership, West Side Citizens Organization, KFAI Fresh Air Radio, Jane Addams School for Democracy, Sierra Club, Northwest Area Foundation, Catholic Charities, Housing Link and Homecroft Elementary School. Aside from the mixture of organizations involved, projects ranged from environmental and housing issues to after-school youth programming and issue-based community organizing.

Midway through the semester, students were asked to reflect on their experiences. Natalie Warner works with children in a family shelter at Catholic Charities and discussed her internship experience, “Every time I’m there I have more and more questions...I’m glad we can be a stable place for [the kids] for 2-3 hours.” Robina Rai has worked closely with Intermedia Arts and plays an instrumental role in planning brown bag discussion panels around their current art exhibit, *Immigrant Status*. Reflecting on her experience, she stated, “I feel a part of the community I talked with. I feel more connected and we have very good conversations.” The emphasis on reflection in-

side the classroom has been key to creating a well-rounded educational experience. In addition to informal class reflections, each student keeps a journal and completes a mid-semester evaluation. In order to better understand the perspective of the community organization, Community Work and Learning conducted site visits to meet with supervisors to discuss and better understand their experiences. Organizations spoke highly of their relationship with St. Kate’s and the students citing they would not normally be able to complete these projects without the help of a student intern and many have expressed an interest in future collaboration.

Paralleling the student response to the service-learning component of the class, Professor Wilcox spoke briefly about the community component and what it added to her teaching experience: “This is by far the most successful service-learning course I have taught. I am truly excited about students’ work and look forward to reading their journals, hearing what they have to say about their work, and marvel at the connections they make between what they learn in class and what they do on their service-learning sites. It’s a process of empowerment for me as well. I enjoy meeting with the community organization liaisons, and have a sense of satisfaction knowing that the stu-

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-Professor Hui Wilcox

dents are working on causes they care about. Community work has a spillover effect in that students who are engaged in civic activities seem to have more of a voice and confidence in the classroom and take more initiative and ownership in their learning processes. I appreciate the support and assistance by Community Work and Learning. They have made the integration of service-learning possible and less labor-intensive for me.”

Community Work and Learning has worked with many classes in this way to bridge the gap between the curriculum and the community. From the beginning, we worked with Professor Wilcox, community organizations and students to create meaningful partnerships and learning opportunities that have integrated both classroom and community experiences. Our partnership will continue as we evaluate both the students and the community organizations in an effort to continually refine the service-learning process. Facilitating these projects allows each person and organization involved to take an active role in the learning process and creates a direct and equal exchange among the student, professor and community site.

**COMMUNITY WORK AND
LEARNING AT
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Now hiring!

Community Work and Learning, America Reads Tutor

Description: Work at least four scheduled hours per week as a reading tutor for elementary-aged children at a local school or community organization, complete a minimum of one full semester of tutoring, attend scheduled training/reflection sessions, meet all host site requirements (including paperwork, dress code, standards of conduct, and attendance policies), communicate regularly with classroom teacher/site supervisor, and participate in the program evaluation.

Qualifications: Desire to work with children, patience, strong communication and organizational skills, history of showing initiative in seeking out work, familiar with tutoring and educational issues, and ability to work in a team setting with other students and staff.

\$8.00 to start. Applications available through Student Employment. Contact Community Work and Learning, CdC 233, or ext. 6842 with questions.

Community Work and Learning, Office Assistant

Description: Office Assistant will be a member of the Community Work and Learning team by participating in the programming of the office. The Office Assistant will be expected to develop her own goals; participate in reflection and evaluation of the work; maintain resource files and database of community sites, resource library, and website; assist students, faculty and staff who are or would like to be involved with CWL; assist with on-campus outreach; recruitment and programming of office. Perform other duties as assigned by Director.

Qualifications: Strong communication and organizational skills. Strong initiative and ability to work independently. Ability to work in a team setting with other students, staff and faculty, attention to detail, computer skills, and commitment to and/or experience doing community work and learning.

\$8.25. Applications available through Student Employment. Contact Community Work and Learning, CdC 233, or ext. 6842, with questions.

Coming up in the December newsletter...

Profile on Longfellow Elementary

Highlight on Advanced Patternmaking course with service-learning component

SCALE Read. Write. Act. National Conference wrap-up

Preview of J-term and spring semester service-learning courses



If you, or your department, would like to receive future copies of this newsletter, please contact Jennifer Haut at jmhaut@stkate.edu or ext. 6842.