



Engaged Times

A member resource of Campus Compact

By Julie B. Elkins, Ed.D., Director of Academic Initiatives

Volume II Issue 5

June 29, 2010

45 Temple Place, Boston, MA 02111 T: 617.357.1881 www.compact.org

Social Justice: At the Core

There are a myriad of motivations that propel faculty and students to become involved in community engagement. Engagement spans all disciplines and each course has its own unique style, goals, and powerful influences brought by the teaching faculty member. While most faculty are vigilant about including key components like the number of contact hours, direct engagement, and reflection, the issue of multicultural competence can often be an afterthought.

This spring I attended a conference presentation where an institution was showcasing the introduction of a new course that featured high levels of engagement, complete with pre- and post-testing assessment. Towards the end of the presentation, the co-presenters indicated that the students had a lack of prior information and exposure to individuals from different economic, racial, and religious backgrounds. The presenters asked if anyone in the audience could suggest a 20-minute exercise to increase cultural competency.

In the context of designing their new course faculty had only allotted 20 minutes to address the diversity issue. For the first time during the conference session, the participants were silent. I considered how I might respond. I was encouraged that the faculty was searching for assistance but troubled that cultural competence was an after-thought.

As a lifelong learner, I believe that becoming more culturally competent is of utmost importance to my ongoing journey. I don't believe that I will ever fully arrive, but it's my personal responsibility to learn, be uncomfortable, and learn more as a result. A larger question arose for me: If service-learning/community engagement must be reciprocal, how can it ever be so if faculty do not make increasing cultural competency a goal, with specific learning objectives for the course?

Engaged Times is a resource for members of Campus Compact.

If you have questions or to suggest a topic for an upcoming issue, please contact:

Julie Elkins, Ed.D., Director of Academic Initiatives

Tel: 617.357.1881, x 205

Email: jelkins@compact.org

Cutting Edge

For years, student affairs professionals have been at the forefront of leading discussions, setting campus policies, creating in-house training for staff and students, and providing quality education that has advanced the field of social justice. Some of the most profound outgrowths of social justice work have been the nurtured through national networks and conferences such as The Social Justice Institute, National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education (NCORE), and American College Personnel Association (ACPA) Roadshows. Since this is difficult work, the systematic support for increased learning and connections have been valuable. Social justice advocate Jessica Pettitt has just released a spectacular pocket book titled, *“Notice Notes: A Reflection Journal.”* This reflective guide challenges the reader to do their own work through a series of guided experiences. There are no right or wrong answers, but a clear challenge for individuals to look within and reflect deliberately about specific experiences.

Faculty who have taught on topics such as race and ethnic relations, religion, or sexual orientation note the value of experiential learning and use panels of individuals who tell their stories to the class. Now, faculty is moving beyond the experiential into service-learning pedagogies to increase impact upon students. Of course there is still the question of how these programs are impacting the community.

With the explosion in social networking, students are now taking the lead in advancing cultural competency. One of the most outstanding examples is USAS (United Students Against Sweatshops), a national organization founded by a student in 1997 after a summer internship placement with a union. USAS is entirely student organized and managed. They have successfully launched activist campaigns across hundreds of campuses on topics such as discriminatory practices against women in international labor, right to organize strategies for janitors on college campuses, and the Designated Suppliers Program. The USAS motto is: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together” (Watson, 1985). Sounds like a guiding principle to reciprocal community engagement.

When you visit the board section of the USAS website you will see pictures of each board member with a brief bio. But this board shares information that goes beyond degrees and experience—each individual identifies his or her own social group membership. For example:

“Gautam Kumaraswamy attends Purdue University. He is a Jamaican national who comes from a professional class background and indentifies as a person of colour.”

“Cherie Seise is a senior at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. Cherie identifies as a white, middle-class, queer woman, and is 21 years old.”

“Ash-Lee W. Henderson is a senior at East Tennessee State University. She comes from a working class background, identifies as a woman of color and is 24 years old.”

Not only are these students providing leadership for one of the most powerful grassroots organizations, but individually, each one has done a great deal of work to understand who he or she is as an individual, grasp power dynamics of their individual identity, and develop the courage to be so open about who they are in their work. Can you imagine if board of trustee members on college campuses had such awareness and shared it so openly? I think that we have a lot to learn from student leaders in USAS.

Importance to the Field

The issue of cultural competency is critical to our field. I argue that unless cultural competency is brought into the core of service-learning courses—and not as simply a 20-minute add-on—there is no opportunity for reciprocal learning. This is a bold statement, but I believe that the field of community engagement cannot advance without this critical piece of a complex puzzle.

Why is this important to my daily work?

Philosophically, cultural competency is at the very core of the work. Failing to move it to the core will only create the illusion of service-learning/community engagement. Without increasing cultural competency, without reciprocal benefits, it becomes service without the learning.

Personally, I don't know anyone who has “arrived” in the area of cultural competency. Many of us have logged hours worth of academic credits, searched our souls, interrupted the cycle of oppression in our own heads, participated for years in week-long retreats, trained trainers on issues of social justice, and still have an immense amount of work to do. Some higher education leaders have not yet begun this journey toward cultural competence.

Creating service-learning courses is challenging and working towards cultural competence can feel overwhelming. It may seem easier to teach a course without community-engagement. No extra organizing, no networking. Just show a couple of films, maybe invite in a speaker and focus on more traditional forms of pedagogy. To lean into the uncomfortable, go into an environment that is unfamiliar, create in-classroom learning on cultural competence; set-up a quality experience for students and the community that is reciprocal is huge. It also delivers big returns. If we don't center the work in a way that increases cultural competency, we may just be offering help that is not needed and wasting everyone's time.

This is also an opportunity to build capacity. Create opportunities for professional development and cultural competence within the resources offered to service-learning faculty. Integrate social justice issues into basic community-engagement development for

faculty and staff. Weave cultural competence into the fabric of your centers for service learning.

Resources

Countless resources are emerging in the area of cultural competency. Due to the complexity of the work, I highly recommend seeking out seasoned professionals with advanced expertise. There are a lot of consultants that have hung out a shingle regarding cultural competence, but it's important to get referrals. One of the first steps is to do your own work. Learn about your own social group identities and seek out opportunities for increasing your own cultural competence. We cannot be teachers or role models for students and be authentic with community partners if we have not done our own work. You do not need to be the expert, but you do need to be authentic, this is an excellent opportunity to use campus and community resources to work towards this goal.

I had the opportunity to attend a session at NCORE a few years ago that was co-facilitated by Dr. Maurianne Adams and Dr. Barbara Love. They have been working together for over 20 years at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Their work is featured in the book *"Readings for Diversity and Social Justice"* (2nd Edition) and Dr. Adams is the editor of the new book *"Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Anti-Semitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism and Classism."* Participating in their session on cultural competence was like being part of a beautiful piece of art. They were both so open, relaxed, inviting, and challenging all at the same time. What gifted faculty! I would highly recommend treating yourself to such an experience.

Instead of squeezing in social justice perhaps it can actually sit in the middle of our work to complete a full diverse picture. For over ten years, *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice* has been the go-to anthology for the broadest possible coverage of issues related to identity and oppression from a social justice perspective. This highly anticipated second edition breaks even further ground, boasting over 40 more readings than previously available, updated and original section introductions, and three entirely new chapter sections on Religious Oppression, Transgender Oppression, and Ageism/Adulthood. As with the first edition, each chapter section is divided into Contexts, Personal Voices, and Next Steps. The first two parts provide vivid portraits of the meaning of diversity and the realities of oppression. The third part challenges the reader to take action to end oppressive behavior and affirm diversity and social justice

This fall, Dr. Maura Cullen is hosting a "Diversity Summit" on October 23, 2010 at Kutztown University, Kutztown, PA. Dr. Cullen is a national educator, author, and co-founder of the Social Justice Training Institute for higher education faculty and staff. "The Diversity Student Summit is a one-day event for current and emerging student leaders, cultivating practical, effective, and compassionate ways to be more diversity competent in an ever-changing world." Campus Compact is one of the featured sponsors of this exciting, engaging experience. This would be an outstanding opportunity for all college

students, but especially those that are in unique leadership roles for service and community engagement. Faculty and Center Service Directors often grapple with how to best introduce, educate, and infuse issues of social justice within service-learning classes, community and civic engagement experiences. This conference is structured to be highly interactive experience that is intent on meeting students where they are at and challenging them to take it to the next level.

Life is full of opportunity and challenges. I am very glad that I was moved to a place of tremendous discomfort when asked, "How can we train students about diversity in twenty minutes?" In the words of the folk singer Dar Williams, "Well sometimes life gives us presents in ridiculous packaging".

Web-based Links

[White Privilege Conference](http://www.whiteprivilegeconference.com) - www.whiteprivilegeconference.com

[Safe Zone For All](http://safezoneforall.com) - <http://safezoneforall.com>

[Human Rights Campaign](http://www.hrc.org) - <http://www.hrc.org>

[Alliance For Full Acceptance](http://www.affa-sc.org) - <http://www.affa-sc.org>

[Day of Silence Project](http://www.dayofsilence.org) - <http://www.dayofsilence.org>

[We Are Family](http://www.waf.org) - <http://www.waf.org>

[Retouch's Mirror](http://www.wild-mirror.com) - <http://www.wild-mirror.com>

[Becoming an Ally](http://www.unh.edu/residential-life/diversity/) - <http://www.unh.edu/residential-life/diversity/>

[Anti-Defamation League](http://www.adl.org) - <http://www.adl.org>

[Straight But Not Narrow](http://straightnotnarrow.blogspot.com) - <http://straightnotnarrow.blogspot.com>

[Scouting For All](http://www.scoutingforall.org) - <http://www.scoutingforall.org>

[Unitarian Universalist Association](http://www.uua.org) - <http://www.uua.org>

[Gay-Straight Alliance Network](http://www.gsanetwork.org) - <http://www.gsanetwork.org>

[Consortium of Higher Education Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Resource Professionals](http://www.lgbtcampus.org)

<http://www.lgbtcampus.org>

[Progressive Resources Catalog](http://www.donnelycolt.com) - <http://www.donnelycolt.com>

[Public Allies](http://www.publicallies.org) - <http://www.publicallies.org>

[League At NCR](http://www.league-ncr.com) - <http://www.league-ncr.com>

[Campus PrideNet](http://www.campuspride.net) - <http://www.campuspride.net>

[All One Heart](http://www.alloneheart.com) - <http://www.alloneheart.com>

[One](http://www.ohiou.edu/~one/) - <http://www.ohiou.edu/~one/>

[Gender Education Center](http://www.debradavis.org/gecpage/indexgec.shtml) - <http://www.debradavis.org/gecpage/indexgec.shtml>

[Alliance for Tolerance and Freedom](http://www.alliancefortolerance.org) - <http://www.alliancefortolerance.org>

[Diversity Inc.](http://www.diversityinc.com) - <http://www.diversityinc.com>

[DiversityWeb](http://www.diversityweb.org) - <http://www.diversityweb.org>

[The Racism Free Zone Concept](#)

http://www.bcca.org/rel/United_Endeavors/WELCOME/RFZ/RFZprogram.html

[HalfthePlanet](http://www.halftheplanet.com) - <http://www.halftheplanet.com>

[Multicultural Pavilion](http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/) - <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/>

[Timeline of the American Civil Rights Movement](http://www.wmich.edu/politics/mlk/tm.html) - <http://www.wmich.edu/politics/mlk/tm.html>

[Tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org) - <http://www.tolerance.org>

[Diversity Web sources in higher education](http://www.ala.org/acrl/ressept00.html) - <http://www.ala.org/acrl/ressept00.html>

[NCORE](http://ncore.ou.edu/2003/index.htm) - <http://ncore.ou.edu/2003/index.htm>

[Students And Teachers Against Racism](http://www.racismagainstindians.org) - <http://www.racismagainstindians.org>

[American Indian Movement](http://www.aimovement.org) - <http://www.aimovement.org>

[The Case of Leonard Peltier](http://www.freepeltier.org) - <http://www.freepeltier.org>

[Syracuse Cultural Workers](http://www.syracuseculturalworkers.com) - <http://www.syracuseculturalworkers.com>

[The Family Flag Project](http://www.thefamilyflagproject.org/) - <http://www.thefamilyflagproject.org/>

Web-based Links to Publications

Please go to the Social Justice Training Institute site for publications.

http://www.sjti.org/suggested_reading.html

Diversity Summit- Dr. Maura Cullen - <http://www.diversitystudentsummit.com>

For Jessica Pettitt's New Reflection Guide go to

<http://www.jessicapettitt.com/buy.htm>