

IRWIN W. STEANS CENTER

FOR COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICE LEARNING & COMMUNITY SERVICE STUDIES

Winter 2016

Nursing Students Engage Chicago Communities

GRADUATE NURSING PROGRAM EMBRACES SERVICE LEARNING

A Chicago-area family takes a child to a doctor's office. Does the nurse greeting them know much about the family's background outside of what can be gleaned from a few forms or questions? How can nurses truly understand the challenges and daily stress of those who struggle economically and with racial and gender discrimination among other social determinants of health? How can nurses begin to comprehend the resiliency of those who experience social and economic stress? How do nurses learn about the assets—individuals, neighborhood and religious groups, community organizations—that contribute to wellness within Chicago communities?



As part of DePaul's Master's Entry Nursing Program (MENP), students learn about Chicago-area communities directly by engaging in service learning projects throughout the two year program at the same organization. The program supports students from both DePaul's Lincoln Park campus as well as the School of Nursing's program at Rosalind Franklin University and Medical School in North Chicago, IL. Students take a range of courses that integrate service learning pedagogy, including Health Promotion for Families and Communities, Nursing Theories, The Art and Science of Nursing and Culture, Ethics and Policy Analysis.

"What DePaul's nursing program is doing with service learning is a nationally unique model," says School of Nursing Director Bill Cody. "Service learning is an important learning resource, and it has opened our eyes to help students learn more about human beings. In nursing education, we want the graduate nursing student to understand a person for who he or she is – and as a full-fledged human being outside of the patient experience. Service learning helps us reach that goal. It's a great fit with our program."

STUDENTS STORYTELLING AND INSPIRATION

...We want the graduate nursing student to understand a person for who he or she is – and as a full-fledged human being outside of the patient experience...

DePaul's graduate nursing program, in collaboration with the Steans Center, works closely with numerous organizations to understand how nursing students can build organizational capacity to serve community members. "It's a big undertaking to place students with community-based organizations for two full years," says Helen Damon-Moore, Associate Director of the Steans Center. "For students, it's a grassroots introduction to a community at large. By the end, we believe they are more sophisticated in their interactions with people." By investing in community-university partnership building for programs like Nursing, DePaul is creating graduates that have a deeper understanding of social issues and their relation to health and wellness.

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Welcome Nila Ginger Hofman

FACULTY DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICE STUDIES



The Steans Center welcomes Dr. Nila Ginger Hofman, Associate Professor of Anthropology, as the new director of Community Service Studies (CSS). CSS was developed in the late 1990s as part of a university-wide effort to extend opportunities for learning through practice. “Our goal is to expose, sensitize and educate students to issues of social justice, within a real life setting,” says Dr. Hofman. “By working with the Steans Center, faculty are able to develop relationships with community-based organizations through which they are able to expose students to social, political and economic issues.”

During Dr. Hofman’s 15+ years at DePaul, she has worked closely with the Steans Center developing her own community-engaged courses. Since 2001, together with Steans Center Executive Director Howard Rosing, she and her students have conducted community-based research on a variety of issues. In addition to directing CSS and teaching anthropology, Dr. Hofman studies urban populations and specifically labor and gender issues. She has authored a number of texts that record the lives of women, undocumented immigrants, unionized teachers and injection drug users in Chicago, Mérida, Mexico and Zagreb, Croatia.

The CSS minor, Dr. Hofman explains, consists of three core courses and three elective courses covering many different subjects and topics. She teaches a section of CSS 201: Critical Community Engagement for new Community Service Scholars and advises all CSS minor students. “I mentor students about the kind of courses they can take and discuss how the courses fit with their career and life goals,” says Dr. Hofman.

Working with the Steans Center, Dr. Hofman also intends to focus on the further internationalization of CSS, expanding beyond the existing two-term program in Mérida, Mexico. The Mexico program includes two of the three foundation courses in the minor and involves a more than ten year collaboration with Universidad Marista, DePaul’s university partner that facilitates service-learning curriculum and placements in Merida. Dr. Hofman also brings her experience to CSS from having been the faculty director for the Merida program.

Rachelle Hernandez

Nursing student Rachelle Hernandez worked with Ravenswood Community Services, located in a church on the city's north side that serves homeless and other low-income residents. The organization provides hunger relief services including a weekly food pantry and a health clinic. One of the organization's programs focuses on oral health and Hernandez helped to provide oral health education and information about access to care to community members.

What we learn in class isn't just about what's in a textbook – sometimes we can see it in the community experience.

Hernandez explained how she understands more about mental illness by applying classroom lectures and discussions to real life contexts. "We're there to learn and understand, and try to think of solutions. What we learn in class isn't just about what's in a textbook – sometimes we can see it in the community." After receiving her nursing degree, Hernandez said she wanted to perfect various skills and would consider working in an intensive care setting and, she now adds, in an organization that provides mental health services.

Another benefit of this experience, Hernandez noted, is that it helped her challenge preconceptions about the homeless population. "In this situation, you are immersed with people who have a variety of different backgrounds. Before, I wasn't really involved with the homeless and disadvantaged – and I had some judgments about them. But once I got to befriend them, that made me more aware of biases I had. We are all the same, even though we are different on the outside." Exemplifying a key goal of the MENP service-learning component, Hernandez learned to distinguish between a hospital and community setting and how her skills can be applied in both contexts. "People at this organization," she added, "are open to our ideas and enthusiastic in including us in their community work."

Natasha Bhayani

Natasha Bhayani, who entered the program in January of 2014, is conducting a research project connected to her service learning placement at Catholic Charities. The organization holds health fairs in five communities across Chicago and is trying to learn why attendance at these events decreased between the summer of 2013 and the summer of 2014 – and how to increase it. "I've been calling organizations that held health fairs or free clinics," Bhayani says. "I've been trying to find out whether other organizations are seeing a decline in attendance. The organization needs more data." One factor, she noted, is the impact of the Affordable Care Act and whether people are now getting the services they need.

Understanding the broader context of healthcare in the U.S., while working on the ground with people is a core characteristic of the MENP program. For example, Bhayani attended a health fair last year for Catholic Charities and gathered information from people about their blood pressure, weight and other vital data. She then conducted a literature review to try to determine why people seek preventative health care. Similar to Hernandez, Bhayani noted that "a textbook is a good baseline – but to have someone tell you or show you what is happening is a completely different experience." She added that "one of the things I learned is the importance of the cultural aspect in health care. It's important to be cognizant about cultural differences – including, for example, how comfortable people are about taking medications. Maybe they nod their heads in a certain way – but do they truly understand? Or do I? It's really about building a relationship – and getting a patient to trust you. Nurses, of course, are advocates for patients, so they have to develop really strong people skills."

Kristin Rakstang Schmidt

Nursing student Kristin Rakstang Schmidt went into Nursing after a positive experience with her grandmother in hospice. The nursing program at DePaul was a good fit. Both Schmidt and Maggie Paces are earning their DePaul nursing degree on the campus of Rosalind Franklin University and Medical School. Through Lake

County Cares, which connects volunteers with community-based organizations, the students bring together primary school children with nursing home residents. The program engages participants in a range of recreational activities at Westmoreland Nursing Center in Lake Forest, IL. The program that the students helped develop is designed to benefit both the school children and the elderly residents of Westmoreland. "Our students have been running with this program," says DePaul Nursing instructor Alison DiValerio. Local children engaged in the program learn about service while nursing home residents experience stimulating inter-generational programming.

"When we are in a clinical setting, the patients and clients will come to us – and we have to learn about their communities through them. This is our chance to go out into communities and understand where people are coming from," says Schmidt. "We are lucky to be working with both kids and older adults. We are getting a glimpse into their lives – and that's the best part of this experience for me." Furthermore, Schmidt continues, "everything in the textbook comes alive," she says. "I've been able to make the connection between research – and real life."

Paces points to the experience they're also gaining as they work to boost awareness of the intergenerational community engagement program. For example, she and other DePaul students developed marketing materials and a Facebook page for the program. "This experience prepares us to run programs like this one," she says. "That will be valuable to us when we become nurses."



VOICE OF FACULTY

The service learning experience builds on an already cutting edge community oriented nursing curriculum. In addition to working with patients in a clinical setting, students also learn about people, the challenges they face and their neighborhoods through sixteen hours per term working with DePaul community partners. That experience, supporters of the program report, can impact how students see their future role as nurses. Karen Larimer, Assistant Professor of Nursing and Coordinator of Community Engagement, plays an integral role in supporting faculty integration of service learning pedagogy into their courses. Professor Larimer stresses how the use of service learning exposes many students to the social worlds of the people they will serve. “Nursing students do get exposed to different people – and their socioeconomic background – in a clinic,” she notes, “but we believe that working through a community-based organization and getting to know a population directly makes a difference. You see clients in a real community environment, not just the hospital, where they are under stress. Having the experience of engagement in the community gives students a whole different perspective.”



Professor Karen Larimer

We also talk about how learning about inequalities and cultural differences will make them a better nurse...

Larimer adds that many DePaul nursing students “already have some experience with volunteer programs or mission work. What is new to them here is the learning part of it – where there are associated objectives in classes that are paired with service experience.” For example, she says, “For a nursing student going to the Austin community in Chicago, for example, we want them to ask: What are the demographics? What is the employment situation? What resources does the community have?”

“We tell students about the difference between doing relevant community service and courses that integrate service learning,” adds nursing instructor and clinical site supervisor Alison Di-Valerio. “We also talk about how learning about inequalities and cultural differences will make them a better nurse. Yes, you can read about that in a book, but it’s best to learn it in an experiential setting.”

Kathleen Rylance, an assistant professor of nursing who supports service-learning on Rosalind Franklin’s campus says “collaboration and communication are so important in service learning settings – and in nursing. I think that the community partners we work with want to collaborate with our students. Through the nursing program, we are seeing how students grow in their service learning experience and reflect on it as along the way.”



Professor Kathleen Rylance

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Erie Neighborhood House, a long-time partner of DePaul and the Steans Center, provides a wide range of services to low-income and often immigrant populations in Chicago. Michael Guarrine, Director of Health & Leadership Programs at Erie, says he believes strongly in service learning. Nursing students have been working with children in an after-school program at Erie that emphasizes dental education, though it also delivers broader messages to you about healthy foods among other subjects. Guarrine says the experience is “not just about delivering dental curriculum – but working with children they might not be used to.” Guarrine adds that he sees DePaul students learning “soft skills” that can ultimately be useful in a any medical setting. “When taking blood from someone is your demeanor awful? When you are talking to a child, are you doing it in a way that encourages trust? The best way to learn these skills is to work with people directly – and that’s what DePaul students who do service learning at Erie have a chance to do.”

On the city’s west side, nursing students work with Marshall High School students through Life Directions, a peer mentoring and motivation program based in Chicago and Detroit. The nursing students work as mentors, taking the high school students on field trips to campus, theater, and for other activities as well as service learning projects. “I think the experience allows DePaul students to really see what it’s like for people living in different neighborhoods. We encourage mentors to get to know students and their families, so families know who is coming into a child’s life,” says Van Bensett, executive director of Life Directions. “The DePaul students are awesome.”

One of the things that nurses bring to communities is that they genuinely care about people.

Bensett suggests that nursing students are often well suited for service learning placements with the organization. “A lot of the nursing students I’ve worked with have a real commitment to the students. One of the things that nurses bring to communities is that they genuinely care about people. Many of the nurses in the program had already worked in another career – but saw that something was missing for them. They went back into nursing because they wanted to care for people. Mentoring gives people a chance to know one another and develop a relationship.”

In North Chicago, IL, the agency North Chicago Community Partners (NCCP) seeks to support underserved children and families and works closely with schools to employ a collaborative model. “The nursing program offers an incredibly powerful volunteer group,” says executive director Jennifer Grumhaus, who started as a volunteer with the organization. “Students understand the value of education, they are from diverse backgrounds, and they are flexible.” At NCCP, students have worked as lunchtime and after-school mentors, supported special events, and worked in a food pantry.



Jonathan Handrup, Academic and Community Program Co-ordinator for the Steans Center and the point person for MENP students, faculty and community partners, echos Grumhaus’ comments. “At this point, supporting the MENP program has become almost my entire role. The sheer size of the program means that a good part of my day has become ensuring that our students are not only placed in sites and have meaningful experiences, but that our community partners can effectively utilize them to build capacity to better serve Chicago communities.”



“We are really grateful to have these students – the impact and benefits are extraordinary, and we hope to expand it over time,” Grumhaus says. “Now we are asking, ‘How can we work together to increase the service learning component?’ This is likely to happen. Growth in the MENP program enrollment continues. Currently, DePaul’s School of Nursing and the Steans Center support 228 (will increase to 306 in January 2016 with a cohort of 48 in Lincoln Park and 30 in Rosalind Franklin) MENP students placed in Chicagoland communities. Each student completes 112 hours in the community before they graduate, which was recently increased from 96.

For more information on the MENP service learning program, visit <http://csh.depaul.edu/departments/nursing/about/Pages/community-engagement.aspx>



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