

IRWIN W. STEANS CENTER

FOR COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICE LEARNING & COMMUNITY SERVICE STUDIES

Spring 2015

Human Resources Management

A frontier of graduate service learning

Compensation, recruitment and selection - graduate students in human resources are finding an innovative way to focus on these and other subjects at DePaul. Students increasingly learn these subjects outside the classroom through direct engagement with Chicago nonprofit organizations. A range of human resources courses that feature a service learning component and the pedagogy has been integrated into two core human resources classes – Compensation and Benefits and Recruitment and Selection. Indeed, students are engaged in service learning while pursuing the Masters of Science in Human Resources housed in DePaul's Kellstadt Graduate School of Business. Faculty members Robert Rubin, William "Marty" Martin and Helen LaVan have employed service learning as an integral component of how they teach human resources management. Their students are not just learning about HR within for-profit companies but also at nonprofits that help support an array of work issues within Chicago communities.

"Business students have an opportunity to help nonprofits meet their goals and run efficiently," says Martin. "They also learn that the focus point has to be working with groups to realize their mission. Service learning is a way to differentiate ourselves – getting out into the community is definitely a unique experience. It's also aligned with the university's mission. Nonprofit organizations have been around for a long time and can have a social impact. They serve in the gap between what the government and private sector will not do. Business students have a real opportunity."

Rubin adds that the service learning experience can increase student awareness about communities, but also about what their options may be after graduation. "It's intriguing to see that some students think that working with nonprofits could be part of their overall picture – something you can do to have a fulfilling career."

Professor Helen LaVan includes a service learning component in both graduate and undergraduate courses. She says service learning at DePaul is growing. "There are more community partners than there used to be and more faculty doing community service options. I think our students give a lot but also learn a lot in these classes."



Students in Communities

Shannon Moore, who finished her MBA at DePaul in spring 2014, took Professor Rubin's Recruitment and Selection course in 2013. Moore engaged in service learning activities at the Chinese Mutual Aid Association in the Uptown community on Chicago's North Side; she was part of a small group that developed a job description for the organization for a manager of the Association's volunteer program. Moore describes how service learning enhances the experience of learning. "Anytime you are in a classroom, you think you know the material," she says. "But to apply it to a real situation with specific circumstances – that makes you really know the material. You retain a lot more of what you learn."

DePaul MBA graduate Joe Mix recalls a group project at Metropolitan Family Services (MFS) as part of Rubin's Recruitment and Selection course. Mix is now Assistant Director of Student Employment at DePaul where he helps oversee student jobs on campus. Founded in 1857, MFS is a nonprofit organization that serves low-income families through seven community centers and various policy advocacy efforts. DePaul students worked on job descriptions and created an interview guide for the organization. Mix notes, "when searching for candidates, organizations need to ask the same questions and be clear about what they are looking for." In essence, for this project students critiqued the agency's format for its job descriptions. In one sense, the process was a timely one, since MFS has grown dramatically in recent years and now employs around 900 people.

Mix says, "service learning is the only way you can practically apply what you are learning in the classroom." The experience, he adds, "has helped me in my job – it lets you hone your skills in basic human resources things, like doing job analyses and creating a job description" and that "Bob [Prof. Rubin] encouraged the duality of this class – the book learning vs. street learning, the educational setting vs. the real world."

MaLinda Lee, a Program Supervisor at MFS, was interviewed by DePaul students about job duties and expectations to get an idea about actual responsibilities and make recommendations for a revised job description. "Working with these students was helpful to our hiring process – it's important to have good job descriptions," she says. "Students were thorough about finding out what they needed to know."



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Welcome Helen Damon-Moore Steans Center Associate Director

The Steans Center welcomes Helen Damon-Moore as its new Associate Director. Dr. Moore brings over twenty years of experience in higher education to the Steans Center. “I have been working with community-based service learning virtually my entire career. I began as an adjunct professor of Women’s Studies and Education at Cornell College in Iowa, teaching four courses a year and collaborating with women’s health and advocacy organizations and the schools; I just couldn’t teach without



connecting my students to the ‘experts’ and it was obvious to me that my students learned much better that way,” says Helen. She has served as Director of Service and Educational Programs at Dartmouth College, where she oversaw service trips, community service, internships, and community-based learning; as Curriculum and Learning Community Coordinator at the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine, where she consulted on curriculum development, developed inter-disciplinary teamwork education, and developed a service distinction track for medical students; and as the founding Director of the Office of Volunteer Services and Service Learning at Cornell College in Iowa. Helen is a founding member of Iowa Campus Compact and she co-chaired the Social Justice Interest Groups of the National Society for Experiential Education for several years.

Dr. Damon-Moore’s research interests include theories of service learning and community-based research; mindfulness; team development and function; and gender and consumer culture. She is the author of Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in the Ladies’ Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post.

“I am excited to build on the good work of the Steans Center by first getting to know the hopes of my colleagues; my goals will build on their goals and on several of DePaul’s, including enhancing academic quality and supporting educational innovation; deepening the University’s distinctive connection to Chicago; and fostering diversity and inclusion. We are mapping the work of Steans with the community, helping to create tools that we can use to employ an intentional, respectful, asset-based approach to our work on campus and in the community. I am excited to be working with the Steans team and Egan Office on a full spectrum of activities from service learning courses to community-based research to internships,” says Helen. “I am a collaborator, and I hope to collaborate with the Office of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment and with academic departments to foster “deep” community-based service learning wherever faculty, departments, and community partners are interested. I also hope to co-sponsor professional development activities that further community-based learning and research. At this point my ultimate goal would be to develop a robust portfolio of Steans Center activities to help us to realize our mission to seek social justice through mutually beneficial relationships in the community.”

Helen earned her Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and her B.A. in Sociology at Beloit College in Wisconsin. She is a native of Rangeley, Maine.

2014-15 Community-based Research Faculty Fellows

Dr. Janine Spears (College of Computing and Digital Media) and her students are working on a research project to develop a structured methodology for security risk self-assessments that also serve to raise organizational awareness of effective security practices. Her study, “Security Vector Risk Assessment Method for Community-based Organizations,” is based on research that illustrates how privacy, confidentiality, and trust are important for individuals living with mental health, substance abuse, and HIV/AIDS when sharing their health information. Many community-based organizations providing prevention and treatment services typically need knowledge and financial resources to develop or assess information security safeguards that protect clients’ sensitive information. Dr. Spears’ project integrates research into a recently developed service-learning course on information security risk assessment. Dr. Spears and her students are working in collaboration with the organization Health Alternative Systems (HAS).



Dr. Sheena Erete (Computing and Digital Media) and her students are working on a research project to understand the design of technologies that support the building of social and political capital in low-income high crime neighborhoods. Her research project, “Understanding Digital Crime Prevention: Investigating How Communities Use Technology to Address Crime,” explores technologies that influence collective action against crime. Partnering with the Woodlawn Children’s Promise Community, Dr. Erete is conducting an ethnographic study with local residents to understand their values, motivations, and desires as they relate to neighborhood crime prevention.

Dr. Suzanne Carlberg-Racich (Public Health) and her students are partnering with the Chicago Recovery Alliance (CRA), a comprehensive harm reduction program that works to counteract the stigma and disenfranchisement of injection drug users (IDUs) through harm reduction service delivery. Her project, “A Voice for Change: Using photovoice and shared narrative to illustrate the value of harm reduction,” aims to capture the meaning of harm reduction in the voices of those who use CRA services. Participants will be engaged in a photovoice project where they will share the value of harm reduction through photography and the creation of a shared narrative. The photos and narrative will be shared with national partners with the aim of using the material to give IDUs a voice in the advocacy process by allowing them to tell the story about the critical importance of harm reduction in saving and improving lives.



The Steans Center awards up to three Community-based Research Faculty Fellowships to support community-based research as scholarship and a form of service-learning pedagogy. A fellowship project can be proposed by any full-time DePaul University faculty member who seeks to conduct research in partnership with one or more Chicago community-based organization and who incorporates undergraduate and/or graduate student research linked to a course. All projects must in some way aim at improving the quality of life for residents of Chicago and must be driven by the interests of the community partner (s) Fellowship applications are encouraged from any topic area. The Center also provides financial support for the Irene and Bill Beck Faculty Fellowship in the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies.

For More Information

<http://steans.depaul.edu/Faculty/cbresearch/fellowships>

<http://beckresearch.org/faculty-fellowships/research-fellowship/>

Jeff Heisler, who completed his masters in November 2013, was part of a group in Rubin's Recruitment and Selection class that was assigned to Lawndale Christian Development Corporation (LCDC) on Chicago's west side. The organization focuses on affordable housing, education and other advocacy efforts. When Heisler took the class in 2013, LCDC was in the process of developing Roots Café, a restaurant and for-profit social enterprise designed to provide healthy foods as well as economic development training and technical assistance. At the time, LCDC had a space for the café, had acquired necessary building permits and had received some funds for equipment. Heisler and his group worked on issues related to recruitment and hiring of people.

"Our main focus was how the organization would hire a head chef," he says. He explains how specific job descriptions need to be designed when recruiting key staff. The head chef, Heisler says, needs to do much more than cook – he or she must administer and plan, maintain an inventory, hire and train additional cooks and have the ability to complete paperwork for the restaurant. In the end, the group's deliverables were a job description and interviewing guide for the café. "This experience drove home the overall purpose of the class," he says. "We were able to relate what we were doing to something real."

"What really got me excited," he says, "was applying theory and content to real-world experience. It takes you out of your comfort zone and opens your eyes to communities you might not otherwise know about. You go to business school to learn different tactics and ways of thinking. We had a distinctive experience – one that involved how we talk to people, explain things and get engaged in working with a community. The biggest takeaway of this class is that it teaches you to think a little differently. Yes, you learn in the classroom, but when you see the community that has both an emotional and professional impact." Service learning for this class involved more work than many other classes, he notes, but also gave him a rare opportunity to develop a project as part of a team for a community-based organization that could benefit.

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Heisler noted that "so many organizations struggle with this component of their company and lose a ton of money because they dedicate the wrong resources to recruiting and hiring initiatives – or hire the wrong people. They have no formal process." Today, he is in sales for a private software company in Chicago. He says the recruitment and selection class "opened up my ideas to the challenges people go through – and how students can help make a difference."

For DePaul students, getting to know a community-based organization is about more than learning how that organization operates on a day-to-day basis. LCDC, for example, has a rich history of community development and recently opened up its Fair Housing Exhibit Center, which pays tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the time he spent in Chicago. King and his family lived in North Lawndale for six months in 1966. Now, Larry Dixon, Project Manager of LCDC, says the organization plans to open Roots Café this spring. The project, he says, is not just a restaurant, but part of the organization's efforts to revitalize North Lawndale.

Dixon, the main contact for DePaul students in Heisler's class, says that students provided "fresh insights" and that their work went beyond creating job descriptions to sharing input about the café project. LCDC, he explained, like many nonprofits, often lacks the capacity to do all that it wants to do – and that employees sometimes take on a number of responsibilities at once. "When you work for nonprofits, you wear five or six hats. It's good to have other minds helping you out. I would tell other nonprofits to form a relationship with DePaul. We're in the trenches, and it's good to have someone from the outside looking in." Dixon says that it's not uncommon for students to come back to the organization and volunteer for projects. "You build a relationship with people, and maybe somewhere down the road they continue to volunteer their time and talent."

Based on her service learning experience in two courses, Adrienne Mitchell says that service learning "is more than about working on assignments – it's working to produce actual deliverables for organizations." Mitchell, who got her MBA from DePaul in 2013, is currently Director of HR and Academic Affairs, Department of Surgery at The University of Chicago Medicine & Biological Sciences. For Martin's Compensation and Benefits class, she worked with a team

at Association House, a settlement house more than a century old that provides wrap-around services for social, educational, and health programs. Students were assigned to develop and plan how to administer the organization's compensation philosophy. "What stood out," Mitchell says, "is that it was wonderful to work with a group whose whole focus was giving back to the community. We were inspired to deliver the best product we could because we felt they needed the work we were doing." Mitchell adds that the work environment of this organization – and other nonprofits – enhances the experience. "In a Fortune 500 company, work would have been more centralized, and you may see certain aspects of a project. But in many nonprofits, you can see the full spectrum of how an organization operates. That really makes a difference."

Camille Grenewich, Human Resources Director at Association House, stated "students were able to help us put our data into perspective. DePaul students were able to take a close look at the labor market and our salary structure for this project. I was impressed with the observations they made." (What) student research did was help me focus on why people leave. We have a lot of bilingual employees, and many are in great demand. Their research on jobseekers also gave us helpful information about employee perceptions."

For LaVan's Professionalism in Human Resources course last summer, Melissa Saladin and three other students on her team worked on an evaluation tool to help the Pan-African Association revamp their process of evaluating staff and volunteers. The organization serves people who come to the U.S. from across Africa, including Somalia, Ethiopia, Liberia, Togo and others countries. "Working with this group was a great experience," says Saladin, who is from the Dominican Republic. "If I have another opportunity to work with a nonprofit, yes, I would do it." Many international students have served community partners through LaVan's courses. "Like all students, it's a way to introduce them to the nonprofit sector, it helps them improve skills and gives them a sense of self-confidence," she says.

Nana Ahmed, a Somali and Arabic interpreter for the organization, says that Saladin helped her prepare for workshops for a Somali group focused on community issues. She also took trips during which she helped job developers work with clients through mock interviews. For one interview, clients visited a downtown hotel; Saladin helped them practice interview questions. Andrea Porter, Volunteer Coordinator and Development Associate for the organization, provided students with information on what services the Pan-African Association provides, the overall culture of the organization, and its mission and goals. "Students," she says, "translated this information into a practical evaluation. It wasn't just about one project," she says. "We want to open up that door to create lasting relationships in the community and with the university."

The service learning experience gives students an opportunity to partner with nonprofits and have a positive impact on programs and issues. Meanwhile, Professor Martin says he also sees the impact on students. "I definitely see a change in students," he says. "Students gain knowledge and expertise that has value." One former student, he says, is "now a mid-level manager with a health systems (company) in Chicago. She spoke about her service learning experience, and said thank you for the opportunity to stretch herself. She was telling me that this work went beyond consuming textbooks. I've heard that before from students. This is real work, and it has an impact on actual lives."

LaVan sees potential for service learning in the coming years. "I think we need to continue to emphasize service learning as an important part of the university's culture," she says. "If we convey that to our students, I believe it will persist."

