

Service Learning Across Cultures:

STUDENTS, COMMUNITIES CONNECT THROUGH ESL CLASSES
 BY DAN BARON

On a Tuesday afternoon in Chicago's diverse Albany Park neighborhood, DePaul student Robyn Franko works with a group of adult students from many countries who are trying to meet a major challenge – mastering the English language. Earlier this year, Franko was a student in “Writing and Social Engagement: Teaching and Tutoring ESL,” a service learning class that connects students to four community sites around the city that teach or tutor English as a Second Language. On a given day, she might be working with students from Korea, Mexico, Yemen and a host of other countries.

It's common for Franko to gain firsthand experience learning about different cultures – from teaching women who grew up in cultures in which they were reluctant to speak in public, to her experience with one man who, during a small group session, spontaneously sang a song in his native language, Korean. “My experience in the classroom prepared me for what to expect from students, what to look for, and what kind of things students want to learn,” Franko says. “I also learned to take into account what people from different cultures need.”

The challenge of working with people of very different backgrounds is a common one for many students taking service learning courses. In this case, barriers may not be just economic or even cultural – they extend to the most basic level of understanding what people from diverse linguistic backgrounds seek to communicate. One outcome is for DePaul students, and the students they teach, to experience a kind of transformation. “The ideal is that our students will have sort of a ‘light bulb moment,’ but usually there is tension in the first part of class, because sites seem so different to students,” says Christine Tardy, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse who has taught the the course WRD 377 Writing and Social Engagement: Teaching and Tutoring ESL for three years. “What happens is that when DePaul students show up, they see the reality of what people served by these programs face. When they teach at these sites, they can see a world opening up to them.”

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Professor Tardy and WRD 377 Students



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DIRECTOR'S LETTER

This edition of the Steans Center newsletter sheds light on how DePaul students engage with people across cultural boundaries through service learning. The community projects outlined place students in new and often awkward contexts traversing social, linguistic, economic, political and geographic borders. The outcome, as you will see, is a learning process that does not shy away from positioning students to encounter difference and real critical social issues as a central part of their education at DePaul.

In Professor Tardy's course, students not only learn about the role and importance of ESL within global, national and local economies or the role that language plays in solving mundane issues such as visiting the grocery store or finding a bathroom. They also begin to understand that language is an inlet to increasing one's access to political and economic life in whatever country one lives. As you will see, Professor Tardy's students begin to recognize the way that acquiring English language skills in the U.S., skills they often take for granted on a daily basis, increases economic opportunities for immigrant families seeking to get a foothold in the economy.

On the other side of the world in the Philippines, Professor Tavanti's graduate students studying in Manila also learn about crossing cultural boundaries. In their effort to conduct community-based research in collaboration with impoverished Manila residents, students realize the challenges of engaging in a form of research that is collaborative and in the interest of marginalized groups. Perhaps most importantly, they learn about the commonality of social issues across political borders and how Vincentian institutions are collaborating with one another to address such issues.

Lastly, in neighborhoods throughout Chicago, McCormick Community Interns provide examples of how advanced, customized community internship projects push students to apply knowledge in a variety of social contexts. From working on translation projects with refugees on Chicago's Northwest side to designing public art tours in the historic Bronzeville neighborhood, McCormick Interns are finding ways to draw upon their education at DePaul to build community-based programs and projects. These advanced internships are capstone experiences for students, regardless of the field of study or career path they seek to pursue.

As all three programs illustrate, DePaul service learning students are reaching beyond their comfort zone and are learning to interact with people who often face very difficult life challenges. These types of educational experiences produce unique individuals who do not fear otherness but who engage with difference in ways that serve the needs and interests of others and that transform them as students into socially engaged alumni.

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COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH IN MANILA

In December 2007, DePaul embarked upon its first study abroad course in Manila, Philippines. In partnership with Adamson University, a Catholic and Vincentian institution that works with underserved communities in Manila, Dr Marco Tavanti, Assistant Professor in the School of Public Service introduced the methodology of partnerships for poverty reduction as part of a unique program that included collaborative research between DePaul students and community organizations. Students on the trip enrolled in Research Methods in Public Service and before traveling they learned Participatory Action Research (PAR) Methods and Appreciative Inquiry. During a week-long, intensive workshop on participatory research in Manila, students teamed with Adamson faculty and community leaders from relocation sites outside of Metro-Manila to brainstorm research proposal ideas. Students applied their understanding of PAR by conducting focus groups and interviews with community leaders and residents. Their goal was to devise a preliminary research plan that would contribute to better understanding how to increase economic sustainability in the relocation sites. Research teams then visited the relocation sites and conducted interviews on residents' opinions about the research topics developed during the focus groups. Melanie Sillas, Steans Center Catholic Schools Initiative Coordinator and a student on the trip, noted how students were able to learn about the challenge of conducting interviews that were appreciative of community input. "They began to understand the importance of community-level knowledge in academic research," she noted. In addition to research opportunities, DePaul was challenged to become a part of the University's "Piso Mula Sa Puso" Campaign, an effort to raise funds for the University's Vincentian Center for Social Responsibility. Known as the "Dollar from the Heart" Campaign in the United States, DePaul students, are currently working on how to support Adamson University's effort to expand its new Center's outreach to underserved community groups in Manila.

McCormick Community Interns: Action-Based Education

BY RAEHEL TIFFE

DePaul 08 graduate Kristen Warman has spent months translating words like “vacuum” and “garbage” into languages from Arabic to Korean to Somali. Warman learned that these are words incoming refugees need to know when coming to the United States, even for those who are leaving behind positions as doctors, lawyers and engineers.

“It’s very hard for a lot of refugees who come from cultural backgrounds where pride is so valued to start working in the United States as a hotel cleaner,” Warman explains based on her experience working with refugees at Chicago’s World Relief, “But, unfortunately, these are the only jobs they can get when they first arrive.”

Explaining the nuances of the US class-system and bureaucracy to war-fleeing men, women and children is no easy task, but it’s one Warman took on using her self-constructed Translation Project—which includes not only translating terms refugees might hear on the job, but also translating the entire interview process into his or her native language—as a guide.

She notes, “From my own experience, I find that it is easier to work out questions and answers in my own language first so that I can properly answer in another language. Because many of our clients have not had experience with job interviews, it is even more difficult for them.”

Warman was able to perform this plan through the McCormick Community Internship, which she was granted by the Steans Center program last winter. The McCormick Community Internship is conceived as the capstone experience in an undergraduate’s service experience for students with a strong interest in not for profit, community and social justice work. The intern spends one quarter in a community setting that is structured to utilize their individual talents, experiences and academic expertise. What is most unique about this program is that instead of students showing up

to an organization and being given an assignment, the students create their own project plan which is approved by the community organization and submitted with their application for the internship. If selected, the intern is granted \$1,200 to help ensure their proposal comes into fruition. This means that the student earns money without being a financial burden to the organization; for the various sites, they are getting an immensely dedicated intern. Throughout their internship students attend reflection meetings with a Steans Center staff member who acts as the McCormick Community Internship supervisor. Final projects are presented at the annual Steans Center Service Speaks conference, which will be taking place this academic year on May 9th, 2009.

During 2007-08, ten students were awarded the internship. Each quarter applications are reviewed by a committee of Steans Center staff, DePaul faculty and community organization representatives. The ten recipients included: Ashley Cureton, who worked at the Bronzeville Visitor Information Center (BVIC); Amanda Dutczak, who worked for the WGN Bozo Ball Fundraiser; Tara Genovese, who worked at Centro Romero; Chris Jaffe, who worked for the Mankind Project Chicago; Lam S. Lin, who worked at the Southeast Asian Center; Azalea Parilla, who worked at Centro Romero; Anne Rooney, who worked at Open Books; Ahlam Said, who worked at Interfaith Muslim Action Network; Kristen Warman; and LaTasha Washington, who worked at Imani.



Ashley Cureton dedicated her internship to her Public Art Tour plan. Cureton saw the need to highlight and celebrate local Bronzeville community artists. She researched the art, made maps of the areas surrounding the art, and then created a cell phone tour, a walking tour, and a bike tour. Cureton says that the experience served as not only an outlet for her interest in anthropological research, but also gave her “real-world” knowledge about the non-profit world. Cureton noted, “I got a lot of hands-on experience. I learned more about funding—I had to write grants and proposals all the time, and prior to that, I didn’t know that that’s a huge part of how the workers get paid, how they fund a lot of their events, and how they keep the organization running. I learned how to plan events, honed down some of my research skills, and got to practice public speaking....I really got to experience some of the leadership roles that you have to take on [at non-profits].”

Paula Robinson is the Managing Director of the BVIC and was Cureton’s supervisor. Robinson says that having Cureton as an intern was “wonderful, particularly because we got to have her for multiple quarters. It’s a huge help to have an intern that can work on a project for more than the length of one school term; that level of continuity is very beneficial to us.”

For several students the internship led to immediate post-graduate employment. Warman, Jaffe, Parilla, and Said were all hired by their respective sites after their internships ended.

Service Learning Across Cultures

For Tardy, being at DePaul has helped open up for her the world of teaching ESL at the community level to immigrant groups. After years of teaching English overseas -- in Czechoslovakia, Turkey and Japan -- and then receiving a doctorate in ESL and Applied Linguistics at Purdue University, she came to DePaul in 2004. "Between DePaul's mission and the structure Steans offers, there was an opportunity to teach service learning classes in ESL," she says. "There's also such a high level of demand, since so many people in the city want ESL support."

Along the way, Tardy worked with the Chicago Federation of Labor, whose Worker

Assistance Committee wanted to build a database of ESL services in the city that would benefit those who have recently arrived in the U.S. from Mexico and other countries. Tardy's undergraduate students compiled information about ESL services in the city for the Federation's database; graduate students designed a class on ESL course development and, later, an ESL class on how to use English in job interviews.

For students in Tardy's "Writing and Social Engagement Class," learning about ESL is a multifaceted opportunity. Students explore the theory and practice of teaching ESL, as well as cutting-edge issues tied to immigration and

other political and cultural topics related to the subject. The experience provides a rich context for students that helps them engage with adult learners in ESL classes in a more meaningful way. In February, for example, a speaker with Chicago-based Latinos Progresando, which provides legal immigration services, education and a range of other programs for immigrants, spoke to the class about citizenship and key policies facing immigrants. Students also participate in reflection sessions with other students, a process that enables them to see how others are going through service learning experience in different communities -- like Albany Park, Uptown and Pilsen.

CLASS REACHES OUT TO DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

Through Tardy's class, students gain experience at a range of community centers -- including a small classroom at the Telpochcalli Education Project in the southwest side neighborhood of Little Village and at the Albany Park Community Center, a large community-based organization on the city's northwest side.

Robyn Franko, who graduated from DePaul in March with a degree in English, calls her service learning work at the Albany Park Community Center "probably my favorite experience in college. It allowed me to see how the other half lives. I grew up in the suburbs, and never saw this kind of community diversity. It was a real eye-opener -- I had to learn how to explain myself 17 ways for 17 students." Franko was required to be at the site once a week but usually chose to be there twice a week. She points out how the class combined what they learned in class at DePaul and what they found when they taught in a community-based classroom. "In the DePaul class," she noted, "I learned a lot about theory -- in Albany Park I learned about the application of that theory."



WRD 377 students hear from a representative from Latinos Progresando

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One day at the site, students were given a page with images of nearly twenty specific topics, like work, sports, friends and family, and were asked to identify them. The exercise, like many others, gave Franko and the students a chance to build key skills. “This experience helped me develop the ability to listen and decipher what people are saying,” Franko explained. “I learned more about how to be patient and flexible. Students learned to identify specific words and situations, and how to talk about them.”

Franko says she would like to continue working in Albany Park as a volunteer. In Chicago’s Uptown community, Muhammad Luqman expressed a similar sentiment based on his experience teaching at the Indo-American Community Center. Luqman, a senior in International Studies, said that “this experience was really about ‘learning as you go’ – for me, as well as for the students.” On one level, Luqman understands the everyday challenges and needs of students at the Center, which serves South Asian immigrants. Luqman, who grew up in Pakistan, lives with his wife and two children and drives a cab in Chicago. “I had faced many of the questions these people face as an immigrant,” he says. “It was a nice experience to be able to work with them – a combination of providing a service to them, observing, and then writing about it for my class.”

Zachary Brenner, a senior majoring in Religious Studies at DePaul, completed his service learning experience at Telpochcalli Community Education Project where he mostly worked with Mexican immigrants. “The experience I had in this class was really about how to develop personal relationships,” he says. “I found that if one could do that, that facilitates learning to a great extent. If two people come into a situation and are receptive to embracing each other’s ideas, there is always a common human bond that can be formed.”

Brenner also notes how his experience in the classroom and service site reinforced each other. “In this class, there is never a gap between your weekly experience at a service site and weekly academic work in the classroom – they inform each other,” he says. “It’s a way of doing service after being prepared to do it.”

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SITES REFLECT VALUE OF SERVICE LEARNING

Maria Velazquez, who coordinates the adult program for Telpochcalli, says the class enables adult students at that site to share what they need with DePaul students, often in a way that reflects daily challenges many Americans may take for granted. “Parents might ask what they need to say when they go to a hospital or make appointments,” she says. “These are very important concerns, and of course language can be a barrier in many situations.”

At the Albany Park Community Center, DePaul students like Franko participate in an ESL program that is making a difference for scores of people who depend on it to learn a new language. More than 1,000 people a year take ESL classes at the Center, according to Michelle Fleming, adult literacy and volunteer director at the site. Albany Park community is also one of the most diverse communities in Chicago with over 40 different languages spoken in public schools. Fleming says that one major benefit of having DePaul students

in ESL classrooms at the site is simply “having another English speaker in the class. Students hear another voice. We find that when students are not here, we miss them.” “Language acquisition in this class is like a patchwork quilt – people bring very different ‘patches’ to the classroom. adds Grace Watson, who teaches ESL classes at the site.” “DePaul students can do things I don’t have time to do. That’s so important, because it means my students receive more attention.”

For Tardy, the service learning experience students go through exposes them to something they could not have fully anticipated. Yes, preparation in the classroom, reflection and applying what they have learned while teaching adult learners are all essential parts of the experience. She suggests, however, that there’s also an excitement and vitality about teaching ESL that students remember. “What happens is, students show up to these sites and it’s real life and has a rich context,” she says. “That’s the nature of teaching – it’s never exactly as you expect it’s going to be.”



MISSION STATEMENT: The Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning provides educational opportunities grounded in Vincentian community values to DePaul students. The Center seeks to develop mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationships with community organizations in order to develop a sense of social agency in our students through enrollment in CbSL courses, community internships and placements, and community-based student employment.

Faculty Community-based Research Fellows Announced

DR. NEIL VINCENT



Dr. Neil Vincent, Ph.D. and his MSW students will be working in collaboration with researchers from two Catholic Universities, Dr. Christine Call (U. of St. Francis) and Dr. Charlie Stoops (Dominican), in

a collaborative research project with the West Side Domestic Abuse Project. The organization seeks to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse by providing culturally responsive interventions for perpetrators, increasing community awareness, and conducting research. The study explores the strengths and needs of perpetrators of intimate partner violence who successfully complete group services and the extent to which they remain nonviolent in the months after program completion. Utilizing Grounded Theory, 30 perpetrators will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. Findings will be disseminated through peer reviewed journal publications, as well as community forums, conferences, and presentations at each university.

DR. NILA GINGER HOFMAN



In collaboration with the Irene and Bill Beck Faculty Fellowship in the Women and Gender Research Initiative, the Steans Center is supporting Dr. Nila Ginger Hofman (Anthropology) and Lauren

Rzepka (Graduate Student, Women's and Gender Studies) in documenting the working lives of women living in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago. Research includes recording the experience of participants in the labor market, the informal economy and as unpaid household labor. In partnership with community organizations in Humboldt Park, the study employs community-focused advocacy and seeks to promote gender equality by bringing the lived experiences of women's working lives into public view.

The Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning and the Women and Gender Research Initiative of DePaul University are working in collaboration to offer faculty community-based research fellowships. All DePaul faculty are eligible to apply. For more information visit: <http://cbsl.depaul.edu/fellows/>



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