Servicing Learning in the Humanities: A Workshop for Interested Instructors and Community Partners
2 February 2015, Dauer Hall 215

Workshop Description

What does Feminist Theory have to do with Slow Food? The answer to this question is service-learning, a significant way for humanities scholars to connect theoretical ideas about the human condition to practical work in our communities. According to the National Service Learning Clearinghouse, service-learning is "a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities." In other words, service-learning combines pedagogy and community involvement to bridge the gap between the academy and the community and bring service into the classroom where teachers can utilize resources in the community, students can gain valuable cultural and professional experience, and community organizations can benefit from increased awareness and volunteerism.

This hands-on workshop will introduce UF teachers and community partners to the growing field of service-learning with particular attention to service-learning components and strategies for humanities courses. The first part of the workshop will discuss existing service-learning courses in the humanities at UF, illustrate relevant student learning objectives, and provide resources for developing mutually-beneficial and sustainable relationships with community partners involved in service-learning courses. The second part of the workshop gives participants time and assistance to develop service-learning components to their existing or future courses. There will be ample time for Q&A and interactive planning by all participants.

Workshop Outline

- Welcome by the Humanities Center
  - Introduction to Anita, Angela, and April
  - Short statement about public humanities and service learning
  - Outline of the workshop
  - This is the first workshop like this at UF, and so we will be taking notes on the discussion so that we can use our interactions today to augment the materials on service learning available through the CLS.
- Introduction by Anita, Angela, and April
  - Invite participants to introduce themselves and the nature of their past work or potential interest in service-learning
- Anita and April comments
  - Distribute syllabi handouts from Anita’s courses
  - Presentation of Anita’s course/s: how we came to integrate service-learning, how service learning addresses course learning goals, etc.
How have we benefitted from service learning?
- Reflections on service-learning in the tenure process

- Angela presentation
  - Description of service-learning and resources offered by CLS
  - Ideas of service learning components in different humanities disciplines. How do the humanities benefit from service learning?

- Anita/Angela/April – Discussion of complexities involved in service-learning
  - How to (1) meet learning objectives of students while (2) meeting needs of the community partners. Community partners need to be taught how to employ students effectively; we cannot assume that they will know how to provide meaningful experiences.
  - Time pressures and ways to manage/coordinate service-learning. What kinds of MOUs or “partnership agreements” are helpful?
  - How can students be good service-learning stewards?
  - What resources are available to students when service learning goes awry

- Q&A
  - Discussion of role of activism in service learning?

- Planning time
  - Individual planning by workshop participants on their own service-learning components
  - Anita/Angela/April/Sophia circulate around the room and assist

- Share with group and wrap up
  - Workshop participants/groups report back to the group on their own ideas and group discussion and sharing of advice.
  - Brainstorming of service-learning online with “Get Involved Activities”.
  - We will send a follow-up email with more resources

- Evaluation

**Outline of Angela’s Presentation**

- What is Service-Learning
  - Service-Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (servicelearning.org).
  - It enhances theoretical and practical understanding of the material

- How do humanities benefit from service-learning
  - I found this list on a UCF page called “10 reasons you should take a humanities class”
    - “Humanities courses help us understand our neighbors”
- Humanities classes all you to learn things about new peoples and culture, and what better way to give a real life interaction to that than to engage with the community.

  - “humanities course discusses ideas we’ve often wondered about but were afraid to discuss”
    - It’s more than learning about the facts and figures, it allows you to apply the “what” and the “so what” to learning, the exact model for reflection!

  - “Humanities courses develop skills we will need in almost any work we will do”
    - Analytical and critical thinking skills, the ability to reflect upon your own understandings and open to others, is key in what we teach about entering the community through service.

  - “Humanities courses are fun!”
    - You are given the opportunity to understand yourself and the world around you, and SL allows you to do that in your local community.

- CLS as a resource
  - Consultation with faculty on potential sites
  - Consultations with students on potential sites
  - Class presentations (what it is, how to be a good volunteer, reflection)
  - Showcase you! Faculty profiles

- How to meet community partner needs
  - Know what their needs are
  - Understand their mission and values
  - Know their expectations
  - Understand what the true scope of work will entail

- How can students be good stewards
  - Start early- too many students wait to the last minute and aggravate the community partners. Try giving them a deadline of when they have to made contact with a potential site. If you are having students work with a particular site, work 1 semester in advance.
  - Be patient and flexible
  - Be punctual
  - Come prepared with forms and requirements ahead of time
  - Stay until the job you agreed to do is done

*In the book “Everyone Helps, Everyone Wins”, there is a chapter called “Ten Ways to be a Good Volunteer”.*
Workshop Summary

Dr. Anita Anantharam from the Center for Women’s Studies and Gender Research initiated the conversation by giving a short presentation discussing the challenges and rewards of service-learning class she had taught previously. This course focused on the intersection of gender and food politics in the Gainesville community. Several important points became clearer in her discussion. First, service-learning focuses on combining theory with practice. Combining theoretical models of feminism with concerted action helps provide the bridge between civic responsibility and citizenship. Service-learning, however, does not have to orient towards women’s studies. Service-learning is not restricted to any specific discipline. Second, service-learning is not equivalent to volunteer work. Volunteer work tends to focus on untrained rote tasks; service-learning attempts to provide a critical, analytical approach to the labor performed. By thoughtfully engaging students with theory while also asking them to apply it in action, a broader range of issues are brought into play than would be possible with volunteer work.

Nevertheless, achieving this goal is easier said than done because the success of any service-learning project depends on cooperation between multiple parties – the faculty member who designs the course, the student who must complete requirements, and the community member who is willing and able to help achieve the goals of the course. If any party does not successfully perform their duties, then the goals of the service-learning project are in jeopardy. Typically, the weakest link in this chain is the student since the faculty and community member are already motivated about the project. Some possible strategies to encourage students include precision and clarity in the course requirements and personal encouragement to divide the labor for the project into feasible chunks. So, given the necessary involvement of the faculty in organizing the course and likely need for student encouragement, service-learning courses should not be too large unless motivated teaching-assistants are available to help the faculty member.

Angela Garcia from the Center for Leadership and Service gave a short presentation on the resources available to help faculty organize a service-learning course. She directed participants to the Center for Leadership’s website which has information, resources, and frequently asked questions for any faculty who would like to incorporate service-learning into their courses.