Collaborative Service Learning: Developing, Documenting, Fostering Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Exchange

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PRESENTATION
A Collaborative Service Learning Project:
Developing, Documenting, and Fostering Intercultural Exchange

AND WORKSHOP
Collaborative Service Learning: Mapping Interests and Interconnections

Presenters

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Assigned Session Chair

Patricia Thorstenson
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FOR PROCEEDINGS

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Georgia Southern University
Statesboro, Georgia, USA
Abstract

Presenters discuss their collaborative service learning project which involved students in an Intercultural Communication and an Advanced Video Production course at Georgia Southern University, and the Southeast Georgia Communities Project (SEGCP), a non-profit organization serving needy community members and seasonal farm worker families in Lyons, Georgia. Students and faculty traveled to SEGCP headquarters and then to a migrant worker camp, participated in a health information visit, and videotaped face-to-face interviews with students, organization members, and seasonal workers. Presenters show the student-produced video and discuss a wide range of products possible from collaborative service learning projects that are useful to the communities being served, to current student portfolios, to future course development, and to faculty as the basis for research projects. Audience members will create a preliminary map of their own possible collaborative project: identify issues/needs/problems of concern, possible project collaborators in their institution, and specific local communities in need.
A Collaborative Service Learning Project: Developing, Documenting, and Fostering Intercultural Exchange

INTRODUCTIONS

PATRICIA: Rebecca (Becky) Kennerly is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Arts here at GSU. She is interested in performance studies, ethnography, performance pedagogy, and oral history interviewing.

Tyson Davis is an Instructor in the Multi-Media Communications area in the Communication Arts Department here at Georgia Southern. Tyson produces original programming and news and supervise students in their productions for our cable television Channel 97 here in Statesboro.

Lyndell Nelson, our guest today is a Senior broadcasting information major in the Department of Communication Arts at GSU. Lyndell has served as a staff writer for the student newspaper, a peer leader with the freshman orientation program, and a peer advisor for our department. Lyndell’s interests include feature news and broadcast news reporting. She is currently finishing her internship at a Savannah television station.

BECKY: Today we’ll talk a bit about how we came to be involved in our collaborative service learning project, and discuss outcomes of this and other possible service learning projects, and show the video documentary of the project. Then we’ll conduct a short workshop to help you create a preliminary map of your own collaborative project. While we are discussing our project, perhaps you’ll begin to think issues/needs/problems of concern to you, possible collaborators in your own institution, and specific local communities in need who might partner with you.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

BECKY: In the Spring of 2008 Tyson and I planned and executed a collaborative service learning opportunity with students in my Intercultural Communication course, students in an Tyson’s Advanced Video Production course, and the Southeast Georgia Community Project (SEGCP). Lyndell Nelson was enrolled in both courses and directed the student video project.

SEGCP, established in 1995, is a non-profit community-based organization reaching out to needy communities and migrant/seasonal farm workers and their families in the Lyons, Georgia area (about 45 miles northwest of here). That area of Georgia is renowned for sweet and juicy Vidalia Onions. The organization is
funded by federal and state grants, and citizen donations of money, goods, and services.

There are many misconceptions about members of the Hispanic community. We have included a handout created by the Committee for Tolerance and Community Collaboration (CTCC), an ad hoc GSU group to which I belong. We used this handout in our classes and other presentations of this work in furtherance of students and community education (see Appendix A).

TYSON: During our field trip, at the headquarters of SEGCP, students received an orientation to the issues and problems that migrant workers and their families face, preparation for being in the field with the workers as they harvested onions by hand, and a brief overview of the history of and services provided by SEGCP.

Due to the heavy rain the days leading up to our trip, the fields were too wet to harvest. Consequently, the workers were taking a forced day off: farm workers are paid by the bushel, and so if there is no work, there is no pay. We visited the workers at a “camp” for single men—men whose families are not with them. We all assisted SEGCP staff handing out print information about disease prevention, a flier promoting a health clinic, condoms, water, and crackers.

LYNDELL: When the health visit came to a close, one of the migrant workers requested help with his cell phone service, and one of the SEGCP administrators served as a translator with the phone service provider: this took over an hour to resolve. We were all standing around wondering what to do when several of the workers came out into the common area and asked if they could practice their English in conversation with us. One of the students, reasonably fluent in Spanish, helped us talk to each other. When one man agreed to a recorded interview, several of his compadres also agreed to talk to us on camera.

SO HOW DID WE FIND EACH OTHER?
A Confluence of Research Interests, Human Interests, and Teaching Goals

BECKY: I am an ethnographer interested in the cultural performance of memorialization— I have been studying roadside shrines for some time, and my research led me to investigate shrines built by Mexican migrant workers.

Looking for an academic community with similar interests, I found and am now fortunate to be working with an ad hoc committee at GSU, the Committee for Tolerance and Community Collaboration (CTCC). The committee promotes education, communication, and advocates for services and justice for Latino/a people in Southeast Georgia. SEGCP is one of our primary partners.

Every spring for the past several years, SEGCP has welcomed students and faculty from GSU in order to introduce to each other members of the migrant community and the university community. In the spring of 2008 I asked Tyson
and his Advanced Video Production class to collaborate in documenting our field trip in the hopes that together we could be of service to all concerned: increase student education and service experience while creating a product—a video documentary—that both organizations could use for community education and fund raising. Fortunately Tyson enthusiastically agreed.

TYSON: **Prior to my employment here on campus**, I was a Services Specialist III with the Georgia Department of Labor for seven years. While working for the Labor Department, I was regularly exposed to the plight of the Migrant Seasonal Farm Worker and the extreme difficulties and living conditions associated with the lives of this workforce population.

I routinely counseled these workers, and helped with their workforce placements at agricultural co-ops across the State of Georgia. I served in the unique position where I was able to learn far more about these workers than one would normally be exposed to in most any other workforce capacity. I saw, first hand, the governmental restrictions placed upon this population, the implied discrimination against these people, and the sad journey of the lives (from our perspectives)… desperate to become more than an onion picker, but restricted by the government and employers to work in the hot Georgia fields…reduced to little more than a Serf class whose language barriers keep them unemployable in the traditional workforce.

Additionally, I produced and hosted community-related programming on a quarterly basis for the PAX affiliate in Brunswick, Georgia, during my employment with the Labor Department. On numerous occasions, I produced multi-cultural programming specifically for the entire community, and was assisted by a translator when news pertained to the Hispanic population.

Lyndell Nelson was in both of our classes and this was fortunate for the success of our project. Lyndell deserves a lot of credit here, because she integrated and put into practice the intellectual and practical application of the material, and the social bond she had with her peers helped to bring us together as a team.

LYNDELL: I was anxious and excited about getting to apply my video production skills out in the field. At times it was hard to balance my training from the two classes; in video production I’ve been taught to look at stories objectively and critically, get the facts and stay emotionally at bay. Based on the Intercultural Communication class, I planned to treat this experience with an emotional and sociological mind. The combination of training from both classes led to the creation of a successful product and eye-opening experience.

The service learning project greatly contributed to my knowledge of the Mexican migrant population. I had not had any contact with migrant workers before the trip. Now I understand not only the work that they do, but what has caused them to be desperate enough to be in their situation. They survive in
extremely meager living conditions and tough working conditions, but are grateful for the income. The workers explained that there are no opportunities for jobs in their hometowns, so they are appreciative for any chance to work.

OUTCOMES & CONTINUING CONVERSATIONS

LYDELL: **This experience gave me a huge insight into the broadcasting industry.** Making a documentary is certainly different than filming local news, but I still learned a lot about aesthetics, writing and editing. Just like in any field, the more you do something, the better at it you become, and the more comfortable you are doing it. When reporting on a touchy subject (like the possibility of illegal immigrants), it’s better to approach the subjects gently and calmly and try to establish a relationship with them first. It’s less invasive than someone shoving a microphone in someone’s face, and people are usually more willing to talk. The language barrier was something that I had not encountered before, so I had to alter my interviewing skills, directing my questions to the translator. But the newsgathering process is still the same. I learned how to get the proper information and write and edit the documentary in such a way that would both informative and expressive.

In the spring of 2009 I began my internship at WSAV, a Savannah television station, using what I learned in the field about the necessary objectivity to see and connect with the heart of a news story.

BECKY: **Our work extends beyond the semester** and the events we documented: Copies of the video have also been given to SEGCP and will be used to promote the services and fund-raising efforts of that organization. We also made multiple copies and SEGCP staff will distribute copies of the video to the men who participated in the interviews.

TYSON: **We hope that this project serves as an example** of what’s best in collaborative learning, because both teachers provided expertise to the project that couldn’t have provided in any single class, teachers and students alike provided an in-field service to the community that we would not have sought on our own—and were exposed to the work and life conditions of the people who pick the food we eat.

Our project has created even more opportunity for research, for students experience, and service to the community. In the spring of 2010 I and a new set of students, along with Mondi Mason and her nursing students, will be returning to work with SEGCP to document an actual rural health clinic and hopefully interview more students, workers and other members of our Georgia community.

BECKY: **I am showing the documentary to my students** this semester. The documentary introduces them to what is possible, introduces them to migrant workers who traveled from Mexico to Lyons, Georgia to pick the onions for which “we” are
famous, and prepares them to conduct interviews of their own. We’ll also be
taking another trip to SEGCP with new students in April.

********

SHOW VIDEO
Hand out materials while video cues (see Appendix B & C)
TAKE A FEW QUESTIONS
********

WORKSHOP

BECKY: Before the moment gets away from you, turn to the “Workshop” hand-out entitled
and jot down your thoughts. (Appendix B)

IF TIME: In groups of three or four, share your ideas, borrow from each other, let
the synergy of the small group discussion work as a mini-collaboration to take
you to a deeper level of imagination and engagement.

WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

BECKY: What possible projects have you identified? (LET PEOPLE REPORT)

Other service learning projects might include (mention what hasn’t been said):

   Services to Senior citizens
   Services to the Hungry
   Services to Battered Women or Children Services
   Serving the Environmental, River Clean-ups, Park Services
   Serving Animals in Need
   The list of those in need is long, and getting longer

IN CLOSING

BECKY: Whatever calls to you, there will be others with similar concerns. Make
arrangements with your main contact person, find out what it is that you
and your students can do for them, set dates, and formalize agreements.

LYNDELL: On-campus student and faculty organizations, your local churches, shelters,
senior homes, hospitals and clinics, civic organizations, the Chamber of
Commerce, are ALL good places to connect you with organizations in need.

BECKY: I have prepared a “How To” handout for teachers interested in working with
senior citizens – it is specifically for read-aloud and sing-a-long services provided
by students, but the basic instructions can easily be modified. I’ll make that
available after our presentation. (see Appendix C)
TYSON:  Cover your legal responsibilities – for instance we have students sign “Off Campus Participation Agreements” (see your legal department in your institution). We also have students and others read and sign “Informed Consent Forms” immediately after being interviewed, and “Release: Authorization to Reproduce Physical Likeness” forms for video or photographic documentation.

BECKY:  We encourage you to take your work beyond the immediate project, write it up and take it to conferences like this one: talking about our collaborative service-learning projects not only advances our careers, but more importantly, meets an ethical obligation to the people we serve in the furtherance of a greater awareness of their need, their human-ness, and fosters a greater understanding of the interdependent communities we help to create.

ALL:  THANK YOU
## APPENDIX A

### Top 8 Immigration Myths and Fact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MYTH</th>
<th>FACT</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. America is being overrun by criminal invaders!</td>
<td>There are about 12 million <strong>undocumented</strong> immigrants in the US (13% of all immigrants in the US). 40% entered legally and overstayed their visas. Living or working in the US without permission is a <strong>civil offense</strong>, not a crime (comparable under the law to speeding).</td>
<td>Pew Hispanic Center, Migration Policy Institute, INS Statistical Yearbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Immigrants take jobs from US citizens.</td>
<td>About 75% of undocumented workers are employed in construction, landscaping, food services, and textile mills. Americans, however, continue to be the majority of laborers working in these sectors. 25% of undocumented workers are employed in agriculture taking undesirable jobs that Americans won’t take at the going wage. Immigrants actually create more jobs than they fill; they buy goods and services, they open new businesses, and they create new opportunities for skilled American workers. The next benefit of immigration to the US is nearly $10 billion annually.</td>
<td>Rand Corp, the Urban Institute, Heritage Foundation, Federal Reserve, National Academy of Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Immigrants bring down wages for US workers.</td>
<td>Undocumented workers bring down wages for some Americans (the effect is strongest on the 10% of US workers who never finished high school). Lower wages for most Americans has to do with Congress’ failure to raise the minimum wage as well as from the transfer of US jobs to other countries with low wages.</td>
<td>Pew Hispanic Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Immigrants don’t pay taxes.</td>
<td>All immigrants pay taxes whether income, property, or sales. Studies find that immigrants pay between $90-$140 billion a year in federal, state, and local taxes. Undocumented workers pay an estimated $6-7 billion in Social Security taxes each year and about $1.5 billion in Medicaid taxes.</td>
<td>Social Security Administration, Cato Institute, National Academy of Sciences, Urban Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Source</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Immigrants use services but don’t pay for them.</td>
<td>*Undocumented people are <em>ineligible</em> for social welfare programs despite the fact that they are paying taxes (exception: education for their school age children and emergency health services).</td>
<td>American Immigration Lawyers Association, Urban Institute, Migration Policy Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Undocumented people are not entitled to constitutional rights or protection.</td>
<td>Noncitizens have the right to due process and equal protection of the laws.</td>
<td>American Immigration Lawyers Association, National Lawyers Guild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Immigrants send all of their money out of the US.</td>
<td>Immigrants send billions in <em>remittances</em> each year but globalization has tied those home economies to the health and well-being of the US economy. A lot of the money comes back in purchases of US goods and services. US banks and corporations enjoy billions in profits each year due to the remittance fees they charge.</td>
<td>Cato Institute, Inter-American Development Bank, Migration Policy Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Immigrants refuse to learn English.</td>
<td>There is no evidence that immigrants are slower to learn English than immigrants who came before them. According to a 2000 US Census, 65% of the foreign-born over the age of 5 speak English “very well”; 23% speak English “not well”; and 12% speak no English. Immigrants are eager to learn English and non-profit organizations cannot keep up with the demand for classes.</td>
<td>US Census Bureau, US Department of Homeland Security</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Due to welfare reform, *legal* immigrants are severely restricted from accessing public benefits and *undocumented* immigrants are even further precluded from anything other than emergency services. Anti-immigrant groups cite programs used by US citizen children of immigrants in their definition of immigrant welfare use.
## APPENDIX B

### Workshop
Collaborative Service Learning
Mapping Interests and Interconnections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues/Problems/Populations I Care About (not necessarily related to my academic research)</th>
<th>Possible Faculty Collaborators with Similar Interests OR AREAS OF EXPERTISE</th>
<th>Specific Local Communities in Need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Workshop and Graphic Conceived and Created by Rebecca M. Kennerly*
APPENDIX C

How to Develop an Audience-Centered Student Community Service Performing Arts Program Serving Seniors in Assisted Living Residences, Senior Retirement Communities and Other Senior Organizations.

1. **Advance Work:** Make arrangements with an organization that would welcome a series of student performances of reading aloud, singing, skits, short plays, etc. - conduct an audience analysis (basic demographics) to help target selections, make arrangements with your main contact person (usually the activities director), set dates, formalize agreements.

2. **Orientation:** Handout materials that include the purpose, value and need for such a program in your area. Describe any grading or credit criteria as necessary.

3. **Initial Class Discussion:** Round-table fashion: Share interests, background, experience with seniors in their lives, as well as experience relevant to the performing arts.

4. **Initial Class Activity:** Ask students to bring 2 short 1-2 minute selections to read aloud. Also, have several selections you would like them to sight read. Make it a light-hearted fun experience. Have a short ‘sing-a-long’. You’ll get an idea who enjoys doing that, too.

5. **Student Research:** research audience interests based on demographics. Begin to choose a repertoire. Be open to student ideas.

6. **Assign Group Members Various Responsibilities.** However, the major thrust comes from you. Try to make it a team effort with a cooperative spirit. Engage and commit members to the value of this community service and its importance.

7. **Select Material** – jokes, humorous and/or inspirational short stories, as well as contemporary and classical poetry. Use short dramatic scenes if that works. Usually the latter holds less interest and requires the small cast to take more time to practice and rehearse.

8. **Plan Performances to be about 45-50 minutes.** Rehearse, have fun, perform.

9. **Keep Technical Requirements to a Minimum.** Be prepared to provide your own. If your program develops beyond a single semester, consider writing a grant for 2-4 microphones with stands, a mixer, a speaker and several music stands. An over the ear remote microphone for the musician is ideal. The total cost for this kind of a setup could cost $1000-$1500.

10. **Keep Track of Your Expenses** such as: office supplies, transportation, etc. Keep records of expenses for tax purposes and look for grant writing opportunities.

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