

*Abstract:*

## **Reflections on Service Learning as a Pedagogical Strategy in First-Year Composition and in Interdisciplinary Courses:**

Expanding from *One-off* service to a Community Partner to Composition & Rhetoric II's **Youth Giving Circle**. (Modeled after, and in conjunction with, Social Justice Fund for Ventura County's Giving Circle). *Discussions about Service Learning both as a component of a course and as the central focus of the entire course.*

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Brief Experience Discussion: Approximately 5 years ago, I submitted the Course Proposal for ENGL 106 Composition & Rhetoric II – Service Learning. I received grants 2 years in a row to develop the course. Prior to that, I had a service learning component in every composition course and in some accounting courses I taught for CSU Channel

Islands (CSUCI). I have been continually updating the course and developing relationships with community partners and their clients. Currently, I am considering adding a service learning component to the interdisciplinary course, Business & Economics in American Literature. As a result of this experience, I am currently a Fellow for the Institutionalizing Student Learning, Access and Success (ISLAS) Academy, conducting workshops for faculty and community partners that explore how service learning engages students both with the university and the community.

Brief Description of Course: ENGL 106 Composition & Rhetoric II – Service Learning students are learning how to participate in the grant making process by acting as a Youth Giving Circle (modeled after the Social Justice Fund for Ventura County). They are the grantors who wrote a collaborative Request for Proposal for University Charter Middle School (UCMS) students to respond to. ENGL 106 students are also fundraising to increase the grant amount, and they will decide which UCMS project(s) for social justice get funded. UCMS students will be responsible for reporting about fund use to the CSUCI Youth Giving Circle. Reciprocal learning is taking place between the Professor, the university students, and the middle school students.

Detailed Description of Project, Activities & Event: English 106 provides instruction and practice in writing university-level expository and persuasive prose centered on exploring socioeconomic and sociopolitical issues in our local and global communities. Special attention is given to evidence discovery, claim support, argument response, and their applications to academic debate, public decision making, and rhetorical reading. The course requires off-campus service with community partners. Experiential learning emphasized.

One of the early writing assignments requires CSUCI students to draft an individual Request for Proposal (RFP). In class we conduct workshops to synthesize language from individual RFPs to one collaborative RFP. Prior to drafting the RFP, CSUCI students visited with UCMS students to discuss social justice on a large scale and then narrowed down to what middle school students might propose to make their school a more equal learning community. We are learning that some needs are monetary, but the largest need is for volunteers to tutor, supervise lunchtime activities, organize a club, facilitate lunchtime sports, etc. I am interested in sharing what the students are learning from the project and how my teaching has been affected.

CSUCI students delivered the RFP to UCMS students and discussed with them the grant-making process, explaining how social justice grants differ from charity. CSUCI students just received the proposals this week, and they will soon decide which

project(s) receives the grant funds. The Professor will not have a vote but will provide input. (For instance, my favorite proposal thus far is one that requests funds to start a female robotics club at the middle school.) CSUCI students are learning that drafting an effective RFP involves educating themselves about the students', faculty, and/or administrators' needs through discussion and workshops. Projects will be given higher consideration for grant funds if the project supports sustainable change toward a social justice issue at the middle school rather than a one-time gift of charity.

Seven principles guide proposal review and grant award:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement in educational growth;
- A free and responsible search for improved character;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process in schools;
- The goal of school community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the dignity and interests of all students.

UCMS grantees will work with both the Professor and CSUCI English 106 students to show how the funds were used and what the funding accomplished for the school. This evidence can be a display, a 1-3 minute video, picture montage, tour of the project or student speaker to come to CSUCI and explain the impact the funding had. UCMS students will educate CSUCI students as part of the grant making process.

Having CSUCI students write the RFP and participate in the grantee selection process fits with our community partner, the Social Justice Fund for Ventura County's, current focus on youth ages 13-23. SJF members periodically visit our classroom to teach students about the SJF, fundraising, and past projects.

Ventura County Community Foundation (VCCF) has agreed to set up a fund to hold grant money. CSUCI students will be responsible for all proposal reviews and other administrative matters and reporting. VCCF would only be allowing us to house the funds with them and then to issue the check to the winning grantee.

English 106 students will hold a small celebratory reception for winning grantee(s). (Of course, the middle school students are very excited about this part of the project and are helping the University students plan it).

This fall 2011 semester is the trial run, and it is going well. We received a \$200 seed money donation and expect to raise a total of \$500-1,000 in grant funds for the middle

school. I have also applied for lottery funds to make the grant larger in the spring 2012 semester.

Workshop Activities: Workshop participants will

- Discuss their interest in/experience with service learning and civic engagement
- Brainstorm adding a service learning component to interdisciplinary courses
- Critique sample syllabi and assignments
- Critique University student-written Request for Proposal
- Review and discuss middle school student responses to the proposal
- Discuss how best to teach social justice for sustainable change versus charity and community service. We will explore why it's important to reach youth regarding social justice, particularly in light of Jean M. Twenge's findings in *Generation Me*, which is required reading in the course.
- Share their reflections about the effectiveness of the ISLAS Fellowship

Interest in Facilitating a Workshop: Having some service learning and community engagement experience, I can add to the workshops while learning from fellow faculty at the same time. I am interested not only in innovating the English 106 course, but also in adding a service learning component to the interdisciplinary course Business & Economics in Literature.