Reflections

Spring Semester 2016

Service-Learning Abroad: Helping the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation in South Africa

By Elisa Stone, SLCC English Professor

This past summer I was invited by Westminster College’s Professor Rulon (Ru) Wood to help his team of professional communication students create an anti-stigma campaign for the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation. South Africa has the largest, most high-profile HIV epidemic in the world. As of 2013, approximately 6.3 million people there were living with HIV, including 330,000 new infections and 200,000 South Africans who died from AIDS-related illnesses (avert.org). Although the Foundation has substantial supporters and resources, they still need marketing assistance.

Our service-learning team met weekly at Westminster and held early-morning Skype meetings with the Foundation. During fall break, Ru and I journeyed to South Africa to meet with Foundation leaders at the University of Cape Town to finalize the anti-stigma campaign. They loved my “Love Don’t Judge” slogan, which will be made into bracelets, t-shirts, and debuted at the 21st International AIDS Conference in summer of 2016. We then headed to Gugulethu Township to attend a community workshop for youth living with HIV/AIDS and to film video interviews with a pioneering doctor in the HIV clinic as well as counselors and kids who were born HIV positive, with the goal of helping erase stigma for those needing diagnosis and treatment for HIV/AIDS.

While in Cape Town, Ru and I visited Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned and tortured for 18 years. We met several Freedom Fighters, including Mr. Visumzi Mcongo, who had dinner with us and allowed us to record his story of being a political prisoner with Mandela for 14 years. Mr. Mcongo accepted my gift of love beads that had been given to me by a stranger in SLC to wish me luck on my journey. Ru hopes to bring Mr. Mcongo, who has never been to America and would very much like to visit, to Westminster College as a guest lecturer.

We also learned about Apartheid and visited non-profit organizations on a philanthropic cultural tour with an organization called Uthando, a Xhosa word for “Love.” It was gratifying to support an animal shelter, children’s daycare center, and seniors’ recreation center while honoring the personal histories of those who endured Apartheid and continue to suffer its aftermath.

The Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation has requested I return in 2016 with Ru and a cohort of Westminster’s professional communication students to film and produce additional videos for the DTHF Youth Centre in Masephumelele, an under-resourced community south of Cape Town.

As a devoted practitioner of service-learning, I am elated and humbled by the opportunity to work towards social justice on a global scale. Lifelong friends from Africa and beyond are my greatest gift from this affirming experience. If you are thinking of trying service-learning, do it! Start small and don’t obsess over obstacles; you never know where the path of civic engagement will take you!

Upcoming Events

• Service Learning Teaching Circle
  Members of the circle will meet in-person and have online discussions roughly once a month from January to April. Both part- and full-time faculty are invited to join the circle and part-time faculty will be compensated for their time. For more information, contact Benjamin Solomon@slcc.edu.

• Service-Learning Infoshop January 26, 2016, 2-4pm, AAB 122
  Are you interested in learning more about high-impact service-learning pedagogies? Studies show that service-learning students do better academically, develop stronger commitments to their communities, and are more prepared to enter their careers. Join us for an infoshop on community engagement and service-learning pedagogies in the writing classroom. Both full- and part-time faculty are invited. Part-time faculty will be compensated for their time. RSVP Benjamin Solomon at 801-957-3930.

About Reflections

Reflections is a newsletter for and about service-learning in English published twice a year by the SLCC English Department. We welcome submissions on students experiences, faculty perspectives, pedagogical insights, community partner engagement, civic involvement, staff profiles, and upcoming events.

Photos or written submissions should be sent to Elisa.Stone@slcc.edu.

Editors: Elisa Stone and Clint Gardner

English Department Service-Learning Committee: Benjamin Solomon (Chair), Jason Roberts, Louise Bown, Lucy Smith, Elisa Stone, and Clint Gardner
**Student Service-Learning Experiences**

By Sheryl Reed, English 2760: James Celestino

I had the opportunity to volunteer at The Catholic Center for the homeless in downtown Salt Lake last week. It’s a place where they can come get free hygiene supplies and shower. The homeless are also able to watch TV, get their mail, and have access to free healthcare. When I first arrived, I didn’t know where to get inside and I was terrified that I was going to have to walk through a big group of homeless people waiting outside the shelter. I was able to find the entrance in the back and didn’t have to walk through the crowd. When I got inside, the big bulletin board full of homeless people’s pictures that had been banned from the center for striking staff members, shooting up in the bathroom, or defecating outside the door did nothing to allay my fears. As I helped pass out the supplies they needed, I genuinely made an effort to smile and greet them warmly. Many reeked of alcohol, had missing teeth, were grumpy, or didn’t look at me at all. But some were kind and wanted to make conversation. A few guys even flirted with me! I got to know Dennis, a sweet, formerly homeless worker there. He told me his story and was so kind and helpful to the people there. After a 7 hour shift, I drove home feeling sad. I was overwhelmed by the hopeless situation of many of these poor people. It seemed like even if you took some of them off the street, let them shower, and helped find them a job, they might be right back on the streets due to addiction or mental illness. Working with the homeless has caused me to think how we can help them in our community long term. Salt Lake City has become a mecca for the homeless because of the many resources available. These resources only seem to be a band aid on a larger problem. What can we do to help those who struggle most in our community?

By Austin Smith, English 2010: Daniel Baird

When it came to the service learning portion of my class experience for English 2010, I chose to do my community service time with the Aging and Adult Services of Salt Lake County. While involved with this organization, they had me head out to my local senior center to be paired with someone from within their work service programs and teach them how to be computer-savvy in this technologically driven day-and-age. Over the course of a few sessions, I have been teaching the ins-and-outs of basic computer function and use. Together, I took someone who was overwhelmed and opposed to using the computer to someone who understands the functions and uses it on a daily basis. To see such a vast improvement in comfort and knowledge about computers from someone so distant from it was just a great experience because I got to see improve someone’s life directly. At the end of this, I would say that my paired senior would be able to hold employment involving a position that works with computers, which can allow her to become a working member of society again after a break in retirement.

**Why build partnerships?**

By Sean Crossland, Thayne Center for Service and Learning

Higher Education has long battled the “ivory tower stigma” also known as the “town-gown conflict.” This is the perception that institutions have a tendency to try to solve the community’s problems (or what we perceive to be community problems) rather than working with the community. As we strive to be “The Community’s College” it is imperative that we are mindful of both how we engage with our community and how we prepare our students for success through engaged learning experiences.

Using best practices from both Academic and Student Affairs and a model developed uniquely for our community, the Thayne Center for Service & Learning established a Community Partnership Program in 2009. The purpose of this program is to create mutually beneficial partnerships with community organizations. These partnerships address community needs and support the learning outcomes of Salt Lake Community College Students. There are currently over 120 organizations registered in OrgSync, a free software available to all students, staff, and faculty at Salt Lake Community College. OrgSync serves as our Community Partner Database, tracks service hours, creates co-curricular transcripts, and has a variety of other useful functions. Each of these organizations has signed a Community Partnership Agreement (CPA) which outlines the expectations of both SLCC and the community partner. The CPA also ensures adequate risk management and liability measures are in place.

As an institution of higher education, our first priority should be student learning. Using Thayne Center Community Partners helps to ensure that this work addresses a community identified need at the same time. Paulo Freire stresses the importance of “co-intentional education” and a notion that knowledge is socially constructed. These organizations have already agreed to, and have a baseline understanding of what it means to be a co-educator. These organizations are more than just placements for students to earn volunteer hours; they truly are partners engaging students in experiential learning, supporting our mission and vision.

Of course, this list of community partners is not comprehensive. If you are looking for a specific type of volunteer opportunity or working with a specific organization that cannot be found in OrgSync, we encourage you to contact the Thayne Center. By focusing our community engagement to Lisa packer Thayne Center Community Partners, we can focus our collective impact and ensure reciprocity with the community.