

The International Undergraduate Journal For Service-Learning, Leadership, and Social Change

Volume 1
Issue 1 Fall 2011

Article 2

September 2011

Editor's Notes IUJSL Volume 1 Issue 1 Fall 2011

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Recommended Citation

Laff, Ned S. (2011) "Editor's Notes IUJSL Volume 1 Issue 1 Fall 2011," *The International Undergraduate Journal For Service-Learning, Leadership, and Social Change*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, p. ix-x.

Available at: <https://opus.govst.edu/iujsl/vol1/iss1/2>

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The Editors' Notes

As my colleague, Joyce Fields, and I prepare this first volume of the Journal, we also struggle with the details, and the glitches, of incorporating our “required” sophomore year service-learning on campus. The mission of our campus is embedded in a favorite line of Caroline Whitson, our President – “Leadership is not about the position we hold, but about the difference we make.” In a simple phrase she captured both the heart and pragmatics of servant leadership. And as is the wont of a college president and her partner in crime, our Provost Laurie Hopkins, we were given a simple task. Make it so.

We will not tell you that it has been easy. Like you, we have spent months haggling on campus about shared definitions, crafting a course that any faculty member could take ownership of, wrestling with learning outcomes, reflective prompts, rubrics, and assessment. We learned from our Americorps/VISTAs and leaned on their expertise as we both identified and worked with community partners. We were careful in our planning to insure that as we worked with our community partners we identified shared, sustainable projects with realistic outcomes. And then we started working on convincing faculty and students. Through faculty development workshops, pilot courses (some succeeding, some failing), meetings with students, and more, we spread the ‘gospel’ of service-learning. And when we began our first semester of the required sophomore experience service-learning courses we faced what we knew was coming – the initial complaints from students about why they had to do this. At times we would look at each other and wonder if it was worth the effort.

It is impossible to predict the power of service-learning on a college campus. Recently, Dr. Field’s required students in her sophomore year experience to serve as facilitators for an annual Sickle Cell Association family picnic. Our community partner visited her class describing the work of the Association and the tasks her students would be assuming. Kicking, screaming, but with no little insistence on her part, students reluctantly signed up to work with the children providing some respite for their parents. As she worked the picnic with these same students, they were unrecognizable to her. Gone was their grumbling and anxiety replaced with laughter and willingness. Being part of a class group added to the pleasure of the day and it was cool listening to them banter back and forth with each other. Bright and early, the Monday morning after the picnic, one of her students met Professor Fields at her office door. She thanked her profusely for the opportunity to work with these children and their parents and siblings. She told her through tears that she had not even listened to the words of our community partner and was not excited about being required to give up a social Saturday (during

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football season) for academics. But that on Monday morning, she was a different. The power of service transformed her understanding of her entire education, adding meaning and depth to her classroom experience and to her integration of the concept of personal responsibility toward social justice. This is one student among many whose lives and educations have been transformed through opportunities to be academic and to be “real” outside the ivory tower.

This Journal is dedicate to Caroline Whitson and Laurie Hopkins for the vision they gave to us and the charge to turn it into practice.

But more importantly, it is dedicated to students across our country and the world, and to hearing their voices. It is dedicated to celebrate their commitments and their willingness to serve. It is designed for us to learn from them, to follow them in their journey as they discover servant-leadership in themselves, and as they teach us that we can be change agents in our communities, our country, and our world.

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