A Preliminary Review of a Sociology Internship Course to Foster Critical Thinking and Awareness through Service Learning

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Abstract

This paper describes a Sociology Internship course in which college students were required to serve as mentors to 50 high school students. The course is an elective for undergraduate Sociology, Child & Family Studies, and Anthropology students who have been exposed to traditional classroom learning platforms. The course incorporates, service learning, in the form of mentoring to guide college students toward learning sociological concepts from a community based, hands on experience and interactive perspective. Expected internship outcomes included experiences that create awareness in three areas: student expectations (range of ideas, attitudes and perceptions about persons, group dynamics that function to create and maintain social institutions and community); student purpose (ability to examine ideas about community participants and interest and intelligence in social problems); and student reflections and connections (ability to realize a personal role and to connect to situations that are real).

Introduction

This paper discusses a Sociology internship course in service learning, a mentoring course in an undergraduate Sociology program and reports preliminary qualitative results that provide a basis for discussion and further investigation. The course design and research analysis were based on best practices in service learning and sociological theory regarding community organizations. College student interns (mentors) were from among the general student population, primarily Sociology majors, Child and Family Studies and Anthropology. Service learning internship activities primarily took place at local high school campuses. The learning objectives given to interns was to encourage high school students to pursue postsecondary education, assist them with career identification, provide networking with professionals from various occupational backgrounds and expose high school students to college campus social activities. Responding to the growing gap between obtaining a degree and unconsciously participating in the enterprises that may create careers, the challenge of teaching sociology is to find creative and constructive ways for students to explore and investigate the pathological and recurring crises of social problems that also devise pathways for direct student participation, learning and involvement. As Korgan and White (2007) state:

> By using the sociological eye, sociologists look at the world from a unique angle, notice what is unobserved, and make connections among the patterns in everyday events that the average person might not notice. In doing so, we can understand how different organizations, institutions, and societies function, how social forces shaped individual lives and ideas, and, in turn, how individuals shape organizations and institutions. This perspective enables us to notice when persistent patterns worked to create disadvantages for certain groups in society, resulting in institutional discrimination (intentional or unintentional structural biases). (p.2)

Dale (1982) used a pyramid model for teaching and applying sociology. In a series of applied projects, Dale (1982) employed a twofold emphasis that helped "students master the basic knowledge available, and then to create space for students to apply their research skills to the expansion of the knowledge base." (p.56) Dale (1982) also states "the utility of a praxis mold of teaching is particularly satisfying to sociologists, whose primary concern is the quality of the learning experience for students rather than with producing her research. Putting knowledge to work in the community and testing concepts in practicum assignments brings theory to life and thereby reinforces educational objectives."(p.56) It is safe to say that one can explore such strategies for even lower level sociology courses as was employed by Baker and Jones (1981).

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They note "a social problems course in the expository tradition makes the implicit claim that classroom knowledge is transferable to pursue beyond the Academy and that knowledge acquired from lectures and textbooks will help students become better informed citizens."(p.125)

Baker and Jones (1981) state that "given the limited capacity of academic knowledge to translate into effective civic knowledge, alternative teaching/learning strategies which self-consciously bring the civic role to the classroom must be developed."(p.125) A compelling and resonating doctrine still most relevant for teaching sociology today according to Mills (1959) is:

> What this means is that you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually to examine and interpret it. In this sense craftsmanship is the center of yourself and you are personally involved in every intellectual product upon which you may work. To say that you can have experience, means, for one thing, that your past plays into and affects your present, and that it defines your capacity for future experience. As a social scientist, you have to control this rather elaborate interplay, to capture what you experience and sort it out; only in this way can you hope to use it to guide and test your reflection, and in the process shape yourself as an intellectual craftsman. But how can you do this? One answer is: you must set up a file, which is, I suppose, a sociologist's way of saying: keep a journal. Many creative writers keep journals; the sociologist's need for systematic reflection demands it. (p.1)

Other sociologist {(Mooney and Edwards, (2001); Feagin and Vera (2001)}share the sentiment that the art of teaching Sociology must be re-invigorated with innovative teaching platforms and opportunities and that we must not instead didactically reference Sociology as a discipline noble because of its foundation imperatives. They re-affirm my belief that it is such a thing as an art of teaching Sociology. Moreover, community organization internships can offer students' hands on learning platforms that reinforce sociological concepts and theories translating into "critical understandings for lifelong impacts." (Baker and Jones, 1981, p.124)

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical construct was developed from course textbooks: <u>Practicing Sociology in the Community: A Student's Guide</u> by Phyllis A. Langton (Author), Dianne A. Kammerer (Author) (2004) and <u>Asset Building & Community Development</u> by Gary Paul Green and Anna Haines (2008). The textbooks were chosen due to their contextual components that are akin to sociology of community organizations and the practice of sociology in the community. The textbooks utilized essential sociological concepts for this internship and service learning course as well as a hand on guide offering sociological theories and perspectives about community development, issues and problems.   Supplemental materials included Campus Compact (2011) *Best Practices in Campus-Based Mentoring* and Learn & Serve America National Service Learning Clearinghouse (2009) *K-12 Service-Learning Project Planning Toolkit*.   These supplemental resources provided additional guidance regarding specific mentor and service learning best practices. Langston and Kammerer's (2004) guide offers immersive and hands on perspectives regarding the practice of sociology in the community. The guide illustrates and describes key elements and processes by which sociology and sociologists assess and analyze community organizations, i.e., schools, government, and individuals, as active participants, maintainers, and role players within a community as well as the dynamics of community development. They state:

> We have written practicing sociology in the community: a students guide for you to use during your community-based learning program. While we speak to various community – based learning programs and this guy, our primary focus is on service learning and service learning advocacy, and less on internships. Generally the former two programs, place emphasis on integrating your community experiences with your educational experiences to opportunities for reflection in the classroom, instead of primarily acquiring pre-professional experience as in many internship programs. In addition, doing service learning advocacy directs your attention to issues of social justice. We want you to learn how to connect social issues and social justice and how these can become a central focus of community-based learning. (Langston and Kammerer, 2004, p.1)

The textbook provides key and important concepts and questions that guided the student mentors to learn about practicing sociology, advocacy, critical thinking, critical reflection, critical sociology, and in engaging social justice.

We are preparing you to question existing social arrangements in a community and to reflect on why things are the way they are. One way to start questioning is by turning to the ways society structure. Throughout this guide we suggest that looking at individual characteristics cannot provide an understanding of why some groups in our society are poor, while others are stigmatized because of their sexual orientation, or why others have limited control over what goes on in their lives because of their gender or age. (p.2)

Additionally, Langston and Kammerer (2004) offer key developmental assessments for student reflection regarding outcomes and objectives. These outcomes and objectives provide measurable aspects of student expectations, connections, perceptions, as well as the overall objective of community organization development. Green and Haines (2008) define community development as:

A planned effort to build assets that increase the capacity of residence to improve their quality of life. These assets may include several forms of community capital capital: physical, human, social, financial, environmental, political, and cultural for each type of community capital, we examined the reasons that community-based organizations as opposed to governments or markets are better able to mobilize these assets; the strategies communities can use to develop these assets; and the institutions and organizations involved in the community development process. (xi)

In a complex yet comparative discourse, Green and Haines (2008) offer students micro and macro perspectives regarding continuing debates in community development. Their approach is interdisciplinary and addresses development, empowerment, programs, and planning, based on theoretical and practical approaches. Critical to community development, according to Green and Hayes (2008) is public participation also known as citizen participation. Also central to community development are education institutions that are closely aligned with public participation. (Green and Hayes, 2008, Figure3.1, p.42) The nature of the internship immersed students as both citizen participants and members of in education organization.

Based on concepts, assignments, and discussion presented in the course textbooks, the following values emerged:
- **E**xpectations (Expression/ideas about self, students at school, school persons the community)
- **P**urpose (Comments that reflect ideas about their function as a participant in this process, interest and intelligence in social problems regarding process)
- **R**eflections & Connections (Awareness of the value of their service to affect the students at the school)

Diagram 1 Sociology Internship - Fostering Critical Thinking & Awareness

Expectation   **Purpose**

Reflections & Connections
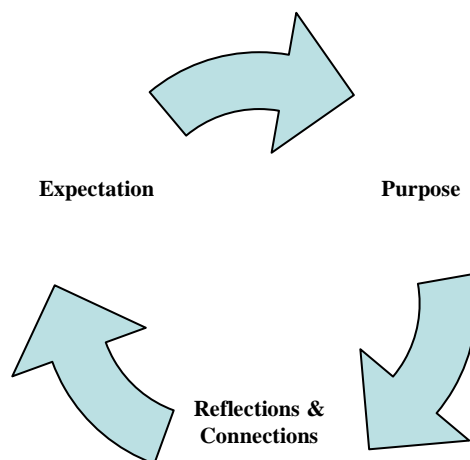
Methodology

Thirty students enrolled in the Internship course over two semesters. Student Interns backgrounds included: 16 black females, 6 white females, 5 black males, and 3 white males. Student Interns were scattered across disciplines but 20 Student Interns were Sociology majors, 3 Child and Family Studies majors, 3 General Studies-Social Science, 1 education major, and 2 Anthropology and 1 Business major. Students enrolling in the internship were primarily seniors and juniors.

A content analysis of 150 college student journals provided direct qualitative data to determine internship critical thinking and awareness based on the following themes:

- **E**xpectations (Expression/ideas about self, students at school, school persons the community)
- **P**urpose (Comments that reflect ideas about their function as a participant in this process, interest and intelligence in social problems regarding process)
- **R**eflections & Connections (Awareness of the value of their service to affect the students at the school)

Interns were required to submit five journals, up to ten mentor reports, participate in conference calls, attend in-person training/debriefing sessions and could participate in online discussion post during mentoring sessions. Using the university online learning platform, student submitted journals, mentor reports, and participated in online discussions regarding the internship mentoring process.

Journals were open-ended so that student experience, idea, perceptions, and reflections would be revealed and assessed as it related to the mentoring process. Journal questions were designed to include components of practicing sociology and community development. Journal open-ended questions were in two parts. In part-one, students were asked to share perceptions about the internship ideas and experience based on course learning outcome objectives. In part two, students were asked to shift these ideas and perceptions toward sociological concepts and theories. Students used the textbooks to guide them in crafting responses for both part one and two. Chart 2 reflects one such Journal.

Box 1 Qualitative Journal Questions

Journal Entry

Part ONE:
Identify and define the various indicators of unsustainability noted in the ABCD textbook (p227-244) that you believe have any bearing on the communities serviced by your mentor school. What type of organizations can positively affect community sustainability (for the school area) in the next year? Explain your response.

Part Two:
Based on your previous review of chapter 6 in (PSC), how does community sustainability relate to the problems of poverty regarding the mentees, and the community in which the schools are situated. Explain your response.

Student mentors journals and reports were reflective and provided sufficient data regarding their experiences, expectations, perceptions, and reflections. Student mentors feedback to the director through conference calls, training/debriefing sessions and online learning platform provided additional data to determine and identify Awareness of the service learning program/project on student mentors experiences, expectations, perceptions, and reflections.

The journal assignments deliberatively caused students to reflect upon key aspects of the internship and mentoring project/program. Journal assignments required students to give a personal account and reflection (subjective values) of what was successful or unsuccessful about overall project/program objectives. Students attended an orientation to service learning and mentoring. Training took place on a monthly basis supplemented by regular conference calls, director site visits, and the use of a university online learning platform. Students were also required to submit intern mentor reports (these described actual contact with mentees) and were student accounts about immediate ideas and perceptions of the mentor and process.

This study categorizes critical thinking and awareness based upon analysis of journal assignments. Student mentor first journal assignment asks about expectation, perceptions, reflections, connections and hoped outcomes and a final project requires that student mentors complete a multimedia presentation (video, audio, pictures) that recounts their entire immersion learning process. This multimedia presentation also included the student mentees that may cause mentor retrospection thereby creating additional outcome awareness.

Critical thinking and the awareness were identified and quantified based on four sets of qualitative data: student journals/student mentor reports, direct feedback from debriefing/training sessions conducted by the director, online discussions from the university online platform and student mentors creation of a reflective video monologue recounting their experiences as well as the mentees experiences.

Mentoring as Front Loading Reality

Imagine a young African American girl saying that no one in her family has ever completed high school, let alone gone to college. Well the interns did not have to imagine it, because they heard and saw her make this statement and for them it seemed to generate instant awareness of expectations, purpose and connections. Similar encounters throughout the internship generated a startling reality that there is a real need for Sociology Internships that could offer students a real world perspective about social issues, social problems, being agents of change and community development. Few opportunities present themselves for college students to experience front loading reality, i.e., experiences that examine early cause, dynamics and areas that may impact social problems that are often manifested later in society.

Thus, one purpose of the course and project was to have a positive impact on the target the communities by increasing the number of low-income students that graduate from high school and pursue postsecondary education. Mentoring between public high school students and university students seems like a logical approach to fostering critical thinking and community Awareness that produce upward higher educational pursuits in youth. According to a report by Buckley and Zimmermann (2003) mentoring and caring adult-youth peer relationships play a positive role in youth development. They present up-to-date research on the efficacy of mentoring as well as the issues crucial to developing, implementing, and assessing effective mentoring ventures. This is where Public Sociology enters the picture. There is a clear and present need for Sociology courses that provide direct involvement in community organizations that targets at-risk students in the community and school system. Again, these opportunities are present and offer unique front loading realities about the changing dynamics of communities that can be affective learning environments and experiences for college students while offering a vital component that may foster community development and stability.

A Note on Service Learning?

Service Learning is a process by which students can gain practical and real world, hands on experience that prepares them for "actual work." Service learning produces the opportunities by which students can practice, refine and critique learned theories through fieldwork. Service learning also provides students the means to critically examine ideas about the nature, scope and dynamics of organizations, institutions, events, situations and human behavior. Ultimately, internships with service learning components can allow students a critical segway to understand, engage, prepare, and proactively respond to social, political, economic and human need through institutional and organizational agencies.

Buroway (2005) states:

> Responding to the growing gap between the sociological ethos and the world we study, the challenge of public sociology is to engage multiple publics in multiple ways. These public sociologies should not be left out in the cold, but brought into the framework of our discipline. In this way we make public sociology a visible and legitimate enterprise, and, thereby, invigorate the discipline as a whole. Accordingly, if we map out the division of sociological labor, we discover antagonistic interdependence among four types of knowledge: professional, critical, policy, and public. In the best of all worlds the flourishing of each type of sociology is a condition for the flourishing of all, but they can just as easily assume pathological forms or become victims of exclusion and subordination. (p4)

A *front loading reality*, i.e., an approach to teaching sociology in the community, offering students an intensive immersion service learning opportunity as mentors at a local high school may foster critical thinking and awareness that lead to greater understanding and appreciation of Sociological analysis and revolutionize approaches to social problems. Additionally, combine mentoring, a service learning project and college students and the dynamics are far beyond any conceivable impact. Suffice to say that this intern mentoring program began as a service-learning project on a university campus. The intern mentoring program was to be a service-learning project that entailed multiple learning dynamics.

Findings & Discussion

From Fall 2009 until Spring 2010, 30 students participated in a Sociology course titled Internship in Community Organization. Student mentors were required to submit five journals each semester (FALL 2009 and SPRING 2010). The total data set generated was 150. The following themes emerged as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Values Derived From College Students Journals in a Sociology Internship in Service Learning (N = 135)	
	Frequency
• Student Expectations (Expression/ideas about self, students at school, school persons the community)	58
• Student Purpose (Comments that reflect ideas about their function as a participant in this process, interest and intelligence in social problems regarding process)	50
• Student Reflections & Connections (Awareness of the value of their service to affect the students at the school)	42

Utilizing the Langston and Kammerer (2008) framework, the journal objectives were based on four processes of immersion: entry, initiation, prolonged engagement, and disengagement. Students used journals to record clear, open and honest thoughts feelings and impressions based on critical reflection, i.e., "learn by reflecting on your observations and experiences in the community and connecting these with sociological concepts and principles. While doing this, you are examining their own personal beliefs and how these may shape your observations and interpretations. The rigor you use a recording in your journal is significant to your success in critical reflection."(p71)

Student Intern Expectations (range of ideas, attitudes and perceptions about persons, group dynamics that function to create and maintain social institutions and community)

Expectations describe the range of ideas, attitudes and perceptions about persons and group dynamics that function to create and maintain social institutions and community. There were ranges of mentor reactions to participating mentees. Some mentees had grown up in similar circumstances as the mentees and, being close in age, many mentors closely identified with mentees on multiple levels. In written reflection assignments student-mentors expressed their perceptions about identifying with mentees:

- *I expected them to come from single parent households and to have parents who were not as involved in their lives as they may have needed or wanted to be. Some of what I expected was no where close to the actual perceptions I received from the mentees. The vast majority of them were actually interested in higher education and many had indeed set realistic goals for themselves. From listening to some of them talk, I observed that the vast majority of them did in fact come from single parent households where parental involvement was lacking a good deal.*
- *It gave me a very positive attitude to work with these students and I am looking forward to the next session.*

Responses came from student mentors whose personal histories were most distinctly different from mentees. In these cases, lessons student mentors learned about mentees appeared more objective and, perhaps, most profound.
- *Prior to going into this mentoring experience I had heard a lot about the part of town labeled Northside. Of all the things that I had heard none of it was positive. From other peoples perceptions I begin to form some of my own expectations of Northside High School. I went into the school expecting to meet people who were not really invested in their own futures. I was expecting to meet people who had not yet set any real goals for themselves.*
- *Prior to my first day at Northside, I was confident in my ability to be a good mentor. Especially with my experience with working with teens. But the day before the fist school visit I was thinking the teens I work with are all in the youth group at church I know their parents and older siblings, they look up to me and admire me already. Public high school freshmen in Lafayette was not what I was used to. I felt Like I was in over my head, I kind of felt like maybe I wouldn't be able to relate because I'm not from here. I was thinking maybe they wouldn't like me, but then I thought I'm going to make them like me, I'm going there to help them not myself.*

The degree to which students' expectations of instruction and educational experience is considered in course planning likely varies according to importance that faculty give it.

When service learning is employed, it seems critical to understand what expectations may be as their expectations will no doubt effect everyone involved and, most particularly those directly receiving and benefiting from the service. Understanding students' expectations is critical to ethical service that accounts as much for the benefit to those served as to the learning that accrues from providing the service. Helping students develop insight into their own expectations teaches not only self-knowledge but, also, important lessons about power, stratification, and privilege that cannot be taught as well from a book or in a classroom.

In their own voices, student mentors revealed a great deal about their expectations.The journals also indicate student awareness about the dynamics that impact those expectations.

- o *There are certainly some mentees that are very excited to be in the program but I also feel that there is at least one who does not hare that same sentiment. I do realize that it is only one person, but I think it would be so much better if I know we could reach them all.*
- o *I think that I have higher expectations than I had the last semester. I think that the mentees are really starting to grasp the concept of them actually getting a higher education. They all seem to have a particular goal and really want to accomplish it. My mentee wants to become an ultrasound tech, I do not think that she knows very much about it but when we were looking up things on the internet about it she seemed very interested. I have started by looking up things online to inform my mentee about the profession she chose*
- o *First day of mentoring was awesome. I had heard so much about the students from Northside High school and I am sorry to say that it was not good. Initially I went into the school not really knowing what to expect but, excited all the same. We had plans of showing them the Kickoff powerpoint presentation, but due to the limited internet connection we were unable to. That gave us some extra time to just talk and after having met the students I fell in love with all of them. It felt amazing that they allowed us to be there to talk with them. Not only did the allow us to be there but, they were all receptive of what we had to say. None of them were reluctant to share. They had no problem telling us their backgrounds and goals for the future.*
- o *At our first session … I could see the students minds turning over ideas on how they can present their projects. Everyone seemed enthusiastic to see the mentors. Once, we mentioned that this semester they must turn in a project the mood changed; some students grunted and moaned at the idea. We quickly explained to them they were not completing the project alone. Then they cheered because there would be prizes for the best. After the students returned to their class the mentors stayed behind to discuss the session. Everyone felt happy with the response from the students and felt productive.*
- o *At our last session I saw happy faces and motivation from our students. I am worried that when we return on the 11th that they completely forgot about the project and we have wasted time. All I can do is stress how important the project is to help them learn about their profession of interested and how important it is to me that we have the best display board or PowerPoint. As for management of the project, I will make a time line with my mentee. .*

Student Purpose (Intern's ability to examine ideas about community participants and interest and intelligence in social problems)

When students can translate learning objectives into real processes that impact real situations, these experiences can create purpose. Creating purpose was a primary function of the internship. Separate instructor training sessions were critical to this process. Interns attended training sessions that focused primarily on purpose; the purpose of the program, the purpose of their participation, the purpose of the mentees participation. Interns were responsible for taking the knowledge, skill into actual learning contents. Combined, these translate into critical self reflections that can lead to clarity of purpose. Upon encountering the student mentees, the mentors clearly articulate reasons for the program, their role and complete activities that reflected larger values and goals.

Purpose also describes the ability to examine ideas and roles as a community participant while expressing interest and intelligence about social problems. The student interns journals reflect these ways of connecting, ways of knowing and intelligence about social problems.

- ➢ *I know that when I was a high school student I did not learn critical thinking. I wish it was stressed before I attended college.*

> ➢ *As a mentor I expect to give the mentee a structured goal oriented career path. This involves providing the mentee with as many resources available to guide his/her decision making. Ensuring that he understand the necessary steps involved in making this process happen will encourage the mentee to take school and everything else he does in life seriously.*
> ➢ *I think that the service-learning encourages that the shortcomings of individuals in need are not the primary cause of the problems that the activities address. The problems are stemmed from society itself.*

The student journals demonstrate that the process allows them an opportunity to gain a sense of purpose because they experienced first hand what it would be like to work within a fluid organization, e.g., an organization that is ever changing and evolving while interacting with clients and partners. Students worked independently by conducting the mentoring sessions and determining the actual makeup and conduct of the sessions as well as the activity implementation.

> ➢ *Ultimately the project will help the mentee focus in school because of the fact that he understands that what he does now has an effect on his future and the entire career building process as a whole.*

Moreover, responses indicate that students developed a keen sense of what it means to be a community participant in a process developing or assisting individuals who would be most affected by the service they provide. This the student mentors focused on how their level of participation and the likelihood that participants in the process would develop understanding about the year need to focus on accomplishing their educational goals. Most students began with small simple techniques that had clear outcomes. The college student mentors explained these goals to the high school participants so that the high school student participants could clearly understand the process they will use to make decisions.

- *When the principal called the students names over the microphone my heart began to race. When the students arrived they were a bit rowdy and then one the teacher explained to the students what they were here for and what we would be doing with them. I liked the way the teacher went about talking to the students and telling them why they were here. She told them that their teachers had been evaluating them and that they were among a special group of students that the teachers thought had great potential and would exceed in life. They were excited about that and were shocked. One of the students said, "My teacher picked me out of everyone in the class?"*
- *I also didn't really like that the teachers let the students cut up so bad, talking back, goofing off, out of uniform, using horrible language. I felt so old but I've only been out of high school 4 years. I was pleasantly surprised that the kids in out group are really cool, well mannered, very interested in what we have to say, and have comments and question about the program. I thought that was wonderful. They were easy to warm up, not a problem talking to them and they listen very well, aside from being a little silly they were everything and more than I expected. I'm happy about this mentoring program. I feel like we're going to make a difference.*
- *Being a product of the community, I fully understand the struggle and efforts made to find solutions to many of the problems. If anything my attitude towards serving the mentees in the community is to change negative perceptions within and of the community. I would also like to point out and build on the positive perceptions of the community to the mentees as well!*

College student mentors ability to discern the particular social problem of poverty as a component that impacts high school student success demonstrates their ability to identify vicious cycles operating within the community. The college student mentors reflections indicate their willingness to examine their own personal beliefs and how these shape their observations and interpretations. The college student mentors note their direct association and relationship to the high school mentee, the school, and the community.

- *As a mentor, I believe that children who live in poverty deserve a chance just as well as those who are not living in poverty. Getting the children involved and being a leader is the first step to helping out and not judging them based on their characteristics.*
- *The problems with poverty as it relates to myself as a mentor, those being mentored and the community are issues that must be addressed and overcome. To be poor in the United States has been described as not having a home or adequate housing and not having enough money to meet basic needs. Being poor in America is depressing, degrading, and you are looked down upon. Individuals facing poverty feel hopeless, lonely and powerless.*

> *One would agree that much needs to be done to address the poverty that surrounds us all. We need to believe that there are means of changing the many injustices that people experience in society.*

- *Poverty affects us all. As students of sociology it is important to study poverty among children. We must ask ourselves why there are so many children in poverty amidst all the wealth and prosperity in out country.*

- *My expectations towards working with the mentees is a little bitter sweet. I know that the students will be motivated while we are in class because we will be there giving them ideas and pumping them up. I feel that once we leave, they will go home and forget about the project. As team leader I will try to combat this problem by sending email reminders to the students on a weekly basis to work on the project. I will also work closely with the mentors so we can work as a team.*

- *The project will also be a learning experience for me as a mentor as well. This will furthermore hold the interest of the mentee as we actively learn together about the endless possibilities and opportunities in his possible career choices.*

Student Reflections & Connections (Intern's ability to realize a personal role and to connect to situations that are real)

Student reflections and connections reflect the student's capacity to recognize, realize and see their personal role and identify with (connect to) those situations that are real and most consequential to outcomes in terms of the mentoring experience. The college student mentors responses demonstrate how the mentoring experience fosters critical reflection and awareness through service learning. As the student notes:

> ➢ *My mentoring experience was like having to go back to high school again in terms of retrospect. Having graduated from the school where I mentored gave me an idea of how far I've come as a person and what things had an affect on my life that has put me where I am today. It was as if I was able to watch a playback from my past, and compare then and now.*

> ➢ *My initial words were letting them know that I am a product of the same school. The reason for that was to give them a "real life" example of someone who comes from the same background and had the same opportunities or lack there of! I believe this gave them the impression that they could trust me as a mentor and someone who had their best interest at heart.*

> ➢ *I looked back on my high school years and realized I once was in the same position that they are in.*

> ➢ *When I think and reflect on where these kids come from, my first feeling is sympathy. I myself came from a home with alcoholism and violence. Our family struggled financially and we did without a lot of things. Eventually, we all got help. Someone gave of a way out of the alcoholic way of life. That is only my story. We all have stories. Yes, some of the students may have alcoholic parents, some type of abuse may be in their homes, or maybe the family just had a run of bad luck and can't seem to get back on track.*

Additionally, the college student mentors shared their honest ideas about the process of connecting with the high school mentees and their role in meeting and overcoming those challenges.

> ➢ *The only obstacles I found with connecting with the mentees were probably just getting over the apprehension. However many of the group members were able to ask questions and give insight to the mentees. In turn many of the mentees had questions of their own, which showed there were eager to know a lot about college life as well. I was impressed with the enthusiasm and personality of the mentees. By the end of the first session I think everybody was laughing and smiling about what are about to experience together.*

> ➢ *The students must see what the mentors present to them about their career of choice and pick and choose what they really want to do with their lives. I truly hope that the students don't take what we present to them and don't decide for themselves because of laziness or because they just would rather be told what to do. I really hope the students research their careers and review the research done by mentors. For example a mentor can suggest to the student that Houston is the best school to go to. I hope the student uses critical thinking to review all their options such as: can they afford the school, will they like living far way from home, and would I be happier at ULL.*

Most interestingly, the mentors were able to identify their experiences and connect them with sociological concepts and theoretical perspectives from the textbook to express their ideas and concerns regarding difficulties to achieve the learning objectives and outcomes goals.

> ➢ *On the other hand as a mentor I need to use my critical thinking skills to review what my mentee is thinking and how they are processing the interaction we are having. I need to observe their body language to see if they are comfortable doing their project on what ever chosen career. …when I go on my mentoring sessions I (sic) realize areas where I should use critical thinking, be open-minded about other views (I think I am ok at doing this but I can be a bit of a control freak), being honest about my bias (such as not denying that bias exists in me), and lastly accepting constructive criticism.*

Speculations for the Future
Immeasurable Value

The value of service learning in sociology courses is immeasurable. Service learning opportunities provide sociology students with opportunities to participate in community programs projects and organizations based on intents to effectively understand how they operate and function. Future analyses will involve more critical case studies that analyze the patterns found in student journals. The value of theory will allow us to draw from previous knowledge and use paradigms reflective of various conceptual frameworks. For example several opportunities are present for undergraduate sociology students to be educated and trained in field research such as subcultures of low-income poverty students in failing public educational institutions. Much of this field research may be ethnographic in nature the types of field experiences may provide sociology students with the essential information about people, what they do, and where they live. Also important in offering this opportunity, was the fact that the instructor did not want this course to be another paper filing, desk top, word processing and clerical experience in which students walk away having learned minimal ideas at best about community dynamics. Additionally, other disciplines are realizing the benefits of such learning platforms/frameworks (Bajgier et al 1991).

Student Feedback After the Internship Was Over

Unfortunately, what I have found to be true in teaching Sociology today is that many of our students are bogged-down in a process of obtaining a degree and not of learning. This reality presented itself as I heard from students after the internship was over. Many expressed that rarely are they engaged in a learning process that involves examination of actual problems that involve people, events, social forces and their community. Hardly do they enter real world learning frameworks that challenge the condition or shape of human nature, human conditions and now more specifically, to a greater degree, far more complex, the impact of social institutions on community development. It is disheartening that so many of our students have developed and participate (willingly and unwillingly) in an educational conveyor belt mentality, i.e, seeking a degree for monetary gain, status, and market acclaim while subordinating the pathological realities that sustains those realities. Students who enrolled in this course had the opportunity to enroll in this course for one semester or two. Most students enrolled in the course for both semesters fall and spring. Other students came back and served as volunteers for the course. Others expressed that the experiences significantly impacted their perceptions about persons as participants in organizations and communities. One student stated to me personally that:

> *Initially, I felt overwhelmed by the entire process. I mean really uncomfortable about what we were getting into. But as we went along, I found myself really appreciating the internship experience and thankful for the challenges to meet the course objectives. I learned more from the internship than I ever could have inside a classroom and just from reading the book."*

End of course surveys (university driven) reflected similar perspectives:

- *I took this course because I wanted to have the privilege and experience of being a mentor. Dr. Muhammad is passionate about the materials she teaches and it makes her courses as enjoyable as they are enlightening.*
- *I found this course both educational and rewarding. Service learning should be required in more courses for Sociology.*
- *I learned more in Success Bound than I would have from a text book. All the knowledge gained from a classroom setting pales in comparison to actual "hands on" experience.*
- *I had a great experience in this course and I am very glad that it exists.*

Some expressed sadness that they had only encountered the course at the end of their academic careers. Sociology must offer a variety of courses with essential experiences that can actively engage their abilities to critically examine community dynamics that may lead to positive awareness upon many of the social problem that sociologist study. In fact, through lived experiences students are capable of learning on a higher level. Specific elements that resonate through lived experiences can include reflection about relationship, dialogue as catalyst for change, helping others. Recognizing this places Sociology at a critical juncture. Sociologists must respond to critical gaps between the social ethos and the world we study and how we facilitate courses addressing these multiple complex essential components. These are not simple task and do not have simple methods. Yet, if Sociology is to become a viable living discipline these opportunities must be vigorously explored and presented.

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