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**Applied Learning  
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**Aims and Scope:** The *Journal of Applied Learning in Higher Education* (JALHE) is an international and interdisciplinary journal serving the community of scholars engaged in applied learning at institutions of higher education. Its purpose is to advance scholarship on applied learning by providing an outlet for empirical, interpretive, and theoretical work related to this pedagogical practice.

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## Applied Learning in Online Education: A Comparative Study Employing DEAL Critical Reflection

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*This article stretches the boundaries of the meaning of applied learning to include online learning activities. The DEAL model of critical reflection was used to obtain student feedback in comparing two delivery strategies of an upper-division online leadership capstone course. Student reflection comments were analyzed for offerings of the course in summer and fall semesters. The fall delivery of the course adopted an applied reading summary strategy which required students to specifically apply their learning to their work and career plans. The DEAL model of critical reflection provided rich qualitative data evaluating teaching approaches and suggested students preferred applied reading summaries over other strategies.*

**Keywords:** applied learning, online learning, applied reading summary, critical reflection, active learning

“Learning by doing” is a generally accepted definition of applied learning (Schwartzman and Henry, 2009). However, this definition creates a dilemma for scholars and educators of online learning, because the nature of online education makes “doing” difficult. Most online education occurs at a remote distance from the learning institu-

tion. Students work independently and seldom leave their study area to interact face-to-face with other students, the instructor, or the broader community. Communication occurs through computer technology. This paper argues that online cognitive strategies, requiring students to apply learning to practice, fit the definition of applied learning. Through critical reflection, it shows how one strategy — the reading summary — is effective both as a learning tool and an applied learning technique.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

While “‘applied learning’ refers more to a spirit or movement in education than to a definitively bounded subject matter,” (Schwartzman and Henry, 2009, pp. 4-5), all forms of applied learning have features in common. They involve “pedagogical principles and practices associated with engaged scholarship, communities of practice, civic engagement, experiential education, and critical pedagogy.” In applied learning, principles are put into practice through the active and concrete process of “learning by doing.” Education is a primary goal. Examples of applied learning are study-abroad, community-based learning, service-learning, independent research, and internships or clinical experiences. They could be part of a course or separate stand-alone learning experiences. In a face-to-face course on emergency management, shadowing a professional, role-playing, demonstrating techniques, and participating in local emergency management training scenarios would be examples of applied learning.

While service-learning is applied learning, volunteering is not unless it has education as one of its purposes. Ryle in 1949 (cited in Schwartzman and Henry, 2009, p. 5) suggested that intelligence combines two kinds of knowledge: “knowing that” which involves “theoretical understanding” determined by the command of facts and principles, and “knowing how” which comprises the manifestation of “skill in performing a task.” Applied learning, Schwartzman and Henry claim, is the integration of “knowing that” and “knowing how.”

Can online education, where learning is at a distance using a computer for remote access, fit the parameters of applied learning, which requires active and concrete learning by doing? This paper argues that online education can successfully provide applied learning, not because learners are physically present and involved in learning activities, but because application of learning can be a mental process as well as a

physical one. Through its findings the paper demonstrates that students can obtain benefits from online education that are similar to benefits from classroom instruction that uses applied learning. In online education, when students relate knowledge to practice and apply concepts to the work situations, they are involved in engaged pedagogies and experiential learning. Since online studies appeal to non-traditional students, who bring practical experience to the educational situation, strategies that require students to apply their new knowledge to their work background fit the definition of applied learning. These paper and pencil type activities bring “learning by doing” in the workplace to the educational experience. Students apply practice to theory, providing conceptual labels to their current work experience. Traditional, younger students gain practical knowledge from the experiences of older students through discussion and online group interactions. This approach fits particularly well in studies pertaining to emergency management. Police and firefighters who bring their work experiences to the learning situation can provide many insights that enrich their own learning experience as well as others as they relate the practice of their trades to the information they learn about leadership and management. As students share their experiences they assist in building a learning community, one of the pedagogical aspects of effective online education (Maxfield and Fisher, 2012).

Not all online strategies fit the definition of applied learning, but many do. The use of applied learning techniques successfully adapts coursework by bringing factors such as communication, active and collaborative learning, and reflective practices and critical thinking to the online learning environment (Al-Bataineh, Brooks, and Bassoppo-Moyo, 2005). Active learning strategies, according to Phillips (2005b), require learners to be self-directed and independent and educators to move from an expert role to coach and facilitator. Active learning strategies accommodate a variety of learning styles and can be used at all phases of teaching. To promote the best learning experiences and create learner satisfaction, feedback from peers, educators, and technology is essential. Phillips (2005a, 2005b) suggests several strategies that can provide applied experiences through active learning. Chat role play is used in a graduate-level online course “to help learners synthesize and evaluate course concepts.” She has learners apply evaluation policies and procedures to a case study involving legal and ethical issues. She also uses problem-solving assignments with real-world problems to give applied learning experiences to nursing students. Another strategy she suggests is online community-building projects (e.g., creating a web site for a support group). Tambouris et al, (2012) show how established pedagogical strategies, such as Problem Based Learning (PBL), can be adapted for online use in conjunction with modern Web 2.0 technologies and tools. Sanford et al (2010) offer an inquiry-based learning activity that gives nurses the opportunity to learn how to analyze and synthesize critical information. Ruey (2010) describes online learning strategies such as submitted artifacts, surveys, interviews, observations that use applied learning concepts. Simulations are

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**AUTHOR NOTE:** In addition to his interest in applied learning in online courses, John R. Fisher, PhD, emergency services faculty member at Utah Valley University, researches mass media impact on disaster public policy. Margaret A. Mittelman, MEd, NREMT-P, is an Associate Chair and the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and Advanced EMT (AEMT) Program Coordinator for Utah Valley University. As a more than 30-year EMS veteran, Mittelman presents various EMS topics at national EMS conferences and is the state of Utah EMT Practical Exam Proctor. Questions about this article should be addressed to John.Fisher@uvu.edu.

widely used in training and educating emergency personnel and some of these exercises have been applied to online education (Ten Eyck, 2011). SkillStat ([www.skillstat.com](http://www.skillstat.com)) offers several tools used in online teaching of emergency medical technicians including an ECG simulator and an Advanced Cardiac Life Support self-testing and assessment tool (ACLS STAT).

In this paper we argue that applying learning to work and life experiences and vice versa applying work and life experiences to learning are methods of applied learning. This process requires effective communication, active and collaborative learning, and reflective practices and critical thinking, all characteristics of applied learning.

### TEACHING STRATEGIES IN THE LEADERSHIP CAPSTONE COURSE

This paper discusses a study based on learning strategies in a leadership capstone course that is part of an online bachelor's degree in emergency management. The course focuses on learning activities that get students to apply their learning to their work situations. Eighty percent of the students in the course are non-traditional students in their thirties, who work in the field of emergency services, principally as fire fighters, police officers, and paramedics. The primary applied learning technique has been to get students involved in applying their work experience to their learning through discussion forums. Students looked at case studies, viewed films, and responded to problem-based questions that required them to apply their learning to their careers or future jobs. In addition, students wrote three papers and in a weekly journal, where they reflected on their learning and applied it to their work situation. One paper required they synthesize leadership concepts and apply them to good and bad leaders they have worked with. A second paper reported interviews they had with leaders in their field. They asked specific questions based on the theories they were studying in class. For the third paper they worked in groups develop a personal code of ethics. As a final project students provided critical reflection about the course using the DEAL model. The final question asked them to tell how they would apply what they learned in the course to their lives and careers.

In the fall offering of the course the assignments were adjusted, adding an applied reading summary and dropping the reflective journals (which feedback suggested students were not taking seriously). The goal of the applied reading summaries was to get students reading the textbook assignment on a weekly basis and to apply their readings to their work experience or future careers. Students chose a section of the assigned reading that had not been summarized by another student. As part of the assignment students were also required to find another reading (preferably a journal article) on the same topic as the textbook reading and relate it to the textbook reading. The applied reading summaries were put into a discussion forum so that all students could read them and comment on them. The applied reading summary assignment had six parts: a) prepare a reference for the summarized section in APA

format; b) state the thesis or theme of the reading; c) write a 150- to 200-word summary of content in point form; d) find another reading on the week's topic, comment on how the other reading applies to the topic of the summary, and provide a reference for the other reading in APA format; e) apply the reading to your work (or future work) situation; and f) comment on the reading summaries of two other students.

### CRITICAL REFLECTION

"Critical reflection oriented toward well-articulated learning outcomes is key to generating, deepening, and documenting student learning in applied learning," wrote Ash and Clayton (2009, p. 25). In their article they described "the meaning of critical reflection and principles of good practice for designing it effectively." In addition, they provided "a research-grounded, flexible model for integrating critical reflection and assessment," called the DEAL model. The DEAL model consists of three sequential steps: a) *Description* experiences in an objective and detailed manner; b) *Examination* of those experiences in light of specific learning goals or objectives; and c) *Articulation of Learning*, including goals for future action that can be taken forward into the next experience for improved practice and further refinement of learning (p. 41). Brooks, Harris, & Clayton (2010) explored the potential role of integrating critical reflection and case studies within professional practice nursing degree programs. They analyzed students' critical thinking scores on two essays and confirmed increases in the quality of student reasoning. Between the two essays students were provided learning activities to enhance their understanding of the course concepts. The two course instructors independently scored the first and second critical reflection essays, providing written feedback to each student. The DEAL Model Critical Thinking Standards Table and the DEAL Model Critical Thinking Rubric were used to arrive at the scores. Hale Tolar and Gott (2012) relate the DEAL model to program review. Service-learning program directors used critical reflection to have students examine and make meaning of their experiences. This information became a key component to assess the program effectiveness.

### PURPOSE OF STUDY

During the fall semester the leadership capstone course was changed to encourage students to read the textbook more thoroughly and to get them more actively involved in the course materials and in applying them to their lives and careers. A reading summary was introduced which required students on a weekly basis to summarize their readings and reflect on the readings in terms of their careers or future jobs. This study helped determine if the reading summary was effective in achieving these aims. It was hypothesized that if students placed reading as the most important teaching element in the course that this would mean that the reading summary was the preferred learning strategy and that learning goals had been achieved.

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods were used to gather and analyze information. As the final assignment in a leadership capstone course offered online in the summer and fall, students were asked to reflect critically on their course experience, using the DEAL approach (Ash and Clayton, 2009). Students were asked to answer four questions. Each question was followed by clarifying statements.

The questions and the clarifying statements were:

1. What did I learn?

- Identify and explain (so that someone who doesn't know you can understand it) a principle, concept, or value that you may have developed or that you understand better from the course.
- Express what you have learned about the principle, concept or value in general terms, as well as in the context of the course, so that it can be applied more broadly to other areas of your life (personally or professionally) and help you in your ongoing personal growth process.
- Introduce a judgment regarding whether the principle, concept or value can serve you in your career. How would you apply the value? Is the value enduring or will it change as you grow older? How and why?

2. How did I learn it?

Clearly connect the principle, concept or value to your specific learning activities in the course so that someone who was not involved would understand, including discussion of the positive and negative aspects of your learning experience. How did you learn about the principle, concept or value? What course activities helped you in the formation of your views about the principle, concept or value?

3. Why does it matter?

Consider how what you have learned has worth over the short and long term, both in terms of your other learning activities and in terms of your life more generally.

4. What will I do in light of it?

- Set specific goals and assessable goals (that you could come back to and check on to see if they are being met) relative to this principle, concept or value over the short and long term.
- Consider the benefits and challenges associated with fulfilling these goals, especially in light of the sources of or reasons for the learning

The analysis of the critical reflections followed a process, described as the data analysis spiral (Creswell, 2013, p. 183). Data from student comments was organized and then read. At the same time the researcher made notes and memos in the margins. Then a process of describing,

classifying and interpreting began. This process put the data in context, made comparisons, and categorized the information using codes to identify themes. The themes were combined and reduced in number and, using grounded theory, propositions were developed that connected the phenomena with their contexts. The analysis focused particularly on the second question, "How did I learn it?" Results from this analysis are reported in in the Findings section of this article.

The number of students responding for the summer term was 20; three were female; 15 were non-traditional students working fulltime in careers as firefighters, police officers or paramedics. The number responding during fall was 31; five were female; 20 were non-traditional students.

## FINDINGS

Table 1 summarizes the results from the analysis of student comments from the summer and fall semesters. The analysis identified eight themes which are listed under the heading "Teaching strategies." The first theme groups student general comments about teaching strategies. The remaining seven categories are teaching strategies, which correspond closely to course assignments: readings (including the applied reading summary adopted in the fall semester), discussion forums (including discussions about films assigned to be viewed during the course), a paper from an interview of a leader, a code of ethics developed by students in groups, a paper analyzing good and bad leaders, online lectures, and a journal.

Table 1. Analysis of student comments

Teaching strategies	Summer Semester			Fall Semester		
	Number of comments	Percent of total comments	Percent students N= 20	Number of comments	Percent of total comments	Percent students N=31
1. General comments	3	14%	15%	6	12%	19%
2. Readings (including applied reading summaries adopted in the fall)	5	23%	25%	23	47%	74%
3. Discussion forums (including films)	7	32%	35%	9	18%	29%
4. Interview of a leader	3	14%	15%	6	12%	19%
5. Paper analyzing good and bad leaders	1	5%	5%	2	4%	6%
6. Online lectures	2	9%	10%	1	2%	3%
7. Code of ethics	0	0%	0%	2	4%	6%
8. Journal (not used in Fall)	1	5%	5%	0	0%	0%
TOTAL	22	100%	*110%	49	100%	*158%

\*Students commented on more than one strategy.

While similar comments from the summer could be used to support the premise that students use application principles when learning on-line, the following from the fall class are illustrative of the statements that the students made.

Six comments from the fall class spoke generally about how the course strategies helped the students apply concepts to their lives and careers. One student commented, "I learned to clearly connect the principle, concept or value to your specific learning activities in the course so that someone who was not involved [in practice] would understand." Another student wrote, "I spent time during the last semester to get back into the habit of doing some soul-searching, analyzing the interactions I have with others and making goals to change the things." Finally, a student declared, "It was interesting to see how I learned so much more different in this class than in any other course."

### **APPLICATION THROUGH THE USE OF APPLIED READING SUMMARIES**

While only five students in the summer class commented about the value of their readings and the textbook in learning the concepts and principles of the course, 23 students from the fall class espoused the value of the readings in their learning. The percentage of total comments doubled from 23% to 47%. What is remarkable, however, is the percentage of students making comments about reading. This tripled from 25% in the summer to 74% of students in the fall. The one factor that created this significant change was the adoption of applied reading summaries, which required students not only summarize their readings, but also find other readings, apply the readings to their lives and careers, and discuss the work of other students.

Here is a sampling of comments made by 23 students who stated that they learned about course concepts from the readings. Some wrote specifically about how the applied reading summaries helped them learn.

- For me the combination of reading and discussion was the best way to learn the concepts that we covered each week.
- It was in reading this chapter and writing the summary of it that I learned about Hill's model for Team Leadership.
- The readings of this class were able to show me different ways of adapting my strengths or weaknesses to make the best of any situation.
- I felt that the summaries provided an effective vehicle to analyze what you have read and then connect it to an outside reading.
- Reviewing and summarizing the chapter helped me to understand the values I appreciated in my past leaders.
- When I would return to the workplace, I could apply the reading into the active workday.
- I normally am not the person to read my textbooks each week for class.

### **DISCUSSION FORUMS**

Results for the discussion forums showed student evaluation of their value dropped in comparison to the usefulness of the applied reading summaries. Students indicated in the summer class that the discussion forums were the most important way that they learned. Seven students commented, describing how the discussion forums helped in learning course concepts or principles. This represented 32 percent of the total comments and 35 percent of students. In the fall nine comments were made, representing 18 percent of the total comments and 29 percent of the students. This doesn't mean that students didn't view the discussion forums as valuable, but that they viewed the applied reading summaries as more valuable. Here is a sampling of some the nine comments made by students in fall semester:

- I am very grateful to all the individuals in this course that have opened themselves up and expressed their inner thoughts and ideas.
- The conversations between students brought an interesting dynamic to the topic at hand.
- Being able to read what others had to say about it was also beneficial.
- I also got new points of views every week by reading and responding to my classmate's posts on our weekly discussions.
- I realized that my emotions sometimes play a significant role in my decision-making and to be a better lead I need to stick to the facts.

### **OTHER STRATEGIES**

The interview was the third most important learning strategy in both the summer and fall. Three students made comments in the summer and six in the fall. One student indicated: "The assignment of interviewing a public administrator helped me develop a better understanding of the concept of leaders needing to have a strong ethical foundation." Another wrote: "Interview gave an opportunity to sit down and discuss the concept of leadership candidly and an opportunity to develop a personal relationship."

The leadership paper required reflection, application, and synthesis. One student commented about it as a learning tool during the summer and two in the fall. "I was able to compare and dissect each and see both the positive and the negative things," wrote one student. Another stated: "After writing the paper, I tried in every situation to use a good example or a leader I liked and a bad example or leader."

Online written lectures were considered valuable by two students in the summer and one in the fall. This may also reflect on the power of the applied reading summaries as a learning technique. The one student who commented in the fall related his personal experiences to that of the author of the online lectures. He wrote: "Truly, Maxfield spoke

from the heart, and shared some personal experiences with a message to learn from. This personal touch, and being able to identify with those similar experiences as I entered my career as a firefighter/EMT, allowed me to latch on to this message, and reflect on my own purpose and mission in life. It was like fatherly advice that spoke directly to my heart, and helped to create a paradigm shift in the way I was looking at my education.”

The code of ethics was viewed as the least effective strategy, with no comments in the summer and only two (four percent of the total) in the fall. One of the two comments was: “Although I dreaded it for much of the afternoon one Saturday, I did get a lot out of the ethics and leadership paper. I really appreciate how that was put into perspective by that assignment and how it forced me to consider my own ethical oath, relating particularly to leadership in law enforcement.”

## CONCLUSIONS

Schwartzman and Henry (2009) determined that a pedagogical activity to be applied learning must be an active or concrete process of “learning by doing.” The online discussion forums (including the applied reading summaries) required students to apply their learning to their work or vice versa to apply their work to their learning. While in a strict sense the discussions may not be a concrete example of “learning by doing,” they required active leaning and they also engaged the student in scholarship, had an experiential aspect, and had education as their goal. Thus, discussion forums and assignments which require student reflection about how concepts apply to practice seem to fit a broadened definition of applied learning.

With non-traditional students the application of learning may go both ways. Students apply the concepts to the workplace, but also use workplace experiences to gain better understanding of the concepts. Discussion forums allow traditional students without work experience to benefit from their older, more experienced learning partners. Thus, applied learning can be redefined to include strategies that allow students to apply practice to theory as well as applying theory to practice.

This study showed that critical reflection can provide a means of determining the effectiveness of various pedagogical approaches in student learning. Also, critical reflection can serve as tool in student evaluation of teaching. In this study, students used critical reflection to evaluate the effectiveness of online learning strategies. Clearly, students preferred applied reading summaries that required reading and reflection over other online learning strategies. The strategy employed higher learning levels as proposed by Bloom’s taxonomy (Ashton and Clayton, 2009). Students synthesized readings, relating them to other readings, and applied them to life experiences. In addition, they analyzed and evaluated the experience of other students.

The purpose of this study was to determine if the applied reading summary strategy was effective in getting students to read and be more actively involved in the course materials and in applying them to their lives and careers. It was hypothesized that if students placed reading as the most important teaching element in the course that this would mean

that the applied reading summary was the preferred learning strategy and that learning goals had been achieved. The results from the critical reflection showed that the applied reading summary was effective in achieving these aims. Students named reading and the applied reading summary as the most effective learning strategy in the course. This study showed that reading is an important strategy in online learning. However, reading must be combined with other strategies to be effective. The applied reading summary, discussed in this study, not only requires students to read the course textbook, but also gets them involved in researching other readings, and applying these to practice. Students become immersed in course readings and other supportive literature and learn the value of critical thinking and reflection as they apply learning to their lives and careers and provide comments to other students in a discussion forum. Reading and writing alone would not fit the concept of “applied learning.” However, when combined with synthesis, application, and discussion the applied reading summaries meet the tests of effective communication, active and collaborative learning, and reflective practices and critical thinking, all aspects of applied learning.

The DEAL approach to critical reflection provided a means of analyzing student learning and the strategies they used in acquiring knowledge. Students indicated the pedagogical strategies they used and which ones they found most effective. Through the critical reflection process, students evaluated learning strategies and teaching methods. The DEAL model of critical reflection provided rich qualitative data used in evaluating teaching approaches and suggesting students preferred applied reading summaries over other strategies.

The findings of this study cannot be generalized, because the study is limited by employing qualitative methods in examining and comparing only two sessions of one course. However, through the process of qualitative analysis, where phenomena were examined in their contexts, the following propositions were developed:

- Online learning that applies theory to practice fits a broadened definition of applied learning.
- Non-traditional students with a lot of practical experience learn by applying practice to theory and theory to practice.
- Critical reflection can provide a means of determining the effectiveness of various pedagogical approaches in student learning.
- Also, critical reflection can serve as tool in student evaluation of teaching.
- The applied reading summary strategy can be effective in getting students to read and be more actively involved in the course materials and in applying them to their lives and careers.

This study shows that reading is an important strategy in online learning, but it must be combined with other strategies (such as application and discussion) to be effective as an applied learning approach.

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## Metamorphosis: The evolution of two practicum classes into a public relations agency

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*Restructuring the public relations practicum courses at a medium-sized Midwestern public university resulted in the development of a student-run public relations agency. Teams were created with students of varying levels of knowledge and expertise, and campus-based organizations were engaged as clients. The initial results for the clients were somewhat uneven, and some client-agency relationships were difficult, which mirrored similar experiences at other college, student-run agencies. Active research methodology showed the overall result as positive. Both the student and the course leadership reflections support the experience as a robust learning experience that prepares students for internship opportunities.*

How to engage inexperienced students with little knowledge of public relations in a more robust, hands-on, practical field experience was the challenge facing a new faculty member at a medium-sized, Midwestern university. With nearly two decades of professional experience, the instructor viewed the practicum classes as a vital step in exposing

students to the field. Yet, the practicum students unknowingly exhibited what Elmore (2010) describes as Artificial Maturity, in which youth “are overexposed to information, far earlier than they’re ready ... [and] are underexposed to real-life experiences far later than they are ready” (4). In addition, the practicum course had no prerequisites through which students might learn any basic public relations concepts or skills. The practicum course was the prerequisite for the advanced practicum class.

During the fall of 2010 the public relations practicum and advanced practicum courses were conducted in a fashion similar to many traditional college classes with short lectures on a variety of discipline-specific topics, in-class exercises, and homework assignments requiring a variety of application-based inquiries.

The instructor soon realized the practicum students had no preparation, experience, or knowledge when they enrolled in the class; as a result, they had little idea what to do with any of the assignments. All of the advanced practicum students had completed the practicum course, and most had completed the introductory public relations course; however, very few had any relevant or practical public relations experiences. Concurrently, the instructor saw a similar need to enrich the experience for the upper-level students.

The instructor resolved that a different approach was needed in both classes. Schon (1987) introduced the seminal concept of reflecting on one’s action during the actual process, which converts the overall action research process into a dynamic teaching, learning, professional growth, and research experience. In addition, Michaelson, Bauman-Knight, and Fink’s (2004) team-based, learning approach mirrors the professional public relations environment with self-directed teams evolving solutions. Consequently, the curriculum was immediately revised, introducing students to the basic public relations concepts and limited hands-on applications. Within a year major course revisions were instituted, including combining the two practicum classes to allow the creation of teams with advanced students in leadership roles. At the same time, campus-based clients were solicited to provide actual public relations issues and problems to solve.

In the spring 2011 trimester, a project was recruited from the university’s recycling committee for the advanced practicum class. Student

teams were established and charged with developing a promotional plan focused on one of three specific target audiences: dormitory residents, off-campus students, or students and staff in non-residential university buildings. At the end of the trimester, each team made a formal presentation of their plan to the recycling committee. The committee members were so pleased with the three plans that they implemented many of the proposed activities the following year. To further facilitate the recycling plans, one of the previous advanced practicum students enrolled in an independent study class to manage the recycling committee’s promotional activities. Throughout the 2011-2012 school year the advanced practicum’s project was to develop and maintain a social media presence for the university’s speech and debate team.

Every term the instructor reviewed the student work and experiences, along with consideration of what additional exposure and skills development were still needed by the students, especially as those might help students obtain public relations internships. British researcher Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) promoted just such a “commitment to systematic questioning of one’s own teaching as a basis for development; the commitment and the skills to study one’s own teaching; the concern emphasized was to question and test theory in practice by the use of those skills” (144).

Re-organizing the public relations practicum courses eventually resulted in the development of a student-run public relations agency, where the most experienced students would lead a team of inexperienced students while working on an actual promotional project for a campus-based organization. The reason for working only with campus-based, student organizations was that they offered a much lower risk for students who were just learning the basics of public relations, as opposed to working with a community organization or business. The driving philosophy behind this inquiry into the practicum/agency experience is encapsulated by Levin and Greenwood’s (2001) statement that “action research focuses on solving context-bound, real-life problems” (105). The purpose of this paper is to view the public relations practicum experiences through the lens of action research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Many traditional-aged college students exhibit the symptoms of Elmore’s (2010) artificial maturity. This view is supported by Allen & Allen (2009):

Generations ago, fourteen-year-olds used to drive, seventeen-year-olds led armies, and even average teens contributed labor and income that helped keep their families afloat. While facing other problems, those teens displayed adultlike maturity far more quickly than today’s, who are remarkably well kept, but cut off from most of the responsibility, challenge, and growth-producing feedback of the adult world (17).

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Elmore's (2010) proposed solution includes four key elements: simultaneous responsibility and autonomy, face-to-face experiences supplementing a technology lifestyle, concurrent information and accountability, and community service.

Dewey (1938) is credited with building the case for the relationship between experience and learning, and he also proposed the need for reflection on school-based problems through disciplined inquiry (Bednarz, 2002). The need for increased student understanding of professionalism, teamwork skills, and improved public relations knowledge is well documented (Educators Academy of Public Relations Society of America, 1999; Neff, 2002; Brown & Fall, 2005; Bush, 2009). Subsequently, the positive impact from the incorporation of action research into the classroom has also been well documented (Calhoun, 2002; Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Mills, 2007; Pelton, 2007; Sagor, 2009).

Coghlan and Brannick (2005) assert there are three essential concepts for appropriate action research: "particularity," "situationality" [sic] and being "out of praxis" (7). Incorporating these concepts into an introductory course is supported by Motschall and Najor's (2001) proposal for a client-centered class and Benigni and Cameron's (1999) research of campaign courses taught in a team-based environment. Maben's (2012) dissertation survey of undergraduate, student-run public relations firms on American college campuses confirmed the practices of team-based experiences and direct client interaction as central to the operation of a student agency. Maben's (2012) research indicates that students in most undergraduate agencies "are the decision makers and the majority handle the firm's planning, finances, client negotiation, client complaints and new client development most or all of the time" (97).

According to Bush (2009), "Student agencies are highly beneficial to public relations pedagogy in two areas that are most difficult to teach: Process-oriented experiential learning and professional skills" (35). Michaelson, Bauman-Knight, and Fink (2004) posit a team-based classroom learning approach provides a more robust educational environment. Commenting on how students can best gain from immersion in an activity, Gibbons and Hopkins (1980) proposed the extent of a student experience was based on the level of direct interaction, planning, implementation, responsibility for mastery, and opportunity for individual growth.

## METHODOLOGY

The process of action research is relatively straightforward and primarily focused on the enhancement of teaching practices and the subsequent improvement of student learning. Coghlan and Brannick's (2005) concepts of particularity, "situationality" [sic] and being out of praxis are central to this inquiry (7). The practicum and advanced practicum students were enrolled in the public relations practicum classes to complete a degree requirement. The client selection was extremely

situational, as they were all campus-based and student-service focused. The ultimate course design was purposefully "out of praxis" as an academic course containing no lectures, review-style tests, or textbooks, while the activities and work processes were team-based and extremely collaborative.

Tomal (2003) elaborated the instructional action research process as "a systematic process in solving education problems and making improvements ... [including] appropriate interventions to collect and analyze data and then to implement actions to address educational issues" (8). Corey (1953) initially hypothesized and Noffke (1997) reemphasized that participant experiences could be improved if the participants reflected on their activities and experiential outcomes and then used that knowledge to adjust the curriculum.

Pelton (2010) summarizes the focus of action research with the question, "How well are my students learning what I am teaching?" (4). Pelton (2010) also counsels that the teacher's response to this question is even more important than the question itself. Reflecting on the experiences of re-designing and implementing a set of college practicum courses is the ideal application for utilization of action research methodology.

To answer the question about learning, the instructor introduced several end-of-course assignments. The student teams were required to write a reflective group paper and make a formal in-class presentation focused on their team's experiences, accomplishments, and learning. In addition, students completed individual assessments of their teammates and their team leader using a peer evaluation instrument based upon Michaelson, Bauman-Knight, and Fink's (2004) criteria. In an end-of-trimester meeting the instructor and the executive director reviewed the collective team reflections and peer evaluations to develop a list of proposed adjustments for the next trimester's lesson plans and team assignments.

## CREATING A STUDENT-RUN AGENCY

Having spent nearly twenty years in advertising, marketing, and public relations on both the agency and client-side greatly influenced the instructor's decision to implement an agency-like teaching and learning methodology. Discussions with faculty colleagues in the spring of 2012 identified several campus-based organizations that could benefit from increased promotional assistance, including the student newspaper, radio station, speech and debate team, and the Communication and Mass Media department's social media.

Starting with the fall 2012 trimester, the practicum and advanced practicum classes were scheduled concurrently to facilitate the formation of teams and provide leadership opportunities for the advanced students. In the first class, practicum students were randomly placed on teams with an advanced practicum student assigned as a team leader. The practicum students were given introductory-level writing assign-

ments during the first three weeks to better prepare them for anticipated client/project needs.

As far as it was practical, the advanced practicum students were given their choice of client/project. (Everyone requested the radio station because it was considered a fun organization.) Advanced practicum students were oriented to the expectations of client/contact work and team management. The instructor explained the needs of each client. Team leaders were told to prepare reports from their first client meetings, which were to be shared in class.

A senior with extensive newspaper and public relations internship/field experience was recruited as the first executive director for the student-run public relations agency. The executive director attended all of the initial client meetings with the respective team leader. For the remainder of the trimester, the executive director scheduled individual, weekly status meetings with the team leaders. In a separate weekly meeting he delivered a summary of the team leader reports to the instructor.

Following Maben's (2012) model, the advanced practicum students were the direct contact for each of the clients. The team leaders developed the agency-client relationship and with their team created a promotional plan, public relations materials, and/or a promotional event. The teams also assisted with the implementation of the promotional plans.

The promotional planning process began with a meeting between the client and team leader. The client would list goals for the trimester or year along with expectations of the promotional team. The client-specific needs varied widely, from creating and managing an event or developing media relations to creating a social media presence. The linking commonality was client direction and mutual goal setting.

One team was assigned to produce social media content for the Department of Communications and Mass Media, specifically a weekly Facebook blog and Twitter. At the start, the department's Facebook page had three "likes." By the end of the trimester, it had 115 likes and reached 400 people every week. The team promoted the page by creating content about the department's target markets: students who were interested in communication and mass communication. Each week, the team wrote an article about an interesting student, faculty member, related organization, or graduate. The articles were created on a Wordpress blog and were shared by the team via Facebook and Twitter. Most subjects were happy to promote their own stories, and soon their friends were "liking" the postings and "re-tweeting" the links. The team leader created a content production schedule that alternated personal features, department news, and student organization spotlighting.

A second agency team was initially charged with maintaining the social media for the forensic team, focused on recruiting high school students for the highly competitive university squad. Several weeks into the trimester, the speech and debate coach added an event to the

public relations team's list of assignments: a humorous, political debate with individual tournament speeches showcased between the debates.

The initial goal for the forensic squad's agency team was to reach prospective members by regularly updating their social media with press releases and tournament updates. The forensic team's Facebook page was also updated with individual team member information. However, the team became focused on the event, and the tournament press releases were not followed up. Tweets rarely went out, and the site remained stagnant for most of the trimester. At the political debate and showcase event, the agency team conducted an informal survey and determined that nearly 50% of the event attendees had learned about the event from promotional efforts, while the other half had heard about it from instructor's in-class announcements.

A third agency team was assigned to the student-run campus newspaper. The newspaper benefited from having a public relations student on staff as its promotions manager. As a result, a schedule of promotional events was already in place, and the agency team expanded on those activities. The newspaper's goals were to increase student readership, social media interaction, and website traffic. The agency team reached out to football fans before every home game to participate in a Biggest Fan contest. The contest required fans to have their picture taken in an unusual location while holding a copy of the student newspaper and then submitting the photo to the newspaper's Facebook page. Every Thursday the agency team helped distribute copies of the newspaper to anyone walking through the Student Union building. The team also developed promotions for a new smart phone app and a Twitter "hashtag" for feedback and potential story ideas for the newsroom staff.

As the trimester drew to an end, the newspaper's promotion manager became dissatisfied with the very low participation for the contest, app downloads, and hashtag/tweets. In response, the agency team developed a new concept, a philanthropy directory where student organizations could advertise their fundraisers. There were dozens of fundraising events every trimester on the campus. The idea had the added bonus of creating friendly competition between the various student organizations while developing a new revenue stream. However, the newspaper's advertising staff rejected the philanthropy directory idea because they did not have the staff to handle the potential increase in business.

The fourth agency team worked with the student-operated radio station, which presented a unique challenge by having a promotional staff of 21 students and two promotion directors. With the blessing of the station's management, the agency team developed a breast cancer education and awareness event tied to the Susan G. Komen foundation. In short order the agency team experienced acute frustration with the client. The radio station enjoys its "wild & edgy" reputation. The station's promotional staff quickly took over the entire event and morphed the agency team's educational theme into a fun fair called "Breast Fest."

The station's staff developed "Breast Fest" to be more about the body part than disease education. They also ignored the agency team's advice to tone down either the promotions or the planned activities. The agency team was extremely concerned about the planned bra-removal contest, the bra-decorating contest, a questionable t-shirt design, and the station's purchase of breast-shaped stress balls. However, the radio station staff could not be dissuaded. Throughout the trimester the agency team regularly consulted with the executive director and the practicum instructor while they maintained a supportive, professional demeanor through the completion of the client's event. Ultimately, this proved to be a great educational opportunity as some real-world clients will have internal personnel to supervise and coordinate their promotional efforts, and there may also be times when agency personnel do not agree with the client.

At the end of the trimester each agency team made a formal presentation to a meeting of the combined practicum classes summarizing their work and what they had learned.

## DISCUSSION

The revised curriculum included all four of Elmore's (2010) key elements. Each team was responsible for providing the service to its assigned client while also being given complete autonomy to develop whatever promotional plans it felt were appropriate to meet the client's needs. Team leaders were given all the available information concerning the client's public relations situation while being held accountable for the team's work product. To accomplish projects, each team leader facilitated face-to-face interactions with clients and team members. Providing promotional services to campus-based clients offered all practicum students the opportunity to serve the needs of someone and something in the campus community beyond their own self-interests.

The agency/practicum experience also incorporated all of the major elements Bush (1999) had identified as criteria of the more successful student agencies: team-based experiences, paid (scholarships) student officers, dedicated office space, course credit for student work, teaching credit for the instructor, an assessment process, and the emphasis on the direct application of public relations principles and skills in the course.

In the agency's first trimester the agency team working with the Communication and Mass Media department created and posted material nearly every week on the Facebook and Twitter sites. The forensic squad's team created an on-campus event to spotlight the squad but updated very little of the existing social media. The agency's newspaper team actively participated in numerous campus-wide promotions and created an interesting philanthropic promotional concept in spite of a leadership change. The radio station's agency team supported and attended the station's event while learning volumes about dealing with difficult situations and people.

Most client-team relationships were generally functional, but one was extremely problematic. As McElreath (1998) expressed, clients

of student agencies may have different understandings of the working relationship and student abilities and may not provide very motivating experiences. Some team plans fell through because their client ignored emails, missed appointments, and generally failed to respond to communications. Some team-organized events were poorly attended because of an apparent lack of interest by the student body. In a few cases, despite advice from the executive director or the instructor, an agency team started its client's promotional tactics too late to be effective.

Moreover, the lack of client sophistication among student organizations was exacerbated by the agency team leader's inexperience and under-developed interpersonal communication skills. Plus, as Pelton (2010) notes, not only is action research "inherently flexible" (14), but instructors and agency personnel must also be flexible to effectively handle the variety of situations and issues that arise in the normal course of providing services.

Two of the four teams encountered major problems. By mid-trimester the radio station team's relationship with their client became so contentious that the executive director regularly joined the team leader at client meetings, and the instructor periodically stepped in to maintain clear and civil communications. Just after mid-trimester the newspaper team's leader was removed for failing to perform, and the executive director assumed management of the team until the end of the trimester. In the end, making changes and adjusting to mitigating factors are not only part of active research, but also they are a normal part of teaching effectively, serving clients, and simply working with human beings.

## CONCLUSIONS

As an evolving process, the agency approach to the practicum classes appears to be a positive and engaging teaching and learning methodology. Despite the challenges, it also provides a useful and supportive service for the participating client organizations. The student experiences in the public relations practicum/agency closely matched the results of Kuh's (1993) study of outside-of-class activities, including knowledge increase and application, improved vocational capabilities, and an overall boost in self-confidence. Student reflections supported the introduction of teams, real clients and their challenges, and the direct, hands-on application of public relations processes.

The instructor and the executive director reflected that the student-run public relations agency was also a truly applied learning exercise in communications studies, interpersonal communication, and promotional effectiveness. Most of the agency students had studied interpersonal and group communication, persuasion, sociology, and much more. Communication between two students often resulted in situations that validated much of what the students had studied in the classroom.

Team end-of-course reflections exhibited an improved understanding of the importance of working in a team and providing service to a client. This outcome is supported by Lev Vygotsky's (1978) zone of

proximal development concept stressing scaffolding, or guided reflection, on an action or experience would result in new learning. In a very similar vein, faculty advisors responding to Maben's (2012) study additionally indicated "Student growth was noted by increases in maturation, confidence, responsibility, problem-solving, leadership skills and teamwork." (102). Agency students also mirrored this outcome.

An encouraging outgrowth of the more active, practical instructional approach was the student behavior in class. The entire experience supports Elmore's (2010) postulation that students are excited about applying their knowledge to something that is authentic and meaningful for them: solving a "real" problem instead of an in-class exercise. The student reflections also indicated that while the teams had solved problems, they also learned how to work more effectively within an intense group setting.

Ultimately, experiences with the public relations practicum classes reinforced Piaget's theory of schema development where the student teams exhibited a cyclical process of cognitive development, utilizing experience and reflection as the basis for the progression of new knowledge, which "certainly validates the action research mindset" (Pelton, 2010, 17). The instructor also believes that being open to learning and applying public relations knowledge in this manner makes the learning experience more robust.

### FUTURE ACTIONS

Following Dewey's (1938) lead and refining the practicum's orientation processes to better inform team leaders about the client service process is the first order of business, especially for future advanced public relations practicum classes. Maben's (2012) study also indicated that a majority of student-run agencies had written policy manuals. A step toward creating a more effective orientation for the practicum/agency was taken as one of the spring 2013 team leaders enrolled in an independent study to develop an agency orientations manual.

Bush (1999) identified several additional characteristics for a successful student agency, which have not yet been incorporated into the practicum courses, including concrete business protocols, a competitive application process, and charging clients for the work product. Attention to business practices is being applied; however, since the agency is housed within two practicum courses it is unlikely the latter two characteristics will be met.

Other challenges Bush (1999) uncovered concerned uneven agency student motivation, along with a disparity in respect, value, and resources allocated to existing journalism/mass communication organizations as opposed to the lack of all of these elements for student agencies. Student motivation is a challenge to address, primarily because the students have indicated they do not place much value on a one credit hour course. To begin addressing this concern, the advanced public relations practicum course was increased from one to two credit hours.

At two credit hours it matches the other practicum offerings within the department, specifically the student newspaper, radio station, and cable television channel. Respect and value will continue to be an issue since it will take time for students and faculty to become aware of the work being done by the agency. Resources are not likely to change for a class-based practicum.

As the agency develops a positive reputation for breaking through the conundrum of needing experience to gain experience, students should view participation in the agency as a valuable component of their educational journey. Other disciplines at the university, such as journalism and mass communications, have already realized the value of early student involvement in hands-on, realistic, and practical experiences and report higher-than-average student retention rates. The public relations faculty believes students who have completed the practicum/agency experience will similarly benefit from their participation. Finally, central to the public relations faculty's plans is Elmore's (2010) conjecture that increased student motivation is a direct result of knowledge application to a real and consequential problem-solving opportunity.

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# An exploratory study of student development in an outdoor higher education program

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*Research on the impact of outdoor education mostly consists of assessments of self-esteem and social skills in adventure programs outside of academia. The present exploratory study assessed personal and academic development in undergraduate participants of an interdisciplinary, semester-long, study away learning community in higher education. We assessed development using a multi-method approach employing qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Concerning quantitative data, outdoor participants' life satisfaction significantly increased from the beginning to the end of the semester, whereas a matched control sample taking traditional courses did not experience this benefit. The outdoor program buffered participants from the decreases in attributional complexity and existential well-being experienced by the control group. Qualitatively, outdoor education students reported learning across a wide variety of intelligences and believed that these achievements could not be experienced in the traditional classroom. Implications and limitations of the study are discussed.*

**Keywords:** study away, outdoor education, learning, multiple intelligence

Outdoor education is one form of applied learning, providing students an opportunity to apply abstract concepts to a relevant context. However, most outdoor education research focuses on adventure programs that teach intra- and interpersonal skills outside of the college setting (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Neill, 2003). The present study involved a multi-method assessment across a broad range of student development in an outdoor higher education program. We collected quantitative data to examine whether the program would improve critical thinking abilities, life satisfaction, and existential well-being beyond that of a matched control group taking similar courses (without an outdoor component). We also collected qualitative data exploring outdoor participants' perspectives of how the program enhanced student development and whether the applied component of the trip uniquely contributed to learning.

### ACADEMIC LEARNING IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Outdoor education is one form of study away experience, in which students take trips into nature to learn various skills and acquire knowledge (Cooper, 1994). Study away is a type of applied learning that allows students to integrate subject areas with learning experiences in new contexts (Schwartzman & Henry, 2009). The outdoor setting is one relevant context, as it provides an opportunity to apply knowledge learned in the classroom, requires attention given the multitude of novel and complex stimuli in the natural environment, and allows time and space for reflection (Beard & Wilson, 2002; Bennion & Olsen, 2002; Daubert & Ream, 1980).

The evaluation of outdoor education has mostly focused on the enhancement of soft skills such as building self-esteem and social capacities (Hattie et al., 1997; Neill, 2003). Some programs have attempted to address academic content in such areas as ecology, geography,

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reading, writing, and math (Bennion & Olsen, 2002; Daubert & Ream, 1980; Fuller, Gaskin, & Scott, 2003; Marsh, Richards, & Barnes, 1986; O'Neil & Skelton, 1992; Van Noy, 1994). However, most of these publications do not empirically assess academic development, and fewer still examine learning in undergraduate outdoor education.

We wished to assess an aspect of academic learning rarely explored in outdoor education – critical thinking. Critical thinking is an important goal within a liberal arts higher education (King, Brown, Lindsay, & Van Hecke, 2007). More specifically, we wanted to address attributional complexity (AC) — the ability to take different perspectives concerning a problem and recognize the multiple causes of an event (Fletcher, Danilovics, Fernandez, Peterson, & Reeder, 1986). We were presented with a unique opportunity in the mid 2000's in the Midwest. Situated along the Missouri river, our local community was celebrating the bicentennial of Lewis and Clark's historic exploration of the territories later to become the United States. We retraced their steps in our outdoor curriculum, exploring history from the "white person perspective" (i.e., Lewis and Clark) and the Native American standpoint. We revisited the path taken by Lewis and Clark — investigating interpretive centers, canoeing the Missouri river, and reading their journals. We also read Native American literature and spoke with indigenous persons to better understand the values and worldview in each culture. We expected this curriculum would increase AC more than that of a typical undergraduate classroom.

### LIFE SATISFACTION AND WELL-BEING IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Outdoor education might provide benefits beyond the learning of academic information and life skills. Theorists (Cooper, 1994; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich, Simons, Losito, Fiorito, Miles & Zelson, 1991) suggest that being in nature can enhance satisfaction with life (LS) and existential well-being (EWB — defined as meaning and purpose in life). For example, attention restoration theory states that natural environments contain characteristics (an organized setting, fascinating stimuli that are different from urban life) that lead to effortless attention, rebuilding a person's cognitive resources (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Further, the stress-reduction theory purports that the natural environment provides a non-threatening, aesthetically pleasing setting that reduces emotional, cognitive, and physical stress (Ulrich et al., 1991).

We believe that increasing LS and EWB are important goals within higher education, providing students an opportunity "to construct lives of substance" (King et al., 2007, p. 2), as well as enabling "individuals to live richer, more interesting...lives" (Glenn & Weaver, 1981, p. 23). A recent national research program included increasing LS and purpose in life as major goals within a liberal arts education (King et al., 2007).

A few studies have assessed well-being in outdoor education (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983; Lambert, Segger, Staley, Spencer, & Nelson,

1978). Kaplan and Talbot analyzed high school student journals in a survival course and discovered a gradual increase in participants' sense of awe, wonder, and closeness to God. Lambert and colleagues found an increase in college students' relationship with God after a nonacademic adventure course, but did not find a similar increase in a more academically-based outdoor course or two traditional college psychology classes. We would like to assess well-being in a more secular fashion, exploring meaning and purpose, as well as satisfaction with life. Given the theorized benefits of being in nature, we expected greater increases in these variables for participants in our outdoor higher education program compared to those taking regular college classes.

### THE OUTDOOR SEMESTER PROGRAM

The program assessed in the present study is known as the Outdoor Semester. It is a multi-disciplinary, theme-based, semester-long, applied learning community at a moderate-sized institution in the Midwest. The program theme of Lewis and Clark's expedition was offered during the fall semesters of 2006 and 2007. Students were provided an integrated curriculum examining America's relationship with the natural world in a historical and cultural context. The program included courses in literature, composition, psychology, geography, and outdoor education. The curriculum emphasized critical thinking (looking at information from various perspectives, acknowledging multiple causes of events) and applying information learned in the classroom to experiences on the trips. For instance, in geography, students learned about the earth's physical systems and compared how Native-Americans and other Americans historically utilized the earth's resources and the resultant effects. In literature courses, students read Native-American books set in the Midwest in the 1800s and a history of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Outdoor education courses taught them how to prepare their bodies for the trips and maintain their health long-term, along with learning outdoor survival skills. Students were also required to make an oral presentation to the local community about their experiences. In psychology, students were taught systematic desensitization and cognitive restructuring to overcome anticipatory fears of canoeing, rock climbing, or sharing a tent or a room with a peer. For composition, students were challenged to write 1,000 words each day while on the trips, describing experiences and relating events to coursework. Students were also required to write a research paper over a topic within the program curriculum.

Students and faculty took two 14-day excursions to the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains. The first trip took place in late September, including travels to the Badlands and Black Hills in South Dakota, through the Big Horn Mountains in Wyoming and the upper Missouri River in Montana. The second trip occurred in mid-November and traveled the Santa Fe Trail through the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to Taos, Santa Fe, and Chaco Canyon, New Mexico. Activities included

canoeing, white-water rafting, horseback riding, hiking, and camping. Students immersed themselves in frontier culture, visiting many interpretive centers, museums, forts, and battle sites. Students met Native Americans from several tribes, participated in hand games and sweat lodges, and listened to elders tell stories.

To review, the goal of the present study was to assess student development in the Outdoor Semester. We hypothesized significantly greater increases in AC, LS, and EWB in students taking Outdoor Semester than those taking similar classes without an outdoor component. We also used qualitative analyses to further explicate what was learned in the program — from the point of view of the students — and to assess how the study away portion of the program uniquely contributed to their education. We did not create *a priori* hypotheses for the qualitative findings since these were exploratory and an attempt to obtain the students' perspective.

### METHODS

#### SAMPLE

Nineteen students participated in Outdoor Semester between 2006 (nine participants) and 2007 (ten participants). We obtained a matched control group of nine students in 2006 and ten in 2007 who took a section of English composition that did not have an outdoor component and was not taught by an Outdoor Semester instructor. The students were matched on age, gender, race, and marital status. Outdoor participants' average age was 22.6 ( $SD = 8.3$ ), and the comparison sample's average age was 22.7 ( $SD = 7.4$ ). Each group contained six males, eighteen Euro-Americans, and one Hispanic-American. Each group also contained thirteen persons who were single, two who were cohabiting, three who were married, and one divorced individual.

#### MEASURES AND PROCEDURE

The comparison sample consisted of students who matched the Outdoor Semester sample on four demographic variables — age, gender, race/ethnicity, and marital status. These demographic variables correlate with the constructs assessed in the current study, as women and older individuals report greater levels of EWB and AC than men and younger persons, and Caucasians and married persons report higher LS than Hispanic-Americans and single or divorced individuals (Barger, Donoho, & Wayment, 2009; Fletcher et al., 1986; Hendricks-Ferguson, 2006; Hess, Osowski, & Leclerc, 2005; White, 1992).

Participants were given extra credit in both Outdoor Semester and the comparison classes to complete a survey containing demographic information and measures of AC, LS, and EWB. The surveys were completed the first (pretest/Time 1) and last weeks (post-test/Time 2) of the semester.

Of 201 students across 9 comparison classes, 105 students were deemed appropriate matches — of the same gender, race, and marital status and generally within one year of the same age. Five outdoor students had unique qualities (26 or older, cohabiting or married, Hispanic-American) that made it difficult to find a single-year age difference. For these individuals, we looked for potential matches with less than five years age difference. To choose the comparison sample, we randomly selected (through use of a numbers table) a match for each participant. Our final matches included 14 student pairs with less than a year's difference in age, two pairs with a 1-2 year age difference, two pairs with a four-year age gap, and one pair — our only nonwhite participants — had a five-year age difference. We believe this age difference is minimal, given the fact that the oldest students share a similar generational cohort and a similar marital status, gender, and ethnicity. One-way ANOVAs revealed no significant difference between the 19 students selected as matched participants and the other 86 students not chosen to be in the comparison sample, in terms of Time 1 AC ( $F(1,103) = 2.37, p = .13$ ), Time 2 AC ( $F(1,103) = 0.13, p = .72$ ), Time 1 LS ( $F(1,103) = 0.33, p = .57$ ), Time 2 LS ( $F(1,103) = 0.06, p = .81$ ), Time 1 EWB ( $F(1,103) = 0.76, p = .39$ ), and Time 2 EWB ( $F(1,103) = 0.49, p = .48$ ).

To measure AC, we utilized the 28-item Attributional Complexity scale (Fletcher et al., 1986), which assesses students' ability and interest in considering multiple causes of an event. Items are rated on a -3 ("Strongly Disagree") to +3 ("Strongly Agree") scale. Internal reliability of the measure is high (coefficient alpha of .85), as is temporal reliability (18-day test-retest correlation of .80). The scale has strong construct validity — as theorized, the items loaded on one factor, were moderately associated with need for cognition, and psychology majors scored higher on AC than natural science majors (Fletcher et al., 1986).

We used the five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) to assess LS. It measures overall quality of life. Items are rated on a 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree") scale. The scale has strong internal (coefficient alpha of .87) and temporal reliability (a two-month test-retest correlation coefficient of .82 — Diener et al., 1985). Demonstrating validity, the five items loaded together on one factor, as hypothesized, and the total score has a moderate positive correlation with self-esteem and moderate inverse associations with neuroticism and mental distress (Diener et al., 1985).

To measure EWB, we used the 10-item Existential Well-Being Subscale of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991). This subscale assesses purpose and meaning in life. Test-retest and internal reliability are consistently above .80 for this subscale (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991). As hypothesized, EWB is associated with positive self-concept, purpose in life, physical, and emotional health (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991). Items are rated on a 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 6 ("Strongly Agree") scale.

In terms of a qualitative assessment, participants completed a two-page, open-ended survey six weeks into the semester, immediately

after the first trip. Questions included what surprised students about the trip; what they valued about the experience; what they disliked/thought could be improved; what they learned about themselves, what they learned about others, whether they could have learned the same things by staying in the classroom, and why/why not. Responses were qualitatively analyzed using grounded theory (Smith, Harre, & Langenhove, 2001), a technique that allows for an inductive exploration of participant responses, using their answers as a catalyst for data analysis. Three coders (the lead author and two undergraduate assistants) individually read through each participant's responses twice, noting major themes and subthemes. Inter-rater reliability was 79.6%, a figure comparable to analyses in prior studies (Smith et al., 2001). Discrepancies were discussed until a unanimous decision was reached, and categories/subcategories were verified with the participants for validity purposes.

Two weeks after the trip (eight weeks into the semester), participants anonymously completed a survey containing closed-ended questions based on the qualitative analyses (see Tables 3 and 4). Participants rated the items on a 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree") scale. The purpose of this survey was to assess the prevalence of the main ideas presented in the qualitative data, without requiring spontaneous reports from participants (as the open-ended questions necessitated).<sup>1</sup>

## RESULTS

### INFERENTIAL STATISTICS: BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR HIGHER EDUCATION

When comparing mean scores on variables for which two samples share variance (e.g., gender, age, race, and marital status), it is appropriate to run a paired-samples t-test (Ha & Ha, 2012). As suggested by statisticians (Ha & Ha, 2012), we first subtracted students' pretest scores from their post-test scores on each variable (e.g., subtracting Time 1 LS scores from Time 2 LS scores). We then ran a paired-sample t-test on the difference scores for each matched pair (e.g., an Outdoor Semester participant's LS difference score paired with the matched participant's LS difference score). Table 1 lists the descriptive statistics for the outdoor education students and the matched comparison sample on AC, LS, and EWB. Given the small sample size, we used a significance level of  $p < .05$  and also assessed for marginal significance ( $.10 < p < .05$ ).

Surprisingly, AC decreased slightly (-0.03 mean points-per-item) in the Outdoor sample. However, the decrease in AC was significantly greater ( $t(18)=2.03, p = .03$ ) in the comparison sample (-0.39 mean points-per-item). As hypothesized, Outdoor Semester students reported a net increase (+0.38 points-per-item) in LS, whereas the matched comparison group reported a net decrease of 0.19 points-per-item. The difference between these change scores (0.57 points-per-item)

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (Mean-per-Item) for Quantitative Measures**

		Pretest		Post-Test				Possible
Sample	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> (18)	<i>p</i>	Range
Attributional Complexity								
Outdoor Participants	19	1.43	0.70	1.40	1.02	-0.24	.81	-3.00 – +3.00
Comparison Sample	19	1.10	0.80	0.71	0.89	-2.24	.04	-3.00 – +3.00
Normative Sample (Fletcher et al., 1986)	289	1.34	1.47					-3.00 – +3.00
Life Satisfaction								
Outdoor Participants	19	4.54	1.45	4.92	1.32	2.50	.02	1.00 – 7.00
Comparison Sample	19	5.39	1.31	5.20	1.26	-0.73	.48	1.00 – 7.00
Normative Sample (Diener et al., 1985)	176	4.70	1.29					1.00 – 7.00
Existential Well-Being								
Outdoor Participants	19	4.67	0.76	4.76	0.75	0.82	.42	1.00 – 6.00
Comparison Sample	19	5.21	0.78	4.86	1.23	-1.74	.10	1.00 – 6.00
Normative Sample (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991)	197	4.89	0.72					1.00 – 6.00

was marginally significant ( $t(18)=1.73, p = .05$ ). Outdoor Semester students reported a small net increase (+ 0.09 points-per-item) in EWB between pretest and post-test, whereas the matched comparison group reported a net decrease of 0.35 points-per-item. The difference between these change scores (0.44 points-per-item) was statistically significant ( $t(18)=1.81, p = .04$ ).

As a point of reference, we contrasted the means of the outdoor and comparison samples with previous normative samples on each construct (Diener et al., 1985; Fletcher et al., 1986; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991). We used One-Way ANOVAs to compare the means of the three groups on each construct, given that the normative samples did not share variance from common background traits with the groups used in the current study (Ha & Ha, 2012). Table 1 includes the descriptive statistics for the normative data as well as the samples in the present study. There were no significant differences in AC between the normative sample and the outdoor and comparison sample means at Time 1 ( $F(2,324) = 0.31, p = .74$ ) and Time 2 ( $F(2,324) = 1.78, p = .17$ ). There was a marginally significant difference ( $F(2, 211) = 2.66, p = .07$ ) between the outdoor and comparison groups' pretest LS scores and the

normative sample's LS mean (Diener et al., 1985). Post-hoc Bonferroni comparisons revealed that the comparison sample had significantly higher LS than the normative sample ( $t(211) = 4.96, p < .01$ ). There was also a marginally significant difference ( $F(2, 232) = 2.69, p = .07$ ) between the EWB pretest scores in the current study and the normative sample (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991). The comparison sample had slightly higher EWB at pretest than the Outdoor Semester sample ( $t(232) = 2.29, p = .07$ ). Nonetheless, these differences disappeared by post-test for both LS ( $F(2, 211) = 1.44, p = .24$ ) and EWB ( $F(2, 232) = 0.25, p = .78$ ).

Finally, we explored whether the changes from pretest to post-test were significant within each group (see Table 1 for paired-sample t-test results). The matched comparison group had marginally significant decreases in AC and EWB, and the Outdoor Semester sample had a significant increase in LS.

### OUTDOOR EDUCATION ADDRESSES MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES: QUALITATIVE AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

The first pattern discovered in participant responses to the open-ended survey was that students were reporting the program addressed multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999), with five of the major categories referencing a different type of intelligence — interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, kinesthetic, and logical. Four of the five themes had subcategories. Table 2 lists the subcategories within each theme and provides example quotes.

**Table 2: Qualitative Data Concerning Learning Outcomes from the Outdoor Semester Program (N = 19)**

Category/Subcategory	<i>N</i>
1. Interpersonal intelligence	19 <sup>1</sup>
1a. Social knowledge	13
“People — who in the classroom appeared shallow and self-centered — are really much deeper and more caring than I realized.”	
“We all have different personalities and we all think different.”	
1b. Social connection	12
“[I value] the bonds I formed with everyone... We truly became friends on the trip. It has been the best trip of my life.”	
“Everyone is nice to each other and became a family.”	
“[What surprised me was] the comradeship and sense of community we developed as a group.”	

Table 2 (continued)

1c. Social conflict	9
“It reinforced my idea of not liking to rely on others to get something done.”	
“Everyone’s personalities...meshed or conflicted...after living together...We all got frustrated with each other but reconciled.”	
2. Intrapersonal intelligence	19 <sup>2</sup>
<sup>1</sup> 16 students mentioned interpersonal intelligence before the survey question on this topic.	
<sup>2</sup> 9 students mentioned intrapersonal intelligence before the survey question on this topic.	
2a. Self-esteem	8
“I’m stronger than I thought...[I value] getting over my fear to canoe.”	
“[What surprised me was] how I had the courage to climb Hole-in-the-Wall.”	
2b. Self-awareness regarding social interactions	8
“People like me more than I thought [which] led me to reevaluate some conclusions I had. I’m too young to be tied down and I need to be free to go and do and express myself.”	
“I have a gift for helping others and I would make a good medicine man.”	
2c. Self-awareness concerning the natural world	6
“I am a worrywart...in the peace of the river, I discovered a place in myself where I can put worries aside.”	
“I like alone time in nature. Nature is far more important to me than I ever thought.”	
3. Naturalistic intelligence	17
3a. Appreciation/connection with nature	15
“[I value] the wonderful things nature allowed us to witness.”	
“[I value] the overall peace of canoeing down the river.”	
“Making a connection with the natural world was extremely valuable.”	
3b. Learning about the outdoors	9
“[What surprised me was] the devastation caused by the pine bark beetle.”	
“I learned about the stars.”	
4. Logical intelligence	9
4a. Native American culture	8
“I was able to put myself in the Indians’ shoes.”	
“I learned I should think out of the box more. I have always gone on trips that have white people history. I need to get both sides.”	

Table 2 (continued)

4b. U.S. history	7
“I learned so much about our history that I never learned before.”	
“[I value] learning about the [battle of] Little Bighorn...I was surprised how hard it hit me.”	
5. Kinesthetic intelligence	8
“[I value that I] learned how to camp and canoe/kayak.”	
“[I learned] that I can climb and canoe really well. I like being challenged physically.”	
“[I valued] learning to whitewater raft.”	

A number of students mentioned that the program helped them gain knowledge or skill in a particular intelligence. For instance, within the theme of intrapersonal intelligence, two subcategories dealt with enhanced learning — gaining self-awareness concerning the natural world and increased self-awareness regarding social interactions. Some of the benefits reported in these subcategories include learning how nature provides a sense of calm during stressful times and discovering the skills one has to help others.

Another common subcategory was a sense of connection, whether with nature (within the naturalistic intelligence theme), or with others (interpersonal intelligence theme). At least half of the participants mentioned this bond with the outdoors or with their peers. Certainly these benefits were not without challenges — almost half the participants mentioned social conflict (a subcategory within the interpersonal intelligence theme). Yet many reported working through these conflicts, as noted in the quantitative items described next.

Students agreed with the Likert-scale items created from the qualitative responses, describing how they had grown in terms of interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, kinesthetic, and logical intelligences (see Table 3). Participants agreed with questions concerning connection with nature, building a sense of community, and working through challenges that they had with others on the trip

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Outdoor Experience Items (N = 19)

Item	<i>M</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>SD</i>
Interpersonal Intelligence		
1. I made friends and formed deep connections with others while on the trips.	6.05	1.02
2. I was touched by how we helped each other out when we needed it.	5.95	0.97
3. I gained an appreciation for others’ talents while on the trip.	5.53	1.57
4. I was able to work out the challenges I had with other people on the trip.	4.78	1.27
Intrapersonal Development		
1. I learned some new things about myself while on the trip.	5.58	1.43

Table 3 (continued)

2. Through Outdoor Semester, I learned how important it is to reflect within.	5.37	1.77
3. On the trips, I learned that modern day luxuries (e.g., cell phone, TV, iPods) can be a distraction from living fully.	5.47	1.61
4. I was able to work out some psychological struggles I had while on the trip.	4.79	1.55
Naturalistic Intelligence		
1. I learned new things about nature.	6.47	0.84
2. My desire to engage in outdoor activities increased after going on the trip.	6.05	1.43
3. I have a deeper appreciation of nature after going on the outdoor trip.	5.79	1.47
4. While on the trips, I was surprised by how easily I adapted to life outdoors.	5.72	1.23
<sup>1</sup> Participants rated the items on a 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree") scale.		
Academic Knowledge/Logical Intelligence/Critical Thinking		
1. Through Outdoor Semester, I learned that there are at least two sides to every story.	6.26	0.87
2. I learned about the history and culture of Westward expansion.	6.05	1.27
3. On the trip, I was able to put myself in other's shoes and see things from their perspective.	5.84	1.34
4. Through Outdoor Semester, I learned that I can generate more than one solution to a problem.	5.95	1.03
Kinesthetic Intelligence		
1. I enjoyed the opportunity to challenge myself physically.	6.47	0.70
2. I was proud of how I adapted to the physical challenges on the trip.	6.05	0.85
3. I learned some new physical skills on this trip.	5.74	1.59

### ADDED VALUE FROM OUTDOOR EXCURSIONS: QUALITATIVE AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Within the qualitative data, three themes were dedicated to the unique benefits of the study away component of Outdoor Semester. These included the distinctive social opportunities afforded by the trip, the experiential nature of the outdoor excursion, and the sense that nature provided a "retreat" from everyday reality.

In terms of the unique social nature of the trip, 9 of 19 students reported that the study away experience required them to spend more

time with their peers and was more similar to "real-life" than what is experienced in the classroom, resulting in greater social connection and social skills. They reported that they had to work together and resolve conflicts, more than what is needed in the classroom. The following quotes illustrate these principles:

"On campus we see each other just two or three hours a day. We don't take the time to get to know each other. Being together 24/7 brings a lot of revelations."

"I learned a lot about a few of the girls. At first my impression was wrong and I am glad I got to know them better."

The second major theme, in terms of the "added value" of the Outdoor Semester, was the various forms of experiential learning that the trip(s) afforded. Nine of 19 students mentioned this theme, noting that the trips provided opportunities to observe firsthand and practice what they learned in the classroom:

"I value the experience itself. The things we saw and were able to do. It was a once in a lifetime experience."

"I learn more by looking and traveling to the place...[I]t's easier to learn by action. I don't focus as well in fluorescent lights and windowless rooms. I like hands-on approaches, and being outside."

"I never recall ever seeing anything as beautiful as the Badlands in any books, nothing like seeing it in person."

The third and final unique benefit to the Outdoor Semester was that the experience in nature afforded 6 of the 19 students a type of "retreat" from everyday life. This "getaway" helped them to obtain important realizations about life and an opportunity to rediscover oneself:

"I would have never felt so free and realized I needed space if I hadn't gotten that space [on the trip]."

"It helps to discover yourself when you're not in your normal environment. You're taken into a different reality that can help you express easier who you are without the pressures of everyday life."

"It took me...not being in close proximity [to my family] to realize I don't have to do everything for my family."

We created items representing the three themes concerning the unique benefits of the Outdoor Semester program. Students agreed with these items, as can be seen in Table 4.

In terms of suggestions for future excursions, two themes emerged. Seven students suggested more time spent in reclusive natural environments (instead of staying in a hotel or riding in a van), and four students suggested that the 1,000-word-a-day writing requirement on the trip be lowered, believing it took away from experiencing nature.

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Added-Value Items (N=19)**

Item	<i>M</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>SD</i>
Unique Social Opportunities		
1. I liked that we had the opportunity to learn from teachers in a more casual way on the trips than in the classroom.	6.68	0.58
2. I made friends with people I would have never gotten to know on campus.	6.00	1.60
3. Going on the trip helped me learn how to interact with people better than I would have just from taking a class with them.	5.89	1.59
4. By traveling and living with each other for this extended period of time, I came to understand people as I hadn't before.	5.84	1.26
5. I was surprised how completely different people are outside of class.	5.68	1.73
Experiential Learning		
1. There is something about seeing the places we read about that adds to our learning.	6.79	0.54
2. I learned more by walking around and actually touching the things we studied in the classroom.	6.58	1.02
3. Going on the trip helped me learn because I was doing things.	6.53	0.70
4. The trips made classroom learning deeper.	6.53	0.70
<sup>1</sup> Participants rated the items on a 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree") scale.		
5. Classroom learning made the trips more meaningful.	6.42	1.02
A Retreat		
1. There are more opportunities for self-reflection by going on the trip than there are in the classroom.	6.68	0.58
2. I was able to learn about the things we studied in a different way by going on the trips.	6.70	0.42
3. The things we saw and were able to do were a once-in-a-lifetime experience.	6.74	0.45
4. Being in nature left me feeling peaceful.	6.47	1.02
5. There are more opportunities to grow psychologically by going on the trip than there are in the classroom.	6.26	0.99

## DISCUSSION

The goal of the present exploratory study was to assess student development in a study away applied learning experience, the Outdoor Semester, by quantitatively examining if attributional complexity, life satisfaction, and existential well-being increased in the program and more generally exploring qualitative responses of student growth. We also hoped to obtain student feedback on the unique contributions of the study away portion of the curriculum.

Our *a priori* hypotheses were partially supported. As expected, the outdoor participants benefited more than the matched comparison sample across all three quantitative measures – attributional complexity, life satisfaction, and existential well-being. Although both outdoor and traditional student participants generally scored in the average range on these variables, there was a half-a-point mean-per-item difference between the outdoor and comparison groups. Given the five-to-six point range on the Likert scales, this is a meaningful figure — an 8-10% benefit for the outdoor participants. As hypothesized, outdoor participants had a significant increase in life satisfaction. Counter to our hypotheses, outdoor participants' attributional complexity and existential well-being did not significantly increase. However, the outdoor students did not experience as great a decline in these variables as the comparison group. Research has revealed an increased cognitive load and level of stress experienced by students at the end of the semester (Glenn & Weaver, 1981; Nisbet, Zelenski, & Murphy, 2011). Perhaps students are less able (or less interested) in thinking critically and finding meaning and purpose in life when experiencing stress during final exams. Perhaps after the semester is completed — and stress levels return to normal — participants' existential well-being and attributional complexity return to earlier levels (or even increase). At the very least, the outdoor program appeared to buffer students from experiencing these losses. Future research should conduct a long-term follow-up to assess if, after final exams, attributional complexity and existential well-being increase more in outdoor education students than comparison samples.

Qualitatively, students reported that the program increased a wide array of intelligences – interpersonal, intrapersonal, kinesthetic, naturalistic, and logical — in alignment with Gardner's (1999) theory of multiple intelligences. The descriptive data for the items created from the qualitative findings further establish the prevalence of these forms of learning. We had not initially considered this potential benefit. In hindsight, we are surprised that students did not report gains in linguistic and musical intelligence, as students learned to play the Native-American flute in our program, and the curriculum included a multitude of writing assignments. Perhaps the lack of reporting of linguistic benefits was because students felt slightly overwhelmed with the 1,000-word-a-day journal requirement on the trips. If educators wish for a more well-rounded experience, they might include a smaller

writing requirement during the study away excursion and include a music course in the curriculum. To fully address all aspects of Gardner's (1999) intelligences, future outdoor programs might involve spatial intelligence through techniques such as requiring students to use maps and track their progress on the trips.

The qualitative data also provide three reasons why the study away portion of the curriculum may uniquely contribute to student development. Almost half the students reported experiential learning, involving an emotional as well as cognitive component (e.g., "I was surprised how hard it hit me at Little Bighorn"). When emotions accompany academic learning, memories may be longer-lasting (Beard & Wilson, 2002). For instance, one night while camping along the Missouri River, we observed the Aurora Borealis. One student explained to the lead author the scientific mechanisms behind this phenomenon, something he had learned in geography the week prior. It is one thing to see a picture of the Northern Lights, but quite another to see them first-hand. Study away is a form of applied learning that allows an individual to experience and form a deep emotional connection with what they learn, which may have a lasting impact.

Another "added value" from the applied learning experience was the unique social opportunity the trip provided. Participants spent 24 hours a day together for two weeks at a time. This intense encounter led to experiencing and working through difficulties, forming bonds and building social skills. For example, sitting around the campfire one night, the lead author observed a young female describing her frustrations with her boyfriend. She found herself perpetuating her boyfriend's jealousy by hinting at interests in other young men. She talked about trust, and one of the trip leaders, a retired male professor, explained that sometimes trust is not always about sexual fidelity, but knowing that your partner will be there for you during difficult times. A few years later, the first author saw this student, who reported that the professor's advice profoundly impacted her. She was engaged to a new man and happy in her relationship. We argue that such experiences are rare in the classroom.

The final benefit to the study away experience is that it provided a "retreat" that allowed some students to extract insights they might not have learned on campus. This finding confirms theories on the benefits provided by nature — the outdoors is a setting different from one's typical environment and affords time for reflection (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich et al., 1991). Perhaps various rules and pedagogies within the program aided this process. Students were told not to bring cell-phones, iPods, or laptops, in order to "fully immerse" themselves in the outdoor experience. Students were also given time on the trip each day to reflect and write. Theories such as the cycle of learning (Kolb, 1984) note that for experiential education to work, time is needed for reflection. Perhaps personal and academic growth were enhanced because the curriculum and the natural setting provided opportunities for reflection and created a retreat-like atmosphere.

Other pedagogies and rules within the program may have aided student development and contributed to the benefits of the trips. Students learned mindfulness skills in the outdoor recreation class while on campus. They were taught to quietly observe the environment with all five senses, notice when they became distracted, and return their attention to the setting around them. The first author (who facilitates mindfulness programs) observed that while on the trips, students frequently sighted animals and interesting scenery before he did. Perhaps the mindfulness training helped students connect with and appreciate nature, and this in turn enhanced their life satisfaction. A second beneficial pedagogy may have been the emphasis by the program leaders to think "group first" and work as a team. Students seemed to internalize this rule. For instance, in 2006, when the group arrived at the hotel, the student contingent spontaneously formed a "human chain" from the van to the hotel hallway, passing luggage in an effort to unload supplies. On the same trip, one student twisted her ankle. Another student, a registered nurse, bandaged her ankle, while three male students carried the injured party back to camp. This type of teamwork is a poignant example of the students' self-reported gains in social connections, knowledge and skills, which may have been influenced by the "group first" rule implemented on the trips.

## LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the results of the current study are interesting, certain limitations should be noted. The current study contained a small sample size. Future studies with larger sample sizes could demonstrate the generalizability of the current findings and utilize more stringent significance levels to lower the possibility of a Type I error.

Objective measures of learning are needed to demonstrate how outdoor programs in post-secondary education increase academic knowledge. For example, researchers could compare test scores in outdoor classes versus similar classes that do not have an outdoor component. Although we did not find an increase in attributional complexity in outdoor participants, qualitative analyses revealed that students thought they learned American history and recognized the cultural differences between Native Americans and the U.S. majority. An assessment of Native-American culture and 19<sup>th</sup> century American history might have revealed a significant improvement in this area for the outdoor participants as compared to the control sample.

There is a possibility of participant bias in the results. The present study was unable to randomly assign participants to groups, as all students interested in the program were needed in order to fulfill minimum class size requirements. Thus, the results could be due to selection bias, in that students who participated had more money and time than comparison students. The results could also be due to cognitive dissonance — given what Outdoor Semester participants invested, they might feel compelled to report benefits in order for their efforts to seem worth-

while. The outdoor participants might report benefits simply to please the researcher or ensure the program continued. Ideally, future research would randomly assign participants to either the study away program or the comparison group to control for some of these biases.

Finally, having different instructors and pedagogical styles in the outdoor and comparison classes might account for the differences in attributional complexity, life satisfaction, and well-being across groups. We were unable to control for this variable because of administrative issues (the outdoor teachers had other responsibilities that prevented them from teaching another section of composition). Ideally, future studies would allow for the same teacher and pedagogies in both the outdoor and comparison classes.

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Despite these limitations, the current study provides initial evidence that an outdoor study away program in higher education enhances student development and in some cases, more than what is experienced in the typical classroom. Outdoor Semester helped students broaden many aspects of themselves — the academic, the physical, the intrapersonal, and the interpersonal, leading to higher life satisfaction and buffering them from the decreases in well-being and attributional complexity experienced by students in standard classes. Outdoor Semester is an experience in becoming a well-rounded *person*. We believe our program addresses the goal of a liberal arts education — through individual effort and group collaboration, a person becomes a responsible, informed citizen who understands and acts on his or her own values. Knowledge is not poured into a student's head through rote memorization of lecture, nor even through classroom exercises. Students learn as they experience nature, engage in small group dynamics around the clock, and apply what they learned in the classroom. It is a unique and powerful form of learning. business and international relations students might be encouraged to share their experiences from their study abroad, particularly if faculty in those disciplines believed in the importance of service-learning. The goal would be to keep the program in an academic home which is discipline-based and academically governed, as indicated in Butin's (2010) book, *Service Learning in Theory and Practice*. The room for creativity and flexibility by connecting to other disciplines would likely benefit the overall health and sustainability of this program. We hope to see this program continue to flourish to the benefit of both the youth it serves and the emerging student leaders involved.

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## Art in nursing: A quilt journey

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*The "art of nursing" was the culminating assignment for student group reflection and gained insight about their assigned vulnerable population as represented in a quilt block created. To learn about their assigned vulnerable population, the students begin with a windshield survey. The windshield survey results were recorded in a blog where the similarities and differences are discussed. The blog provides the basis for a group Wiki paper describing the challenges and opportunities of each of the vulnerable populations. Art can play a significant role in the modern caring sciences. It can touch thousands of people.*

Community Health Nursing is a senior nursing course emphasizing vulnerable populations across the global spectrum. The focus is on nursing knowledge and skills in community health nursing and nursing research to promote health and prevent disease. It includes clinical experiences of at least 96 hours during the semester. It is an integrated service-learning course that provides a community-based learning experience. Service learning addresses the practice of citizenship and promotes an awareness of participation in public affairs through service to the six identified vulnerable populations. The agencies include public schools, county health departments, hospice, home health, and an organization serving children and young adults in crisis. The course objectives are these:

1. Discuss historical, cultural, economic, social, ethical, legal, and

- political factors pertinent to the delivery of health care in community settings.
2. Apply theory and research to the practice of population-based nursing.
  3. Integrate concepts from environmental health, epidemiology, and health education when providing health care in community settings.
  4. Implement technical skills and professional nursing roles when providing care for the community-based client.
  5. Incorporate psychological, physiological, social, spiritual, and cultural factors that impact health care within communities.
  6. Utilize a systematic approach in providing health care in diverse settings for the client, through the life span, experiencing acute and/or chronic illness.
  7. Integrate legal, ethical, and professional standards when providing care in community settings.
  8. Participate in community services designed to improve the health care of communities.

## BACKGROUND

The use of the fine arts in nursing has been highlighted in anecdotal reports, although there is a paucity of literature within the last five years. According to Blomqvist, Pitäkä, & Routasale (2007), art plays a significant role in modern caring sciences. Art can be an interpreter of emotions, representor of meaning, and a unique elicitor of reactions to the subject matter. It can touch thousands of people when it represents a universally evocative topic. Knowledge in art helps us better understand others and ourselves. Studying the symbolic language of art develops creativity and ability to regard phenomena theoretically. It improves self-knowledge. Often the focus of the art in nursing published articles is the development of reflection in nursing students or patients. Baker, Thomas, & Turner (2004) spoke of creating a permanent memorial of dialysis patients through the art of quilting. McCaffrey & Good (2000) used expressive arts to assist nurses in a better understanding of their patients. Walsh and colleagues (2005) studied use of an arts' intervention on the stress level of nursing students finding students reported the exercises in art, drama, and writing helped them see individuals as unique and better understand what it means to be human. McCaffrey & Purnell (2007) further found students expressed surprise in the power of the expressive arts. Some of these students developed ways in which patients could participate in art while hospitalized, such as an art cart

or making music available for interventions to reduce pain, anxiety, or restlessness.

Nursing is a unique profession because of its synthesis of practice, multidimensional assessment and intervention, interpersonal communication, case management, and resource linking on the behalf of patients (Jackson, Clements, Averill, & Zimbro, 2009). Nursing practice has an overarching altruistic framework and is practice within a framework of caring. Florence Nightingale established the roots of modern nursing that embodies caring for vulnerable populations. Carper (1978) identified four fundamental patterns of knowing in nursing in her sentinel work. The patterns included empirics, esthetics, personal knowledge, and ethics. These patterns represented the complex phenomenon of knowing that nurses use when caring for their patients. According to Carper (1978), basic nursing knowledge proceeds through pattern recognition and development in the areas of a) empirics, b) ethics, c) personal knowing, and d) aesthetics. The most applicable area to this nursing course's series of group assignments is aesthetic knowing. Aesthetic knowing involves a deep appreciation of the meaning of the situation. Inner resources of the nurse or, in this case, nursing students draw on inner creative resources to transform experiences into reality something that would not otherwise be possible (Behm, Comrie, Crane, Johnson, Popkess, Verbais, Yancy, Keen, Davis, & Durbin, 2006). Using a variety of methods of inquiry develops formal expressions of knowledge. Patterns of knowing can also be demonstrated in non-scientific form as a representation of synthesized learning and performance. Developing knowledge patterns is critical to nursing practice. Knowledge acquisition, comprehension, and application, together with the skills of integration, analysis, and synthesis — essential for a well-prepared graduate nurse — are threaded through the patterns of knowing (Behm, et al., 2006). Aesthetic knowing involves a deep appreciation of the meaning of a situation and moves beyond the surface of the situation. The creation of a quilt block involved the students' perception of the nature of the clinical situation of each vulnerable population and represents this information in a visual art form. This evolving series of assignments shared the elements of nursing care situations in vulnerable populations to create a meaningful visual representation of the whole of learning experienced.

A vulnerable population is a group of individuals at greater risk for adverse health outcomes, health disparities, increased morbidity, and premature mortality as well as decreased quality of life (Aday, 2001). Flaskerud and Winslow (1998) developed one of the first conceptual models for vulnerable populations' research. The model has a population-based focus placing responsibility for the collective health status of its citizens with the community. Vulnerable populations are social groups who experience limited resources and consequent high relative risk for morbidity and premature mortality. The root cause is typically socioeconomic status and lack of access to resources or capital (Flaskerud & Winslow, 1998).

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## THE “ART OF NURSING” JOURNEY

The “art of nursing journey” was the vision of the former program director of the Bachelor’s in Nursing program at a Midwestern university. The current course instructor, Carol Daniel, created assignments with a final project where student groups collaborated to create quilt blocks. These were sewn together to form a quilt, which is now on display in the Department of Nursing.

At the beginning of the course, students were assigned to various diverse community sites throughout the Midwestern city and surrounding communities to perform their 96 hours of service learning. These 13 groups of three to six students provided nursing care in the following settings: home health/hospice, shelters, free medical clinic, schools, health departments, and drop-in centers for homeless youth and adults.

### ASSIGNMENT ONE

The first assignment for the student groups was an assessment survey of the neighborhoods where vulnerable populations lived. A blog was set up on the course management system to document the information. Each student completed a windshield survey and reported the information on the group blog site. Students blogged about their findings and adventures in discovery, which included the commonalities and differences in their findings. The student groups then moved to a group discussion about the common strengths and weaknesses seen in their vulnerable population and the ability of the population to meet its needs. They discussed issues found at each site and came to consensus about their vulnerable population. Each group chose a leader to summarize the findings into statements related to services offered in the community, strengths and weaknesses noted in the population, and identified health concerns. The blog was worth 25 points.

### ASSIGNMENT TWO

This assignment was a Wiki paper. This web-based, interactive, collaborative opportunity allowed student groups to share ideas and receive feedback from other groups in the creation of a professional paper. This paper was undertaken in groups of students working with similar populations within their clinical service-learning sites. They identified 13 different vulnerable populations, including homeless teens, domestic abuse females, homeless adults, adults and teens recovering from addiction, and so on. The theme of the Wiki was “Meeting Healthcare Needs of the Vulnerable Population.” The groups of students addressed issues of health care accessibility, health literacy, and health promotion in their vulnerability groupings. A grading rubric was used to evaluate each Wiki paper, which included identification of at least two health care needs of the vulnerable population, access to healthcare, health literacy, nursing strategies,

and teaching/learning strategies appropriate to the population. The Wiki included reliable sources of information and pertinent evidence-based literature. Each student’s contributions were distinguished by color-coding to ensure participation by all members of the group. Points for grammar and the correct use of the American Psychological Association style were also awarded. This assignment was worth 100 points.

### ASSIGNMENT THREE

The third assignment was the creation of the quilt block. Two sample blocks were created depicting the vulnerable populations from medical mission trips. The symbolism in the blocks was explained to the class through a PowerPoint display of the blocks as well as the actual blocks in class for the students to view, touch, and examine. The visual art represented the vulnerable population as well as the challenges and opportunities in their own neighborhood.

The student groups were asked to use their creativity to plan and develop a quilt block. Each group was provided a fourteen-inch fabric square and other necessary materials. Each quilt block was to represent in art form what they learned through the neighborhood windshield survey, the blog, and the Wiki paper. Although there was no instruction on the subject of colors and textures, students were asked to consider why they chose certain colors, textures, and shapes for the design. The art design could be abstract or realistic. Students made appointments to come to the “quilt room” to draw a design, choose fabric that represented what they had learned, and finally cut and fuse the design to the fabric square. The block was worth 25 points and reflected teamwork, communication, and cooperation completing the block as well as an explanation of the colors, textures, and shapes used as symbols.

### ASSIGNMENT FOUR

After the completion of all the blocks, each group presented their quilt block to the class with an explanation of what the art, colors, and shapes represented and explained how the art represented their vulnerable population. Most blocks included what nursing and other services were available. The presentation of the blocks was 25 points. Along with the presentation, the groups each wrote a reflective narrative describing the quilt block and including a photograph of the completed block. This narrative was limited to 2000 words. All of the assignments were to be a team effort, and each individual had to provide notations of their personal contributions to the project as part of the grading criteria.

The blocks were then assembled into a quilt. The final quilt consisted of 13 student blocks and two embroidered blocks. The embroidered blocks recognized the creator of the dream and the class as creators of the quilt.

## DISCUSSION OF THE JOURNEY RESULTS

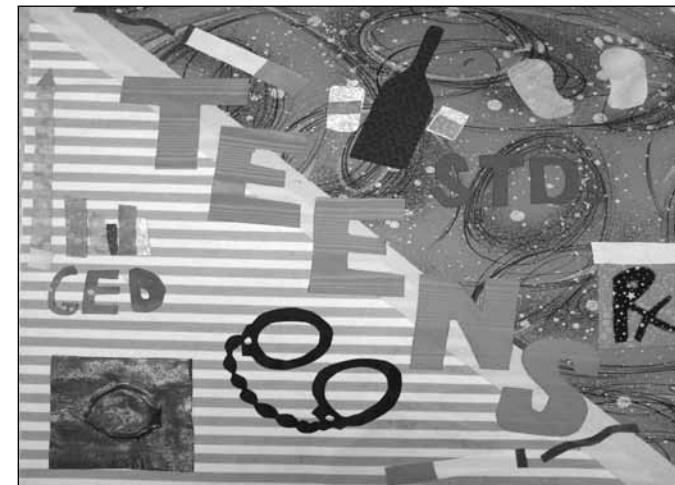
Although this article cannot showcase all 13 blocks, three are presented as exemplars of the thought and creativity of the students. The first block is titled "Caring for Populations through a Women's Shelter." The students' description of their representation of the women's shelter is as follows:



This quilt block represents the women and children at the women's shelter for domestic abuse. Many of the women at the shelter are suffering from depression, low self-esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, substance abuse, and hypertension. The cage represents the women being trapped in an abusive home. The open door shows there is a way out. The red represents the anger and blood that can be shed during the abuse. The red also represents that abuse can be misrepresented as love. The bird in the cage has a broken wing to represent not only the physical effects of the abuse but also the crippling emotional effects of the abuse. The emotional and physical effects of the abuse can make it difficult to gain the strength to leave. The purple on the outside of the cage is the color for survivors of domestic abuse. The bird on the inside of the cage is black and white showing a lack of self-esteem, depression, and a loss sense of self. The bird on the outside is colorful showing that she has rediscovered who she is, regained self-esteem, and independence. The sky is the limit for her now. The women are able to move forward with the help of the women's shelter. The shelter provides classes, resources, a support system, and a safe place for the women to rediscover

who they are and become independent. These women are not just victims; they are survivors.

The second quilt block is titled "Caring for Troubled Teen Populations."



The student-composed description is:

Our population is caring for troubled teens. We were at two community sites. One was an outreach center and the other a youth academy. The outreach center is a drop in site for homeless youths ages 13-21. There they are provided many services. For example, staff can offer help with housing, food, clothing, hygiene necessities, counseling, general education degree (GED) classes, and many other classes. The youth academy is a program for males, ages 13-17, who are involved with the juvenile court system for a law violation. They are provided with individual, group, and family therapy along with education and many activities.

First of all, our quilt block is divided into two sections, stripes and a chaotic pattern. The stripes represent the youth academy. Their day is very structured. The teens have a daily schedule of classes, therapy, and activity. The outreach center's typical day is very chaotic. The youth have no set schedule and can use the center's services as needed.

The other objects placed on the quilt block represent some of the major problems that the teens face. Smoking is a huge problem with the youth at both facilities. Many of the teens have problems with alcohol and drug usage. Another struggle with teens is ignoring the practices of safe sex. This leads to problems of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases

(STDs). Many teens at the outreach center have children or are currently pregnant. They offer parenting classes, baby clothing, formula, and other baby supplies. No kids are allowed at the youth academy; however, many of the boys do have children. Troubled teens are at a higher risk for contracting a STD because of their riskier lifestyle, when they practice unsafe sex or participate in intravenous (IV) drug usage. Another problem the teens face is with the law. All the boys at the youth academy are there because of some sort of law violation. Many of the teens at the outreach center have had trouble with the law due to loitering in the square, underage drinking, drug usage, and stealing. The troubled teens have struggles in school either that have dripped out of school and wish to receive their GED. The youth academy also provides educational classes for the teens in the program appropriate to their grade level.

Many times the patients of home health care and hospice are not thought of as vulnerable populations. Aday (2001) identifies the chronically ill and disabled as a vulnerable population in the United States. The student description of this quilt block, titled "Caring for Populations through Home Health and Hospice," emphasizes that these populations are often very vulnerable. The students wrote the following about the design of this block:



Home health care and hospice is a vulnerable population that encompasses a wide variety of patients with various diseases processes, health literacy, and health care needs. Skilled nursing care is provided to hospice patients to promote and maintain quality of life for the terminally ill. Patients with

home health care receive nursing care to treat an illness or injury to promote independence and to regain quality of life.

Home health and hospice agencies around the area care for patients across multiple counties spanning homes in rural to city populations. The quilt block depicts the contrast from the homes in rural and farm communities to homes in the city and suburbs. The homes in the rural areas are spread apart, surrounded by trees and open spaces, and are often far away from access to health care. The homes in the city are close together and range from older homes, worn down homes, to brand new homes as represented by the types and textures of the fabric. Health issues related to the population include diabetes foot care, safety in the home, and fall preventions.

The hand and dove represent both the home health and hospice services. The hand represents the nurse who cares for the home health and hospice patients. The nurse implements interventions to treat an illness, provides education, and helps patients to regain independence and quality of life. A hospice nurse cares for and provides comfort to the terminally ill. The dove symbolizes the patient. For home health the goal is the patients can regain their quality of life and be free to live a healthy life. For the hospice patients it shows the fleeting of the spirit and body from this life. Hope is the last component of the quilt block. This encompasses what home health and nurses promote and provide for all of their patients and families.

The journey's destination, this quilt, represents communities in action. The students took time to think creatively about what they had witnessed and felt, and then working as a team, expressed to others what they learned and felt in an artistic way. Just as the vulnerability groups were diverse, the art created was diverse and reflected a wide range of responses to the communities the students encountered in the community health nursing class.

## CONCLUSION

The faculty was impressed with the students' ability to represent their vulnerable population in art. The students were enthusiastic and gained insight into their populations through the process of creating art. The students were not required to have any actual "quilting skills." They developed the concept and created a drawing for their quilt block. Using the drawing, they chose fabric from the selection provided. Using double-sided fusible web, they drew the shapes onto the web, ironed the fusible web onto the fabric, and cut out the shapes. Once all the shapes were created, they again fused the fabric to the base quilt block. The quilter stitched the shapes to the block, stitched the blocks together in a quilt, and finished the quilt.



Lessons learned included the fact that all of the students were able to participate. Using groups ensured greater success with the project. In some cases, one student came up with the design and others did the actual block creation, but in other cases they did it jointly. Design instruction will be included in future quilt projects. For example, the base block fabric needs to be lightweight as the students totally covered it with other fabric. The fusible web made the block heavy. The students often used very small pieces of fabric, which were very difficult to stitch around because of the sizes. Another design instruction to include

is the use of highly contrasting colors so the design does not get lost in similar colors. Also, the students need to think about the distance at which most quilts are viewed and make sure there is enough contrast in color to emphasize the design.

The depth of the student understanding of the issues of vulnerable populations in the community was apparent in the blocks and the descriptions of the color, shape, and texture of the art. Many of the blocks showed empathy with the populations that might not have been gained without the art project. The community agencies were very interested in the project. The preceptors, as well as the directors of the agencies, were very impressed with the students' work within their agencies and with the artistic representation of their purpose and the depth of understanding represented in each quilt block. This project will continue in this course.

The 2012 quilt will be donated to the community agency of the class's choice. Both students and the agencies will benefit from the creativity of the student project.

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## Crossfire in the Kitchen: Race and Class Role Tensions in Service-Learning

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*This study approaches service-learning through a critical dramatic perspective. Erving Goffman's concept of human interactions as staged performances combines with the structuration of race- and class-based power hierarchies to provide a theoretical framework for examining the interaction patterns between African-American college student volunteers and African-American clients at a faith-based community meal center. Employing an ethnographic method, the paper explores how intersectional identities foreground class differences in ways that fragment shared ethnicities. Observation of how volunteers and clients at the site react to each other's backstage activities (moments when actors depart from roles scripted as appropriate within the service-learning context) reveals how class-based tensions reveal systemic power imbalances that can influence the conduct and impact of service-learning.*

Service-learning projects designed to promote racial equality and level class differences may ultimately (albeit unintentionally) lend support to embedded injustice and intolerance. As Butin (2010) puts the matter, "The very institutions that service-learning advocates are trying to storm, in other words, may drown them" (p.37). This essay investigates the power dynamics of a service-learning project that seemingly failed to fulfill its potential. By re-enacting roles, plots, and scenes that

reinforced hierarchies based on socioeconomic class, a service-learning project designed to break down class-based barriers may have fortified them instead. The roots and repercussions of this project's problems yield deeper insights about the conduct of service-learning pedagogy.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

### SITE AND PROJECT PROFILE

The service-learning site, referenced herein by the pseudonym "Place of Plenty," is a meal distribution center serving three meals daily. The site operates year-round, including holidays, serving an average of 630 meals daily. The sponsoring organization, a local ecumenical group, also hosts a shelter for the homeless, a food pantry, a clothing distribution center, and a substance abuse rehabilitation facility. This extensive array of community services, combined with minimal resources, creates a chronic labor shortage. The organization claims on its website that ninety percent of its labor force consists of volunteers. The patrons for the duration of the service-learning project consisted almost entirely of African Americans, a point that assumes special significance for this analysis. Place of Plenty is located in a badly decayed urban area of a city with a population of approximately 230,000.

Place of Plenty was a new community partner for the university involved in this study. The educational setting is an urban, doctoral-granting, research intensive university of approximately 18,000 students located in the southeastern United States. The student volunteers selected their site from a list of prospective community partners. The course was a core requirement for all majors in communication studies, and it bore a course marker notifying students that it included a service-learning component. Upon successful completion, the course would be listed with a service-learning designation on the student's transcript. The topic of the course was community activism, and it was designed to apply theories of communication to pressing social problems, such as poverty, racism, and homelessness. All students were required to complete a minimum of twenty hours at a site. The class was divided into several groups, each assigned to whatever site the group members chose and the instructor approved from various options. The group whose experiences form the ethnographic basis of this paper consisted of five students: three African American females and two African American males. A few weeks into the service-learning project, only

one of the students remained active. In its debut as a community partner with this university, the volunteer group working at the site suffered an 80 percent attrition rate.

### RATIONALE ROOTED IN AFROCENTRIC VALUES

The student service-learning group had eagerly anticipated their project. The site selection offered an opportunity to reach out to fellow African Americans in need, thereby implementing a communitarian ethic deeply rooted in African traditions. The principle of *Ujima*, defined as "collective work and responsibility" and honored as one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa known collectively as *Nguzo Saba*, recognizes the problems faced by any African Americans as the responsibility of the entire African American community (Johnson, 2001, p. 416). *Ujima* stresses the collective, cooperative responsibility to recognize social disadvantages and thereby to take ownership of actions designed to counteract them. Assuming such collective responsibility builds a sense of empowerment arising from the synergies of working alongside those who share one's cultural heritage (Belgrave et al., 2011). Johnson (2001) explicitly identifies service-learning as a way to implement *Ujima* in higher education: "Service learning programs that connect African American students by major with African American agencies in the African American community that could use their services would execute the principle of *Ujima*" (p. 418).

Martin and Martin (1985) note the significance that an ethic of indigenous caregiving plays in African American communities: "Even in earlier periods when the urban black population was much smaller, black caregiving was viewed as necessary to help blacks adapt to and survive" systemic racism and social disadvantages (p. 65). This observation also identifies a communitarian ethic of care as a counterpoise to the competitive individualism that can challenge the willingness of communities to coalesce so they can assist their members in need. Service-learning offers one way to restore the communal links that the zero-sum competitive mentality so common in capitalist societies threatens to fray (Schwartzman & Phelps, 2002).

The noble tradition of *Ujima* and its extension into an ethic of intracultural care sustained through service would seem to make a service-learning project focusing on African Americans an especially attractive and worthwhile endeavor for a group of African American students. The students were shocked and quickly disillusioned when, instead of the communal bond of *Ujima*, they encountered an institutional culture and African American clientele who were resistant and sometimes antagonistic to the service-learners' efforts.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODS, AND THEORETICAL GROUNDING

The sole student who completed the entire project posed a compelling set of researchable questions that she was still trying to process more than a year later. First, what factors could explain the high attri-

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tion of student volunteers? These students displayed motivation for the course and its service-learning component. They were not lazy, and they genuinely wanted to make a positive difference in the community. Their rapid alienation raises a second, related question. Why would a bond fail to develop between African American users of social services and African American student volunteers distributing those resources? In other words, what kept the rich ground of Ujima from developing a positive, caring relationship between the students and the clientele?

The answers to these questions emerge most clearly from close attention to the interpersonal relationships that developed at the site. Accessing the formation of these relationships requires direct exposure to the lived experience of the students *in vivo*, as they encountered the physical, attitudinal, and relational conditions at the site. The most appropriate method for generating such information is to derive it ethnographically, in this instance from the observations of a student engaged in the service-learning project. Unlike summative self-reports of service-learning that often reflect social biases favoring glowing testimonials of transformative experiences (Schwartzman & Henry, 2009), ethnography focuses on interpretively processing the experiences themselves. Through deep descriptions, ethnography delves into how the participants in service-learning engaged in the lived practice of the project. An ethnographic method enables naturalistic observation, placing experiences "in the context of the natural settings which give meaning and substance to their views" (Brewer, 2000, p. 36).

Rather than using service-learning to test an administrative structure for applied learning or to provide evidence for an education theory, ethnography focuses on how the experience has no teleology or predictable trajectory. Instead, the twists and turns of the project are faithfully reported according to the perspectives of those who experienced them. The result, as in this case, may not yield a neat closure and happy ending. Ethnography, however, recognizes and embraces the open texture of lived narratives whose plots may raise unsettled and unsettling questions. The result is, according to Goodall (2000), "the persuasive expression of interpreted cultural performances" (p. 83).

Implementation of ethnography in this essay invokes a larger theory known as dramaturgy, which approaches social practices as enacted performances that position social actors in roles (Goffman, 1959). Just as dramatic plots are driven by conflict, the interactions between the students, clients, and staff at the service-learning site generated tensions. Many of these tensions resulted from class hierarchies that confounded the formation of kinship based on shared heritage. The tensions were not resolved largely because they were experienced and approached episodically and not systemically, as troublesome individual incidents rather than indicators of entrenched divisions based on degrees of social privilege. Dramaturgy as a theory has limitations when dealing with such entrenched antagonisms. Although dramaturgy can identify the interaction patterns symptomatic of social structures, it fails to connect individual roles people assume with social forces that

distribute power. When people enact interpersonal roles, these interactions occur within the context of broader political or cultural norms that define what constitutes "proper" behavior. Dramaturgy, while offering a powerful descriptive resource, could be enriched by conjunction with theoretical tools that unpack the dynamics of power (Williams, 1986).

This essay ethnographically invokes a critical dramaturgy, juxtaposing first-person reflections from a student service-learner with analysis that connects these direct experiences to the structural components of relationships that sustain social privilege and hierarchy. Physical breaks (designated by asterisks) in the text represent the shift between those personal and theoretical perspectives.

Attention to structures that sustain and restrain power becomes necessary to address broader questions that connect the experiences at this service-learning site with larger social practices. In his theory of structuration, social theorist Anthony Giddens (1984) directs attention to the institutionalized practices that produce and preserve relations of power across time and space. Structuration concurs with dramaturgy's focus on interactional practices as the observable indicators of power and privilege. It adds a more thorough consideration of how the dramatic enactment of roles in a particular situation can provide a microcosmic view of how power relations get embedded in the fabric of society.

The fundamental root of many difficulties encountered in this project lies in intersectionality, or the multiple layers of identity that also can furnish multiple points for connection or oppression (hooks, 2000). Any component of intersectional identity can become more or less salient in particular situations. Intersectionality surfaces in the project under consideration because the student service-learners initially considered shared racial identity as sufficient to form the interpersonal bonds that could activate Ujima. Instead, class became more salient at Pantry of Plenty. The distance created by perceived class distinctions outweighed the shared self-identification as African Americans. The impact of class on interactions will be discussed more thoroughly in the following sections.

### BACKSTAGE SIGNS OF CLASS PRIVILEGE

Using the analogy of a stage layout, Goffman (1959) calls attention to different types of human behaviors involved in impression management. Front stage behaviors consist of the publicly observable, often managed impressions that people present to each other. Front stage actions are, to varying degrees, strategically crafted to cast the actor in the light that she or he desires. Backstage behaviors are all the spontaneous, unintentional actions that can challenge or contradict the "official" actions in front stage behavior. Backstage behaviors violate the impressions conveyed by front stage actions. Because backstage actions are private and not crafted to impress an audience, they seem more truthful and genuine (Goffman, 1959, p. 112). For instance, a person's habits of dress and manners at home may give a truer indication of one's lifestyle than the same person's demeanor at a formal party.

Backstage behaviors at this service-learning site constitute seepage of cues that signify social privilege. These cues are analogous to so-called “leakage cues” identified by deception research. According to this line of research, nonverbal behaviors that indicate deceit can infiltrate or “leak through” the façade of truth a deceiver tries to maintain while lying (Ekman, 2009). The observed backstage behaviors operate analogously in a service-learning context. In these cases, backstage behaviors “leaked” cues that signified class differences. As Ekman (2009) observes, unintentionally leaked behaviors tend to be interpreted as more genuine than other behaviors, especially verbal claims, which can be easily rehearsed and manipulated. Backstage behaviors, even when apparently insignificant individually, carry disproportionately greater weight as genuine signs of social status. Because they are presumably unstaged, leaked behaviors can assume a degree of veracity that conventional performances of charitable duties lack. The following sections detail three sites of backstage leakage: parking, bringing and consuming food and beverages from outside the facility, and clothing.

### TRANSPORTATION PRIVILEGES

Volunteers at Place of Plenty were given V.I.P. parking spots behind the building, closest to the kitchen. They were also near a bus stop where clients could view us as we drove in and out of the lot. John, the full-time head cook, always parked his car in these spots also. From day one, John was always obsessed with where we parked our cars. He continually asked, “Where did you park your car today? I hope directly beside the door because it’s safer. Every day you come here, Rule Number One: always park your car close to the door. Rule Number Two: lock your doors. These people, given the opportunity, will steal. You know what I mean.”

This didn’t square with my professor’s Rule Number One: No judgments in the service-learning environment.

John, the service-learners, and other volunteers were the only people allowed to park in these designated spots. Gayle, the director, did not park where the clients could see her. Instead, she parked on a secluded one-way street that clients did not use because it was not easily accessible to a bus stop.

My service-learning group drove basic American autos: Chrysler, General Motors, Ford. None of us thought of our cars as pretentious, but what impression was conveyed by the fact that we arrived in various cars? Not only did we have our own reliable transportation that we could use at will. We also had choices of whose vehicle to use when we carpooled to and from the site.

I drove a Chevy Cobalt — basic transportation by my middle-class standards. I didn’t view it as a luxury car, but some of the clients at the site viewed *any car* as a luxury.

When I arrived for breakfast duty before dawn one cold morning, one man huddled under his blue hoodie addressed me as he waited for breakfast service to begin.

“Is this your ride?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“It looks goood! I wish I had a car, so I didn’t have to walk or beg for a ride.” I paused, searched in vain for a suitable reply, and escaped through the kitchen entrance. I felt a vague sense of discomfort, a nagging sense of shame that I couldn’t quite identify or describe.

\* \* \*

The automobile has long served as a tangible indicator of socioeconomic status in the United States. Possession of a car, regardless of the make or model, signifies not only an affiliation with the middle class (or higher), but also carries social privileges deeply tied to American values: geographic mobility, independence through not having to “bum a ride,” and autonomy to determine one’s own schedule of travel (Urry, 2004). Juxtaposing automobiles, multilayered signifiers of success, with the bus stop and with the waiting area for people who had walked to the facility created a site where different class indicators were bound to clash.

Goffman (1963) observes that boundaries of status, like physical boundaries, require adaptation and negotiation. In this case, spatial dynamics set up boundary conditions that were presented as existential facts: the parking situation simply is the way it is. Interrogating the implications of the setting reveals the power and class issues at stake. John occupied an ambiguous social position. As the head cook, yet he held a position of status and authority. He also was Hispanic, yet he positioned himself with the more well-to-do African American service-learners, warning them of risks to their property from the nefarious “others.” Choosing to affiliate more by class than by shared status as a marginalized non-White population, John’s willingness to put his own vehicle at risk certified his membership in the category of service “providers” rather than the “needy” clientele.

The parking lot also created an ambiguous setting for negotiating boundaries between social classes. The client’s comments to the student, narrated above, could have been interpreted as an indirect request for a ride. The rule of beneficence would instruct students to offer as much service as possible. What about offering transportation to one of the clients? What risks and rewards would attach to bridging the transportation gap between service-learners and patrons? These questions never seriously arise as long as the class differential remains firmly entrenched and trespassing across classes remains prohibited. With class distinctions solidly established, the cars provided a daily reminder of the freedom, mobility, and comfort attendant to class ascension.

### DIETARY PRIVILEGES

Whenever I had to go to the service-learning site, I performed my morning ritual of stopping at Hardee’s, Bojangles’ Famous Chicken ‘n Biscuits, Starbucks, and other restaurants to eat before I started the physically demanding job of serving food. I needed my energy and my

strength to get through the day. Besides, I had to arrive at 6 a.m. for breakfast service. One mouthwatering biscuit and a large cup of coffee was my usual fare. Some days I was able to eat the biscuit while driving to the site. Other days, I had to bring the food in with me, and I ate it in the back entrance to limit the number of clients who saw me. But that concealment wasn't always effective.

Eyeing me scarfing down the day's biscuit, one client said, "Why didn't you bring me a biscuit from Bojangles'? I love Bojangles' when I can get someone to buy me something!"

"Sorry!" I mumbled through the biscuit crumbs. John, the head cook, interrupted the conversation. "Leave her alone while she eats! She doesn't need you making her feel bad for not bringing you any food."

This encounter with the client halted me from bringing food onto the site. The client's comment pointed directly to the contrast between my food choices and the menu the patrons of Place of Plenty had to accept.

I stopped bringing in food, but I continued to bring in cups of coffee. I didn't think there was a problem with that.

The one souvenir that remained from my morning breakfast ritual was the drink cup from the restaurant. The red and yellow Bojangles' coffee cup had no special significance for me. At least no more than the Hardee's and Starbucks cups that we sipped from as we staffed the food line.

Others noticed the branded coffee cups more than I did.

In the food line, a woman wearing a yellow crochet hat remarked, "Man, I wish I could drink coffee whenever I wanted and not have to stand in this line all day for some coffee."

My branded coffee cup visibly reminded her of my access to choices she did not have.

\* \* \*

The mere presence of food and drink from beyond Place of Plenty, regardless of whether it was consumed, introduced an incursion of the students' backstage world of dietary choices into an environment of limited options. Place of Plenty becomes an ironic moniker referencing a locale that issued identification tags to clients as a way to track access, offered no choices beyond what was available on the food line, and strictly enforced limits on portions. By leaving their coffee cups visible, the service-learners juxtaposed tokens of their social privilege with the restricted options faced by the patrons. The changing brands on the cups reminded onlookers of the wide array of selections the student enjoyed.

Importation of food from outside gave a tangible indication of class hierarchies. These vestiges of privilege served as reminders of a lifestyle with more dietary options and fewer externally imposed dietary constraints. The portability of the food and drinks demonstrated control over access that the Place of Plenty patrons did not enjoy. The students

could stop at a convenient drive-through window or takeout counter, customize their order, and decide where to consume their purchase. The clientele at the site had to travel where the food was served, consume it on site (with one exception to be discussed later), conform to the choices they were offered, and eat only within a limited window of a few hours. Many clients would be waiting outside for an hour or more before service began, even in the pre-dawn darkness before breakfast or in inclement weather. They had to adapt to the facility's schedule and to the availability of transportation.

## APRONS AND AUTHENTICITY

Each shift of food service began with the ritual of donning the plain white, institutional-style apron. Every day it was mandatory that I wore a white apron provided by the kitchen staff. John, the head cook, insisted that I wear an apron to keep my clothes clean.

"Never forget your apron. We don't want to be responsible for your clothes being stained," John said.

I responded, "I don't think I need an apron because my jeans and t-shirt can easily be washed, and I'm not worried about stains."

After the shift was over, I hung my apron on the coat rack located at the back entrance. Even the soiled aprons were reserved a special storage area, while the patrons of the food line carried their coats or draped them over their chairs when not wearing them. Shorn of my apron, I then walked out the back door where clients would be standing in the parking lot already waiting for the next meal. Officially off duty, now I wasn't cast in the role of server or helper. Absent the institutional costume of the apron and my staged position of provider in the food line, I became a visibly better dressed woman than the African Americans waiting for food. Besides, I was heading *away* from the food that they could not yet access.

"Are you leaving now?"

"Yes, I am!" I answered.

"Where are you going once you leave here?"

"I'm going home." Little did I realize my automatic response amplified my secure housing status compared to many in the food line.

"Well, that's nice! I have about six hours before I can go back to the shelter for check-in. I'll see you next time." The remark had no malice, but it placed our starkly different social situations in bold relief.

"I'll see you later," I said, oblivious to the fact that I simply assumed this African American would reprise his role as a hungry, underprivileged man when I returned for the next shift.

\* \* \*

Aside from their practical role in protecting clothing, the aprons also had the potential to act in some degree as class equalizers. Clad in aprons that covered their entire torso, the student volunteers might have

been able to shrink the status gap between themselves and the clientele. The aprons could mask the status indicators lurking beneath, conveying a classless uniformity much like military uniforms. Those uniforms, however, effectively replace rather than simply obscure sartorial signs of socioeconomic class. The regular sights of student volunteers before and after they donned their aprons reinforced the signal that their genuine garb was tied to a wealthier demographic than the clientele. The act of putting on an apron in itself indicated that the volunteers wore clothing worthy of protection. Goffman (1986/1963) notes that visible indicators of prestige or of stigma play an especially important role in assigning status and identity. These markers structure future interactions, since they — accurately or not — fuel predictions about how to treat and react to others.

Although they served a practical purpose, the aprons formed part of what Goffman (1959) labels the “front,” defined as that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his [sic] performance. (p.22)

Goffman’s terminology is instructive and nuanced. The aprons furnished the physical front of the volunteers, in effect converting the visible portion of each volunteer in the food line to a signifier of “server.” The fact that this indicator of a role was later visibly set aside also lent the aprons an air of artifice. These fronts were not fixed, but rather detachable accoutrements to a performance. The aprons temporarily masked the outfits the students voluntarily wore. Removal of the aprons revealed more permanent signs of social privilege: brand-name clothing and reminders of college affiliation unattainable to the people awaiting food service. In this sense, the volunteers unwittingly put up a front when they put on their aprons.

The clothing that the aprons protected often signified class-based privilege even when it carried no designer designation. The service-learners often “branded” themselves by wearing clothing and accessories emblazoned with the name or logo of their university. Not only did the university attire signify wealth and social mobility compared to the clientele, but it also distanced the students from the African American patrons. Previous student volunteers had come from nearby historically black institutions (HBCUs). This service-learning group, however, arrived from a university that was predominately white and with a higher tuition than the HBCUs. The disparity accentuated the rift between the students and other African Americans.

\* \* \*

As we began setting up for food service, one man harshly called out to a member of our service-learning group. The man was wearing a hoodie bearing the logo of a local HBCU.

“Hey, what you don’t like ‘bout the Eagles?” The Eagles were the mascot for the HBCU. The man’s tone was aggressive, making me glad we arrived as a group.

Bernie, the student, said, “I like the Eagles.”

“If you like the Eagles, why you wear a sweatshirt that doesn’t have an eagle on it?”

“I’m wearing the sweatshirt from my university,” Bernie replied.

“Why you not supporting Central or any other HBCUs? Please, correct me if I’m wrong, but your university is predominately Caucasian.” At first his rather formal vocabulary surprised me. On second thought, I questioned my assumption that the clientele had less education than we did.

Al — the dishwasher, enforcer, and conflict resolver — suddenly interceded. “Not everyone has to go to Central or any HBCU. You didn’t even go to any college, and you’re complaining because Bernie’s college isn’t an HBCU.”

I appreciated Al’s attempt to mediate, but to the man waiting for food, the lines of loyalty had been drawn.

### ENACTING FAMILIAR SOCIAL SCRIPTS

The staging of the food service structured interactions according to a familiar, stereotypical script. This implicit but embedded social narrative, summarized bluntly by bell hooks (2000), presumes that “the journeys of the privileged have come to constitute the norm ‘white’ colonizer and/or immigrant experience, whereas the norm for black people continues to be slavery” (p. 90). The stinging accuracy of this script becomes apparent in depictions of many public service or aid activities that feature whites typecast as benefactors and darker-skinned people typecast as needy, passive victims. Although such role assignment is deeply problematic, its enactment occurs routinely when racial and class hierarchies intersect. When discrepant classes with a shared ethnicity interact, the tensions of intersectionality can flare.

\* \* \*

When Caucasian volunteers staffed Place of Plenty, the African American clients were far more receptive to them than to us, who were supposedly their brothers and sisters.

“Please,” “thank you,” and other polite comments flowed profusely from the clients’ mouths when White volunteers were serving them food. “I’d love any piece of bread that you give me. Thank you and have a nice day!”

When interacting with White volunteers, African American patrons did not want to be seen reinforcing stereotypes that they were ill-mannered. An unspoken code among African Americans instructs us that we should not act out in front of company (i.e., White people) because we do not want to be perceived negatively.

When my group served food, many clients forgot their manners. There was no “please” or “thank you.” The clientele did not display the same gratitude when we rendered the same services as the White volunteers. These clients expected us to fulfill their every demand.

“Gimme me another slice of bread!”

“Gimme me another piece of meat!”

“Gimme me some more sugar!”

When we did not obey their commands, they halted the line and did not move until we gave in. The clients never challenged the authority of White volunteers. When the line stopped, the clients would stare down a service-learner until their demands were met. Al, the Caucasian dishwasher and self-designated enforcer, was not always nearby to help us with the more difficult clients. Al refused to comply with their demands. He warned them: “If you can’t follow directions and respect the servers, you’ll lose your food privileges.”

Something struck me as strange about referring to a food distribution line as a privilege.

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The rules of food distribution placed the African American service-learners in a difficult position. The aggressive demands for more food, although delivered harshly, reflect a degree of presumed complicity with ethnic kin. Whereas any additional requests to the White servers would deepen the disparity between benefactor and “needy” recipients, African American servers might be more likely to circumvent the system to help their brethren. The confrontational demands of the patrons contain a hint of Ujima, an invocation to the African American service-learners to fulfill an obligation for communal aid that was not incumbent on Whites who did not share such kinship. The visit of a high-status White man in the role of server triggered an exaggerated re-enactment of gratitude for White beneficence. Even if the performance of the server and the clientele were pure artifice, the front stage actions legitimized racial and class hierarchies by providing images that conformed to the standard script. A personal narrative re-creates the scene.

\* \* \*

The White Savior came in on a Wednesday morning.

I arrived at 6:00 that morning for breakfast duty, as usual. This day was different. Place of Plenty was abuzz with preparations. A rich, important man was coming, so everything had to be spotless. (I never discovered exactly who this important man was or what he did for a living.) As he arrived, his chauffeur escorted him in. His car was parked illegally in the volunteer parking lot. The Caucasian celebrity arrived with an entourage of camera crew, photographers, and handlers to show the public he cared. I was pushed out of the way as the picture was snapped of him helping the “poor people.”

One regular client at the buffet line gushed, “Thank you, Mister!” He dropped to his knees to worship the man who took a total of twenty minutes out of his busy schedule to win points to show how he cared for the poor. Continuously, the African American clients gratefully received their food, honoring the man who never reappeared after his twenty-minute photo op. Meanwhile, I had been working for four hours already and had endured the standard demands and challenges.

## ANTAGONISTIC INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS

The following sections describe and critically examine the interpersonal dynamics at the site. Several antagonistic relationships became interwoven in a tension-filled atmosphere: staff versus clientele, service-learners versus clientele, and internecine struggles among the clients.

### FOOD GUARDIANS OR FOOD PROVIDERS?

The portions we distributed were always small, and the clients voiced concern about this every day. Before service started, Al (the dishwasher) or John (the head cook) always reminded the servers to remember the portion sizes for breakfast.

“One piece of meat, one ladle of oatmeal or grits, one slice of bread, and half a cup of coffee. The most important thing is the sugar rule: only one packet of sugar for every cup of coffee. Nothing more than this and then we send them on their way.”

The morning rules were easy to recite, but hard to uphold when interacting with the clientele. It was tough to look into people’s hungry eyes and know that some of them hadn’t eaten in days. Many clients kept saying the same thing: “Can I have...?” Another spoonful of oatmeal, an extra ladle of grits, another piece of meat, a bigger portion of meat—more of whatever we were serving. There was a battle between our morality and the rules at Place of Plenty. It seemed wrong to withhold food from people who needed it, and it was also wrong to break the rules of the site. The clients always appeared to need more, and we were not allowed to fulfill that need. This restriction on our ability to help was depressing, and sometimes we felt we had to break the rules. Then we faced an awkward choice: which clients would receive more food?

A few clients were upset with the rules and decided to rebel by taking second and third servings. These clients would come through the line one time and then change their outfit and no one would notice. One man we nicknamed “Red Toboggan” was infamous. The first time through the line he would wear his customary red toboggan. Then about fifteen minutes later, he would come back through the line without the toboggan and wearing a different shirt. This behavior continued for about three visits until the servers noticed.

\* \* \*

The buffet line in effect became a boundary line. The servers, shielded from the food by aprons, accompanied by remnants of drinks unavailable to the patrons, denying requests for additional or customized servings, occupied the high status side of the line. On the other side of the line were the clientele: sometimes rebelling against or circumventing rules they believed were unfair, always cast in the role of needy recipients.

The daily incantation of portion limitations enacts structuration by requiring "actions to be constrained by these shared abstractions of social structure" (Orlikowski & Robey, 1991, p. 147). The system of food rules, like the practices of parking, operate as directives that reinforce the very class hierarchies that food aid and other social services are designed to erode. These operational structures guide conduct on two levels (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Giddens, 1984). As external, dehistoricized rules, they define norms of proper behavior (much like one "minds one's manners" simply because that is what a civilized person does). As internal guides for personal conduct, they create motivations to self-regulate behavior because the service-learner does not want to be insubordinate. The rules in this case became problematic because they directly conflicted with the ethical norms espoused in the service-learning class: maximize care and assist those in need. This recasting of service providers into service deprivers could partially explain the high attrition rate among the students. The more altruistic a student's motives for serving at Place of Plenty, the more problematic the enforced limitations became.

### FOOD FIGHT FRIDAYS

On Fridays, two food lines were set up: the customary one for the hot meal served to each person, and a second line that was for food that could be taken away. I wondered how those who selected the perishable food could store it. Take-home food required access to a refrigerator if the food were to remain fresh more than a few hours. The distribution of leftover food avoided waste at Place of Plenty, but how likely was it that the food could be put to good use once it left the facility?

The hot meal line was rigidly organized, with the standard sequence of portion-protected foods allocated to each passing plate and palate. The orderly ritual resembled many institutional cafeteria lines.

Not so for the take-out line, which hardly qualified as a line at all. There was chaos, pushing, and people insulting each other because they wanted to claim their food. The scene of Food Fight Fridays reminded me of news reports showing hungry people in third world countries pushing and shoving as they mobbed foreign aid trucks delivering food.

The take-out area turned ugly as the shouting and shoving escalated. Amidst the chaos, our buffet line stopped serving. People seated at the tables stopped eating. All eyes in the dining room turned to the take-out food line. People were pushing each other and angry over not

having enough food to take with them. Clients were grabbing as much of everything as they could carry and did not leave anything else for others behind them.

Al, the full-time dishwasher, was watching through the window above the sink. He quickly left his post washing dishes, grabbed his broom, and ran to the chaotic scene. Using his broomstick as a giant gavel, he banged on the table with authority.

Al yelled, "Stop all this foolishness! There are children and the student servers in this room who are seeing you act like this. The images that people see of you make them think that we all act like animals."

The pandemonium subsided. Punishment for the food fight was that the second food line closed because the proper security was not available to keep order. Al and his broomstick had other obligations and could not break up the fights all the time.

This cycle of setting up the take-out line, the mad scramble to grab as much food as possible, the shouting and scuffles, the staff intervention, and finally the shutdown of the second line became the standard script for Friday food service.

\* \* \*

The staging associated with Food Fight Fridays amplified class tensions on several levels. The lack of any organized distribution system transformed the patrons from cafeteria diners to food hoarders. The availability of uncontrolled portions of random foods (whatever was kitchen surplus for the week) was framed differently by the different actors. From the side of management and kitchen staff, the take-out line was framed as an act of generosity, a fringe benefit on Fridays to those who might need additional food.

Al's characterization of the clientele as "animals" identified another logical role of the patrons under the circumstances. The staging of the distribution itself could be framed as analogous to dumping food and leaving it for animals to devour. The setting lent itself to this less flattering attribution: food strewn willy-nilly without the sequenced serving or portion guardianship of the standard buffet line. By providing uncontrolled access to scarce resources, Place of Plenty inadvertently staged a scene for zero-sum conflict. The take-out line pitted patrons against each other, since each person's access to food became more limited with each item taken by someone else. Conditions of scarcity can reduce chances for a group's cohesiveness as each person sees the other as a limit on one's own resources. The more acute scarcity becomes, the more it can generate violent conflicts (Gendron & Hoffman, 2009). A zero-sum mentality escalates conflict as each person's cohorts become recast as potential sources of personal deprivation.

Al's admonition that eased the conflict contains subtle but significant signs of class dynamics. Enconced at his dishwashing station, Al at first witnessed Food Fight Friday squarely within the confines of the kitchen. From this space reserved only for staff and volunteer labor, his

role was defined as a staff member and enforced by his physical separation that also marked a difference in status from the clientele. As he crossed the boundary that sequestered staff from clients, he blurred the border that differentiated him from those in the dining space. Different physical enclosures call for different styles of performance (Goffman, 1963), as demonstrated in Al's language use. Beginning by labeling the combatants foolish, he proceeded to shame them into proper behavior. He then suddenly shifted away from an us-them terminology — addressing the offenders as “you” — to the first person plural “we,” linguistically including himself as one of those who “act like animals.” While this shift could be dismissed as an accidental verbal lapse, it illustrates a reference to kinship starkly opposed to the antagonistic tones he uttered within the kitchen's borders.

### PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The conventional wisdom of “know the service-learning site” may require augmentation to cope with the sorts of tensions that arise from institutionalized class distinctions. Even the most detailed factual knowledge about a site may not translate into adaptive behaviors. Knowing the service-learning site may require deeper immersion in the dynamics of interpersonal encounters on site. This deeper knowledge can arise from role-playing simulations that require students to address situations that involve conflict or ambiguity. One major pedagogical advantage of service-learning is its capacity to prepare students to cope with uncertainties and under-determined outcomes. This advantage can be maximized only if students have some experience with such situations in safe, low-stakes activities before embarking on a service assignment. Rehearsing potential scenarios the student could encounter encourages service-learners to become more mindful of how they interact with others.

Students need to be emotionally as well as cognitively prepared for processing their service-learning experiences. Alongside the gratification from helping others, student volunteers also may witness or participate in the denial of services to some clientele. Some students may become discouraged and withdraw from participating if the service-learning site fails to meet their altruistic expectations. Before working on site, students should confront the prospect that available resources might not suffice to meet all clients' needs. On a theoretical level, readings such as Henri Barbusse's (1918/2008) short story “The Eleventh” provide a first-person perspective on the emotional pain caused by turning away people in need. After reading the story, students could discuss how they would cope when face-to-face with individuals they could not help. On a more concrete level, service-learners who had previously volunteered at a site could discuss the tensions and concerns of their experience, thereby enabling the next wave of service-learners to anticipate these challenges. To maximize candor, such discussions might best be conducted solely among the students without an instruc-

tor present. While it is common for peers to orient new service-learners to their duties, far more attention could be devoted to the prospect of not executing those duties as the students had anticipated.

The most direct way students could prepare for the racial, class, and interpersonal conflicts at a site would be to encounter them on site from multiple perspectives. To understand the perspective of service-learners, prospective participants could shadow students who currently serve at the site. In addition to providing training for specific tasks, shadowing exposes observers to the interpersonal dynamics that operate at the site. Shadowing furnishes a barometer of the interactive climate among the organization's staff, service-learners, and clientele.

A more ambitious diagnosis of conflicts and convergences could directly probe the perspectives of the clientele. Students could learn proper interview techniques by conducting detailed interviews or focus groups with an organization's clientele to determine their perceptions of the power relationships operant at the site. If such direct interactions prove impractical or might place students at risk, indirect observations of power dynamics could proceed from reviewing audio or video footage. Reviewing a record of a problematic situation by actually observing how it unfolded could convert a negative experience into a learning opportunity. Such observations have the further advantage of enabling better self-monitoring so students can recognize ways to avoid flash-points that cause tempers to flare and feelings to be hurt. Any form of detailed observation offers the opportunity to instruct students in taking proper field notes and communicating rich descriptions. In class meetings, students could directly compare perceptions of service-learners (themselves and their classmates) with those recorded by students who focused on getting feedback from the clientele. When the analysis of a site is fully triangulated by adding input from deep engagement with organizational staff (via interviews, etc.), areas of potential conflict as well as convergence can be addressed.

Students also could use an extension of ever-popular “selfies” (self-portraits, usually via a tablet or mobile device camera) as ways to document and reflect on the emotional aspects of their experiences. As soon as possible after a problematic experience, the student could make a brief video recording of her reaction to the situation. These documented experiences could serve as focal points for personal or class-wide reflection. Students could probe why they reacted the way they did, what triggered the reaction, what the consequences of the reaction were, and how they could adjust their reactions in the future. This kind of exercise might reduce attrition, since unaddressed frustrations or disappointments can accumulate and eventually alienate students from service-learning.

As for assignments, the experiences at Place of Plenty point to the need for reflective practices to extend beyond reporting and engage with issues of power and resource maldistribution. Critical reflection on the systemic roots of observable class differences can energize service-learning as an engine for social change. This iteration of reflection con-

trasts with the more passive practice of descriptive journal entries that report social practices without interrogating their roots in class hierarchies. Ethnography initiates self-reflection that can expand to include reflections on the social structures an individual's actions reproduce. Pine (2008) suggests, "Perhaps one way for students to both practice academic literacies and work toward 'critical consciousness' in service learning writing courses is to conduct ethnographic research of their community service experience" (p. 52). Engagement with the deep social structures that inform everyday practices at the site requires more than a narrative that simply details what each student did. In contrast to more detached journalistic reports, ethnographies can acquire a critical edge by juxtaposing the personal with the structural. Critical ethnography, therefore, melds personal perspective with structural critique.

Rosenberger (2000) articulates need to move past simply re-enacting the same service assignments that address the symptoms of social inequalities without inquiring into the structures that perpetuate them.

I propose that unless we who teach and participate in service learning are willing to view reality as dynamic and mutually created and to analyze the structural inequities that create unjust and oppressive conditions, we risk providing what Freire called 'false generosity' — acts of service that simply perpetuate the status quo and thus preserve the need for service. (p. 52)

Service-learning sites such as Place of Plenty perform vital social services that fulfill genuine needs. At the same time, students must develop greater awareness of food distribution and meal service centers (and many other service providers) as treatments for symptoms of larger social inequities.

## CONCLUSION

Joi Nathan (2009) expresses concern that socially privileged, college-educated African Americans could become less likely to extend a helping hand to the underprivileged. Better educated, upwardly mobile African Americans may subscribe more to an ethic of self-determinism whereby they "may not seem very effective or overly ambitious in their political challenges and confrontations on behalf of non-elite blacks" (p. 45). Nathan (2009) chronicles a contraction of the sphere of caring among many young African Americans, a materialist self-centeredness she hears celebrated by a wide swath of hip-hop music culture. The ethic of *Ujima* can generate communal care among African Americans only to the extent that class distinctions do not fragment the sense of kinship and mutual obligation that drives community-building. The experiences at Place of Plenty show that foregrounding class hierarchies can inhibit a communitarian spirit.

Students also may need to confront the uncomfortable fact that poverty and undernourishment are consequences of policy decisions that consistently marginalize underprivileged classes. Legislative developments in the state where Place of Plenty is located furnish convenient cases. In the first year after the 2012 elections, the state legislature:

- cut maximum weekly unemployment benefits by 35 percent;
- reduced the maximum weeks of unemployment benefits from 26 weeks to 12-20;
- restricted eligibility for unemployment benefits;
- approved requiring drug tests as a condition of eligibility for public welfare programs (Brown, 2013; Yaccino, 2013).

Such policies underscore the need to accompany episodic service-learning experiences with critical awareness and willingness to engage in "ongoing constructive confrontation with class politics in the United States" (hooks, 2000, p. 148).

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