

3-18-2015

Sustaining a Successful Community Partnership: a ten year retrospective of quality practices and sustainability applied to service-learning at the Douglas County Department of Corrections

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Recommended Citation

Dufner, Donna and Monarrez Diaz-Kelsey, Judith, "Sustaining a Successful Community Partnership: a ten year retrospective of quality practices and sustainability applied to service-learning at the Douglas County Department of Corrections" (2015). *Presentations*. 2.

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**Sustaining a Successful Community Partnership:
a ten year retrospective of quality practices and sustainability applied to
service-learning at the Douglas County Department of Corrections**

**UNL's Extension's Eureka! 2015 conference, University of
Nebraska at Omaha, NE, March 18**

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Team-work Earns Nation-wide Recognition for UNO



Shown from left to right are Michael Grove, MS, Director of Information Services; Donna Dufner, Ph.D., Associate Professor; Judith Monarrez Diaz-Kelsey, MS, Educational Advisor.

The Jail Course was one of projects featured by the University of Nebraska at Omaha, which received the **Presidential Award *for Economic Opportunity***, the highest honor in this category via the **President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll**.

Introduction



- ▶ One of the University of Nebraska at Omaha's three stated strategic goals is to be "...recognized for its outstanding engagement with the urban, regional, national, and global communities."
- ▶ Starting in fall 2004 the University of Nebraska at Omaha's (UNO) implemented a service-learning course that takes college students into the Douglas County Department of Corrections (DCDC) to teach basic computer skills to inmates. To date over 200 undergraduates and 600 inmates have completed the course.
- ▶ Quality practices (NYLC 2008) such as progress monitoring, duration and intensity, participant voice, partnerships, meaningful service, link to the curriculum, reflection, diversity, planning, and impact used to develop, implement and sustain the course over ten years will tell this story.

PARTNERSHIPS AND SUSTAINABILITY: “Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial and address community needs.” (NYLC 2008)

- ▶ The foundation of a great partnership is **respect, quality educational practices, and cooperative, on-going planning.**
- ▶ To build a mutually beneficial partnership the requirements of each partner must be respected, accommodated and worked into the course collaboratively with enough flexibility to incorporate the ever-changing environment and requirements of all stakeholders.





In the class room at the Jail

INTENSITY AND DURATION: “Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes.” (NYLC 2008)

- ▶ Very strict dress code at the jail requires students to dress in pressed, clean, logo-free, loose fitting, modest, business casual clothing with blouses and shirts buttoned to the neck
- ▶ Background check, and attend the Jail-based training
- ▶ Assess student’s motivation for teaching at the jail
- ▶ The Service-Learning course takes place over one semester and almost entirely in the field at the jail.
- ▶ Criticism of the inmate is not permitted. Praise, courtesy and respect are the tools for building trust.
- ▶ Assess the needs of the student inmate (the “client”). Each UNO student tutor develops a lesson plan created to meet the individual inmates’ needs and skill level. The tutor suggests a starting place for the client.
- ▶ For inmates, the knowledge of technology and social relationships outside of the jail can assist in making a successful reentry into society. IT instruction is, therefore, designed to help each inmate learn essential computer skills, increase their confidence with technology and maintain and build social relationships with significant others from their pre-jail life.

MEANINGFUL SERVICE AND STAKEHOLDER VOICES: “Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities.” (NYLC 2008)

- ▶ The educational outcomes for UNO students and inmates were achieved and easily measured. UNO student projects show inmates demonstrating the skills they have learned during the semester. UNO student journals show learning outcomes have been met and exceeded for UNO students and inmates.
- ▶ Since this service-learning course, Computer Basics for Inmates, involved teaching inmates at the DCDC, a great deal of planning and coordination with the community partner was required. Partnership is 1 of the 8 quality standards of service-learning (NYLC 2008). It is defined as “...collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address(ing) community needs.” The success of this service-learning project is grounded in the strength of the relationships among its various partners – UNO faculty, DCDC Jail staff, UNO students, and DCDC inmates.





Community Partners

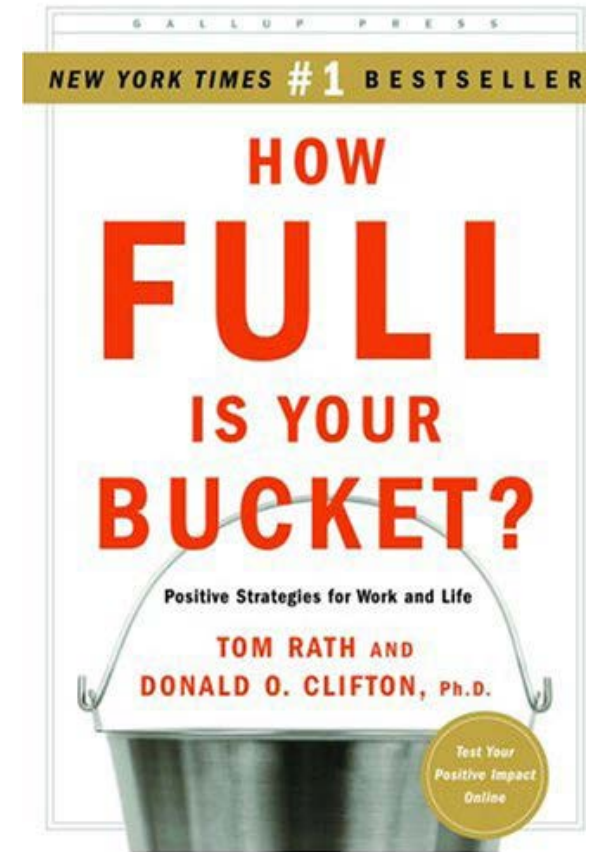
Importance of Planning: Instructors and Community Liaison

- ▶ The commitment and dedication to community outreach is the cornerstone of a successful, sustainable service-learning experience for students and for the community partner.
- ▶ The course transformed both inmates and college students dramatically. Each group learned to work together and developed deep and permanent respect for each other.
- ▶ Inmates were genuinely grateful for the caring and educational support they received from the students, while they made progress toward IT literacy.



COURSE STRUCTURE AND EXPECTATIONS

- ▶ In addition to the IT instruction, the inmates are assigned to read *How Full Is Your Bucket? Positive Strategies for Work and Life* [Rath, T. and Clifton, D.O. 2004].
- ▶ The community partner liaison selects the inmates who will be rewarded with permission to attend the course based on past performance. Inmates must earn the privilege to take the course.
- ▶ The last class of the semester is spent back in the campus classroom debriefing on the tutoring experience and sharing student group project presentations.



Course Structure and Expectations



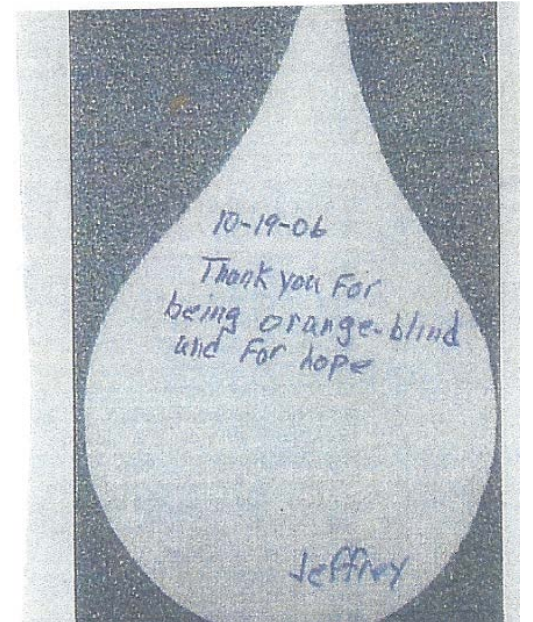
Drops show positive recognition and are given to reward inmates and UNO tutors for a job well done, act of kindness or a considerate comment.

Student Voices – Select Quotes from UNO students

- ▶ “Throughout this class, I have learned that jails can be places for rehabilitation, healing, and change. I’ve learned that it is easy to fall into the wrong path and difficult to get out. I’ve learned that people who make mistakes should always be forgiven and encouraged to do better. I’ve learned that we should never give up on people and instead give them and society hope for the future.”
- ▶ “Before this class, I, like most people, thought everybody in jail was a bad person and must deserve to be there because of what they had done. I now have an entirely different outlook on the inmates. They are just people. And somehow along the way they made a mistake, some small, some larger than others. That doesn’t make them bad people; that makes them human.”
- ▶ “Throughout my time as a tutor in the computer class at the DCDC, I have learned a lot about teaching. Coming from a background where computer skills are basic knowledge, teaching others how to use them came as quite a challenge at times. Learning how to communicate basic tasks was a very humbling experience that I hope the inmates will use to better their futures.”

Jail Inmates Voices (Selected Quotes from Inmates)

- ▶ “This class helps me and the others to focus our minds on something that helps us forget our situation for a least an hour. This class gives us a moment to relax and work on our abilities to imagine and create things on the computer. Of course we all learn different things that will help benefit us in the future.”
- ▶ “This class has helped me in many other ways besides expanding my computer skills. Zack and all the other students here from UNO have given me a sense of normalcy here and peace for the time that is spent in this class. I’m very grateful that this class is available for me and I hope that it is for the people to come in the future. Thank you very much!”
- ▶ “I just want to thank all the students that came in to help us learn a little more about using a computer. For me it was more than just learning a few tricks on the computer. More important is that I have been able to spent time and energy looking toward the future and focusing on the positive things in my life. I’ve also gained confidence in myself and in my ability to continue to grow and learn. I could not ask to be placed in a better environment, all things considered. Thanks everybody.”





Diversity Among Student Tutors

Questions?