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Blog: The Facing Project

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Tuesday October 17, 2017

The Facing Project

Seventy University of Dayton students captured the experiences and challenges of living in Dayton by interviewing local residents as part of a national community storytelling project intended to bring awareness about local human rights issues to inspire social action.



The University's Fitz Center for Leadership in Community brought the "Facing Project" to Dayton in partnership with Citywide Development and several Dayton neighborhood associations, with support from an Ohio Campus Compact grant.

The project, *Facing Dayton: Neighborhood Narratives*, will be a book of 30 stories from Dayton residents, scheduled to be published this spring. The project also has a visual component, a poster exhibition reflecting the stories in the book open through Nov. 17 at the Dayton Metro Library, 215 E. Third St., in downtown Dayton. The opening reception is 5 to 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 20.

Fitz Center graduate assistant Alexa Irwin, who is working on her master's degree in the department of psychology, said the project allowed students to engage with neighborhood associations to meet with residents and share stories about the neighborhoods.

"It's just such a great collaborative project that has a long extensive vision for positive change," Irwin said.

Most of the student writers were involved through their English classes. Some others were volunteers from the Roesch Library's Write Place, which helps students improve their writing, including Emily Biery, a junior from Cincinnati, Ohio.

"I thought it would be really cool to have a platform for hearing other people's stories just because I love talking to people and finding out what their life is like," Biery said.

The students went through writing, sensitivity and Dayton history training before meeting community members. In March, there was a social event with

all the writers and storytellers so the students could get to know the community members. The students later met one-on-one with their storytellers, wrote the story, edited it and submitted it to the department of English faculty before the end of the spring semester.

Misty Thomas-Trout, assistant professor of graphic design, applied for the Experiential Learning Innovation Fund and organized the poster exhibition along with her students.

"I think a lot of times the University of Dayton is kind of a tight-knit community that remains in their bubble on campus," Thomas-Trout said. "This project in Typography Two allows for the students to do community-based design which impacts the local Dayton community."

The Fitz Center conducted an extensive dialogue with community leaders and members about the topic the students should focus on. Irwin said the consensus was to focus on neighborhood change.

The Fitz Center worked with neighborhood association leaders to identify individuals in their neighborhoods with stories to tell. Many of the subjects have lived in Dayton for decades and have seen their neighborhoods' gradual change from childhood to the present.

The two biggest injustices the students identified when reading the stories were racism and food deserts. Other problems referenced in the stories are drug abuse and poverty.

Meeting with the Dayton community members also served as a mentoring opportunity for the younger students, who were paired with upper classmen.

The poster exhibition is also an opportunity for the design students, who rarely get the opportunity to show their work in galleries. Out of the 30 stories, 25 will be represented in the exhibition.

"I was really interested in the students engaging with the community more and learning how to express typography through the narrative of someone else that has lived here," Thomas-Trout said.

Currently, all of the stories have been collected. Thomas-Trout is in the process of designing the book in collaboration with illustrator Carolyn Kay Chema, graphic design and photography media facilities coordinator in the department of art and design.

"The final idea is to bring awareness and action to any issues that come forward in the stories," Irwin said. "So the last stage is to how can these stories influence positive change in Dayton."

The Fitz Center hopes to identify issues and bring awareness that will result in action.

The Facing Project is a nonprofit started in 2011 in Muncie, Indiana. The organization's model to share stories and raise awareness is in cities across the U.S. focused on topics such as poverty, sex trafficking, mental health, immigration and others. Facing Project stories are compiled into books and on the web for a community resource, used to inspire art, photography, monologues and community-wide awareness, dialogue, action and change toward a more understanding and empathetic society.

- Clare Gallagher '18

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