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## ‘Slowly Changing the World’: Embedding Experiential Learning to Enhance Ethics and Diversity

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### Abstract

In this chapter, the authors discuss the process of embedding experiential learning in a required ethics and diversity course (ED200). The course is a model of humanistic education in which students develop disciplinary-based methodological expertise while also drawing on cross-disciplinary, inclusive, problem solving skills. We suggest that in a course that challenges students to think about their lives in community, engagement with that community plays a critical role in humanizing the learning experience. This pedagogical emphasis on experiential learning, instantiated as community engagement, unites the foci of ethics and diversity through students’ practical application of and reflection on their experiences to enhance ethical and cultural self-awareness. In the process, it also fosters a desire for participatory and justice-oriented citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne 2004). In what follows, we provide a history of the development of ED200. We then justify the inclusion of experiential learning in the course from theoretical and practical perspectives: Why is it valuable to include experiential learning in this course and how does it advance our goal of developing critically-engaged citizens through improving ethical reasoning skills and actionable understanding of diversity? Last, we detail positive impacts and implementation challenges and indicate next steps for continued development.

*How lovely to think that no one need wait a moment, we can start now, start slowly changing the world.*

--Anne Frank, *Anne Frank’s Tales of the Secret Annex*

In this chapter, the authors discuss the complex process of embedding community-engaged experiential learning in a required three-credit second-year ethics and diversity course (ED200). This course, housed in the university’s general education program, is intended to enhance all students’ critical engagement of their ethical reasoning skills as culturally competent citizens. The course was launched in 2013 with a curricular design that is a model of humanistic education, one in which students necessarily develop disciplinary-based methodological expertise while also drawing on cross-disciplinary, inclusive problem solving skills. We suggest that, particularly in a course that challenges students to think ethically about their lives in community, engagement with that diverse community plays a critical role in humanizing the learning experience and gives students a sense that their experience is about who they are becoming in addition to what they know and can do (Bain 2011).

The authors of this chapter successively served as Associate Director of an emergent and evolving general education curriculum at a four-year doctoral university with a primarily non-residential, undergraduate population. One of the authors came into the program at the point of curriculum implementation, shortly after the faculty approved the new distributed curriculum. The second author stepped in at year four during a time of curricular assessment and revision. The associate director position has broad responsibility across the general education curriculum, including teaching in the first and second year required common courses, but is primarily responsible for faculty, course, and curricular development of ED200. Importantly for this conversation, our institution holds the elective Carnegie community engagement classification. Carnegie’s evidence-based classification focuses on the institution establishing reciprocal partnerships with the community that enrich scholarship and teaching, prepare engaged citizens, and address critical societal needs (Carnegie Classification). Our University was one of only 76 institutions granted the classification when it was first established in 2006 and our sustained classification in this area is partially predicated on the community-

engaged work that students and faculty accomplish in ED200. While the community-engaged experiential learning component of the course hangs on only one sentence in the narrative for the approved curriculum, it is indicative of the institution's prioritization of this aspect of students' education.

Although its comparative emphasis has waxed and waned over the years, increased moral reasoning has always been a presumed goal in higher education, and in the last few decades, the study of its impact has seen something of a resurgence (Gautschi & Jones, 1998; Mayhew & King, 2008; Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2012; Murphy, 2014; Smith, Fulcher, & Sanchez, 2015). Accompanying this in recent years has been an increased focus on diversity across college campuses, not only in relation to the identities and development of students as well as faculty (Chang, 1999; Hurtado, 2001; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Denson & Chang, 2009), but as a pedagogical emphasis (Bowman, 2009; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2014; Adams, Bell, Goodman, and Joshi, 2016; Parker, Barnhardt, Pascarella, & McCowin, 2016). ED200 combines the desires for increased moral reasoning and cultural competence into a single required educational experience. This topical combination coalesced in part due to limits on curricular capacity—each of these topics itself constitutes a field of study, after all—but in our experience the benefits of tackling ethics and diversity in a single course have outweighed the potential disadvantages. One way we can examine the benefits of this course on ethics and diversity is through another one of its components: experiential learning. We argue that a pedagogical emphasis on experiential learning, instantiated as community engagement, unites the foci of ethics and diversity. Students' practical application of their course content and reflection on their experiences through this course requirement enhances their ethical and cultural self-awareness and fosters conceptions of citizenship that Westheimer & Kahne (2004) identify as "participatory" and "justice-oriented."

In what follows, we provide a brief history of the development of ED200 within the context of revitalizing an entire general-education curriculum. We then justify the inclusion of experiential learning in a required course on ethics and diversity from theoretical and practical perspectives: Why is it valuable to include experiential learning in a course such as this and how does it advance our goal of developing more critically engaged citizens through improving ethical reasoning skills and actionable understanding of diversity? Last, we detail positive impacts as well as challenges in implementation and briefly indicate next steps for continued development.

### **Ethics and Diversity in a New General Education Curriculum**

Our university, like many, had a distributed-core program in place for multiple decades. While students were able to take a broad range of courses, there were insufficient means to determine that all students were receiving the skills necessary to work and live in a changing society (Hart 2006). In response, the university launched a new general education curriculum in Fall 2012. It consists of a first and second year common course, a selection of courses that introduce students to discipline-based methodologies, and a capstone course in their major discipline. The courses are aligned with eleven distributed learning outcomes inspired by the essential learning outcomes of the Association of American Colleges & Universities' (AAC&U) Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative. As part of this new curriculum, we launched ED200 in Spring 2013 with eight face-to-face sections and one online section. The general education program now manages over 100 of these ED200 courses each year that reach over 3,000 second-year students. The courses are taught in sections of 25 students for online courses and 30 students in face-to-face courses. ED200 has some common structural and ideological components that shape the curriculum, but each faculty member develops their unique course content and pedagogical approach including course activities and assessments. The anchors of the course are three learning outcomes: written communication, ethics, and diversity. The learning outcomes we focus on in this chapter are the latter two. The scope of competencies for ethics includes an ability to analyze ethical issues and produce reasoned evaluations of competing value systems and ethical claims. The diversity outcome asks that students apply knowledge of a variety of intersecting identities and understanding of socio-cultural systems to engage social issues of local and global importance.

As noted above, the approved curriculum also requires an experiential learning activity for every student that reinforces course learning outcomes. This requirement was, in part, an intent to incorporate a high-impact educational practice (Kuh, 2008). Since the 'how' of incorporating experiential learning was unspecified, the application of this component of the course has been an evolving process of assessment and revision. At its core, however, we understand experiential learning as "learning by doing," which is not just active, student-centered learning but learning that encourages self-direction and reflection (Roberts, 2011). Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton (2009) propose an ideological action model of civic engagement that shifts the conversation away from the "right model" toward a stance of critical inquiry that embraces the democratic norms of inclusiveness, reciprocity in public problem solving, and equality of respect for the knowledge that everyone brings to the table. Our course model allows for this through

meaningful integration of experiential learning that takes shape as a range of projects and assignments based on faculty expertise and student interest and through which to critically engage these large social and cultural problems —issues scholars have referred to as “wicked problems.” A wicked problem, as Rittel and Webber (1973) define and Brown et al., (2010) summarize, “is a complex issue that defies complete definition, for which there can be no final solution, since any resolution generates further issues, and where solutions are not true or false or good or bad, but the best that can be done at the time. Such problems are not morally wicked, but diabolical in that they resist all the usual attempts to resolve them” (p. 4). Students and faculty grapple with these problems, such as poverty, human displacement, and community sustainability, within a framework of ethical problem solving and attention to diversity and inclusivity. Experiential learning in ED200 also has some aspects that align with Thomas Ehrlich’s (2000) definition of civic engagement as “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community” (p. vi). Our dual focus, then, is on enhancing conscientious, participatory citizenship through developing students’ complex problem solving skills and civic responsibility (e.g., Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

The frameworks for this course are also informed by a student-centered approach based on an understanding that students’ investment in their own learning is closely tied to community engagement (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Mezirow, 2000; Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, Stephens, & Carnegie Foundation, 2003; Fink, 2003). Our curricular development is influenced by this movement, a movement embraced in many national, state, and institutional policies such as our own state board of education’s goal to produce innovative, critically engaged citizens who will problem solve for their communities.

Faculty provide opportunities throughout the course for each student to carefully consider their sense of self (micro) as well as their direct interactions with others (meso) and their role in the larger, global community (macro) (Tatum, 2013; Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2013). Due in part to the personal implications of the course material, faculty report that the course often requires considerable emotional investment compared with many traditional disciplinary courses. The course tends to attract faculty from academic departments that embrace interdisciplinary methodologies and who are invested in the broader goal of general education—to foster critical thinkers who will succeed in and benefit diverse communities. Additionally, we find that those faculty who persist in teaching the course over multiple semesters utilize student-centered pedagogical frameworks and have an ability to integrate various, conflicting perspectives. They are highly reflective teachers who are willing to adapt their pedagogical approaches to integrate diverse students who bring a variety of perspectives and levels of intrinsic motivation toward engagement with the course.

### **The Theory: Why Care About Experiential Learning in a Course on Ethics and Diversity?**

As mentioned above, the course is tied to the learning outcomes of ethics and diversity and requires an articulation of those outcomes through experiential learning. Each of these terms—ethics, diversity, and experiential learning—has a broad range of expressions in higher education and beyond and requires further unpacking. Ethics is about right human conduct. Anthony Weston (2018) states that “to think or act ethically is to take care for the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as our own” (p. 3). ‘To take care for’ involves paying attention *to*, being conscientious *of*, and sustaining and furthering the good *for* something or someone. What constitutes “basic needs and legitimate expectations” is a core question that animates much of the discussion around ethics.

In this context, attention to diversity exposes the historical-cultural assumptions of “basic needs and legitimate expectations” by asking who defines those needs and expectations and who benefits from them. Diversity in this context goes beyond mere acknowledgment of human difference on multiple levels, although this is an important step. Lee Anne Bell (2016) describes the scope of “others” in the broadest societal terms. She is describing social justice, but her description is applicable here:

The *goal*...is full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. The *process* for attaining the goal...should also be democratic and participatory, respectful of human diversity and group differences, and inclusive and affirming of human agency and capacity for working collaboratively with others to create change (p. 3).

If ethics is frequently understood, at least initially, at the level of the individual, then this understanding of diversity imagines ethics applied broadly and equally. Notions of diversity and inclusion challenge ethical ideas to live up to their fullest potential within a democratic society, and some recent work has borne out that diversity-focused courses

can positively impact students' moral development (Parker et al., 2016). The "why" of Bell's "full and equitable," "democratic and participatory," and "inclusive and affirming" may seem obvious, but is grounded in an ethical notion. It is the "right" thing to do. Ethical frameworks can help students conceptualize and articulate why that is the case. Combining ethics and diversity in one course challenges us (students, faculty, and the university community) to explore our values collectively, giving equitable space and voice to all who are committed to the public good, in order to build a more just and democratic society.

Experiential learning adds a participatory and practical application to ethics. The explicit application of one's learning outside of the classroom during the course emphasizes the practical direction of the pedagogy within the course. Students may feel that they already "have ethics." As the university's learning outcome on ethics states, however, "students' ethical self-awareness develops as they practice ethical reasoning skills and learn how to describe and analyze positions on ethical issues...the aim is to help students turn what they've learned in the classroom into action." The classroom is established as a place of practice, which all members of the classroom community can benefit from. It is also a "home base," a place from which to venture forth, practice, and then return to analyze the results.

Experiential learning focuses understanding of diversity as well. Diversity may be understood by students (and may be inadvertently promoted by institutions) as simply an appreciation for individual difference based on trivial personal preferences (Scarritt 2019). This is a simplistic understanding that can be seen in the classroom when, for example, students see diversity primarily in the ways others in the classroom think differently about an issue than they do. This can be a valuable initial insight, but should extend beyond tolerance or acceptance of difference to experiencing how that difference is articulated within cultural and institutional systems. The university's learning outcome for diversity describes this as "systems of inequality," which are "historically and socially constructed institutions, structured according to social identities, that reinforce and normalize unequal status, power, and access to resources." By planning and executing an action in community, whether self- or faculty-selected, students bring their own context—including their values and identities as well as knowledge gained—in contact with the lived reality of diverse communities and the power accorded to various identities within.

Experiential learning in ED200 also encourages a more complex level of practice than students may generally experience in our predominantly white institution. This may be more complicated for students who hold marginalized identities that have been the object (and subject) of diversity studies and whose communities have been recipients of problematic, non-reciprocal, non-relational, charity or volunteerism (e.g., Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; McKnight, 2000). In any course, the ability to experiment with one's thinking and reflect upon the results has tremendous value. This cannot be as effectively accomplished when the values reflected in the classroom come primarily from positions of comparative privilege or relative homogeneity and students who hold marginalized identities are perceived as the spokespersons for their communities. Engagement with diverse others in broader communities, while critically reflecting on who is defined as "other" and why, allows more realistic testing of hypotheses around ethical action.

The course presupposes that there should be an integral connection between one's ethical values and one's actions in our diverse world. However, there is always a level of uncertainty in the process of aligning values and actions. While traditional ethical models may imply that one thinks rationally and disinterestedly about various options before taking action, recent research recognizes that we often act based on intuitive judgements and then rationalize our actions in hindsight (Haidt, 2001; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Experiential learning is one location to expose disconnections between values and actions to produce a potentially productive cognitive dissonance. For example, a student who holds rigid stereotypes about "homeless people" might feel tension in those beliefs as a result of direct experience at a shelter. This dissonance is an opportunity for expansion of one's notion of community and deeper engagement with the cultural, social, and other organizational systems that bind communities together. While not every sort of discomfort creates productive cognitive dissonance (Taylor & Baker, 2019), experiential learning affords efficient opportunities for growth in ethical reasoning and expansion of community.

Students typically recognize and respond to cognitive dissonance first on an individual level, but can apply it to social structures and institutions as well. Part of the value of intentionally engaging theories of diversity, equity, and inclusivity in a course on ethics is that it allows the realization that even when individual values and actions are well-aligned, social and institutional values and actions may not be. As a result, unethical outcomes may be produced from organizations despite well-intentioned individuals, and this again implicates individual ethics if one is willing to realize it.

Even when individual and institutional values and actions appear to be in alignment, there is yet an additional productive tension between intention and action. Determining what course of action will bring about a positive result in one's communities is challenging, and the execution of one's plan introduces additional variables, any one of which may contribute to the success or failure of a given action. And what/who defines success? Is it the feeling of the person engaged in making change? The primary recipients of the benefits of the action? A combination of both? The under-determination of social action based on individual or group ethical intention leaves significant space for doubt, but also for improvement. This tension is encapsulated in the idea of "wicked problems" mentioned above.

The course is not designed to eliminate the tension between professed and actualized ethics on a personal or societal level. Rather, the charge of the course is to explore that tension with students in order to foster development of self-reflexive and community-minded citizenship. Faculty model this, in part, through transparency with students about the unpredictable results of community engagement, no matter how thoughtfully executed, and support for students to identify and commit to a particular course of action.

### **The Process: Embedding and Assessing Experiential Learning**

As we have articulated, the case is compelling for integrating thoughtful community-engaged experiential learning that helps students meaningfully engage with the course learning outcomes. Furthermore, ethics and diversity content explored through experiential learning ensures a greater degree of transferable knowledge and skill building (e.g., Eyler, 2009). This course provides an opportunity for students to respond to challenges in their community. Our larger aim is that students continue developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions acquired in ED200. Efforts to achieve this aim are continuing, but have included a pilot program to integrate reflection on skills introduced in ED200 in all student capstone courses. Ensuring that faculty and students in all ED200 courses each year achieve these outcomes, goals, and hopes requires thoughtful curricular structure and consistent faculty development. It necessitates careful consideration of the impact on (and potential risks for) faculty, students, the institution, and our community.

### **The Evolution and Scope of Experiential Learning in ED200**

Four faculty initially took the lead in developing the course, teaching the eight pilot courses in Spring 2013. Three of those four had previously taught courses with integrated service-learning for many years and saw the potential to integrate this component. These faculty had high expectations for the use of service-learning as a high impact practice that impacts students' academic, civic and personal learning outcomes (Eyler & Giles, 1999), but wrestled with the scalability of service-learning in a required course, due both to course growth and availability of support staff. Additionally, while the initial faculty teaching the course were community engagement experts, integrating experiential learning and taking individual ownership of building emergent experiential learning is a new way of thinking about course design for many faculty. It demands attention to alignment of outcomes, assignments, activities, and assessment.

Considering these challenges, we have developed criteria for all faculty teaching the course that allow for a wide spectrum of community-engaged activities and assignments while also providing structure:

- Community-engaged experiential learning should be faculty-curated,
- Draw on pre-existing faculty or student community connections (in order to reduce potential harm to community partners from excessive or inappropriate requests), and
- Incorporate application of and reflection on course knowledge and skills.

Since the pilot launch, almost 500 ED200 courses have been developed and taught by faculty from across campus. Faculty do not work from a common syllabus, but from the common learning outcomes and signature assignment templates they use to assess those outcomes. Faculty work closely with the general education office to decide on a course theme and design their course, drawing on their own expertise as well as a wealth of resources outlined in more detail below. Course themes and experiential learning components have included the following:

- Ancient Religious Practices in a Selfie World: Students organize a panel of invited guests representing different religious practices to demonstrate and share about hospitality
- Diversity and Acceptance in Education: Students create stories that engage diversity and inclusion in meaningful ways for younger audiences and turn those stories into books to read to students at local elementary schools

- Personal Responsibility in a Global Community: Students partner with a refugee settlement organization on food and clothing drives as well as fundraising events such as film screenings
- Building Sustainable Communities: Students visit local sites, including a human rights memorial, a nature center, and a state capitol building to assess how and why we sustain communities
- How Ought We to Live?: Students hear from guest speakers on local homeless issues and visit a homeless shelter to understand the economic and social challenges of housing insecurity
- Privilege and Difference in American Society: Students conduct an in-depth interview of someone with a different worldview, perspective, or identity to foster appreciation for diverse communities
- Social Identity, Community, and Citizenship: Students map the accessibility of campus buildings and make recommendations to the university for improvements

In each of these cases, students' preparation before and reflection after is even more important than the content of the engagement. Without appropriate preparation, well-intended faculty and students may inadvertently do harm by, for example, overburdening a particular community organization with multiple student requests for service opportunities. Inadequate preparation may contribute to counteracting desired outcomes, such as students stereotyping individuals related to their experiences on the basis of assumed difference. Without reflection, students may fail to integrate the experiential activity into their learning, thus hindering their ability to retain, transfer, and apply what they have learned. In subsequent course developments, we have incorporated the Kolb cycle, discussed below, to reinforce the critical importance of preparation and reflection for students to effectively integrate their experiences with the ethics and diversity course learning outcomes.

### **Assessment**

As ED200 experiential learning is grounded in diversity and ethics, there are several aspects that have helped to provide a more consistent, sustainable common experience for both faculty and students. These include suggested readings, a syllabus template with suggestions for reading load and accessible, inclusive language, a course website with access to readings, assignments, syllabi, and examples of how faculty have integrated community-engaged experiential learning. This content has been shaped and revised by ongoing assessment.

### **Example of Indirect Assessment Informing Curricular and Faculty Development**

The variability of faculty implementation of experiential learning has resulted in varying experiences for students. Early in the course, students expressed wide variability in satisfaction with their community engagement experience so we facilitated two group conversations to better understand the feedback we received through course evaluations. Each group had about 20 students who had completed the course. The students were recruited through an email invitation which assured them of anonymity and receipt of a small gift certificate for an on-campus coffee shop. Two staff members facilitated a variety of activities over the course of 90 minutes. Each conversation had an identical format. After providing information for informed consent, we asked students to document through a visual image how they felt about their community engagement experience. Students were given a large selection of magazines to identify an image and, once all images were pasted on a flip chart, students explained their choices. Additional activities included written reflections and small group discussions with an all-group share out. An additional staff member took detailed notes in order to capture the verbal feedback, and we compiled all the data to identify themes and patterns through a normed coding process.

The two most important student needs that surfaced from these Spring 2015 conversations related to community and relevance. Students wanted to wrestle with real-world issues connected to course content and do so in a way that would help build community—between faculty and students, among peers, and with their larger communities.

### **Example of Direct Assessment Informing Curricular and Faculty Development**

ED200 is part of the larger general education assessment plan that functions on a four year cycle. The ethics and diversity learning outcomes were the focus during the 2015–2016 academic year so we facilitated an assessment team to review student learning in these areas. We recruited eleven ED200 faculty who were paid a small stipend to review a stratified random sampling of 111 distinct samples of culminating student work from all ED200 courses. We went through a process to ensure inter-rater reliability and then rated the artifacts, with each being reviewed by two faculty. The overall average student score for the three assessed criteria (ethical reasoning, analyzing social issues, and applying knowledge of diversity to social issues) was about 2.4 out of 4, which is within the “developing” range.

Students who show “developing” skills are able to apply ethical principles or theories, show some understanding of potential objections to their ethical arguments, demonstrate some understanding of issues arising from the intersection of diverse group frameworks, and can sometimes evaluate an alternative approach to a given social issue. The subsequent discussion was rich and informed the revisions to the following year’s ED200 curriculum. While the majority of the conversation and revision focused on revising content and assignments directly connected to the ethics and diversity learning outcomes, our approach to these outcomes serve as the foundation for ED200 experiential learning.

### **Faculty Development**

In addition to support focused specifically on course development, we provide many faculty development opportunities including application-focused faculty orientations each fall and spring, individual faculty consultations, formal course design workshops collaboratively designed with the center for teaching and learning, informal course design peer-mentorship teams, partnerships with research librarians, and ongoing collaborations with internal and external partners to provide faculty in-roads for high caliber experiential learning opportunities. The university service-learning program has been a critical partner throughout the life of ED200. They engage at the curricular level by helping to define and shape the frameworks and scope of experiential learning, while also facilitating many conversations between community partners and faculty built on already established reciprocal relationships between the community organization and the service-learning program.

We encourage engaged conversations and contributions from our faculty through regular trainings, workshops and meetings. Collaborative learning is a priority for this course but we also know that faculty ability to engage in development opportunities is not equal across faculty rank. The percent of course sections taught by full time faculty has varied widely, from a low of 22% full-time faculty to over 50% after significant recruitment efforts. Significantly, there is no differentiation in student satisfaction as evidenced in course evaluations that is correlated to faculty position, but we understand that the demand on time relative to financial compensation for part-time faculty has a somewhat ironic inequity. We have worked through several iterations of faculty leadership and engagement models to better support our faculty. In the first two years, four lead faculty developed and taught the course while also serving in an advisory capacity to the associate director. The following year we inaugurated faculty learning communities, which developed out of conversations with faculty from the previous year. The goal was to encourage faculty community through creating sub-groups of the larger ED200 faculty body that would meet at least once a month and focus on a particular question or idea. ED200 lead faculty facilitated the teams and each team had the directive to produce a deliverable that demonstrated their learning around the question or idea on which their team focused. Experienced faculty continue to play leading roles in facilitating various forms of professional development in addition to one-on-one mentoring of new course faculty.

### **Successes and Challenges: What is the Impact of Experiential Learning in This Course?**

The integration of experiential learning with other aspects of the course curriculum has yielded significant, positive results for faculty and students. While we have not conducted research to establish a definitive correlation, end-of-course student evaluations continue to provide one indirect measure of our increased attention to faculty development focused on experiential learning. End-of-course student evaluations for all ED200 courses through Spring 2019 included qualitative responses (from 1–5, representing ‘Strongly Disagree’ and ‘Strongly Agree,’ respectively) to the following question: “My community engagement experience positively impacted how I feel as an engaged member of my community.” From Fall 2014 through Spring 2019, mean scores have gradually increased from 3.7 to 4.1. Student comments in evaluations also tend to reflect incorporation of new understandings of ethics and diversity based on their experiences. Supplementing the rating responses indicated above, students were asked to “take a moment to describe the impact of your community engagement in terms of your understanding of the course content, perspective on the community issue, and your potential for continuing community engagement.” In Spring 2018, responses included the following:

The community engagement project reinforced my connection with my community. After discussing in the class the ethical issues and dilemmas of humans throughout history and in the present day, having a whole-hearted communal experience and reconnecting with the people around one more than lends some perspective.



A student from another section replied that,

I think my engagement in terms of this class really opened my eyes to see things like discrimination, sexism, and those hard to grasp concepts.

Reflecting the discomfort that may accompany cognitive dissonance, a third student noted,

My community engagement opportunity pushed me outside of my comfort level a little bit, and as a result, I'd say it helped me understand the significance of the issues presented in [the course].

Many more students expressed a general appreciation for thoughtful engagement. One student wrote,

The community engagement project really was a great experience. It empowered me to realize I can make a change in my community and that by even small action of engaged citizens, great change can be made.

Another concluded,

Looking at my community with a different perspective really helps to broaden and strengthen my worldview. I am now able to understand the importance of working with my community because my participation really does impact the future in a positive way.

This brief selection of student comments suggests that experiential learning has the potential to make knowledge of ethics and diversity actionable while enlivening student notions of participatory citizenship. Faculty and student experience in ED200 reflects research about the positive connections between diversity-related experiences and community engagement (Bowman, 2011). Research has also demonstrated a positive correlation between particular content strategies, such as service-learning, and the development of a student's moral reasoning (Mayhew & King, 2008). While instruction on ethical frameworks and principles of diversity might seem staid if confined to the classroom, they are given intimate, creative expression when practiced with our (expanding) communities. Additionally, planning for and reflecting on the motivations from which we engage in community provides a basis for conscientious action.

While celebrating significant successes in embedding experiential learning in ED200, we have also experienced challenges in its implementation. One structural challenge is that while the ethics and diversity portions of the course correspond directly with respective university-level outcomes, the experiential learning component of the class does not. Insofar as outcomes provide an anchor for the course in terms of course design and university-wide assessment, some faculty had comparative difficulty integrating and prioritizing experiential learning. Student evaluation comments occasionally reflected this felt lack of integration. Some faculty—including one of the authors the first time they taught the course—placed the responsibility on students to cultivate a small community engagement project as a culmination of their learning in the course. While this was an effective strategy for students who had embraced the course, less-engaged students floundered. While in each case reflection about their engagement could provide a helpful tool for their learning, gauging their expectations against their actions and the results, we wanted to be able to connect more students with a meaningful application of their learning in the course. In addition, we wanted to be a support to community partners with thoughtful and engaged student learning that was not a community burden. Scholars such as Saltmarsh et al., (2009) ask practitioners to attend to this, questioning whether institutions of higher education are truly engaging in reciprocal, shared problem solving or if they generally see themselves as the experts and utilize their communities as a laboratory for research. We work closely with our office of service learning to ensure a sustainable disposition toward partnership building that attends to reciprocal community relationships.

Another challenge we identified with balancing the multiple important aspects of the course was the general lack of adequate financial compensation for adjunct faculty. While this is by no means unique to the institution where this course resides, it presents an ongoing complication to professional development efforts. While in an ideal world, such efforts would be both required and more-robustly compensated, often neither is the case. As we noted above, while faculty are united in a desire to improve their courses, they are limited in their ability to spend time and effort doing so, including attending program-cultivated events.

A final challenge for many students, particularly working and parenting students, was finding time to participate in community engagement. In course evaluations, one student reflected that "I work the night shift and had to go to the community learning project after I had been working for 12 hours over night." Another revealed, "I work, so I did not

have time to complete the assignment until the end of the semester. I actually had to skip class in order to get the assignment done. I feel like there should be an alternative assignment option for the engagement activity.” Another: “I like the idea of community action, but it is hard to balance school and work already.” In more recent semesters, increasing numbers of faculty have allowed students to participate, whether collectively or individually, in their community engagement work in lieu of the traditional class in order to reduce the burden on these students. We have also reconsidered the necessary scope of engagement projects, which will be discussed further below.

### **Next Steps: Where Do We Go from Here?**

With recognition of the positive outcomes as well as the challenges of the course to date, we have continued to develop the structure for experiential learning in the course. As mentioned, while it is a natural outgrowth of student learning in relation to ethics and diversity in the course, experiential learning is not an explicit outcome in the course. To compensate for the perceived lack of parity, we have focused in recent professional development more extensively on the Kolb cycle of experiential learning to ground our pedagogical approaches (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Each course is required to have an experiential learning component, and to lead students through every stage of the Kolb cycle. As we claim in our professional development literature, “Experiential learning [in this course] is an intentional experience outside the classroom that provides students an opportunity to practice applying knowledge of ethics and diversity and reflect on their experience to create a new understanding of the relationship between ethical responsibility, diversity and community.” Note that while experiential learning does not require that the experience be outside the classroom, our conviction that practice in diverse communities is more beneficial leads us to delimit the experience this way. Our intent is that explicit use of the Kolb cycle will solidify a process for experiential learning while retaining flexibility in application for individual instructors.

The emphasis of the Kolb Cycle as a way to conceptualize experiential learning in the course also serves to combat a tendency to measure experiential learning on the basis of time. While this has the advantage of being easily verified, it may tend to encourage comparatively unreflective ways of practicing experiential learning. In contrast, understanding experiential learning as a process that encompasses knowledge, planning, experience, and reflection in an iterative fashion enriches the experience far beyond “checking a box,” and it promotes a model that students can employ in other classes and their post-educational experiences. Thus, we will continue to encourage faculty to engage their students in the messiness of community engagement and the corresponding variability of time and energy required.

Another point of emphasis is reconceptualizing experiential learning as an academic career-long, rather than simply course-long, process. Course instructors, and indeed to a certain extent the general-education program, felt they shouldered the burden of responsibility for a student’s community engagement in their college experience. This can be traced to many different factors, including the outcomes orientation of general-education courses and the tendency of faculty to be comparatively siloed, and thus unaware of additional pathways of student experience. In fact, Howe et al. suggest that it may be inappropriate for sophisticated levels of experiential learning, such as a self- or group-directed service-learning project, to be deployed in a lower-division course where students are less likely to have the requisite cognitive and epistemological development necessary to succeed (Howe, Coleman, Hamshaw, & Westdijk, 2014). Thus, reinforcing multiple iterations of practice with community engagement is more beneficial than a single iteration for faculty and students.

Connected efforts in our broader general-education curriculum include piloting specific reflective questions on learning development in major-bound capstone courses near the end of a student’s college career. It is difficult to measure statistically significant development on ethical or diversity-related measures, or the impact of experiential learning on notions of citizenship, within the limited time-frame of a single course. Expanding the scope of measurement increases the assessment possibilities by providing points of longitudinal assessment data regarding longer-term course impact.

### **Conclusion**

Developed as one part of a revised general-education curriculum, ED200 has ambitious goals, including increasing students’ ethical reasoning and self-awareness as well as furthering an understanding of diversity and dedication to inclusivity in shared communities. A unique development and benefit to this course has been the incorporation of experiential learning. Embedded experiential learning connects domains that are usually treated separately, and does so in a way that reiterates the importance and benefit of community-minded action. That is, experiential learning

symbolizes that knowledge of ethics and diversity is not isolated, but must be applied, and in practicing that application, one is opened to change. This is an emblematic example of humanizing higher education, a process that is messy and non-linear, but ultimately, we argue, more authentic than reflecting on these important components in isolation. The course is neither a beginning nor an end, but a place of practice and refinement on faculty and students' educational journey.

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