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Final Report on the Activities of the Center for Immigrant and Refugee Community Leadership and Empowerment (CIRCLE) Project: Covering the Period from 09/01/99 to 08/31/00

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**Final Report on the activities of the
Center for Immigrant and Refugee Community
Leadership and Empowerment (CIRCLE) Project**

Covering the period from 09/01/99 to 08/31/00

by the CIRCLE evaluation staff:

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Final Report

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Final Report

Center for Immigrant and Refugee Community Leadership and Empowerment (CIRCLE) Project

Covering the period from September 1, 1999 to August 31, 2000

By the CIRCLE Evaluation Staff

Part 1 – Project Description

Introduction

The Center for Immigrant & Refugee Community Leadership & Empowerment (CIRCLE) project seeks to facilitate an enabling environment leading to the empowerment of members of refugee and immigrant communities to make choices around important issues in their communities. Using informal, democratic and highly participatory study circles, CIRCLE is committed to grassroots collective leadership and community development within Russian, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Tibetan and Bosnian communities in the area. The project affiliates view the relationship between the university community, and those of the newcomer communities they serve, an equal partnership in the sense that each community learns from the other.

Since _____, service learning and mentorship educational programs in the United States have evolved programs to provide learning and community-building experiences to undergraduate learners. Early experiences in the academic setting focused on providing students with “real-life” experiences while providing services to local communities and improving “town and gown” relations between the university and local communities. More recently, student learning and mentoring experiences have sought to provide educational experiences that build the moral character and sense of social awareness of students.

This service learning model serves as a foundation for the CIRCLE program at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. The unique feature of this program is its effort to facilitate community outreach and building among immigrant and refugee (or “newcomer”) groups, as well as with minority communities in towns near the university. With the assistance of donor support from the Kellogg Foundation, this program implemented an evaluation program drawing on elements of empowerment evaluation, as well as.... (site Patton). The evaluation program initially sought to respond directly to evaluative questions raised by Kellogg. These questions focused on the development of a multi-cultural model of leadership and the impacts it had on program participants. As the evaluation progressed, other evaluative indicators, and the questions derived from them, were developed by program staff to more fully assess the activities undertaken by the project. Through the implementation of the evaluation, the program participants grew to appreciate the principles of empowerment evaluation and the important roles they each played in gathering information and determining program effectiveness. This chapter highlights the evaluative experiences of program participants, the strengths and challenges of the particular evaluative approach adopted, and the results of the evaluation.

The paper describes the evaluation process utilized by the giving SEED program. Aspects of the evaluation covered here include the: rationale, timing, methodology, as well as the identification of indicators yielding information responsive to staff and donor questions about program performance.

Organizational Background

CIRCLE was established in 1994 with funding from the Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants as a partnership between the three campuses of the University of Massachusetts -- Amherst, Lowell and Boston. Since its inception, CIRCLE has provided a model of collective leadership to members of refugee and immigrant communities who have then gone on to organize projects in their communities. The "Giving Students Educational Empowerment and Development" (Giving SEED) program is an initiative of the CIRCLE project at the University of Massachusetts (UMass) in Amherst. The CIRCLE is managed through the International Education program within the School of Education at the university. The CIRCLE was created in 1994 with a grant from the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants.¹

The Giving SEED program (hereafter referred to as 'SEED') is an experimental initiative that initially targeted immigrant and refugee (also referred to as 'newcomer') students and youth, and their respective communities throughout the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts. The youth participating in the program range from eleven to sixteen years of age and attend middle and high schools in the valley. The youth live in the largest communities in the valley, including Amherst (population 34,000), Holyoke (population 44,000), and Springfield (population 156,000). The newcomer and minority youth groups in these communities are characterized by cultural alienation which hinders their ability to build community and to become active participants in American society. Support and social services for these groups are inadequate and the constant threat of elimination of existing services adds to the fears that members of these communities have about their future well-being.

Within these communities there exist cultural and generation gaps that also hinder community cohesion. These gaps are created when older generations, preferring to hold on to their traditional values, find it increasingly difficult to relate with and to understand younger people from their culture. A major reason for this is the youth prefer to adopt certain mainstream American values in order to appear culturally assimilated. This divide creates conflict within homes and communities, and also raises issues concerning confusion about cultural identity.

The SEED program seeks to "create an alternative model of community service learning for newcomer students" (Arches, et. al., 1997:38). It is based on an ethnocultural perspective of community service learning that encourages newcomer, as well as minority college students to explore their own ethnic identity, cultural values, and their beliefs within the context of self, family, social groups, and community. These experiences, grounded in the sociocultural realities of their lives, will ultimately lead to a transformation of their identities and help them to become active organizers within their respective communities.

The fundamental concepts behind the SEED program emerged from a seminar held in the Fall of 1994. This seminar was attended by undergraduate students from newcomer families as well as graduate students from the Center for International Education (CIE) at UMass. The seminar sought to identify ways in which university students could help to address challenges faced by newcomer communities. After the seminar, leaders within the newcomer communities were identified and contacted, and their options were solicited concerning where and how the CIRCLE (and SEED staff and students) could intervene. In 1995, the graduate students working with the CIRCLE teamed up with undergraduate students to organize community forums to further develop the concept behind SEED as well as to identify community resources and needs. The undergraduates decided that they could better serve CIRCLE if they formed a Student Activities Council (SAC) and if they helped CIE staff to develop three undergraduate courses (at the sophomore and junior levels) that would facilitate service learning and

^{1/} Please refer to appendices A and B showing the organizational structure of the Giving SEED program, as well as the placement of the program within the CIRCLE, respectively.

community building among fellow students and the community youth they were to mentor.

The SAC is a group of students made up of undergraduates from the Five College area (UMass, as well as Mount Holyoke, Smith, Amherst, and Hampshire Colleges) that is the governing body of SEED. The SAC collaborates closely with faculty and graduate students from the CIE in the development of the service learning courses.

Project Mission, Goal and Objectives

The goal of the CIRCLE project is to develop and document innovative models and practices that strengthen collective leadership in newcomer communities and ultimately facilitate sustainable development within these communities. The primary role of SEED within the CIRCLE project is to facilitate the organization of newcomer and minority youth and community groups and building their capacity to address community-wide concerns.

The goal of SEED is to develop the leadership potential of youth who will ultimately advocate for and give back to their community. SEED cultivates the indigenous knowledge and cultural identity of newcomer and minority youth as a way to promote the empowerment of community members as well as the amelioration of the community in general. The SEED project aims to do this by linking newcomer youth to college student mentors and by increasing the educational access of the youth from these newcomer and minority communities.

To facilitate this process, the SEED program has six objectives:

- 1) to establish a core of qualified newcomer and minority undergraduate student mentors by providing them with training in group facilitation and communication;
- 2) to link mentors to local newcomer and minority youth through project outreach in a service learning program;
- 3) to lend support in developing the leadership skills of both the undergraduate students and the newcomer and minority youth they mentor through courses on cultural identity, community dynamics, training skills, and community activism;
- 4) to improve the organizational capacity of the community groups with which newcomer and minority youth affiliate;
- 5) providing students with experience in CIRCLE's participatory and collaborative methodology via involvement with the SAC, for the purpose of instigating community action;
- 6) to assist newcomer and minority community groups in the preparation and implementation of community action plans (CAPs) and the funding proposals for those plans;

The broader mission of SEED is to create a coalition of youth groups that promotes understanding between cultures. These groups are to consist of ethnic, interethnic, and mainstream membership and, it is hoped that this program will ultimately expand to national and international levels. SEED seeks to channel the energy and idealism of these youth to combat the divisive societal elements that result in misunderstandings within and across cultural groups.

Strategy for Program Execution

An important aspect of SEED is the learning experiences that it provides for those involved in the program. These learning experiences are done via participatory action research (PAR) which also helps program staff, students and youth to analyze the collective leadership and empowering elements of the program in the community setting. The use of PAR is also appropriate given the empowering aspect of SEED, as PAR

“emphasizes the establishment of liberating dialogue with impoverished or oppressed groups” (Mertens, 1998:172).

Participating Youth Groups

During the three years the undergraduate students worked with six youth groups in newcomer and minority communities. They include the following: 1) Cambodian-American Association and Khmer Student Club of Amherst (Ma.); 2) New American Russian-Speaking Association; 3) African-American Girls and Boys Clubs of Springfield (Ma.); 4) Clubs at the Amherst (Ma.) Regional Middle School, including The International Students Club, The Students of Color for Excellence Club, and The Hispanic-American Club; 5) Vietnamese American Civic Association (VACA) from Holy Names Church in Springfield, Ma.; and 6) Hispanic-American Youth of the Teen Resource Center (TRC) in Holyoke (Ma.). Group sizes ranged from seven to twenty, with an average of fourteen students per group.

These groups participated in a number of activities based on their particular interests. The activities undertaken included: training on identify and respect issues; communication skills and conflict resolution; tutoring in English as well as other academic subjects; nutrition education; organizing and participating in cultural events; the development of an orientation handbook for new students; producing a video film addressing social issues of relevance in their community; and, developing multi-media documentary about the lives and experiences of newcomer youth and their families. The youth also prepared funding proposals to acquire funds for the implementation of their respective activities.

Description of Project Activities

1) “SEARCH” Project

This project was begun by an “alumnae” of the CIRCLE project, who began working exclusively with young Hmong women living in Springfield, MA. These young women worked with several mentors from UMass, Amherst College, and Mount Holyoke College. With guidance from their mentors, these women took part in a number of activities including: preparing an “identity” booklet, writing essays on self-identity and family relations, and cultural presentations including traditional dances and formal (classroom) presentations about Hmong culture. These activities helped the women to examine more closely their own cultural identify and to improve their own understanding (as well as that of others), about what it means to grow up as a Hmong woman in American society. As one of the group participants explained, the project “created an atmosphere” in which she became more knowledgeable about her culture and religion. This group also participated in the youth conference which allowed participants to learn about diverse cultural groups. The girls have developed positive attitudes about their schooling and are all undertaking preparatory activities to facilitate their college application and enrollment process. Likewise, a number of the young women involved in this program have noted an improvement in and strengthening of their family relations. In general, the creation and growth of this particular project provides an excellent example of one of the ways in which the CIRCLE project hopes to encourage the expansion of its service-learning model to other projects, communities, and institutions.

Part 2 – Evaluation

The evaluation of the CIRCLE project was done as an on-going activity throughout the life of the project. The reason for this was to encourage to the greatest extent possible that the program was in tune with the needs of the project beneficiaries, and to maximize the degree to which programmatic changes could occur when they were deemed necessary.

The evaluation methodology evolved during the past three years, from one that was initially addressing project outcomes to one that became more a more inclusive process. The three years of evaluation activities are highlighted below:

Year 1 (1997-1998)

During this period, the evaluation focused on the activities of project participants that resulted in the execution of special projects. Some examples of this include: a visual portrayal of the lives of immigrant and refugee students and their families. This, and related activities, highlight the importance of learning and its' embeddedness in collective action and reflection.

Year 2 (1998-1999)

The second year of the program evaluation assessed program success based largely on the activities done by the university students and their youth mentees. The highlight of the year was the organization and execution of a youth conference in Springfield, MA. This year-end event brought together all of the various youth and student mentors associated with the project. The youth and students were entirely responsible for the organization and facilitation of this conference. The success of the conference was due in large part to the collective and collaborative manner in which the organizers worked. This activity help move the project forward in its goals to link interethnic communities through coalition building across ethnic groups.

Another important activity during the year was the production of a booklet entitled "SEARCH" by Vietnamese Youth. This activity involved the interviewing of immigrant and refugee parents of the youth. This activity was instrumental in addressing another important goal of the CIRCLE project, namely, to improve intergenerational relationships at both the household and community-levels.

Year 3 (1999-2000)

During this final year of the program evaluation, there was more of a focus on the results that project activities were having in the community beyond the direct program participants (e.g., the student mentors and the youth mentees). This included more analysis on the role that parents were playing in project-related activities, as well as the nature of the relationship between the university and surrounding communities.

Another focus during this period was on institutionalization within the academic setting. This was addressed in a number of ways including: a meeting between CIRCLE staff and 10 faculty from other departments on the UMass campus who are involved in the development and implementation of service-learning courses. Another way in which the effort at institutionalization was persued was to orient the program and its related courses more in the Asian Studies Program at the university.

Finally, another aspect of the evaluation that went beyond an analysis of the immediate project participants was to examine the activities of past CIRCLE program participants, both students and youth mentees. A number of CIRCLE students have finished school and moved on to a variety of activities including: graduate studies, creating and working for non-profit organizations, and international travel, all of which are involved in activities related to immigrant and refugee communities.

HOME PAGE.....

In Springfield, for instance, the Vietnamese community established the New World Theater and the Russian community started NARSA (New American Russian Speakers Association).

CIRCLE is guided by the concept of "making the road as we walk," a metaphor that captures the organic process behind building leaders and communities. If the road to leadership and empowerment is built by, with, in, and for the community, the ground on which it is laid will be firm, and it will become a solid medium for community development.

The program encompasses three main components: the Learning CART (Communities Acting and Reflecting Together); the Helping ROAD (Researchers and Organizers Assisting in Development); and the Giving SEED (Students for Education, Empowerment and Development).

The Learning CART carries the knowledge of older established leaders who have worked together to mobilize their communities. In the refugee and immigrant communities of western Massachusetts, groups of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Tibetan and Russian leaders pass on what they have learned from collective leadership in the past year. Once learners guided by CART, they now facilitate the learning of the next group of leaders, ensuring that the leadership model is spread on a grassroots level. CIRCLE staff remain available to help when needed.

At the heart of the Helping ROAD and Giving SEED components are graduate and undergraduate students who are members of refugee or immigrant families. As the research component of CIRCLE, the Helping ROAD fosters the exchange of knowledge between university facilitators sharing research and theory and community leaders responding with practical experience. Under the direction of Sally Habana-Hafner, graduate and undergraduate students take their academic knowledge back to the community where it can be put into practice.

The Giving SEED develops the potential of young leaders who learn to advocate for and give back to their community. The program links refugee and immigrant undergraduate students with local young newcomers in a community service program and prepares youth to be effective community educators and leaders.

In Springfield, women students are working with women leaders

in the Vietnamese community to organize a girls group that will be brought to UMass and Mount Holyoke so that they can experience college and see that a college education is important.

"It's a type of mentorship program," said Habana-Hafner. "We see the two (UMass and the immigrant community) as an equal partnership because we learn from each other. Together we're developing new ways to build their communities."

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to identify areas of success and weaknesses to facilitate the refinements of program activities and facilitate the achievement of program goals and objectives. A primary concern of the evaluation process is to identify the extent to which student mentoring of community youth improves their capacity to develop, implement, and monitor community development action plans. Ultimately, the suggestions gathered and ideas generated during the evaluation process assist SEED in achieving its mission of developing a multi-cultural service learning program resulting in positive social change in local newcomer and minority communities. In an effort to improve the effectiveness of program activities, evaluation has become an integral component of SEED's routine activities. The evaluation process includes the solicitation of input at all levels, (youth, students, staff), and it is incorporated into all aspects of project activities. This helps the evaluation to be seen as a natural and appropriate event to occur within the organization.

Evaluation Participants

The evaluation process began by asking the following basic question: "who or what was to be evaluated?" The 'who' portion of this question included all parties who are involved in the implementation of SEED. Thus, the scope of the evaluation included the following actors:

- 1) the members of community youth groups who are directly linked to the undergraduate students
- 2) the community group liaisons and other group personnel and supervisors who link community-youth groups to the undergraduates
- 3) the undergraduate student mentors enrolled in the courses that facilitate service learning with community youth and their affiliated organizations
- 4) the undergraduate student members of the SAC
- 5) program staff and graduate student mentors

To increase the likelihood that all the participants would implement activities based on suggestions coming out of the evaluation process, they were all involved in the inquiry process. This approach is similar to the organizational philosophy of implementing activities via participatory action research. This approach helps to make SEED a "learning" organization in that it continually adjusts its activities based on what it is learning from feedback via the evaluation process. This activity helps to keep the program flexible and adaptable to continuous change for the purpose of improving its effectiveness.

Evaluation Questions and Indicators

The processing of gathered information was guided by six evaluation questions presented by the major donor, the Kellogg Foundation. These questions are as follow:

- 1) *How successful was the leadership model in supporting newcomer and minority youth?*
- 2) *What unique cultural leadership models emerged, and how were these shared across groups?*
- 3) *What impact did the mentoring opportunities have on strengthening leadership skills among the undergraduates?*
- 4) *What relationships were formed between the middle and high schools and the university as a result of the program?*
- 5) *How involved were the youth leaders with the broader community in the implementation of the community action plans?*
- 6) *In what ways were the links between home, school and community strengthened?*

To respond to these questions SEED staff worked collectively to clearly identify evaluation indicators in light of the mission, goal, and objectives of the SEED project. These indicators also reflect the concerns of the Kellogg Foundation, with respect to determining the effect of the approach and model used by SEED in newcomer and minority communities. The indicators that were identified are divided into two categories for ease of analysis: those that can be determined in the classroom (with the undergraduates who mentor community youth); and those that can be assessed in the community (where student-youth interactions are occurring).

The indicators at the classroom-level include the following:

1. *What skills are considered relevant to mentor others?*
2. *How do you define leadership?*
3. *What are important leadership characteristics?*
4. *How often do students participate in class activities? (e.g., broken down by classroom discussion, facilitation of activities with youth in community, etc.)*
5. *What do the students believe they have learned from the experiences they have had in the community service learning course?*
6. *What observations do program staff have about student learning during the course of the semester?*

The indicators at the community-level include:

1. *What kinds of activities were undertaken and with what frequency?*
2. *Whom among the youth have assumed leadership roles during the mentoring process and in what ways can this be identified?*
3. *How many times have the students met with the youth group(s) they mentor?*
4. *How have the undergraduate students taken the information they have learned in class and applied it in the field?*
5. *What are the cultural strengths of the community youth (as identified by both the youth themselves as well as the students who mentor them)?*
6. *To what extent have the mentoring encounters between youth and students strengthened the cultural identity and increased the pride and confidence of each group?*
7. *In what ways were leadership and problem-solving skills exhibited by both groups (students and youth)?*
8. *How many youth are participating in community activities as a result of the SEED program?*
9. *What do the youth believe they have learned from the mentoring experience?*

Program Evaluation Methods

The methods by which SEED participants evaluate program efforts are closely linked to the PAR methodology outlined earlier. In order for evaluation to be useful to the program as a whole, the program staff believe that the evaluation process should be both a learning and empowering experience for everyone involved.

Eight methods were used to collect information for the evaluation of SEED. The techniques included the following: in-depth interviews; questionnaires; meetings; observations; the facilitation of in-class discussions; activities surrounding the organization of end-of-the-semester activities (e.g., youth conference); informal discussions; and reviewing written materials. Information from these various resources was copied, processed, and presented by the program staff who concentrate their efforts on program evaluation. The details of each technique are noted below.

1) In-Depth Interviews

The administering of periodic in-depth conversational (or dialogic) interviews were helpful as they yielded large amounts of rich information. The dialogic interview method is beneficial as it is a more personalized method of obtaining useful information, since it involves the establishment of a good rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee and "a mutual sharing of perspectives and understandings" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998:125). These interviews, done primarily with program staff and the undergraduate students, were done in an informal or conversational manner. Unstructured open-ended questions were asked from a guide of questions that is developed by the interviewer beforehand. This open-ended structure allowed staff and students to raise issues of concern to them. Two of the most important questions include:

- *In what areas do you think you might benefit in order to improve your effectiveness in mentoring the community youth (in the case of the undergraduate students) or the students (in the case of the graduate students)?*
- *In what skill areas do you think the people/groups you serve need assistance?*

One potential drawback of this interview method is that it tends to collect large amounts of information, some of which is not useful for the purposes of the inquiry (Arnold & McClure, 1996:55). To lessen this problem, and for the sake of time management, interviews usually did not exceed an hour in length.

2) *Questionnaires*

Evaluative information was also collected through the administration of questionnaires to the students (by the university) at the end of each semester in the form of a final course evaluation. These questionnaires were helpful in providing staff with a better understanding of what the students considered to be the strong and weak points of the course. Since these questionnaires were completed anonymously, this allowed students to be honest about their appraisal of the course. The questionnaires were efficient to use as they are inexpensive to administer, and they lend themselves well to statistical processing. The questionnaire asked respondents to indicate their relative levels of satisfaction with the course using a Likert scale. Some open-ended questions were also included in the survey to allow respondents more freedom to provide useful suggestions. While such information is difficult to code, it was invaluable in terms of the amount of rich information it provided.

3) *Meetings*

The evaluation process also occurred during weekly staff meetings. Various issues relevant to evaluation were brought up and discussed among those present. The meetings were also a preliminary step in the information collection process, assessing staff viewpoints about their perceptions of the program, as well as those of the undergraduate students they mentor. Reviewing the minutes and recordings of comments made by the SEED staff during weekly meetings was also done. To facilitate this process, the minutes were simultaneously noted by hand and tape recorded. Meetings were also held with the youth groups to gather a more diverse range of views about the effects of the program.

4) *Observation*

Observation of the activities of the various staff members and the youth groups with whom they work were done by the program evaluators and students, respectively. The field notes taken during those observations provided another valuable means for evaluating program results.

5) *In-Class Facilitation and Processing of Discussion*

Periodic class sessions were devoted to discussion and reflection about student activities with the youth. These sessions, facilitated by SEED evaluators and other staff, allowed students to review the events of the semester, as well as to provide feedback concerning what the youth think about the program. A nominal group process was utilized with the undergraduates for these sessions during which they responded to particular evaluation indicators (e.g., questions on mentorship and leadership). The rich information emerging from these discussions helped make the service-learning courses more rewarding for undergraduate students in subsequent semesters.

6) *Youth Conference Organization and Presentation*

Observation and evaluation of the workshops facilitated by the undergraduate students at the one-day youth conference were also done². Afterwards, members of the program staff met to assess the results of the conference and to plan a processing session with students during the class period the following week. A two hour session was then

²/ Please refer to appendices D and E for an example of one type of evaluation done at the conference by session facilitators and photos of some of the conference activities, respectively.

held during which the students discussed their assessment of the conference. The students also speculated on the needs that future students may have for the next semester of this course, based on their own experiences as well as the reactions and feedback of the collaborating youth groups. Finally, the project staff met to discuss student input, and then identified the needs of both the students and the youth groups in light of the next phase of the program, which includes the preparation of community development action plans by the youth groups.

7) *Informal Discussions*

Discussions with and feedback from community group liaisons. Staff-facilitated discussions with undergraduate students about their experiences with the community youth groups.

8) *Reviewing Written Materials*

Reading the written comments of undergraduates made in their field journals and final term papers about their experiences working with the community youth. Written observations from staff concerning program progress were also periodically collected and reviewed.

Analysis of Collected Information

The evaluation done within SEED is at a level pertinent to the issues addressed by staff concerning challenges encountered during the execution of activities done the undergraduate students in the field. In the cases where student involvement was solicited (either from interviews or in-class discussions), their comments were separated into relevant categories and grouped by emerging themes. This process was facilitated with the use of the nominal group process as well as focus group discussions done respectively with undergraduate students and program staff.

**Evolution of the Evaluation Process
(ADD MATERIAL HERE)**

Evaluation Results to Date

In general, most participants in the SEED program agreed that being involved in the program-related activities was a learning experience for everyone. With respect to the program objectives, students acknowledged that the SEED program provided them with the ability to reach out to the community in a way very different from the traditional sense of “community service”. The students also noted how the skills they acquired in class were directly applicable to the work they performed in the community.

The service-learning courses have also been effective at helping students to develop mentoring abilities as evidenced by their oral comments and written statements. The students commented that the course taught them useful techniques and skills that

helped them to communicate with the youth. The undergraduates noted how they learned to be empathetic toward the youth after having learned about the difficult conditions in which they were raised and live. The students also learned to be more assertive with the youth and how to maintain their attention; how to facilitate discussions without leading or dominating them; to deal with frustration and miscommunication; to be patient; how to “work with people very different from ourselves”, and how to listen actively to what the youth were saying and in doing so, the students found themselves learning a great deal from the youth. The students noted how it was a two-way learning experience in that everyone involved learned from the activities.

The mentoring relationship also created a special bond between youth and students. The youth developed an interest in the lives of the undergraduates and this was largely due to the comfortable rapport created between the two groups. The students taught the youth how to set and achieve goals as well as how to apply their newly acquired skills to any aspect of their lives. The undergraduates became “leaders” for the youth through the establishment of friendships, which resulted in them being considered friends, in addition to leaders and role models. The views that one student had about the program are summarized as follows: “*overall, this was a tremendous experience for me. I truly discovered a great deal about myself, and my potential as a future educator*”.

The model of collective leadership used by SEED consists of a problem-solving method involving repeated group action and reflection, on community issues. Learning has occurred through a shared vision and action of community building among SEED participants. One undergraduate student summarized the results of the leadership model in stating that, “*the youth in the community have come together to believe that we all share the same understanding of basic rules and ideas concerning issues such as racism and cultural identity.*”

The unique cultural leadership model that emerged consisted of a widely variable notion of what it means to be a leader, depending on the particular cultural perspective of the students. To some, a leader was someone to be respected, while others thought the notion of being a leader had a negative connotation since they had witnessed abusive uses of power by political leaders in their home countries. One of the undergraduates (who is a native of Ghana, West Africa), noted how he developed,

“an appreciation for the need and ability to identify with cultural traditions other than my own. I believe the more you treasure and respect your own culture, the more you tend to respect other people’s culture.”

One Nepali-American undergraduate noted how she had learned that it was “*extremely important to understand every individual within his or her own cultural and societal context.*” Finally, an Asian-American noted the feelings she had while working with youth from communities different from her own, “*I was uncomfortable in the beginning and I realized that I had come into the group with my own strategies, which changed as I continued working with the youth.*”

The SEED program did appear to have a number of positive impacts on strengthening the leadership skills among the undergraduates. Some of the following observations note those impacts:

- “*working with the youth was a great learning experience. The youth rarely deal with people from outside their community and culture, so we tried to help them to develop some sort of awareness of the outside world...I was really happy with our work in the community*”;
- “*there was a lot of satisfaction working in the community*”.
- “*the class taught me a lot concerning facilitation and communicating among people*”;

The students also noted how they have acquired more self-confidence with facilitating groups and standing up and presenting ideas in front of others. Finally, one student noted that, "*the fact that we were working in a community very different from our own also helped the youth to understand leadership within the context of diversity and a diverse atmosphere.*"

The leadership skills of the undergraduates have been strengthened with every encounter they had with the community youth groups. They have: a) learned more about their own cultural identify as well as those of the youth; b) gained confidence about their own abilities to serve as an example for others to immitate; c) applied group organization and facilitation skills acquired in the course; d) facilitated the youth to make decisions about activities they would like to do to improve their communities; and e) defined their roles at the youth conference, as well as the roles of the youth who participated.

The SEED program helped to build and strengthen existing bonds between youth and students. The youth acquired an understanding that the relationship between home and school is more direct than they previously perceived it to be, and the youth and community groups proved to be a safe haven for youth. The youth have also observed that the material they are learning can be applied in their homes, for example, some of the youth have used the facilitating skills to tutor younger siblings, or have applied their communication skills in improving their own relationships with parents and other familial care-givers.

The youth displayed commitment to their activities, enthusiasm, self-discipline, and a great amount of awareness of issues that hinder community building. The youth were well aware of community strengths and weaknesses, and displayed tremendous discipline in completing their tasks. In general, they displayed a great amount of leadership potential.

The strengthening of links between home, school, and community are happening in a number of ways. The undergraduates gained a great deal of confidence in themselves, their identities, and their ability to mentor others. This leads to the first link with the community, where students have found it initially difficult to make contact with the youth. However, as the number of encounters between these two groups increased, the linkages grew stronger and developed into a positive spiral...the students worked with the youth, the youth became engaged and learned, the students in turn gained confidence and encouraged community reflection on addressing community concerns, and the youth in turn were motivated to take action.

Other linkages are more difficult to witness and require more time to work through this upward "spiral". Thus at this point it is difficult to describe the dynamic of intergenerational linkages (between students at school and how they interact with their families at home). However, it has been noted that older immigrants and refugees are more likely (than their children) to tolerate difficult situations they encounter here in the U.S., most likely due to language difficulties or a lack of knowledge of the proper avenues to address such difficulties. It is possible that the students, using their knowledge of the language and their ability to function more smoothly in American society, may become more of an advocate for older generations.

The undergraduate student mentors learned that the minority and newcomer youth face a unique set of problems, especially when the youth are enrolled as students in schools that are predominately Caucasian. The undergraduates learned as well that there are very real differences about the way the youth are treated due to their physical appearance, and in many cases, this has negative results with respect to the formation of self-identity.

The results of the evaluation process thus far reveal that the youth are interested in learning more skills that can help them in their community-building efforts. The students have appreciated their mentoring experiences and have made suggestions to

improve the general functioning of the project. The students expressed an interest in having more clarity in the goals of the course and any course-related activities (e.g., community outreach, organization of workshops, seminars, or conferences) from the very beginning of the semester, as well as an interest in establishing contact with the community groups early on in the semester. This would allow them to maximize the amount of time available for planning end-of-the-semester activities.

A practical skill that the students were interested in having included one that would help them to manage the group dynamics of the youth. The students said that all too often their time with the youth was rendered less effective due to a few disruptive youth whose behavior diminished the quality of the educational environment and prevented others from learning. The students found themselves unprepared for how to deal with disciplining the disruptive youth. The students expressed another frustration in noting that all too often the meetings they had planned with youth groups (as well as with the community group liaisons or supervisors) were canceled (due to a lack of attendance), or resulted in a lack of activities (due to miscommunication and/or unclear objectives). Concerning course content, the students were content with the mentoring and facilitation skills they acquired during the course of the semester, but would have appreciated more opportunities to meet with the youth groups to apply these skills.

With respect to the community groups, the youth expressed an interest in spending more time with the students learning more about the techniques that they introduced to them during their encounters in the communities as well as during the conference workshops. The youth appreciated the participatory and respectful manner in which the students worked with them. This approach served to increase the self-awareness of the youth while also boosting their confidence.

The work of the service-learning courses, which includes community outreach and the organization of youth-student encounters, is only the first step toward community change. It is important that there be follow up to activities already done in order to maximize their effectiveness, while also assuring the eventual development and implementation of community action plans. The momentum of work done thus far should be sustained.

The undergraduate students made a number of comments that appeared to capture the significance of the program for themselves. One comment noted how they learned about, “the power of friendships to transcend diversity”. Another comment noted the two-way nature of the learning experiences provided by the SEED program, “the youth have a lot to teach us if we just open our ears and listen”. Other comments included: “we learned how to reach the youth and built friendly relationships in doing so”; “we learned skills to deal with people one-on-one”, and in general, the students noted that they enjoyed their experiences with the program in general, and working with the youth in particular. The students did admit that it was difficult, especially working out the “logistics that go into community work” and in the process, came to realize that they should “expect the unexpected”. In the end however, the students found the experience to be educational and rewarding, noting that after having worked with the youth, they (the students) felt good about what they had done, while “enjoying the friendship of the youth, and having learned a lot about their culture”. Some of the particular successes of the SEED program included: 1) Improved Interest and Understanding of Students and Youth; 2) They also noted how their confidence and enthusiasm built throughout the semester with each encounter they had with the students, they acquired more knowledge about SEED, and their role within the program; 3) Reflective Process: All of the activities being undertaken in the name of the SEED project encourage all participants (students, community youth, graduate student staff, etc.) to reflect on the processes involved in capacity building, at both the individual and organizational levels as well as about their backgrounds and what it means to be a member of a newcomer or minority community in the United States; 4) Equal Importance Placed on Process and Outcomes:

The reflective process noted above also lends itself to analysis of the process that SEED is going through to achieve the end of community development. The continual self-assessment that SEED participants do encourages them to look at where they are currently and compare this to from whence they have come, in order to fully appreciate their improvements throughout the course of the semester; and, 5) Use of Techniques Presented in Classes: Most of the students have shown themselves capable of using the interactive and participatory facilitation techniques they have learned in the service-learning courses, as well as techniques on organization and planning of activities; 6) Loose Organizational Structure: The loose structure of the SEED project enables staff and students to remain flexible and able to respond to rapid changes. This flexible approach requires an evolving curriculum and willingness on the part of the student participants to be receptive of these changes. This initially posed difficulties for students who were accustomed to the traditional university teaching method of being "filled with knowledge", rather than using their existing knowledge to assist in the development, design, and implementation of a course.

The external conditions that aided project success include: 1) a social climate in newcomer and minority communities that encourages its members to take initiatives in improving the well-being of their own communities; 2) a growing diversity of ethnic, minority, and newcomer groups in the SEED work area of Western Massachusetts; 3) a growing interest on the part of minority and newcomer communities to learn more about how to resolve cultural, generational, and ethnic conflicts, and the role that education can play in such a process.

Challenges to the Evaluation

A non-conventional approach that some students initially found difficult to adapt to; adhering to an academic calendar and an uneven curriculum workload during the semester, leading to a heavier than normal load of work at semester's end limited to some extent the information collected. Difficulties in coordinating the schedules of program participants. Time consuming nature of building collaborative efforts with other organizations also contributed to the collection of evaluation information at the end of the semester rather than at the beginning.

Plans for resolving the aforementioned challenges include: Make efforts to even out the work load over the course of the semester. For example, by linking up sooner with the youth so that work is not too heavily concentrated toward the end of the semester. Also, planning for major class activities should be initiated much earlier in the semester, with tasks planned and executed at an even pace throughout the term.

Part 3 – Accomplishments

Mini-projects (community projects conducted)

Academic activities (conferences attended, presentations made, dissemination of the CIRCLE model)

Publications (documents produced for class and conferences, training attended, Azeris and Somalis).

Model base on Research (Collective leadership/Inquiry; Webpage)

Part 4 – Implications

Institutionalization (See “Change” article) including philosophical outlines of the model.

Replicability and Institutionalization

Since the inception of the SEED program, participants have sought to replicate the methodology used by SEED into different communities in other parts of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. For this reason, the SEED program has begun to collaborate with the statewide CIRCLE network to apply the SEED model of multicultural community empowerment to newcomer and marginalized populations, especially those living in the eastern portion of the state near Lowell and Boston. This process of replicability will also be aided by the creation of new collaborative efforts, (or the strengthening of existing ones), for example, with the Coalition for Asian-Pacific-American Youth and the New World Theater group. This replication process will be facilitated by the use of the training model developed by the interethnic youth group and documented in their training manuals.

With respect to the identification of indicators that the SEED program can be adapted elsewhere and within other ethnic-minority or at-risk groups, it does appear that there is potential for this to occur. During the year, the project made great strides in expanding its efforts into local Hispanic- and African-American communities. Youth groups from each of these communities were involved in the project and have made plans to initiate community development initiatives with the assistance of program grants. The SEED approach to encouraging community self-analysis of community issues is one that members of the African-American and Hispanic-American communities greatly appreciate. Likewise, there is a great interest in expanding this program through contacts at the UMass campuses in Boston and Lowell.

Conclusions

(ADD MATERIAL HERE)

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