Community Engagement Through Muraling: Historically Underrepresented First-Year Composition Students and Sonoma State’s Core Values

~ Funded by the Koret Scholar Award ~

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This 2020-2021 Koret Scholar Award is currently supporting two research activities that are in conversation with one another (one scholarly, one creative) centered around the success of community engagement work in the first-year writing classroom.

The first activity involves an analysis of past and current community projects, driven and designed by students, that supported their learning outcomes.

The second activity is a creative expression of the themes of those projects via a community partnership with Soco Monarch Project and Petaluma Bounty, who we have collaborated with on creating a mural. We believe this mural is a broad, inclusive representation of the positive social and community impact students are making early on in their undergraduate careers, as well as an abstract embodiment of the many of the values that our communities share.

“...convening people from diverse sectors and experiences, [to] design innovative programming that responds to the need of our community and works toward our common vision.” - Petaluma Bounty Mission Statement”
We intended for the award to support the research and quantification of the positive social and community impact students are making so early on in their undergraduate careers and how this influences their attitudes, professional goals and embodiment of SSU’s Core Values in the future.

**CORE VALUES**

Our core values are an expression of who we are at Sonoma State. We proudly embrace integrity, respect, excellence, and responsibility as part of our Seawolf Commitment. Our core values include:

1. Diversity and social justice
2. Sustainability and environmental inquiry
3. Connectivity and community engagement
4. Adaptability and responsiveness
Hindsight: analysis of past and current community projects via student reflection essays

Student Understanding: Understand how this academic discipline can serve the needs or address the issues of the community/nation/world
96 responses

- Basic: Students understand service-learning but are unable to articulate discipline specific connections (25%)
- Intermediate: Students demonstrate awareness of how discipline-based knowledge can impact social needs/issues (27.1%)
- Advanced: Students analyze and evaluate how disciplinary expertise can impact the social needs/issues (47.9%)

- Almost 50% of the researched population were found to have an intermediate understanding of how academic discipline can address issues of the community.

Diversity: Appreciate cultural and community diversity
96 responses

- Basic: Students recognize their own cultural and/or community values and assumptions and see them as distinct from others; exhibit little curiosity about what can be learned from others (15.6%)
- Intermediate: Students reflect on how their own cultural and/or community values are different from others; exhibit curiosity about what can be learned from others (35.4%)
- Advanced: Students acknowledge the positive impact of multiple cultural and/or community perspectives on themself (49%)

- Though we expected a higher amount of students to gain from the diversity aspect of the Service Learning Projects, this teaches us what we can emphasize in future projects.
Results showed that students articulated varying degrees of their civic responsibility in their respective service learning project. There was a slight trend towards advanced understanding that was articulated.

Results found that a slight majority of students articulated an advanced understanding of communication and collaboration with their respective communities.
Students who participated in service-learning projects during their freshman year were surveyed. This is our preliminary data and we plan to continue pursuit of this survey. Results found that the mass majority of students would engage in another similar project.

**Current Survey Results:**

- **Would you participate in a cross-listed service-learning course again?**
  - 23 responses
  - Pie chart showing:
    - 78.3%: Yes I have already.
    - 17.4%: Yes, I would.
    - 4.2%: No, I would not.

- **On a scale of 1 to 5, did service-learning help prepare you for your educational journey?**
  - 23 responses
  - Bar chart showing:
    - 1 (0%): 0 responses
    - 2 (4.3%): 1 response
    - 3 (26.1%): 6 responses
    - 4 (43.5%): 10 responses
    - 5 (26.1%): 6 responses

A majority of the students polled stated that on a scale of 4-5 out of 5, that service learning helped to prepare them for their subsequent educational journey. This confirms our Mission Statement that service learning, early on, is beneficial towards a student’s educational career.
How has participating in service-learning affected your college experience? Please select all that apply to you.

- It helped me meet people and make friends.
- It helped me better understand the learning objectives of my class.
- I got to know about my region.
- I learned about a marginalized community or demographic.
- I helped address the needs of a community.
Which of these Sonoma State Core Values were reflected best in your service-learning experience? Please check all that apply.

23 responses

- Diversity and Social Justice: 7 (30.4%)
- Sustainability & Environmental Inquiry: 8 (34.8%)
- Connectivity & Community Engagement: 20 (87%)
- Adaptability & Responsiveness: 9 (39.1%)

Which option best describes your ethnicity or race? Please check all that apply to you.

23 responses

- I am Black or African American: 3 (13%)
- I am Latinx or Hispanic: 14 (60.9%)
- I am Native American or Indigenous: 0 (0%)
- I am White: 9 (39.1%)
- I am Pacific Islander: 2 (8.7%)
- I am Asian: 0 (0%)
- I prefer not to say: 0 (0%)
Allow us to explain a little about our Mural and community partners:

Mural Development:

Rima and SoCo Monarch Project:

- Our team of students collaborated with Rima Makaryan, who is an experienced, well-known local mural artist and founder of Socoimm.org. to help us visualize this mural. The goal was for an all encompassing depiction of the students who participated in such projects. As an artist, Rima is known for portraying inclusivity with figures possessing collective swatches of different shades of skin. Additionally, the monarch is an important expression of dignity and resilience and an especially applicable repetitive theme in Rima’s work. She seemed like the perfect fit as a community partner for our endeavor. Who better to help us elucidate this visual concept than a well-known muralist, who specializes in beautiful depictions of our community?

Mural Home:

Petaluma Bounty

- As for the location that pays homage to our mural, we partnered with a previous community partner with whom some of our early English composition classes had worked with. Petaluma Bounty, is a local community farm whose goal is to help end the food disparity in the greater Petaluma area with locally grown organic produce and promoting community self sufficiency. They stride to increase the low-income consumers purchasing power. After a long journey of looking for a home, we were ecstatic to put it in a place whose mission statement aligns almost precisely with very our own.
Technical Stuff:

- Our fully-funded, thoughtfully researched budget covers all the costs, materials, supplies and meets professional standards and considerations for all exterior murals, including enduring outside elements, maintenance-free etc. The mural will be roughly 10’ X 20’ and mounted on Shasta 64 Building at the farm.

- Much of this project is possible because of generous local community donations, local volunteering and love (acknowledge petaluma bounty John...)

- All four scholars, myself and Rima participated in the installation and painting of the mural. However, as is the goal and spirit of all community-engagement work, we invite our local community members (that are comfortable and interested) to participate in the painting process in a Covid-conscious.
Here, we partnered with artist Rima Makaryan to bring our vision to life on paper.
RECIPROCITY MURAL
(in progress)
RECIPROCITY
The remaining slides are prior community-based projects that are informing our work in different ways.

Portions of these slides were used in a prior presentation at the ARC conference about Service-Learning Projects in my First-Year Composition Classes.

Thank you.
“Through their community service, students become active learners, bringing skills and information from community work and integrating them with the theory and curriculum of the classroom to produce new knowledge. At the same time, student’s classroom learning informs their service in the community”.

-Tania D Mitchell (Stanford)
Montgomery High School artist wants people to see beauty in immigration

Emily Hostutler, left, an instructor from Sonoma State University and one of her students Paola Islas, right, who is also a DACA recipient, volunteer their time assisting Rima Makaryan, center, with painting butterflies for Makaryan's Dreamer Mural at Montgomery High School in Santa Rosa, California, on Saturday, March 30, 2019. (Alvin Jornada / The Press Democrat)
Emergency Response to Food Insecurity During 2017 Fires ~ Petaluma Bounty
Donation Management During 2017 Fires
St. Vincent de Paul
Inaugural Letter Writing Partnership ~ Village Elementary

Dear [Name],

You are such an inspiration! I would love to follow your footsteps and be more like you! You seem very confident, but not arrogant. I admire that type of personality. I am very excited to meet you! I don’t know why I started that because when you read this letter, I will be standing next to you! I hope you don’t find this uncomfortable, but my dad has very, very high expectations for me, so I have a lot of knowledge. I keep a notebook with me at all times and write anything interesting down at all times! I’m getting another brand new one for this “special” occasion. You wouldn’t say I’m a nerd, but I am smart and my friends admire that.

Now I told you where I’m from, so what are you?? Have you ever read a book on the history of authors? I did when I was about seven. What is your favorite type of hair style? I can do many to my hair (its curly). Honestly, I don’t know what to write about because I can just tell you everything and ask you everything when I meet you. It’s weird to think that by the time you are reading this letter I will be standing beside you. What would we talk about. I think it might be harder for us to start a conversation in person than basically talking to a computer; even though eventually you will receive what I decide to write to you! Is it ever difficult for you to figure out what to write to Maddie and I?

My new words of the day are subdermatog and cranioschisis. They are big words but since I have decided to take on reading the advanced dictionary, (a little more than occasionally) I pick up new words! Do you have any words of the day that you create? Moving on, what is your favorite type of sweet treat (besides ice cream LOL) Mine is probably anything fudge related! Yum. It is delicious if you don’t like really chocolatey flavors, its cool, but I think it’s a burst of one of the best flavors ever. Pistachios are nice as well. Out of nowhere, (for some reason just have to mention this) I like the word smooth, but the word Tasty I just can’t stand. Tasty!

[Signature]

[Your Name]
Writing Partners

With this new paradigm [where service-learning is integral to the mission and practice of higher education]...we would see students not as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge but as active learners who build meaning through context. We would see the campus not as an ivory tower, but as a socially engaged institution. We would see community service not as charity, but as a reciprocal process with reciprocal benefits. We would see teaching and research not only as the domain of faculty, but also as the work of students and community partners...we would see education not as a value-free venture, but as a directional process cultivating public virtues and meeting public needs.

-- Goodwin Liu, Service-Learning Educator
Student meet partners after a year of written correspondence and show them what life at SSU is like.
Over 100 Paired Students ~
600 Letters Written!
CCE, Shadow Day, Discovery Day, Museum & Library Explorations and Other Collaborations that Informed the Other Projects
Broader Benefits/Intersections

- Enhanced Freshman Year Experience & Academic Rigor and Culturally Responsive Teaching for Historically Underrepresented Student Populations
- Potential for Cross-Discipline, Cross-Course and Other University Collaborations
- Adjunct/Lecturer Agency, Visibility, Recognition
- Embodied SSU Core Values
University Support Materials:

- Center for Community Engagement at Sonoma State University
- Michigan Journal of Community Service of Learning – Service-Learning Course Design Workbook-Jeffrey Howard
- Writing Partners Program Created by Write to Succeed -- available on the Sacramento State Service-Learning website
- Sonoma State University Mission Statement


