

Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse: An Academic Service-Learning Project
by Shereen Siddiqui, Florida Atlantic University

Students enrolled in “Feminist Perspectives on Gender,” an upper-level, introductory course, are exposed to the major topics in the discipline of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Among the various topics covered in the course are feminist theoretical perspectives, sex/gender differences, identities and social location, sexuality and personal relationships, women’s health, violence against women, women and the environment, popular culture and the media. According to the syllabus, “The goal of this course is to provide students with a broad overview of how the construction of gender and sexuality impacts representations of the feminine and the lives of women in western culture. Through the study and analysis of the course topics, students will gain insight into the ways in which paradigms of gender are defined and work to shape cultural mores, ideologies and discourses on both the theoretical and practical levels. They will also gain an understanding of feminism, both historically and currently, and will develop skills to assess the need for continued feminist activism in western culture and elsewhere.” Keeping the course themes and objectives in mind, as well as the circumstances and interests of the students enrolled, an action-oriented pedagogical project was designed.

Contact was made with a few prospective agencies in the community to find a good match. A representative from a local domestic violence agency was very enthusiastic about establishing a partnership with the university and designing a project that would benefit the students and the agency. The design of the project began as a brainstorming session between instructor and community partner over lunch and was hammered out over subsequent email communiqués. The criteria were: class participants would spend a minimum of ten hours over the course of the semester on an academic service-learning project; the project would address a need in the community; involve a connection between the campus and the world around it;

challenge students to be civically engaged; and involve structured student reflection. The outcome was a true collaboration between the instructor, the agency, and the students.

The community partner for this project, Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA), is a Certified Domestic Violence Center providing Palm Beach County with emergency shelter, a 24-hour hotline, support services for victims of domestic abuse, and prevention and education programs for the community. Academic service-learning is a mutually beneficial relationship between students and the community partner. An agency such as AVDA that serves so many communities within a large county has a long list of needs. The agency and the instructor had to determine which of those needs could realistically be met by college students over the course of one semester, while aligning with course content and fulfilling course objectives. It was determined that students could assist with educational programming by reaching parts of the community that AVDA had not been able to reach due to limited contacts in those areas or because of staffing limitations. Because AVDA depends on grants, if students collected data about their presentations, AVDA could count these numbers toward maintaining grant funding.

One month into the semester, after students had studied the foundations of women's studies, including feminist theories and methods, and discussed violence against women, AVDA met with the class for a three-hour training to teach the students to become violence prevention educators. In this "train the trainer" approach, students participated in a typical presentation given to youth groups and were then provided a template curriculum to use for their own presentations. The curriculum included a template PowerPoint presentation, links to videos, and suggested ice breakers and other activities. They were then asked to find a group in their own community, tailor the curriculum for that group, and organize and deliver a three-hour presentation for the group.

The requirements for the project included a minimum of ten hours spent on service, including training (three hours), preparation (four hours), and the actual presentation in the community (three hours). The ten-hour minimum requirement gave students enough hours to qualify for an academic service-learning designation on their official academic transcripts. In organizing their violence prevention events, students were given the option to work alone or with others in the class. The first tasks were for them to find a group in their community that could benefit from and would be willing to listen to a violence prevention presentation and then find a location for the presentation. They were encouraged to design flyers, create Facebook invitations, or send targeted emails to publicize their events. Once their audience and location were determined, the students had to figure out the best way to present the material to their group. Students were encouraged to seek assistance from the agency and the instructor in obtaining additional resources if necessary.

Not included in the ten hours were the reflection components of the assignment, which included an online time log, participation in class discussions, and a 4-5 page final reflective/critical paper that connected their activities to the course objectives, texts, and subject matter. They were also asked to reflect on what they learned from the process and how the project affected them, as well as how they believe the project contributed to their communities. At the end of the paper, students were required to give themselves a letter grade on the project with rationale. They were also required to show documentation, or “proof,” of their work through artifacts such as photographs, testimonials from participants, and their tailored PowerPoint presentations. Finally, the students were asked to submit the data from their presentations to AVDA by a specific deadline for statistical entry into a live system. The data

included the date of presentation, length of presentation, number of youth, number of adults, location of presentation (facility name), city of presentation, and county of presentation.

There were three major concerns students had when presented with the assignment: 1) finding time to complete the project on top of other school, work, and family obligations; 2) finding a group and location to give their presentations; and 3) not feeling qualified to educate others about violence prevention. Concerns were addressed as a group during class discussions, and in some cases, private meetings and correspondence with individual students.

Once students realized the flexibility of the assignment—that they could use established contacts, such as friends and peers, as an audience, and that they could personalize the presentation and make it their own—they became less intimidated and more excited. Many of them spent over the required amount of preparation time, doing further research to educate themselves and seeking new resources to augment their presentations. Two students teamed up to give a presentation; the rest did them alone. In their reflection papers, students made clear connections between the course material and the project. Many of them wrote about feeling empowered and like they had made a difference. The sense of accomplishment was obvious. For a few students, it was truly a life-changing experience. Several expressed that as a result of the project, they were changing their majors or careers. One student in particular found her calling when she gave her presentation and ended up getting a full-time job with AVDA when she graduated at the end of the semester.

The community impact was also substantial. In total, there were 20 presentations. Students spent 57 hours of time in the community and reached 197 people (124 youth and 73 adults) throughout three counties. The agency was able to use the data for their grant and would like to replicate the project.

Academic Service-Learning Project Guidelines
Shereen Siddiqui, Instructor
WST 3315

Academic Service Learning Project (30%)

Class participants will spend a minimum of 10 hours over the course of the semester on an academic service-learning project. This activity will address a need in our community, involve a connection between the campus and the world around it, challenge students to be civically engaged, and involve structured student reflection. The project will support our course objectives:

The goal of this course is to provide students with a broad overview of how the construction of gender and sexuality impacts representations of the feminine and the lives of women in western culture. Through the study and analysis of the course topics, students will gain insight into the ways in which paradigms of gender are defined and work to shape cultural mores, ideologies and discourses on both the theoretical and practical levels. They will also gain an understanding of feminism, both historically and currently, and will develop skills to assess the need for continued feminist activism in western culture and elsewhere.

You will spend time reflecting on your service-learning experience through class discussions and a final reflective/critical essay. While there is a 10-hour minimum for service to pass the course, your service-learning efforts will be the core of much of the learning in this course. Therefore your grade for service-learning will come from the tangible class-related assignment (i.e. the paper) that comes out of it, rather than simply from completion of the hour minimum.

Our community partner for this project is Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA), a Certified Domestic Violence Center providing Palm Beach County with emergency shelter, a 24-hour hotline, support services for victims of domestic abuse, and prevention and education programs for the community. AVDA will train you to become a violence prevention educator and give you the curriculum you will use for your presentation. You will then organize and deliver a three-hour presentation for a group in your community. Because academic service-learning is a mutually beneficial relationship between students and the community partner, we will assist AVDA by collecting statistics about your presentations. This will help AVDA meet its requirements to maintain grant funding.

Academic Service-Learning Requirement includes:

- Minimum of 10 hours spent on service. Breakdown as follows:
 - Training (3 hours)
 - Preparation (4 hours)
 - Community Presentation (3 hours)
- Reflection on your service through:
 - a time log (SweatMonkey.com);
 - a 4-5 page final reflection paper that connects your activities to course material and objectives;
 - participation in class discussions
- Documentation or “proof” of your work (e.g. photographs, testimonials from participants, your tailored PowerPoint presentation, etc.)

A Step-by-Step Guide to Completing the ASL Project

Step 1: What is Academic Service-Learning? Read the presentation at the following link:

http://www.fau.edu/volunteer/files/ASL%20Presentation_WEB%20Student%20Version%20Spring%202012_Rev%202-28-12.pdf

Step 2: Take the Pre-Assessment Survey

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Pre_Assessment_ASL

Step 3: Print the Waiver, fill it out and sign it, and give it to your instructor in class March 26.

http://www.fau.edu/volunteer/files/Academic_S-L_Waiver_2010.pdf

Step 4: Register for SweatMonkey to track your service-learning hours. Do this by March 26. But first, read the instructions below. The “join code” for our class is **676854230**

<http://www.fau.edu/volunteer/files/Quick%20Guide%20Student%20ASL%20WCCES%20Instructor.pdf>

<http://www.sweatmonkey.org/>

Step 5: Begin logging your hours on SweatMonkey. (Your first entry will be for the training on March 19, 2012.) **Important note: All hours must be logged by April 23, 2012**, in order for you to receive credit on your transcript.

Step 6: Organize your violence prevention event. You may work alone or with others in the class. Find a group in your community that could benefit from and would be willing to listen to a violence prevention presentation. Find a location for the presentation. Consider designing a flyer, creating a Facebook invitation, or sending a targeted email to publicize your event.

Step 7: Give your presentation. Collect statistics for AVDA.

Step 8: Email statistics to Jennifer Rey at AVDA and copy Shereen on message.

Email Jennifer Rey at jrey@avda-fl.com

cc: Shereen at siddiqui@fau.edu

Date of presentation

Length of presentation

Number of youth

Number of adults (do not include yourself)

Location of Presentation (Facility name)

City of Presentation

County of Presentation, if outside of Palm Beach

(IMPORTANT: Information needed in the same month presentation is provided for statistical entry into live system.)

Step 8: Write your reflection paper. (Guidelines on next page.)

Step 9: Take the Post-Assessment Survey

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Post_Assessment_ASL

WST 3315 Academic Service-Learning Project Reflection

Critical reflection on experience is an important component of intellectual growth. Take notes as you go on your participation in the academic service-learning project. When the project is complete, write a reflection paper.

Your paper should include:

- **Project Summary**
 - A discussion of your community agency, Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse. Visit their website to familiarize yourself: <http://www.avdaonline.org/>
 - Goals (what you hoped to accomplish or establish a foundation for in the future)
 - What your project entailed
 - The process itself (activities, pitfalls, successes)
- **Connection and Reflection**
 - A discussion of how your work connects to course objectives, discussions, texts, and subject matter
 - A discussion of what you learned from the process and how the project affected you.
 - A discussion of how you think it contributed to the public good.
- **Letter Grade.** Grade yourself and explain the grade based on the following criteria:
 - How much effort you put in
 - How much you learned
 - How meaningful the act may be or become for others
- **Proof**
 - Include documentation to demonstrate the work you completed (e.g. pictures, participant testimonials, PowerPoint presentation, etc.).

Further details:

- Your paper must be well-developed and well-organized, and you should observe the conventions of correct writing (i.e. complete sentences, spell checking, and proofreading, etc.), since these details reflect an author's commitment to and respect for good scholarship. Preparation details can affect your grade.
- The purpose of this paper is to articulate your experience(s) and the actual **process of and reflection on** your actions, which is probably varied and involves ups, downs, barriers, and successes. Discuss the project process as such, including original plans, changes of plans, and other related issues.
- Offer a clear description of what your project consisted of: purpose, activity or activities, outcome(s), and the role of your project in the future. Do you plan to continue working with/on the issue(s) in the future? In what capacity?
- Keep anything you acquire as a result of your service-learning and attach it to your paper. Take pictures if you can—it's a great way to document your activities

- ****Perhaps the most important part of this paper is reflection and connection to course content—what did you learn from your experience? How do you think you and/or others benefited from your service? How did your service connect to the objectives of the class? Be specific.**
- ****You *must* explicitly link your academic service-learning experiences/work to course content, especially course objectives. You may also wish to draw from specific texts, quotes, passages, and reading assignments. You should develop these connections and spend some time making them clear.**

Tips for Good Reflection Papers:

PROOFREAD YOUR PAPER. Mistakes in grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation result in a paper that is difficult to read and understand. These deficiencies in clarity result in lower marks. At a university level, the confusion of they're, their, and there is unacceptable, as are other clumsy typos. Do yourself a favor, and read over your paper before asking me to do so. Any reviews with five or more grammatical, spelling, or typographical errors will be returned to be redone. If writing is not your strongest subject, consider making an appointment with a consultant at the University Center for Excellence in Writing: <http://www.fau.edu/UCEW/>

ASK FOR HELP - from me or your classmates. I am happy to discuss your reflection paper with you outside of class. Don't hesitate to drop me an e-mail or schedule a meeting if you're not sure where to begin. Also, talk about the assignment with your friends, family, and classmates. Often, useful discussions result in a much better reflection paper, so don't be afraid to have these.

Paper Specifications

- 4 pages (not including the “proof” materials)
- double-spaced
- 1-inch margins all around
- size 12 font, Times New Roman
- Number all pages
- Name, Course # should be single-spaced at top left of first page.
- Submit on-line through Blackboard
- **Due April 23, 2012**