

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY PILOT MODULES**

The Community and Cultural Competency modules were conceived as a way to encourage IC faculty to engage their classes more collaboratively with community leaders and projects. The trainings orient students to the overarching issues and the rich diversity of our local community and prepare them to interact respectfully with limited-income residents and residents of color.

The specific goals of the pilot module were to:

- Afford students a direct experience of community organizations, leaders and residents that helps break down stereotypes and attitudes that inhibit respectful and effective engagement;
- Highlight the multiple challenges faced by residents who often experience themselves as marginalized, side by side with the social and cultural assets of these same residents;
- Introduce the rich community resources present in the organizations and neighborhoods in which students perform their project work;
- Facilitate partnership building and community competency work for professors—whose work life makes it hard to develop and maintain intentional relationships in the community;
- Move community engagement work away from the “service learning” model (which perpetuates the idea of community as recipient in an unequal relationship) towards a “community-based learning” approach that focuses on educational partnerships involving mutual and long-term community-campus goal setting and capacity-building.

In 2010, a small grant from PSE (Partnership for Sustainability Education—now the “Committed to Change Committee”) made it possible to convene regular meetings of IC faculty members with community leaders and trainers to develop “modules” that could be inserted into courses early in the semester to intensively orient students to local residents and leaders, and to relevant issues and skills, thus preparing them for community-based projects that were built into subsequent coursework.

Two IC adjunct faculty members, Elan Shapiro and Karryn Olson-Ramanujan, coordinated the process. Judith Pena-Shaff, Amy Frith, Judy Gonyea, and Elan Shapiro participated on the planning team and incorporated the modules into their four fall 2011 courses. Laura Branca, Jemila Sequiera, Kirtrina Baxter, and Neisha Butler—community leaders and trainers—were equal collaborators in the process and were paid for their time as consultants. Early in the planning, we decided to include the faculty in the module trainings, as they experience many of the same cultural and social divides as the students, and they would also be better positioned to follow up on the training this way.

The module curriculum included an introduction to the dynamics and demographics of the community, the downtown neighborhoods, and to the community organizations with which students would be working throughout the semester during their coursework. In addition, the trainings introduced students in very personal and experiential ways to race and class issues in the United States and in Ithaca. This was facilitated by

- preparatory readings,
- hearing personal accounts from a variety of residents of different socio-economic backgrounds,
- presentations by community trainers
- experiential exercises, writing, and journal assignments,
- a choice between attending either a screening and discussion of the film, “Color of Fear,” or participating in one of two resident-led downtown field trips,
- developing direct connections with the community trainers and educators.

The ensuing course-related project work was a mix of group projects to support organizational capacity and/or to provide services (such as functioning as staff in after school programs).

The training of 40 students and 4 faculty members from 4 courses were carried out in downtown locations over two weekends in early February 2011. This intense work was challenging for students, yet also very well received. It became clear that students need even more time than we had allotted during and after the trainings to process these complex issues and the associated difficult emotions. The trainers also felt that more time was needed to cover the curriculum. This feedback led to ideas about other options—such as an intensive one-credit weekend unit format for the modules. We will explore this option in our future work.

During and after the modules, we gathered both quantitative and qualitative feedback from students, faculty, and the community-based project guides who worked with students. From this information, it was clear that the students made major strides in their learning. In addition, they were perceived by the project guides they worked with throughout the semester as substantially more effective in their community work and in their cultural competency than students who did not do the training or its equivalent.

All involved felt that the modules were very valuable for effective community work. At the same time, the feedback outlined important ways in which the trainings can be strengthened. It is clear that another round of module refinement and assessment would greatly advance this work.

To move this work forward, our team applied for and was issued a Park Foundation grant in September of 2011. The grant dedicates \$12,000 to support the development of selected community organizations involved in the modules to develop their capacity as effective educational partners with Ithaca College. The Park Grant funds:

- trainings for project guides to improve their skills as educators and facilitators,
- development of materials that thoroughly orient faculty and student volunteers to the organization,
- drafting of partnership standards along with IC faculty and accompanying agreement forms to be negotiated and co-signed by faculty and students,
- time for collaborators to substantially revise the Community and Cultural Competency modules,
- staff time needed for mentoring student project teams and assessing outcomes.

For the Park Grant to be disbursed, our team must first secure matching funds from Ithaca College to support the IC-based work performed by faculty coordinators:

- guiding a new round of faculty interested in using the modules through the steps and options involved in designing coursework that is more community-based,
- collaborating with IC faculty and community leaders to revise the cultural competency modules, and to develop trainings that build the capacity of project guides as educators and facilitators.

The IC match would also pay for the trainers for the second round of the community competency modules, which we hope can be schedule for the spring of 2014, once matching funds are secured.

The Community and Cultural Competency Modules are a valuable resource for IC's 20/20 Plan for integrative learning and excellence, as they already have a proven track record of meeting the plan's Diversity and Civic Engagement requirements. Moreover, the networks and relationships cultivated while working on the trainings have built the foundations of long-term, robust community-campus relationships. We trust that Ithaca College will capitalize on this investment by providing funding to grow this pilot of the modules into a replicable set of valuable trainings that can be open to all students.