

Re: Food Dignity student learning objectives summary 2012-2013- Amy Frith:

Drs. Lapp and Swords and I developed an approach to engage IC students with the community in an intentional manner to assist community members in their work and to increase student awareness of the structural injustices that prevent people to obtain food in a dignified manner. We envisioned this as a series of steps that engaged students and community members progressively more closely through time. A larger number of students will become exposed to the concept of structural injustices and organizations that address the injustices that lead to food injustices in the community; then a smaller group of students engage with the community on a personal basis in small projects or learning experiences; and finally, an even smaller group would work with community organizations closely, and then become leaders among students.

Under this process, in the fall of 2012, 30 sophomore-level Human Nutrition students were asked to write what they thought contributed to hunger and what food dignity meant (pretest). They were then assigned readings that highlighted the structural barriers and opportunities to overcome those barriers to food justice. Two community leaders came to class to explain to the students about the reasons why there was going to be a 2nd Ithaca Food Justice Summit walk and event. Students then walked in the 2nd Ithaca Food Justice Summit walk, and afterwards students reflected in writing and in class discussions regarding the meaning of, and barriers to food dignity in Tompkins County. Some of the most prevalent themes regarding the reasons for hunger and the meaning of food justice are listed below.

Objective: to understand if in a sophomore level nutrition course, students would gain a deeper understanding of the causes of hunger in the US and an understanding of justice as it relates to food.

Factors for hunger		Justice around food	
Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Poverty	Location	Equal	Healthy
Money	Distribution	Access	Everyone
Access	Education	Fair	People
Price of food -expensive	Availability	Well-rounded	Access
Distribution	Money	Help	Justice
Economy	Economy	Opportunity	Affordable
Education	Status		
Unequal	SES		

One shift in student perception after the readings and engagement with the community event was that hunger is not just caused by having too little money, but that there are larger forces that keep some from access to food, including a new acknowledgement of social status as a barrier. In addition, students began to think in terms of quality of food being important in terms of food dignity.

Twenty Life Cycle Nutrition students were more closely engaged in the 2nd Ithaca Food Justice Summit by working with community members as volunteers. We wove what students learned into class discussions and exams when discussing vulnerable groups for malnutrition.

Another project that has involved students becoming more engaged with the community is the building of a website that will facilitate collaboration among community organizations, community members, and IC faculty. Six community nutrition students began gathering information about community organization needs and IC faculty courses where students learn about food and gain specific skills that may be useful to organizations. Discussions are underway to design this networking, information-sharing website.

In addition, in Spring 2013, community members trained 20 junior and senior level Community Nutrition students to provide nutrition education and Hunger Scholar lessons to children from K-12. Five students went into 3 different community organizations and provided a series of lessons that focused on nutrition and the issues of hunger in our county. Five different students worked with the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program and the Healthy Dinners program that is part of Ithaca Community Harvest. From the beginning to end of the engagement, there was a trend for increased civic engagement self-efficacy. In addition, in an evaluation, ~80% of the students wrote that the community training was one of the activities that they learned the most from in the course. Besides simple cognitive learning, students were engaged in a deeper emotional level that can motivate them to continue working in the community. One student wrote, "After all is said and done I am ashamed to say that I was not more enthusiastic about this project from day 1. This has been by far the most moving project that I have done here at Ithaca College and I look forward to continuing it next year. "

Finally, from this work, 2 students have emerged as leaders. Both students were involved in awareness building activities in the Food Dignity project and have subsequently interned with CCE in the spring. These students have also facilitated the training of the Community Nutrition students on the nutrition education and Hunger Scholar training. One student is hoping to be an intern this summer for Food Dignity.

Some barriers to obtaining student learning outcomes mirror many of the institutional barriers that we face. As will be outlined by my colleagues, discussions are underway to break through some institutional barriers to engage students in the community. Some barriers that we have discussed are: 1) lack of cohesive curriculum that is in part due to lack of cohesive structure between course; 2) a potential administrative barrier to development of minor linked to job lines; 3) lack of recognition of time needed to engage with community organizations; 4) lack of funds to compensate community organizations for their time and expertise. Some resources we hold are: 1) a vibrant cadre of community members with expertise in community organizing, nutrition, economics, environmental sciences, building sustainable systems and more...; 2) a very enthused student body that desires to learn about food dignity; and 3) faculty expertise in community organizing, politics, writing, anthropology, environmental sciences, studies in sustainability, and nutrition that exists on campus. We are in discussions on how to overcome the barriers and also work in coordination with the program at Cornell to engage students and faculty with our colleagues working in community organizations and community members. The question remains on how to best accomplish this. Some examples of ongoing questions include: 1) How can train students so they are a "help, not a burden" to community members?; 2) How can we authentically understand community organization needs and their "real" experiences with the students—so that we can assist in making it better; 3) How can we set up a more structured learning experience for students to explore the many facets of food dignity?