

## UNIT 2: CULTURAL COMPETENCE

### COMPETENCIES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Create effective strategies for developing and maintaining culturally competent approaches and practices throughout the development and implementation of a service-learning course.
- Intentionally integrate cultural competence into all stages of service-learning course construction and delivery.
- Identify meaningful roles for faculty, students and community partners to promote culturally competent approaches and practices in the community and campus setting.

### HANDOUTS

- Memberships Exercise
- Case Study: Crossing the Color Lines of Service

### INTRODUCTION

High quality service-learning can contribute positively to students' academic, civic, and personal development (Butin, 2006; Saltmarsh, 2005; Eyer, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Zlotkowski, 1998). For example, beyond enhancing academic learning, scholars have shown that service-learning can increase students' cultural awareness (Gray, Ondaatje, and Zakaras, 1999), decrease racist beliefs (Myers-Lipton, 1996), and decrease students' stereotypes of poverty (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000). However, we cannot ignore the fact that service-learning also has the potential to do real harm. Service-learning can, in fact, reinforce notions of white privilege and perpetuate inequity (Mitchell, Donahue, & Young-Law, 2012). This unit provides information based on a review of the literature and other resources for you to apply in the development of culturally competent approaches in the construction and delivery of your service-learning course. ***This unit must not be considered an isolated or stand-alone unit. The meaningful practice of cultural competence must be incorporated at every level of the service-learning course planning and implementation process.***

The following recommendations and strategies are meant to improve or enhance the principles of cultural competence in community partnerships and service-learning courses and to inspire critical thinking, action and growth among faculty, students, and community partners. Several of the tips provided are adapted from the [National Center for Cultural Competence](#) website.

### WHAT IS CULTURAL COMPETENCE?

According to the National Center for Cultural Competence, cultural competence requires that organizations:

- have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally.
- have the capacity to (1) value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage the dynamics of difference, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge and (5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities they serve.
- incorporate the above in all aspects of policy making, administration, practice, service delivery and involve systematically consumers, key stakeholders and communities.

Cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skills along the cultural competence continuum. (adapted from Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Issacs, 1989).

### THE CULTURAL COMPETENCE CONTINUUM:

According to Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989), cultural competence is a developmental process that occurs along a six stage continuum. Those stages are:

1. **CULTURAL DESTRUCTIVENESS:** Attitudes, policies and practices within the organization are destructive to cultures and individual members of those cultures.
2. **CULTURAL INCAPACITY:** The organization does not intentionally seek to be destructive but rather lacks the capacity to help minority clients or communities.
3. **CULTURAL BLINDNESS:** The organization functions with the belief that color or culture makes no difference and that all people are the same.
4. **CULTURAL PRE-COMPETENCE:** The organization recognizes its weaknesses and attempts to improve some aspects of its services to a specific population.
5. **CULTURAL COMPETENCE:** The organization is characterized by acceptance and respect for differences, continuing self-assessment regarding culture, careful attention to the dynamics of differences, continuous expansion of cultural knowledge, and a variety of service models to meet the needs of minority clients.
6. **CULTURAL PROFICIENCY:** The organization seeks to develop a base of knowledge of culturally competent services by conducting research, developing new therapeutic approaches based on culture, publishing and dissemination information on cultural competence and hiring specialists in culturally competent practices

### DETERMINING CULTURAL COMPETENCE

In determining the stage of cultural competence, it is important to engage in meaningful assessment and intervention processes on each of the following levels: faculty, student, partnership, institutional, and community. The handout for this unit provides a snapshot of different activities that can be carried out at each of the levels described below.

#### At the faculty level:

As part of the overall strategy to design a service-learning course, it is important to understand effective ways of practicing cultural competence on a personal level. What can you, as an instructor, do to practice and integrate cultural competence in your own personal and professional life?

- Assess your own cultural competence. By completing a self-assessment of your own cultural competence, you will gain a greater awareness of your strengths and areas of improvement in this area. For example, your self-assessment might indicate that you are placed somewhere between cultural blindness and cultural pre-competence. You may want to identify ways of moving towards greater cultural proficiency.
- Provide and consistently enforce an inclusivity statement in your syllabus.
- Actively facilitate and monitor class discussion in a manner that honors diversity and inclusiveness. Explicitly challenge stereotypical assumptions students express in class or coursework about race, class, privilege, and Whiteness. Avoid spotlighting students of color in a predominantly White

classroom (e.g. putting a student in position in which they feel they must represent their race) or creating an environment that makes them feel racially invisible.

- Discuss and come to consensus with your students on the meaning of cultural competence.
- Incorporate texts, guest lectures, and assignments that encourage students to reflect on culture, diversity, and equity.
- Develop pre-service orientations for the course and activities that address culture, diversity and disparities.
- Discuss the roles that poverty and education play in the community.
- Provide and discuss in the course socio-demographic data, including the needs and assets of racially and ethnically diverse populations in the community.
- Assist students in learning about and incorporating culture into the assessment of and delivery of services to racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse groups.
- Incorporate themes related to culture, diversity and disparities in reflection activities with students.

### At the student level:

Through involvement in service-learning, students can gain the necessary skills and knowledge to be culturally competent by:

- Learning more about other cultures and understanding their values, beliefs and practices.
- Discussing the meaning of cultural competence.
- Discussing the roles that poverty and education play in the community and identify creative strategies for reducing poverty and increasing education through community service activities.
- Participating in required and extra-curricular courses to learn more about the needs of racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse groups in the community.
- Taking a proactive stance to learning more about being a culturally competent professional.
- Inviting speakers from different cultures and backgrounds to present to campus student groups focused on issues related to culture, diversity, and disparities.

### At the partnership level:

Members of a service-learning partnership must take an active approach towards better understanding ways in which the partnership or group practices cultural competence. Recommendations for a partnership level response include but are not limited to:

- **Identifying and developing plans to determine your level of cultural competence.** Members of a service-learning partnership may refer to the handout in this unit to assess level of cultural competence of each partner and the partnership as a whole. Findings from this assessment can foster action and growth for change.
- **Creating measures targeting the partnership's degree of proficiency in systematically incorporating culturally competent principles.** Might measures be developed that will assess the degree to which there is diverse representation of membership on the planning committee? Is there a policy for open communication and acceptance about issues related to race and ethnicity on the committee? How is that policy assessed? Partners may wish to identify their own measures for incorporating culturally competent principles into their service-learning efforts.

- **Identifying those structures that are in place to support cultural competence activities in the service-learning course.** In order to maintain and sustain cultural competence practices and proficiency, it will be important to identify meaningful structures and resources to support your efforts. For example, are there faculty members or community leaders with background in understanding cultural competence who could lend their expertise to the course planning? Is there a special interest group on the campus or in the community that might assist in improving the partnership's ability in practicing cultural competence? If so, how might they support your efforts?

### At the institutional level:

- **Examine the historical legacy of the relationship between the campus and its surrounding communities.** Gaining a historical perspective of the relationship between the campus and the surrounding communities will contribute to the current and future understanding of these relationships. Have there been instances of exploitation, mistrust and misunderstanding between the school and communities? If so, have the concerns been resolved and addressed? Have there been instances of success and positive contributions? If so, how have these successes and contributions been recognized and celebrated?
- **Discuss the meaning of cultural competence.** Invite partners, faculty, staff and students to discuss the meaning of cultural competence and the rationale behind designing practices and policies that drive the inclusion of cultural competence at all levels of the institution. Offer diversity awareness and sensitivity seminars to faculty and students on campus.
- **Discuss educational reform efforts that will promote the necessary skills and knowledge for culturally competent graduates.** What type of institutional response is necessary to promote educational reform efforts that shape culturally competent graduates? How might community-based or classroom based courses offer opportunity for skill and knowledge development in this area? Engaging partners, faculty, staff and students in discussions related to reform efforts will uncover potential strategies.
- **Identify and develop plans to determine the academic institution's level of cultural competence.** Campus leaders may complete a self-assessment and an organizational assessment to gain a greater understanding of the institution's response towards cultural competence. Campus leaders may consider incorporating the assessment process in meetings and retreats of faculty, staff and students.
- **Create measures of the academic institution's degree of proficiency in systematically incorporating culturally competent principles and practices at all levels of the institution.** Campus leaders may wish to create measures to ensure a high degree of proficiency in cultural competence among their faculty, staff and students. What does it mean for an institution to practice cultural competence at all levels? What are markers for success? The following ideas provide some direction towards ensuring that the institution is making systematic changes (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2015):
  - Increase recruitment and retention of culturally diverse faculty and students.
  - Develop ongoing professional development activities to support faculty and their acquisition of cultural knowledge, awareness and skills needed to inform their teaching practice.
  - Provide a vision and a commitment that will support the curriculum development committee in creating modifications to the curriculum to include the building of community capacity.

- Provide a vision and a commitment that will support the curriculum development committee in expanding teaching content related to cultural and linguistic competence.
  - Develop policies and procedures that support a teaching/practice model which incorporates culture in the delivery of services to racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse groups.
  - Host ongoing discussion groups on diversity awareness that is open to the campus and community.
  - Examine and address issues related to campus services and the presence of disparities within the campus community; and
  - Create a campus advisory board that gives special attention towards issues related to culture, diversity, disparities and cultural competence.
- **Understand the priority concerns of the surrounding community.** As a resource in the community it is important to determine what percentage of the population that resides in the geographic locale is affected by socioeconomic, educational, health and other disparities. Collaborate with community members, community-based organizations and informal networks of support to develop approaches to address these concerns.

### At the community level:

- Discuss and understand the meaning of cultural competence.
- Meet with campus leaders to discuss community interests and expectations related to the skills and knowledge of students and graduates that serve and work in the community.
- Meet with faculty, students and institutional leaders on campus to gain a better understanding of the institutional culture. This will provide a broader understanding of the academic environment.
- Engage with campus student groups and any offices of minority/diversity affairs; identify ways to advance diversity and cultural competence on campus.



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be “culturally competent”?
- What sources of support are needed to improve culturally competent practices and approaches in your service-learning course?
- What plans are in place to improve your personal response toward cultural competence? Also, what plans are in place for faculty, institutional, student, and community response towards cultural competence?

### CHECKLIST

The following tips are presented to promote critical thinking and action around the practice of cultural competence on a personal level. Users may wish to refer to the Handout for this Unit to ensure that progress has been made towards meeting the recommendations on a faculty, student, community, partnership and institutional level. On a personal level, have you:

- Taken a self-assessment of your own cultural competence?
- Learned more about the cultural groups represented in the particular community you are working with?

- Become informed about the “intra-cultural variability” issues in your community?
- Developed an understanding about the role of the family in decision making?
- Developed an understanding of the traditional spiritual practices in your community?
- Lived and worked in a culture that is different from your own?



## SUGGESTED WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

[Cultural Competence in a Multicultural World](#)  
[National Center for Cultural Competence](#)



## SUGGESTED TOOLS AND WORKBOOKS

[Association of American Medical Colleges Tool for Assessing Cultural Competence Training \(TACCT\)](#). This self-assessment tool is designed for medical schools to examine curricular components. Many aspects of the tool could be adapted for curriculum assessment outside of the medical field.

[The Community Tool Box: Enhancing Cultural Competence](#). This site provides a framework and supports for assessing and enhancing your personal cultural competence as well as that of your organization, working group, or community.

[BaFá BaFá](#). This simulation tool is designed to help participants understand the powerful effects that culture plays in every person’s life. It may be used to help participants prepare for living and working in another culture or to learn how to work with people from other departments, disciplines, genders, races, and ages.

[Quality and Culture Quiz](#). This 10-minute quiz located at the Providers Guide to Quality and Culture site provides individuals with an opportunity to assess their level of cultural competence.



## SUGGESTED READINGS

- Desmond, K. J., Stahl, S. A., & Graham, M. A. (2011). Combining service-learning and diversity education. *Making Connections*, 13(1), 24.
- Donahue, D., Mitchell, T., & Young-Law, C. (2012). Service-learning as a pedagogy of whiteness. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45(4), 612-629. doi:10.1080/10665684.2012.715534
- Hurtado, S. (2007). Linking Diversity with the Educational and Civic Missions of Higher Education. *The Review of Higher Education* 30(2), 185-196. The Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved July 7, 2015, from Project MUSE database.
- Mitchell, T. D. (2015). Using a critical service-learning approach to facilitate civic identity development. *Theory into Practice*, 54(1), 20-28. doi:10.1080/00405841.2015.977657
- Seider, S., Huguley, J. P., & Novick, S. (2013). College students, diversity, and community service-learning. *Teachers College Record*, 115(3), 1.

**HANDOUT: MEMBERSHIPS EXERCISE***Submitted by Binghamton University*

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this exercise is to help students gain greater insight into their own identity, how they perceive others, and how others may perceive them as outsiders going into a new community. Understanding how people perceive each other helps us to a) identify our preconceived notions, be they accurate or not, and b) know how preconceived notions about people may influence interactions, be they between students and instructors in the classroom or students and community members.

This activity is useful in preparing students for any community-engaged activity, such as service-learning, study abroad, or community-based research. It can be used to introduce a discussion on behavior expectations while in the field and facilitated again for post-trip reflection. This exercise is also useful in courses that address racism or stereotypes regardless of a field component.

**TIME:** 1-1.5 hours

**MATERIALS:** Students will need something to write on and will work with a partner. The room should be arranged to allow for discussion. Discussion questions should be displayed on the board or by PowerPoint.

**DIRECTIONS:** We will be going through an exercise that will help you take a look at your own perspective – your perspective of yourself and of others. I'm going to ask you to make a few lists. You will choose what you would like to keep private from this list and what you would like to share from your list. Be honest as this exercise is for you. Any questions before we begin?

**1.** List your memberships:

We all have memberships or groups we belong to. Make a list of the groups you belong to—try to list at least five. (If there is confusion, give some examples below but try not to so that students can identify memberships as they like).

Example: family, school, hometown, education, religion, sex, heritage, race, sports teams, fraternity/sorority

- 2.** When finished, have a few students share one or two of their memberships. If they are homogenous (all sports or sororities) then provide more examples from the list above to show variety.
- 3.** Now put this list aside. Find a partner and introduce yourself. Without asking questions, make a list of groups you think your partner is a part of. This list will be kept private, so be honest.
- 4.** Stay with your partner and return to your first list of groups which you identify. Take turns sharing your own memberships with your partner. Only say what you are comfortable with sharing. Partners: listen closely and compare what your partner tells you to the list you created about them. Switch roles.
- 5.** Display the questions one at a time, giving students time to write their responses (display on board or screen):
  - How did it feel to make a list about yourself?
  - How did it feel to make a list about your partner?
  - How did it feel to have someone list things about you?
  - When your partner shared his/her list, did anything surprise you?
  - Have students share some of their responses as a group. This is to illustrate how comfortable it can be to self-identify verses have someone make guesses about your identity. Since we have limited

information about each other, we may rely on our assumptions which are based on our own experiences and are subjective and incomplete.

### Follow-up questions:

- How many of your guesses about your partner were based on things visible/invisible? What assumptions did you make? Were there any memberships you thought your partner belonged to but were afraid to write down/ask about?

**Discuss:** personal experiences, friends, family, culture and media all influence our assumption about others. Did any of these things play a role in making your list about your partner?

**Have a few students share.** Discuss how some memberships are innate (race, sex, ethnicity, etc.) and some change over time (sports teams, affiliations, year in college, etc.). Some are visible and some invisible. Can you see that someone is a certain religion or belongs to a certain fraternity? Can you see what kind of education they have? This can segue into deeper discussion of race, class and gender.

**Describe for the class:** There is a difference between identity and image. Identity is things that make up who I am versus one's image is how others perceive me. In trying to understand a new person or culture, we create images based on limited information and make assumptions which are not always accurate. Discuss how people's assumptions are shaped by their own experiences. Think of how someone can see your image and make assumptions about your identity or values.

- Which memberships on your list about yourself are a part of your identity (what you see about yourself)? Which are a part of your image (what others see or you project about yourself)?
- What does the order of your list say about you? Are some memberships more important to you than others? How have they changed over time? How will my list look different five years from now?

### Additional follow-up questions:

- What are the things that shape our assumptions about others? What are some memberships others may assume we have when we are in a new community?
- What memberships do we all share? Human race, earthlings, made of star dust. While it is interesting to learn about the differences between cultures, don't lose sight of the similarities.

## FINAL CLASS DISCUSSION:

We will be serving as ambassadors while in the field/abroad. People will construct an image of who we are based on what they see or what they have heard about Americans, university students, young people, etc. What other groups might people assume you represent? What groups will you represent? What kind of ambassador will you be?

**Example answers:** Your family, hometown/state, America, the west, university

Conclude the activity by explicitly naming who we as a group and individuals will represent while in the community and why it is important to take this representation seriously. This can be followed by establishing codes of conduct with the students or name expectations for conduct as required by the course or university. Students should also have a clear idea of what consequences follow the inability to follow the code of conduct.

This is also a nice segue into information about the culture the students will be visiting. Present what we know about the culture, but when you meet people remember they will have additional memberships which may not be visible.



## CASE STUDIES



*The following case studies describe different projects aimed to improve student understanding of culture and cultural competence. The components described in these case studies may be adapted or modified for activities you may be considering with members of the partnership, academic institution and community.*

### [Crossing the Color Lines of Service Learning: How We Can Deepen Students' Understanding of Racial Identity and Inequality in a Juvenile Hall Community Service-Learning Project](#)

*Submitted by University of the Redlands*

Read Educate Attain Create Hope (REACH) is a volunteer community-service learning project that brings undergraduate students from a small liberal arts University into a juvenile hall in Southern California. REACH has two main parts. In the volunteer program, 25-30 students conduct weekly discussion and writing workshops in juvenile hall and publish student writings with a national magazine called The Beat Within. The course faculty also teach a course based on the “Inside Out” model that brings 15 college students together with 15 students in a juvenile court placement to look at whether there is a cradle to prison and cradle to college pipeline and what we might do about it.

The REACH program is located within the Race and Ethnic Studies (REST) Program at my University in order to encourage students to link their work in juvenile hall to academic coursework that explores the significance of race in their own lives and in American society. We aim to challenge the colorblindness that characterizes most volunteer programs in and out of college and to craft a model of social justice community service learning (Mitchell, 2010; Green, 2001). But only about half of our volunteers are REST majors or take a substantial number of courses that help them to reflect on their own racial identities or to explore racism, poverty or inequalities in childhood. We worried that for some privileged students, volunteering in juvenile hall might be a kind of volunteer tourism, a safe way for privileged students to develop their knowledge of black and Latino urban youth cultures, “urban” cultural knowledge that hip hop music and culture has defined as the epitome of cool.

#### **Problem:**

As college volunteers walk into prisons or juvenile justice facilities, they see one of the most visible pieces of evidence that we do not live in a post-racial society, but instead that race matters in shaping life chances. Youth of color are massively overrepresented in the juvenile justice system, just as adults are in the criminal justice system. The facility where we work is 47% Latino, 35% Black, and only 17% White. Latino youth are only slightly overrepresented in this facility as the county youth population is predominantly Mexican-American. However, in this county, like nationally, African Americans are massively overrepresented, as they are 4 times more likely to be detained than White youth (Haywood Burns Institute, 2015). Most private four-year colleges present a stark contrast. In the residential undergraduate college where I am on faculty, Black and Latino youth are significantly underrepresented, only 3% of students are African American, 22% are Hispanic, and 53% are White (personal communication).

Volunteers in a wide range of community service projects often see these kinds of stark racial and class contrasts, but they struggle to understand how exactly race matters in an ostensibly colorblind era, when racial boundaries are both more porous and flexible than in the Jim Crow era. The shifting nature, and ongoing significance, of these racial boundaries raises significant questions for all volunteers doing community service along the color lines that continue to divide America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

But volunteers do not interpret or experience crossing the color lines embodied in our prisons or other community service settings in the same way. Race, class, and gender shapes experiences of volunteering in distinctive ways, as does the degree to which volunteers have themselves engaged in studying or reflecting on race in America. As Mitchell and Donahue (2009) argue, there are significant differences in how White volunteers and volunteers of color understand their volunteer service. White volunteers usually see their work as a chance to learn from and to help young people radically different from themselves, while students of color often see their volunteer work as a chance to give back to their home communities or to reconnect to a shared racial identity.

The vibrant emerging literature on race in community service asks the important question of whether volunteer experiences are effective in challenging racial stereotypes and promoting a deeper awareness of racism and privilege (Dunlap et al., 2007; Caro et al., 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012). Some students respond to their growing awareness of racial and class inequalities by confronting their own privilege and preexisting stereotypes, while others retreat from the resulting discomfort or guilt and recommit themselves to dominant explanations for, and rationalizations of existing inequalities (Dunlap et. al 2007, Caro et. al 2009, ). In an important paper, Mitchell et. al. challenges service learning practitioners to acknowledge the way that they often implicitly rely on “a pedagogy of whiteness,” constructing courses to meet the needs of white students and reproducing color-blind discourses that leave our students with little understanding of the ways racism continues to oppress the communities in which we live and do “service” (Mitchell et. al 2012).

### Program Evaluation and Gaps in Student Learning

Inspired by this literature, we have developed an ongoing process of program evaluation and transformation in order to better understand and then deepen student learning about race, class and racial inequality through their volunteer experience. This evaluation builds on existing research that explores whether service learning programs challenge racial stereotypes, but also explores how volunteers develop their own racial identities through their volunteer experiences.

Our initial evaluation of student learning combined analysis of student reflections with 34 open-ended exit interviews conducted with a broad sample of volunteers over a two year period. In these reflections and interviews, we explicitly asked volunteers to think and talk about how race mattered in the context of their work in juvenile hall, and how their work in juvenile hall shaped their understandings of their own identities and the significance of race and class in America. Working in juvenile hall did indeed prompt substantial reflections on race, class and inequality among all volunteers. But our findings highlighted several important limitations in student learning, especially for students who had few explicit links between their volunteer experience and course of study:

- We found that many students struggled to think analytically about their experiences in juvenile hall. Had little experience developing analytic questions to make sense of their own experiences.
- Students identified many problems that faced kids in juvenile hall, but had few models or ideas of how to engage in social change efforts that might improve young people’s lives and change their trajectories. They often defined themselves as “apolitical” and couldn’t move beyond direct service models for helping individual youth. Helping individuals is what most community service learning projects teach our students to do, and even social justice community service models do not often provide hands-on engagement in campaigns aimed at changing public policies or structural barriers. Indeed when we work in schools or probation facilities, our ability to cultivate a broader vision for political action can also be constrained by our community partners who might be uncomfortable with engaging in political action.

- We also found substantial, but different needs among white volunteers and volunteers of color. Volunteering in prisons and juvenile corrections is an intense experience for all volunteers. They are often confronted with stories of deep personal suffering that emerge out of conditions of poverty, family dysfunction, and the failures of schools, courts, and social welfare systems to support young people and their families. But the emotional struggles volunteers faced took distinctive forms across racial, class and gendered lines.
  - White volunteers often felt hyper-conscious of their whiteness in juvenile hall, often for the first time, and struggled with how to understand the feelings of guilt and shame they felt as they became increasingly aware of their privileged childhoods. White volunteers sometimes struggled to move beyond their color-blind commitments or tried to camouflage their whiteness and their privilege as they tried to forge relationships with young people inside.
  - Volunteers of color often described the strange, and fundamentally disconcerting, experience of feeling more at home in juvenile hall than they did on their predominantly white college campus. Nonetheless, many women of color described going to juvenile hall as “the high point” of their week and valued embracing the culturally over-determined role of community caretaker, as they nurtured students in juvenile hall. In contrast men of color were to face in a much more personal way with the racialized stereotype of “the thug.” And for many their own experiences of being stereotyped as criminals made the experience of going into juvenile hall much more personally charged and exhausting.

### Program Revision

This on-going evaluation has led to substantial revisions in the volunteer program aimed to better help students integrate their service-learning into their existing course work and to deepen their learning about race, class and inequality in America.

We are currently developing a 2 credit a semester class which student will take alongside their volunteer work so they have the space and support to explore the range of emotional impacts and analytic questions volunteering in corrections raises. This course will provide a brief basic understanding of the structural forces and criminal justice practices that have produced significant racial disparities in America’s prison system. Without this knowledge, many more privileged volunteers rely on standard US cultural narratives for why people are poor or incarcerated. They focus insistently on the bad choices of individual kids or the terrible parents who have failed them. Their analyses reproduce common sense cultural, and implicitly racial, explanations for crime and violence in America. The intimacy of volunteering and mentoring can actually make this problem worse because getting to know individual kids in the system focuses volunteers’ attention on individual choices and often chaotic family lives (Tilton, 2013).

We will also cultivate explicit conversations about how race and class shape volunteers’ expectations and experiences coming into prisons and juvenile halls. Sometimes we will hold conversations in separate identity-based groups so that students have the space to reflect on their distinctive experiences of race. This could help build communities of support for volunteers of color, whose experiences confronting race inside and outside of juvenile hall can be exhausting and demoralizing. But this is also important for White volunteers, who are unused to, and often uncomfortable with, exploring their own racial identities and stereotypes. They may be able to more directly explore their own racial experiences and stereotypes among other White volunteers. This can also avoid putting volunteers of color in the uncomfortable position of having to confront the racial stereotypes of their White colleagues as this can intensify feelings of alienation many students of color experience on predominately White college campuses (Mitchell et al., 2012).

Finally, in the second semester, this course will encourage REACH volunteer to learn about existing community organizing and political efforts to reform the juvenile justice system and to create equal opportunity childhoods. I will ask students to monitor one statewide or national organization or campaign (such as the Children's Defense Fund, Haywood Burns Institute) so that they understand some of the concrete ideas and I hope these efforts will help students move beyond a vision of helping individual kids survive unjust social systems and towards a vision of working collectively to transform those systems.