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4-5-2012

Community University Project for Literacy (CUPL)

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Recommended Citation

Chandler-Rourke, Carol, "Community University Project for Literacy (CUPL)" (2012). *Office of Community Partnerships Posters*. 21.

https://scholarworks.umb.edu/ocp_posters/21

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Community University Project for Literacy (CUPL)

Adult Community Learning Centers, Adult Literacy and ESL Programs,
Community Schools, Public High Schools and Middle Schools,
Community Youth Centers, Harbor Point Community Programs

Summary/Abstract

The Community-University Project for Literacy (CUPL) provides an academic structure for undergraduates to work as tutors in community-based learning centers. Students who enroll in CUPL commit to tutoring four hours each week at a community learning program while attending a credit-bearing academic seminar at UMass/Boston offered each semester:
Language, Literacy and Community (Fall)
ESL Tutor Training Seminar (Spring)

"This class has been an experience I will never forget. It gave me the opportunity to try to do something I've wanted to do since I was seven years old. I always wanted to teach, but events in my life beyond my control have prevented me from following this dream of mine." CUPL Tutor

Goals and Objectives

CUPL recruits students of linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds to work with learners from diverse communities.

While meeting the needs of learners in community-based programs, CUPL provides a unique model for community leadership and diversity in community service.

Seminars provide the theoretical and practical foundations of tutoring and a forum for students to discuss their tutoring experiences, to problem-solve together and to examine second language and literacy acquisition theories, methods and materials.

Results/Impacts

For more than two decades, CUPL has worked closely with more than 20 community-based organizations and schools serving immigrant and refugee communities and has recruited, trained and placed hundreds of undergraduates from more than 30 countries as tutors.

By the end of their semester students:

- develop a more profound understanding of the meaning of learning and teaching and of themselves as learners and teachers.
- express an increased sense of confidence and self-esteem as language learners and in their ability to contribute to their communities.
- are encouraged to explore new academic and career options.

"When I first began the program, not being a native speaker of English, my reading, writing and conversation abilities were very limited. The program really helped me find my own voice. One thing that helped a lot was that the material used in the class was all relevant to my own life and the lives of my students. I overcame the fear of presenting myself. I have built a lot of self-confidence, and it was because of the program. If it wasn't for the program, I don't know what I would have done. You find yourself. I know what I'm about, what I can do, what I can't do. You learn your strengths and limitations." CUPL Tutor

Approaches and Methods

CUPL combines formal study in areas of adult education, first and second language acquisition and cross-cultural and community issues with the tutoring fieldwork.

As the majority of tutors are ESL students themselves, training is designed to encourage students to reflect on their own educational and language learning experiences and to apply this reflection to their practice.

Results/Impacts

CUPL tutors have assisted community learning centers to serve additional students and provide more small group and individualized instruction.

Teachers also report that tutors bring new ideas, materials and fresh perspectives to the centers/classrooms where they work.

Many UMass tutors continue their service as volunteers or professional staff after CUPL.

Tutors become role models for many adult students.
"The program has been important in helping adult education students into college - to make that transition. Students are able to ask the tutors, 'How does it feel to be a student, to have a job and family and be a student at the same time?'"
Teacher at CUPL Partner Site

Results/Impacts

"I believe (the tutor's) greatest value to our class was that she was a Chinese student who is just a few steps ahead of where my students hope to be next year or two. I could not have asked for a better tutor. She understood the students, spoke their language and knew about their problems in learning English and integrating themselves into the American society in general and American colleges in particular. She was a great role model for everyone in the English Transitional Program." Teacher at CUPL Partner Site

Partnerships and Contact Information

Sample Past and Present Placement Sites:

Asian American Civic Center, Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center, Brockton Adult Education Program, Centro Latino de Chelsea, Community Learning Center, Everett Literacy Program, Haitian-American Public Health Initiative, Haitian Multi-Service Center, Harbor Point, Immigrant Learning Center, Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers, New American Center, Watertown High School, Quincy Asian Resources, Vietnamese-American Civic Center

For more information, contact:
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