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4-2-2014

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Recommended Citation

Srikanth, Rajini and Penner, Louise, "International Epidemics: Interdisciplinary Thinking and Global Citizenship" (2014). *Office of Community Partnerships Posters*. 267.

https://scholarworks.umb.edu/ocp_posters/267

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International Epidemics: Interdisciplinary Thinking and Global Citizenship

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Summary

The Honors College aims to serve as a crucible for curricular innovation by enriching and deepening classroom study with on-the-ground learning. The symposium is a year-long course, with the winter session field trip giving students a two-week immersion in the details of HIV/AIDS health care delivery in one province of South Africa. Upon return, students volunteer at health centers or nonprofits exploring related topics, while continuing to study the complexity of South Africa's history and its attitudes and approaches toward HIV/AIDS at the medical, cultural, economic, and social levels.

Approaches and Methods

- 12 students are accepted into the year-long, three-part course
- Explore epidemics and their impact throughout history through multi- and inter-disciplinary teaching and learning (diversity of student majors and guest speakers)
- 2 week international field experience based in Cape town and Khayelitsha township, South Africa
- Service-learning model requires students to contribute 16 hours at local organizations as a way of serving the needs of our immediate environment
- Explore the Uses of Narrative, including issues of representation and exploring questions such as "Who controls the narrative out of which research questions are raised and answers sought?" and "What assumptions inform the ways that narrative is constructed?"
- Reflection activities used to deepen student learning, connect academic content with field experiences, and for assessment

Field Experience and Service

Goals:

- Learn about the history of epidemics and challenges in implementing public health initiatives.
- Understand the significance of the trip and the activities and experiences of South Africa
- Explain the relationship between local and global citizenship and develop lifelong commitment to civic engagement

In South Africa:

- Participate in three-day peer educator retreat with students from the University of Western Cape
- Meet members of Treatment Action Campaign, an organization that triggered the government to provide free antiretrovirals for all HIV+ citizens
- Visit Robben Island and District 6 to observe the legacy of apartheid

In the Boston-area:

- In Spring 2014, students are volunteering at Boston Living Center and Fenway Health.



At the HIV/AIDS Peer Educators' Retreat with UWC Students



Philani Child Health & Nutrition Project

Results/Impacts

- Year-long course has been offered 5 times since 2005
- 60 students enrolled over 5 offerings
- Students report that field experiences enhance intellectual development and understanding of course content.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that the course increases students' commitment and sense of responsibility to participating in their communities, locally and globally.

Student Reflections:

"My trip to Cape Town has made me a new and better person. What I learned in two weeks in Cape Town is more than what I have learned my whole life put together. I am a better person for knowing [those] who came forward to tell us about their story and their contribution to this world. We keep on waiting, waiting for the world to change. Now, I refuse to wait."

"The trip itself allowed me to develop connections between culture and society and aided me in comprehending the importance of active citizenship. I saw a direct correlation between HIV/AIDS stigma and poverty...The concepts and questions which I have developed could not have stemmed solely from a classroom, but require experience with differing cultures to truly intellectually develop."

"I was an eyewitness of the hope and engaging spirit of this young generation of South Africans, all united in the fight against the HIV/AIDS virus. Almost all of those students, in some way or the other, had been affected by this epidemic..."

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