During spring break, Laura Wilmarth Tyna, Kurt Schackmuth and Christie Billups explored best practices in community-engaged learning in the San Francisco Bay area. On Thursday, March 3rd, our facilitator, Sam Dennison of the nonprofit organization the Faithful Fools, took us on a tour of community organizations in the city’s Tenderloin District. The Tenderloin is a community challenged with the growing needs of people who have been disenfranchised by economic inequity. We stopped by St. Anthony’s Foundation as they prepared to serve 1200 lunches to people in need. Then we went next door to St. Boniface, an old mission church, where the Gubbio Project keeps the church doors open during the day for homeless people to get much needed “sacred sleep.” It was a dreary, damp day in the Bay area, and every single pew had someone in it seeking a few moments of peaceful rest. This experience touched us deeply. It also raised numerous questions about social justice and our efforts to deepen the transformation of students who engage the community and our university’s role of walking in solidarity with community organizations and residents.

During our travels, we saw community partners who understood that students’ ideas can be very good and that by receiving them gracefully, they empower those students to take ownership and be part of the solution. We sat in on an all-day faculty training session at St. Mary’s College in Moraga as faculty enthusiastically shared ideas and continued learning about how best to interconnect the curriculum with community engagement. We heard from administrators about the growth and development of community engaged learning on their respective campuses and reflected on ways we might bring some of those best practices to fruition at Lewis. We exchanged ideas, questions and hopes for ensuring that universities are a part of initiatives to ensure human rights and dignity as well as greater social justice. We were stretched in amazing ways to continue imagining methods and means for enriching how we “do” service learning at Lewis University.

All of these exchanges provided reassurance that service learning at Lewis is moving in the right direction. They also inspired us to reimagine how we prepare faculty members and community partners to build relationships in the community and the classroom and to offer meaningful, rigorous curricula for students across the disciplines. (Stay tuned for exciting offerings during May Institute.) We want Lewis to be a source of community transformation in places where poverty or other barriers are keeping people from meeting their basic needs. (Log on and register at Get Connected: [www.service.lewisu.edu](http://www.service.lewisu.edu) to learn about relationships that we’ve been fostering.) We continue striving to ensure that our office is a dynamic resource for faculty, students and community partners.

One of several colorful murals in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco, an area in which residents struggle daily with economic, housing, health and nutritional challenges.
As a faculty member, building relationships with community organizations can be extremely worthwhile, though daunting. Building a reciprocal, collaborative, and dedicated partnership requires time – something which most faculty members don’t have much to spare.

This spring, faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences have been exploring ways to create deeper, more committed service learning partnerships with the support of the Office of Service Learning (OSL). Dr. Jennifer Buntin (Sociology) and Dr. Jim Burke (Theology) have decided to do things a little differently this semester with their Cultural Diversity and Intergroup Relations and Christian Social Teaching service learning courses, respectively.

To begin, Drs. Burke and Buntin met with OSL staff to share about service learning goals and the type of service in which they wanted students to engage. Then, each faculty member was provided with a list of possible organizations to consider. In some cases, the faculty members even suggested possible organizations for OSL staff to further research and contact. After some discussion and research, Dr. Buntin sought out four partners, with which she met, and then invited them to present on their service opportunities early in the semester, allowing students a choice in their service learning placement:

2. SOS Children’s Villages – a unique foster care agency which houses siblings together in a village format.
3. Warren-Sharpe Community Center – a community resource which provides programming for youth of all ages, along with a food pantry.
4. Hearth Haven Outreach (H2o) – a resource for high school youth that offers social, recreational, and academic opportunities for engagement.

Similarly, Dr. Burke identified five partner organizations to work with the Social Action Learning Teams (SALT) that he has formed in his Christian Social Teaching course. Each SALT works with one of the following organizations:

1. Faith Behind Bars – a letter writing initiative with incarcerated persons.
2. Forrest Preserve District of Will County – a nature-based organization focused on preserving the natural resources of Will County.
3. Interfaith Committee for Detained Immigrants – an organization dedicated to the care of and advocacy for undocumented people detained in the US justice system.
4. Loaves and Fishes Community Services – an organization which provides various community resources, such as access to food, assistance with utilities, etc.
5. Will-Grundy Center for Independent Living – a resource for those with disabilities, providing assistance and guidance related to maintaining an independent lifestyle.

Both faculty members have committed to continued engagement and interaction with their partners over multiple semesters, some of whom they had worked with previously. This will empower both partner organizations and faculty members to improve upon the relationship each semester. Further, as each party gets to know each other more, partner organizations and faculty members will likely find additional ways to connect and support one another’s work.

While more engaged, ongoing relationships with partner agencies takes time to foster, both Dr. Buntin and Dr. Burke have a better understanding of where their students are serving, what they are doing, and more leverage with partner organizations to coordinate effective student learning experiences. New endeavors always come with a few bumps, which we’re sorting out together with each faculty member, partner, and member of the OSL team; however, feedback so far has been promising!

Laura Wilmarth Tyna, Community Partner Liaison, Office of Service Learning
What happens when the Business Administration capstone course at the College of Business meets the Executive Director of the Warren-Sharpe Community Center’s South Side Urban Farm?

Strategic Management 61-460-2 is working with Kay Bolden to develop a strategic plan on how to utilize the products the urban farm grows. They hope to augment the food distributed by the Community Center’s pantry, and to sell the excess vegetables at a farm stand. These vegetables are grown on urban lots on the south-side of Joliet that are being converted to small farms run by the children and families of the center as well as corporate, community and student volunteers (hint). The income generated by the produce sold would help operate the other programs provided by Warren-Sharpe during a time when government programs and private donations are becoming more difficult to obtain.

“Our plan is to have Warren Sharpe Center be a safe haven for the community; if we can help people grow in themselves a hope that they didn’t have before while instilling a positive sense of self, then I think we’ll be successful in our aspirations.”

- Lauren Grady

This is the first Strategic Management class to include a service learning component. The students are gaining first-hand, practical experience using the knowledge and skills that they have developed over their years of education. Service learning promotes the Lewis Mission, allowing students to gain real-world experience while the Center can gain insight into how to run their non-profit in a more effective manner. This is a critical part of service that is often overlooked by society: helping people help themselves is very important to making a significant change to our world.

On their first visit to the center, students toured the food pantry, the after school youth program, community murals on the exterior of the center and special blocks painted by individual students who attended the center. It was an experience that touched all of the students. The presentation by Kay Bolden also had an impact on the class. Her dedication to the programs was apparent and talked about by all the students after our meeting.

The class plans to present at the end of the semester a 5-year business plan. Included will be a detailed strategic analysis looking at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that will effect the environment in which the Warren-Sharpe Southside Urban Farm will be operating. We will also review and do an economic analysis of several projects that Kay hopes to include in the future operation of the Center. Finally, we will develop operational plans for the farm including recommendations for growth cycles, anticipated product yield and potential incomes that will be generated.

Dr. James Krejci, Assistant Professor of Business Administration (COB)
Community Engagement in the COE

Within the College of Education all the candidates in our initial programs are asked to complete a service learning project across a few semesters before they graduate. In the Special Education Department specifically, students are introduced to the concept of service learning in the 200 Field Experience and 223 Disability Studies courses. Within the class, students make a commitment and create a contract with an agency that describes their plan for the next three semesters. Agencies include but are not limited to: SOS Children’s Village (Lockport), Community Outreach Naperville, Best Buddies (Lewis student organization), Special Recreation Programming, DayBreak Services (Joliet), San Miguel (Chicago), Gigi’s Playhouse (Joliet), and Ready Set Ride (Plainfield).

Here are some comments from current special education and combined major students.

-Dr. Jennifer Buss

For my service learning (SL) project, I chose to lead a Book Club program at GiGi’s Playhouse (a Down Syndrome Achievement Center). I planned short passages and fun activities for the participants to do every week. The genre of the story ranged every week so the stories fit the interests of all the participants. The activities I planned dealt with the story and comprehension questions but were not the same to avoid repetition and keep the participants interested in the story. I love leading the book club because in just 8 short weeks I have watched the participants love and want to return to book club every week. I have seen them become more confident in their reading-aloud abilities and also being appropriate while others are reading. I have learned a lot about meeting the needs of all different readers and how to engage different leveled readers.

-Mady Stein

Growing up, there was never a day in my life that I had to worry about going without the things that are essential to thrive, such as food, water, shelter, clothing, etc. I grew up in a place where the greatest concerns were if your jeans were from Abercrombie and whether or not your boots were actual Uggs or just knock-offs. I was blinded by ignorance to the reality of other people’s lives, especially those in underdeveloped countries. I chose to complete my service learning hours with Feed My Starving Children, which is a non-profit Christian organization that is committed to feeding children that are hungry in body and spirit by hand-packing meals specifically formulated for malnourished children and sending them to countries in need. While this may not directly influence my community, it serves as a life-saving resource for many children and has a positive impact worldwide. To have the opportunity to contribute to an organization that provides relief, nourishment, comfort, and hope to the lives of precious children who are suffering is quite humbling.

-Kelly Egan

For my SL project, I chose to spend time educating junior high students at San Miguel School in an inner city area of Chicago. It’s a school that offers academic opportunities to those that couldn’t afford them without assistance. It was an unbelievably life-changing experience for me, exposing me to a culture that I’ve never before seen. I, along with many other volunteers, spent time working with the class as a whole, but the most powerful part of my experience happened when we worked with students one-on-one. I spent a majority of that time being read to by students, allowing them the attention and audience that they crave and deserve. We served as role models for these students while we were there and I only hope I made the same impact on them as they did on me.

-Megan Carmody

I am volunteering at Lincoln-Way Special recreation in various programs. Currently, I have volunteered for 3 hours so far. It has been great experience so far. I love working with the participants. I am helping the participants communicate with their peers doing different social activities like cooking, dancing, crafts, and games.

-Katie Hinde
Lewis University, a university guided by its Catholic and Lasallian heritage, has a strong belief in service to the community. As a result, Lewis University students, from every discipline, serve the community in a multitude of ways. These community services range from working at food banks, to volunteering at health fairs and screenings.

Young Hearts for Life (YH4L) Cardiac Screening Program, an organization founded by Joseph C. Marek, M.D., in 2006, was created to offer free ECG screenings to all physically active young persons. In the United States alone, sixty young adults die a week due to sudden cardiac death. Many of these deaths could have been prevented had the conditions that lead to the sudden cardiac death been detected earlier. Dr. Marek, an internationally renowned cardiologist, has used his expertise to create a model that utilizes community volunteers to deliver a low cost and efficient screening program. To date, YH4L has screened over 130,000 students for conditions that can lead to sudden cardiac death. Of the 130,000 students screened, hundreds of students have been found to have life-threatening cardiac conditions.

As a part of their Health Promotion and Community nursing courses’ curriculum, Lewis University nursing students have been working with YH4L screenings for the past few years. These nursing students are responsible for assisting the high school students being screened to the correct tables, as well as applying the “stickies”, or the ECG leads, to the student’s chest, forearms, and ankles. Following the screening process, the nursing students are then responsible for getting the ECG strips to the trained professionals who run the screenings. After a preliminary screening of the ECG strip for any irregular readings due to machine malfunction or lead misplacement, the high school students are then sent back to their class. Dr. Marek and his trained staff then carry out a more thorough review of the ECG strips. In the case of a detected irregularity, the high school student is then asked to come back for a more thorough ECG. Following the second ECG, Dr. Marek decides whether the student needs to be referred to a cardiologist for follow-up.

As someone who has had the privilege to serve twice with the YH4L organization, I have nothing but the utmost respect for what Dr. Marek and his staff have created. Having a brother who was diagnosed with a heart defect at a young age, I have come to see the impact of early detection of a heart defect has, both on those directly effected by the heart defect, as well as on the family of the individual. To be given the opportunity to go out into the community and participate in such an important preventative screening has truly been a blessing.

The work being done by the YH4L organization is having an immense impact on the communities it is serving. In my short experience with YH4L, I have been able to witness firsthand the effects of these screenings, including student athletes, who would have otherwise continued to play their respective sports, with a heart defect that could cause serious harm a death, get the referral and treatment they so desperately needed. For the majority of the young adults, those who are screened and given the news that their ECG looks normal, the screening helps to alleviate any of their own prior concerns about their heart’s health. It is also important for these young adults to come to the realization through this screening process that they are not immune to illnesses or conditions that could cause death. Illness, disease, and death are not reserved for the elderly, and it is important that these young adults learn the importance of being aware of their own health.

At the very core of many of my nursing classes is the idea of community service, and how through this service we can help educate and protect the health of all the individuals in our community. Through serving with the YH4L organization, I was able to relate the topics of community health and secondary preventative screenings learned in my Community Health Nursing course to a real world scenario. The ability to look back on past experiences, and relate the topics learned in class to those real world experiences is invaluable.

Kyle Matuszewski, Student, College of Nursing & Health Professions
Community Engagement Cooperative (CEC)

In April of 2014, the city government of Flint, MI rerouted the city’s water supply to the Flint River as a cost-saving measure. The original source was the Detroit system or Lake Huron, one of the largest bodies of fresh water in the world. The following year, homes in Flint Michigan reported levels of lead of up to 397 parts per billion. It took months before anything was done, although the Environmental Protection Agency states that it takes action when lead levels are identified at 15 parts per billion.

According to the U.S. Census, over 40% of the residents of Flint live below poverty level, nearly 30% of the population are children and over 60% of the residents identify as people of color. This information moved advocates to investigate the indifference that poisoned thousands of impoverished residents with extreme levels of lead. For the most vulnerable, any trace of lead in the blood stream is a high risk health concern, as many effects may be irreversible.

One of these advocates, pediatrician Mona Hanna-Attisha, directs the Michigan State University and Hurley Children’s Hospital Public Health Initiative. Worried parents sought medical attention for their children, who were suffering from the evident effects of lead poisoning. In September 2015, Dr. Hanna-Attisha and her team took matters into their own hands, performing blood tests to identify the extent to which the children were harmed. It was only after persistent and strong efforts that Michigan’s Department of Environmental Quality accepted the numerous test results as valid indicators of the poisonous water in Flint.

Throughout the month of March, Multicultural Student Services is accepting donations of water in efforts to provide safe water for woman and children in Flint. During the first week of April, a volunteer driver will deliver all of the donations to Building Strong Women Inc., an organization located in Flint, Michigan, which seeks to empower woman and children by promoting personal development and educational success. You may stop by our offices located in the Student Union to make your contribution. For questions regarding your donation please email Dr. Kristi Kelly at kellykj@lewisu.edu or Mariza Rocha at rochama@lewisu.edu.

Mariza Rocha, Assistant Director, Multicultural Student Services
Community Partner Spotlight

Warren-Sharpe Community Center

The Warren-Sharpe Community Center is a longstanding partner of the Office of Service Learning (OSL) and of Lewis University, more broadly. This semester, the OSL has been thrilled to engage with Warren-Sharpe in new and exciting ways that expand and deepen our commitment.

According to their website, “Warren-Sharpe Community Center is a nonprofit, community-based organization offering social service projects and assistance to low-income, at-risk families on the south side of Joliet.” The Center opened its doors in 1991 with the goal of cultivating neighborhood solutions to neighborhood problems. Since then, Warren-Sharpe has developed programs that focus on early childhood education, youth development, family support, holiday assistance, and more recently, nutrition.

This last focus area, addressed through their South Side Urban Farm, is one about which Executive Director Kay Bolden has been particularly excited. She and the kids have become “accidental farmers” right in the city, empowering the Center’s youth to learn about the earth, growing produce, healthy cooking, and feeding their neighbors. This program is really thriving, with the kids working on developing a cookbook and hosting a YouTube cooking station. The White House got word of the great learning happening at the Center and First Lady Michelle Obama, invited Kay and some of the kids for a visit to see the White House gardens. Needless to say, there’s a lot of exciting work happening at Warren-Sharpe!

This spring, Warren-Sharpe is partnering with five Lewis faculty members in five courses:

1. Cultural Diversity and Intergroup Relations with Dr. Jennifer Buntin – students are tutoring and mentoring youth, along with engaging with the Center’s food pantry
2. Marketing Strategy with Dr. Jim Oakley – a small group of students is creating a video for promotional purposes
3. Introduction to Social Work with Dr. Michael Lloyd and Ms. Barb Rzeszutko – students are tutoring and mentoring youth, along with engaging with the Center’s food pantry
4. Strategic Management with Dr. Jim Krejci – in small groups, students will create four separate strategic plans for Center programs
5. Applied Sociology with Dr. Jennifer Buntin - students are administering surveys with community members, ascertaining how best the urban farm might serve them

To learn more about the Warren-Sharpe Community Center, check out their website at http://www.warren-sharpecommunitycenter.org/ . To connect directly with Center staff, contact Laura Wilmarth Tyna, Community Partner Liaison in the Office of Service Learning, at wilmarla@lewisu.edu or (815) 836-5848.

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We Believe in Our Youth... Our Community... and Our Future.
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