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LEWIS AND NEARBY FAIRMONT COMMUNITY GROW VIBRANT PARTNERSHIP

On pages 2–4 of this newsletter, you will read about numerous ways that Lewis faculty, staff and students are collaborating with the people and programs rooted in Fairmont, a community in unincorporated Will County. The Office of Community Engaged Learning hopes to introduce more faculty during May Institute to the amazing people that live in Fairmont and who strive to cultivate a thriving community where all have safe water to drink, nutritional food to eat, a safe and clean environment, and justice fostered through advocacy and innovation.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN THE FAIRMONT COMMUNITY

DR. CHRISTIE BILLUPS, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY, CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT ADVISOR FOR THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING

The Fairmont Community is an often overlooked unincorporated neighborhood sandwiched between Lockport and Joliet. Natural leaders in the area have been working to improve services and realities for those who live there. That said, the challenges for the people are many as Fairmont struggles with being under-resourced (until now, no trash service, poorly maintained water systems, a food desert, etc.) There are only a couple of businesses on the outskirts of the community, one K–8 school, and a handful of churches (Shiloh Baptist stands out as a steadfast collaborator within the community).

Lewis faculty members have gone to Fairmont for the last two May Institute sessions and learned about the community and residents’ hopes for development and greater resources for children and families who live and learn there. Again, in meeting with area leaders, school administrators, and church pastors, we have discovered plentiful opportunities to partner with Fairmont in meaningful ways. This diversity of contributions we can offer as a neighbor and academic institution holds a variety of interdisciplinary teaching and cooperative potential.

For instance, students in the Peace Studies Capstone (spring 2018 and 2019) have worked with Fairmont leaders in a variety of ways. Examples of projects include:

- Development of a community garden next to the Fairmont Community Center with residents and area school children
- Growth of marketing and resources for the food pantry
- Survey of abandoned and poorly maintained homes in conjunction with Will County
- Research into water infrastructure contracts between Lockport Township and area companies to assist the community leaders in justly resolving the standoff re: restoring clean water to homes
- Establishment of an after school tutoring program
- Creation of a “learning garden” with curricular components; produce will help to improve nutritional options for children on the free lunch program
- Exploration of introducing a transitional housing program in the community through Shiloh Baptist Church
- Research into establishing the Fairmont Community Partnership Group as a non-profit and Community Development Corporation
Through the Community Engagement program at Lewis University, a partnership was opened amongst various Colleges on Campus and the Fairmont community. Two programming options that were offered through the College of Education courses: 1) Literacy Strategies Nights and 2) Cross-cultural Literacy for Teaching English Language Learners. Within both courses our future teacher candidates had an opportunity to participate, working one-on-one with the students at Fairmont School.

Within both of the programs, instructors captured reflections of what the teacher candidates experienced. Here are two that were chosen in the reflections.

Reflection 1: Last semester (Fall 2018), we had the opportunity to apply our knowledge first hand with the “after school” reading program at Fairmont School. During our class, we were consistently learning about how culture can be pivotal when it comes to language acquisition of English Language Learners (ELLs). With the after school reading program, we were trying to find ways of making reading fun and engaging for young people. Taking into account that the students probably had a very long day, we tried to implement as many kinetic strategies as possible. As we were working on their reading skills, pronunciation, and language acquisition, we were able to go in-depth and find out specific background information about some of the students. Not all were ELLs, but we definitely got to work with a handful of students who spoke languages other than English. It was one of the greatest field experiences I’ve had because all students were engaged and eager to participate along with other classmates on the specific reading activities we had planned. The school provided us with the library room, which had many resourceful tools we used throughout our lessons. Some of those tools included bilingual books that we were able to implement in the activities. This was a great way to expand their multicultural knowledge, while making it more culturally relevant to the ELL students. Toward this end, we planned a Reader’s Theater activity with all the students and brought a guest speaker. Students were able to perform the Reader’s Theater in front of the classroom successfully. Something I learned from this field experience is the positive impact culturally relevant strategies have on all students, especially ELLs. Having prior knowledge of the activity due to the culturally relevant content allowed the group of ELL students to be engaged in the activity, and excited to present their book stories with their own twists. Seeing how much effort the students were exerting on the activity, and watching how engaged they were, made me extremely happy because it served as reassurance that I’m in the correct field. I would do this again in a heartbeat!

Reflection 2: Teaching to a school community was an amazing experience in so many ways. First, we were trained in our methods class on various reading and writing strategies weekly with Dr. Buss. We were then asked to prepare weekly lessons and apply some of these same skills with the students in our sessions at Fairmont. This was beyond amazing. It made us realize we aren’t just learning these skills for fun, we are actually making this learning come alive. Working every week on a new skill, seeing the excitement of the students learning and loving to read was breath taking. But, most of all, I loved the connection we made over the eight weeks working with each learner on a skill that needed some encouragement and excitement to love reading. Dr. Buss encouraged us, guided us, and showed us how to reach and push learners to be their best. It was an amazing performance every week.
Imagine being in the middle of a desert. There is little access to food and water, and there are not many resources for a comfortable adventure. The conditions are far from pleasant, but it is probably short-lived — it’s only a temporary experience.

For many people in the United States, though, this is a reality. Not necessarily the hot, hostile environment, but the inaccessibility of quality food and water. From a 2009 study conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture, approximately 23.5 million Americans are living in a desert — a food desert[1]. This term is unfamiliar to many people. Food deserts are areas where access to affordable and nutritious food is difficult. Grocery stores and supermarkets are beyond reach — located more than one mile from these low-income communities which also have limited access to transportation. Residents of these communities rely on convenience stores, gas stations, and fast food restaurants as a main source of food. This leaves community members with diets that are lacking essential nutrients.

A deeper issue resides within the schools that are in these communities. The children that attend schools in food desert communities often cannot afford to bring breakfast and lunch to school. A solution has been in place through governmental support since 1946 — a non-pricing meal service option called Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), funded by the National Lunch Program[2]. One food desert near Lewis University is the unincorporated community of Fairmont, located on the outskirts of Lockport, Illinois. The average household income in Fairmont is sub-median, and as a result, Fairmont School District 89 qualifies for CEP. The program provides free breakfast and lunch to 100% of students in the particular school, regardless of the student’s economic status. The program serves as an assistance to families who cannot afford to provide sufficient meals for their children, but unfortunately, the school meals are lacking in nutritional quality. Since students may not be conscious of the poor nutritional value of their meals, they may not understand how quality nutrition is essential for proper physical, emotional, and intellectual growth.

Undernutrition in school-aged children is a setback to overall health, cognitive development, and school performance. Students who are eating a sugar-filled breakfast and a protein-deficient lunch have poor energy throughout the day, and they are not able to focus during class. Thus, they may have lower motivation to learn and explore. It is a vicious cycle — students are not performing as well as they potentially could be, which impacts them for the rest of their lives — excelling on standardized tests, acceptance into colleges and universities, and finding a career. With subpar cognitive development, students in food desert communities are being stripped of the opportunities that other students may have to be successful in the future. Indeed, the concept of a free meal program is practical, but it is not enough if the benefits are not sufficient. Instead of turning a blind eye to the under-performance of students, we need to look closer. What is happening beneath the surface of the under-performance? Schools that lie within economically challenged communities and food deserts are not provided quality nutrition in school meals, and as a result, students lack energy and focus, and their overall health is suffering. The claim that funding for school meals is inadequate is not an answer — packaged chips or sugary cereals are not more expensive than fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grain breads and oats. Quality nutrition is within reach, and it is the fuel for the children who drive our future.


Heart Haven Outreach (H2O) is an organization that works to “transform the lives of struggling teens through caring relationships and programs that support healthy development.” Working with middle and high school teens in Bolingbrook and Romeoville, this Christian–based organization takes a multidimensional approach to their work, engaging youth physically, socially, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

The organization offers a variety of programs after school, ranging from academic tutoring, community service projects, recreational activities, support groups, mentoring, and an alternative discipline program. Additionally, H2O offers a series of summer programs through the month of June, which keep kids engaged. Remarkably, they offer transportation for all of their initiatives and youth can participate free of charge.

During the last five years, Heart Haven Outreach has been a particularly strong partner with Lewis engaging University students from social work, sociology, theology, peace studies, and computer science. Additionally, H2O’s executive director, Ryan Lawrence, has served for the last 3 years as a member of the Lewis University Community Partner Advisory Board. More recently, H2O and Lewis’ University Ministry staff have been exploring ways to collaborate to engage more students with youth involved with H2O’s programs.

This April, Lewis will celebrate this strong partnership with H2O at the second annual Celebration of Community Partnership, which honors a community–based organization that has demonstrated outstanding collaboration with the University through curricular and co-curricular engagement. What a joy to celebrate an organization doing such great work to strengthen our communities by supporting youth!

By the Numbers (2017)*

- 3,455 – number of programming hours delivered
- 238 – number of clients served
- 20 – number of youth mentored
- 55 – number of volunteers who supported the organization
- 180 – number of youth who participated in support groups
- 30 – number of students receiving homework help
- 38 – number of youth engaged in the community
- 1,110 – number of hours youth served in the community

*The data provided is self-declared by H2O based on the Charity Navigator website.
Lewis University recently facilitated investment from the Des Plaines River Valley Enterprise Zone to launch a business incubation program called the Innovation Hub. The business incubation program was created as a public benefit of the Enterprise Zone to stimulate economic activity in the communities surrounding the University, including Romeoville, Joliet, Rockdale, Lockport, and broader Will County.

The Innovation Hub will support entrepreneurs who are looking to pursue, launch or scale a business. It offers co-working space to house startups, coaching/mentorship, and other support programs and services that guide entrepreneurs from idea to market. As each company progresses through the two-year incubation program, the Lewis University Innovation Hub will offer customized start-up support services to clients. Lewis University faculty, staff, and students will be involved in the incubation process as subject matter experts.

As a part of the support ecosystem created around the Innovation Hub, the Romeoville Chamber of Commerce will relocate its offices to the Lewis University Romeoville campus adjacent to the business incubator. This synergistic relationship will allow the entrepreneurs to take advantage of the services at Lewis University and the business support programs, events, and services within the Chamber of Commerce.

To receive more information about the business incubation program please contact Kristin Burton, burtonkr@lewisu.edu.
Towards the end of my junior year in high school, my AP United States history teacher stressed that “education is transformative”. He insisted that if a student took a course and was not a changed person afterwards, then it was a waste of time. His words stuck with me. Since then, I vowed to never take a course and not allow it to challenge my worldview. Every class I’ve taken here at Lewis has encouraged my intellectual development and opened my mind. However, one course in particular stood out from the rest—Christian Social Teaching. Although at first glance, the course merely fulfilled a GenEd requirement, it was actually a Community Engaged Learning course and it changed my life for the better. Sometimes it is easy for students to get lost in a textbook and overwhelmed by coursework. I am a Political Science and History double major. Needless to say, the course load can be quite heavy. However, Community Engaged Learning reminded me why I wanted to go to college in the first place: to make an impact in the world. Undoubtedly, it is difficult to change the world from the classroom.

Community Engaged Learning encourages students to learn inside and outside of the classroom. When I was completing my service learning at the Blessing Table with Second Baptist Church, I learned more about how to really help people in the community. I learned that people don’t need someone to come into their neighborhood and tell them what they need to do to improve their lives. Instead, they need others to listen to their stories, understand the disparities they face, and help break down the obstacles that are in their way. So that’s what I did. I was so inspired by the community and the class that I applied to become a Community Engaged Learning Facilitator (CELF). I figured that if I could help another student realize the injustices that people face on a day to day basis, regardless of his or her major, then I could help make the world a better place.

I’ve been a CELF for two semesters now and it is definitely a transformative experience. As a CELF, I work closely with faculty and create reflection activities for students to help connect their coursework to the community they are serving. For example, last semester I led my first discussion as a CELF for Dr. Liesen’s State and Local government course on environmental injustice. They were completing their community engaged learning with the Will County Forest Preserve so I explained what environmental injustice is and how it affects certain communities. The students were very interested and engaged in this activity. It showed me that all it takes is effort to get people to care about an issue and then take action. Apparently my activities were effective because one of the students from that class last semester is now a CELF as well.

It feels great to know that I am encouraging my peers to advocate for social justice with our community partners. Being a Community Engaged Learning Facilitator has been the most rewarding part of my educational career here at Lewis University, and I am so grateful for this opportunity to share my experience!

Do you know a student who would be a great Community Engaged Learning Facilitator (CELF)?

We’re looking for responsible, passionate, organized Lewis University students who are good communicators!

Contact Laura Wilmarth Tyna at wilmarla@lewisu.edu or (815) 836-5848 to nominate a student
The mission of the MS Occupational Therapy (MSOT) program at Lewis University is to prepare intellectually engaged, ethically grounded, and socially responsible occupational therapists in the spirit of our Catholic and Lasallian heritage. The MSOT faculty collaborate with students to identify needs in the community. We meet these needs by creating fieldwork opportunities and other experiences for populations and community organizations that traditionally have limited access to occupational therapy services.

In the spring of 2019, MSOT students and faculty began collaborating with Franciscan Village, Synapse House, and Cornerstone in Joliet to develop innovative and sustainable programs focused on physical health and well-being. The programs were designed to meet the specific needs of the clients at those organizations. In the fall, the MSOT students will return to community sites to focus on supporting clients’ occupational engagement through mental health promotion.

The MSOT program also partners with the Department of Aviation to host Ready to Fly!, a travel preparation event for youth with developmental disabilities. The event offers students with special needs from nearby schools the opportunity to practice travel routines. The occupational therapy students and faculty create visual supports and identify accommodations and modifications for the high school students that facilitate participation and lead simulation activities related to packing for a trip, selecting appropriate carry-on items, and going through security. The aviation students and faculty guide participants through a tour of the hangar, flight simulations, obtaining a boarding pass, and boarding a plane.

The MSOT program is preparing to host Car-Fit, a program that offers older adults opportunities to check how well their cars “fit” them, in the fall of 2019. Car-Fit is a community education program that was developed by the American Occupational Therapy Association, AARP, and AAA. MSOT students will become trained Car-Fit technicians and skilled at making recommendations related to modifications that promote safe driving and community mobility for older adults. Older adults from the surrounding communities are invited to come to the event and participate in a 20-minute ergonomic driver assessment and receive tips on how they can drive more comfortably and safely.

The Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) has been leading their own service initiatives. In their first semester on campus, SOTA sponsored a toiletries drive for the children and families of Fairmont. More drives for Fairmont are planned for the future.
FALL 2019 DESIGNATED COURSE LIST

Supervisory Management (BSAD 38000.001, 002)
Dr. James Krejci
This skill-building course stresses supervisory competencies: self-assessment, time and stress management, creative problem solving, motivation and performance, conflict management, power and influence, and team building.

Strategic Management Theories and Application (BSAD 46000.002) Dr. James Krejci
Students use all the knowledge acquired from prior business courses, coupled with new strategic-management techniques learned, to chart the future direction of different organizations.

ST: Community News & Information (COMM 30003.001) Tracy Hemmingsway
In this course, students learn and apply skills in the use of video and audio production equipment in a number of production situations, based on their interests, to create content for LUTN-TV news.

Software Systems Capstone (CPSC 42000.001, 002) Dr. Michael Lewis
This course will require students to incorporate knowledge from other core computer science courses to design, implement, and test a large scale software project.

Computer Infrastructure Capstone (CPSC 49300.001, 002) Dr. Khaled Alsoubi
This course will require students to incorporate knowledge from other core computer science courses to design, implement and test a networked computer system.

Field Experience 1: Community and School Immersion (ELED 20000.001) Ann O’Brien
This course helps develop pre-service teachers’ abilities to view the total picture of the teaching profession.

Methods and Content of Teaching Social Studies (ELED/SPED 35400.001) Dr. Elizabeth Sturm
This course focuses on instructional strategies, resources, national curriculum standards, and the Illinois Learning Standards and CEC standards for social studies through engaged learning in the classroom.

Introduction to Professional Writing (ENGL 30000.001) Dr. Jennifer Consilio
This class will help to strengthen writing and design skills to become more marketable to potential employers and graduate schools. Class projects will teach valuable professional skills, including: strategies for researching, internships, and graduate schools, as well as crafting resumes, cover letters, and graduate school personal statements. Through engaged learning, students work with community partners to create real, usable projects for them to implement.

Marketing Strategy (MKTG 47000.001) Dr. James Oakley
Analyzing an industry and its companies in detail, and drawing on all aspects of marketing theory, students learn to develop and present a comprehensive ‘marketing plan’ – the centerpiece of marketing strategy.

State & Local Government (POLS 21000.001) Dr. Laurette Liesen
This course will examine state and local governments in the United States. Students will partner with a government agency or non-profit that works with local governments.

ST: Community Engaged Learning Leadership Seminar (POLS 30601.001) Laura Wilmarth Tyna
This course provides an engaged learning and leadership development experience through the Office of Community Engaged Learning. Acceptance to this course is contingent on successful application and interview. Contact wilmarla@lewisu.edu for further information.

Introduction to Social Work (SCWK 10000.001, 002) Dr. Gretchen Hoge & Dr. Henry Kronner
This course includes the historical development, diversity of services, key concepts, professional values, orientation, ethics and standards of social work. Students will have an opportunity to participate in community engaged learning through volunteering and "shadowing" professional staff at selected agencies.

Diversity and Social Justice (SOCI 29000.006) Dr. Jennifer Buntin
The primary goal of this course is to give students an understanding of the roles that race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability play in the social inequality experienced within the United States.

Content Area Reading Strategies (SPED 47100.001/57000.001) Dr. Jennifer Buss
This course examines the theories and the practices appropriate for balanced reading and language arts instruction and assessment in grades 4-12. The emphasis of the course is on functional technique for improving student reading performance in the upper grades and incorporating reading into subject matter instruction.

Practicing Faithful Justice: Faith Behind Bars (THEO 26700.001) Dr. Christie Billups
This course will explore justice as understood through the lens of Christian teachings. Through community engaged learning, the course will examine social realities related to incarceration and practical responses to address a variety of concerns affecting today’s marginalized and oppressed persons and communities related to the prison system.

Foundations of Peace Studies (THEO 25000.001) Dr. James Burke
This course provides an overview of peace studies which examines human conflict and its peaceful transformation. Drawing from Catholic social teaching’s imperatives, the emphasis will be on acquiring a just peace lens in order to do social analysis through community and civic engagement.

For questions or more information, contact Dr. Christie Billups, billupsch@lewisu.edu, 815-836-5829.
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