

Fall 2008 Course Title: *Immigrant Integration through Community Planning: Together creating conceptions of child- and youth-friendly communities for all*

IECE provided funding to support a fall 2008 interdisciplinary course that served as a forum for investigating multicultural youth engagement and the issues that diverse youth face in our local schools and communities. Although after the fall 2008 semester we modified the course to incorporate digital storytelling and purposefully work with previously unengaged community partners, we are excited to offer *Immigrant Integration through Community Planning* for the third time in the fall of 2009.

The course is designed for students interested in examining how multimedia ethnographic methods can be used in both research and practice to examine issues related to: community planning and design; local, national and international immigration policy; youth development; and, most importantly, the centrality of young people's voices in expressing issues relevant to their lives and their communities.

The course provides university students with an opportunity to participate in a community engagement program, Youth FACE IT (Fostering Active Community Engagement for Integration and Transformation), that employs multimedia methods to document the views of diverse high-school youth in advocating social and physical change in their communities. Youth FACE IT is run out of the Children, Youth and Environments Center for Research and Design, and is designed to connect university students with diverse high-school students and collaboratively develop recommendations to create a more inclusive youth-friendly community. University students facilitate a variety of participatory activities with high-school youth and mentor them in the creation of digital stories and photovoice essays to share their perspectives and experiences with the larger community.

Over the fifteen-week semester, undergraduates learn theory to support their work with marginalized populations, including multicultural youth, as well as how community design and planning can contribute to a more inclusive community. They also develop skills in photovoice, digital storytelling, intergroup dialogue facilitation, community asset mapping, as well as other tools to engage high-school youth in discussing their experiences and ideas for community change. We focus on background knowledge and training for the first four weeks of the semester and then oversee our undergraduate students as they facilitate the activities with the high-school youth over an 11-week period, one day a week for approximately 90 minutes each day. During the process our undergraduates develop an understanding of the lives of multicultural populations and how personal stories can often affect critical social change in the community.

The three-credit course is open to all undergraduates, and although it is offered through the College of Architecture and Planning as a special topics course in the Environmental Design program, we contact several departments and ask advisors to help advertise the course to students in other programs. Bringing together a diverse group of undergraduate

students, in terms of their educational major and personal experiences, is an important aspect of our course as we want to bring different perspectives to the table.

## PROJECT IMPACT

---

*"I don't think I've ever had a course that has challenged me both emotionally and mentally to really think about what I believe, and what I think, and what I know. I have had exposure to this topic area before, and it wasn't necessarily just learning the facts. I think there were a couple days where some of us got emotionally drained. Some days were really negative and some had really emotional highs, and any class that can have that kind of impact on people, and especially the majority, it's pretty amazing"* (Undergraduate student during a focus group, Fall Course 2008).

As the first semester came to an end, an outside facilitator ran a focus group with our students to evaluate their experiences in the course. Although the course was challenging to teach because of the extensive amount of time required to support successful community partnerships, as demonstrated in the above quote, our students confirmed the critical importance of offering courses that support undergraduate participation in opportunities to engage with youth in our community. In this section we discuss the different levels of impact that the course had on our university community and our Boulder County community.

In the fall of 2008, we co-instructed *Immigrant Integration through Community Planning* and had 14 university students, five of whom were first or second generation immigrants themselves. We worked with two youth community groups, a total of 26 youth, in Lafayette, Colorado. Both groups were previously engaged with the community and were interested in partnering with our class for the semester.

### *University-Level Impact*

For the undergraduate students, reflection prompted by individual blog entries, group-debriefing sessions about particular topics, and open group discussions was imbedded weekly in the course. We found that face-to-face debriefing sessions were a powerful way to support their reflection and thus the sessions were held consistently throughout the semester. After students began working with their community partners, we set aside a minimum of twenty minutes in class to debrief their session from the previous week. Students worked in their small teams or as a whole class to address the following questions:

- Initial responses & gut reactions? How do you feel?
- What happened? What went well? Interesting and/or challenging situations?
- What did you learn? What key themes/ideas emerged?
- What next? How can we approach some of the situations differently?

We have found that the students appreciated this time to talk about their experiences and get immediate feedback in order to strategize for the following outreach session.

*"I thought it was pretty awesome, because after every meeting with the youth, we would break up into our two groups the next class period and talk about the dynamic and how things went. And then we would get everyone together and get to hear from the [other group] and we could hear what worked and what didn't work."* (Undergraduate student during a focus group, Fall Course 2008)

### *Community-Level Impact & Public Distribution*

Public distribution of the work completed in this course occurred on many different levels. On one level, the goal of the dialogues and activities was to encourage understanding between both immigrant and non-immigrant youth and encourage meaningful discussion about the issues in their community. At the final celebration at one of our community sites, one student said that working with us helped her to really think about what her community offers and does not offer to teenagers. Although one of our goals was to bring together immigrant and non-immigrant youth, one challenge that we have faced is the pattern of segregation across different community partner sites. While each group engaged in valuable discussion, our original objective to bring together youth from immigrant and non-immigrant background was not achieved until the final exhibit. Two promising situations have since presented themselves. First, student participants have suggested that we bring together participants from different schools to talk about their work on a common project. Second, in the fall of 2009, we are set to work with a community partner for the third semester in a row. Fifty percent of the class, for the first time since we have worked with the site, are first or second generation immigrants. While we believe that the impact of this project on the individual level is critical, our work to engage the larger community is also of great importance.

On a more formal level, the university students and high-school students held a three-week public Photovoice exhibit at the Lafayette public library in December of 2008. The youth made speeches about their work that shared their perspectives and reflections on the community. The university students also talked about their experiences over the course of the semester and hosted a reception for the guests and participants. In our spring of 2009 course, participants made a presentation at two different city government meetings: a joint meeting with the Lafayette City Council and Planning Commission and second meeting with the Boulder City Council.

We also submitted proposals and were asked to write two book chapters about our work with the youth that began with the course in fall 2009. Those chapters are currently in process.

Finally, during the summer of 2009 we are working to publish elements from the course on the Children, Youth and Environments Center for Research and Design (CYE) website.

*"This is the most refreshing format change I've ever had at CU. It's like having the service-learning component, reinforced everything we had in class. It's like in seminar classes, everyone's going to take their own research direction and no one really cares about keeping it on track; but actually having the service learning component helped to reinforce all the material that we were going through"*  
(Undergraduate student during a focus group, Fall Course 2008)

We are sometimes overwhelmed by the amount of work required to ensure all stakeholders benefit and to simply keep the course running smoothly. Yet, despite the many challenges and frustrations, this has been an extremely rewarding course to develop and teach. And based on the feedback received from past students, we believe the structure and content of the course is effective at providing a valuable learning opportunity for students, enabling them to work with marginalized populations to effect positive change in their communities. In this section we provide a summary of the project implementation and key strategies to ensure our success; challenges that we faced; how the project has furthered IECE goals; and the ways that we have built on the course that we were able to offer because of IECE funds.

#### *Project Implementation and Key Strategies*

*Working with the community.* Although we designed our course to provide meaningful opportunities for our undergraduate students, it was just as important for us to provide a relevant project for the participating multicultural youth. As a critical step in our development process, we ran pilot sessions during the spring and summer before offering the course for the first time and hired five diverse youth to advise us on developing the best format for connecting undergraduates with high-school students.

In effort to connect with more youth in our target population, we have changed our partner sites each semester. Although developing new partnerships has meant additional work on our end, we feel it has been beneficial to the success of the program. We have also changed the context in which we work with the high-school youth, from after-school or evening with a club or youth board to within a specific high-school class. Both options present benefits and challenges and we have yet to determine the ideal situation. Our biggest issue so far has been attendance, since the population of youth we are working with often have jobs and other obligations, such as infants of their own, that take priority over their involvement in this project. To date, we have been able to connect with various groups, including, teen parents, Latinos, youth who plan to be first generation college students despite considerable challenges, and youth who are at-risk for dropping out of school.

*Building community in the university classroom.* In order to encourage our undergraduate students to take ownership of their work with the high-school students and develop a higher level of responsibility than what is required for a typical lecture course, we used a number of participatory techniques to engage them in each class session. In

addition, our students collaborated with their facilitation team during their outreach work and were responsible to each other to be prepared and provide support. Therefore, we tried to foster a high level of community in the class itself, giving the students a chance to get to know each other.

*“I know everybody here, and we have all been able to talk about a lot of different things, and I don’t know anybody in those big lecture classes besides studio, but I got to know everybody in this class, and hear different perspectives, and everybody comes from different places. It’s so helpful; I liked hearing what everyone had to say, because everyone came from different places and had a different point of view. We all came here kind of interested in some of these things, but then putting it out there and being able to talk about it, it was cool. I really liked the structure of this class.”* (Undergraduate student during a focus group, Fall Course 2008)

*Team Teaching.* Team teaching is another essential aspect of our course that has enabled us to bring together two disciplines that are rarely connected at the university level: education and community planning and design. Furthermore, it would be overwhelming for one of us to attend to the logistical requirements for this course, including regular meetings with our community partners, in addition to actually teaching it.

### *Challenges*

*Semester constraints.* Teaching an outreach course in one semester requires a delicate balance between ensuring skill development and proper training for our students, and adequately addressing the theoretical context within which the outreach work is situated. Because of the time required for the outreach work with the high-school students, we are forced to limit the amount of in-class face time we have with our students. This in turn limits the amount of content we are able to cover in one semester. Offering this course over two-semesters would allow us to prioritize skills training and the theoretical background during the first semester, with an emphasis on the outreach work during the second. Although we have not yet tried this format ourselves, other professors who have indicated that it is not ideal for the students and can result in low-enrollment.

*Varying undergraduate facilitation abilities.* There are no prerequisites for our course, so some students may have extensive experience doing outreach work while other students do not start with the necessary skills to work effectively with community groups. We train our undergraduate students to facilitate dialogues and activities with diverse youth; however, the trainings are not enough for some students to feel adequately prepared. There is a tension in the fact that although this is a learning opportunity for undergraduates, we are also putting them in a situation where on the job training may not be entirely acceptable. In order to confront this issue, we work closely to advise students who need more help and try to pair them with more experienced students. We also carefully oversee the work with the high-school students and step in when needed.

### *Furthering IECE Goals*

Our course makes a genuine commitment to supporting undergraduates in their community engagement work. Through our class, students get a behind-the-scenes look at what is involved in facilitating social justice oriented community programs. Furthermore, students have the opportunity to bridge the content and theory discussed in our class sessions with their hands-on experience facilitating an 11-week project with high school youth. We see the IECE work in the CU community as invaluable and believe that our course contributes to furthering the IECE objectives to develop a more engaged citizenry.

### *Project Sustainability*

Over the last year, beginning with the course that IECE funded, we have invested significant energy and time in the development of a larger youth engagement initiative called Youth FACE IT (Fostering Active Civic Engagement for Integration and Transformation) that was described in the project description section of this report.

Specifically related to the course that IECE funded in the fall of 2008, we offered the special topics course again in the College of Architecture and Planning during the spring of 2009. The course was called *Designing with Multicultural Youth*. We had total of 14 university students and served 60 youth at four community sites. The College of Architecture and Planning supported one GPTI position and funding granted by CARTSS partially supported a second GPTI position so that we could co-instruct the course and successfully work with twice the amount of participants as the semester before.

While the premise of the course remained very similar to the fall 2008 course, there were a few key differences. CU students and high school youth participants created digital stories about their experiences as youth in Boulder County. In addition, the young people presented their digital stories at a Lafayette City Council and Boulder City Council meetings held at the beginning of May 2009. Two critical action points resulted from the public exhibits in May of 2009.

- 1) We are beginning work on a project that aims to connect youth who are already engaged through mainstream leadership roles with youth in the community in order to create more opportunities for representative youth leadership throughout Boulder County.
- 2) In order to support youth civic engagement in our community, we are starting talks with Maggie Sullivan, Steve Cherson, Elaina Verveer and Stacey Hammond about how to build on our work this past year with the youth at Centaurus High School. We have proposed that during Public Achievement students who participated in our work over the past year draw on their digital stories and ideas for community improvement and begin action campaigns to make the changes they want during the 2009-2010 academic year.

*Additional Funding Sources*

We applied for additional University of Colorado grants as well as other Foundation grants to support the related initiatives enumerated above and received the following grants:

- 2007-2008 Service Learning Grant;
- 2008-2009 Service Learning Grant;
- 2009 CARTSS Teaching Grant;
- 2008-2009 OUTREACH Grant; and
- 2009 Award of Merit from the American Architecture Foundation Community Grants Program  
(<http://www.archfoundation.org/aaf/aaf/Programs.AccentGrants.Recipients2009.htm>).

FINANCIAL REPORT

---

<i>Itemized Budget Item Expenses</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Instructor GPTI Stipend</b> 1 GPTI stipend - \$4,000	\$4,000