Teaching Ethnography for Social Justice Collaborative Initiative

Kathryn E. Goldfarb
University of Colorado Boulder
kathryn.goldfarb@colorado.edu

Eric M. Hirsch
Franklin & Marshall College
eric.hirsch@fandm.edu

The Initiative
Teaching Ethnography for Social Justice is a teaching and research initiative to address three major social problems: environmental change, gun use, and immigration.

The Project’s objectives are to 1) build a faculty network of ethnographers to teach hands-on research classes, in which instructors collaborate in course design. Each instructor would choose one of three contemporary problems for their class to focus on: environmental change, gun use, or immigration. 2) This initiative will train undergraduates and graduate students to sensitively engage and collaborate with community members on problems that require dialogue. Students across academic institutions will collaborate online as they develop research questions, learn ethnographic methods (semi-structured and life history interviewing; participant-observation; focus group interviews), and publish their results in diverse genres for public audiences. The students’ ethnographic research will involve interviewing policymakers, members of community organizations, and journalists; they will conduct participant-observation at community meetings and local events; and they will partner with community stakeholders. 3) Our third objective is to use the student research process to cultivate relationships with diverse community constituents, work alongside community partners to develop research questions and methodologies, communicate findings, and produce university research relevant to locals. This curriculum is rooted in forging connections between students and members of their communities, including minority and underrepresented demographics and people identifying as conservative, who often feel alienated by university and college communities. 4) Finally, we will disseminate information about our pedagogical approach, including posting syllabi and assignments, on a publicly accessible project website, which will feature student research results in multimedia formats (video, photography, podcast, essay).