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Steans Center Newsletter

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IRWIN W. STEANS CENTER

FOR COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICE LEARNING & COMMUNITY SERVICE STUDIES

Winter 2012

Service Learning and Education

BY DAN BARON

At Spencer Technology Academy in Chicago's Austin community, involved parents, new technology resources, and signs that students are highly engaged reflect significant changes at the west side school.

Spencer is a recipient of a five-year technology grant from the Chicago Public Schools and DePaul University has played a central role in the grant's implementation. Support by DePaul's Egan Urban Center (EUC) and Steans Center has helped to provide a two-way conduit between the Austin community and the school. "DePaul's partnership with Spencer Technology Academy is a good example of how a university pools its resources in order to support quality public education, says Chad Williams, Assistant Director for Community Development at the Steans Center. "This partnership between DPU & CPS technology academies exemplifies the ability of large institutions to create meaningful local change."

The five-year, \$11.7 million technology grant, which is supported by the U.S. Department of Education, targets schools in five Chicago communities - Austin, Roseland, Englewood, Woodlawn and North Lawndale. The goal of the grant is to expand academic options and increase student engagement and achievement in low-income communities. Spencer serves 791 students as the largest elementary school in Austin, a low-income West Side neighborhood that is 90% African American. The Egan Urban Center's funding is to strengthen the schools by increasing parent involvement and establishing links to community organizations through parents who serve as community liaisons. "Schools are often closed systems," says John Zeigler, EUC's director and coordinator of the multi-year grant from CPS to support schools in the five communities. "Our role has been to work with teachers, parents and the community to cultivate a more congenial environment. We work with the school and community, and aim to help provide indigenous resources to the school," says Zeigler. "A school is more than just bricks and mortar."



Spencer Technology Academy in Chicago's Austin neighborhood



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According to the 2010 U.S. Census, full-time workers age 25 and over without a high school diploma had median weekly earnings of \$444. This compared with \$641 for high school graduates (no college) and \$1,158 for those with a bachelor's degree. Even more revealing, the unemployment rate was 14.9 % for those with less than a high school diploma, 10.3% for those with a high school diploma, and 5.4% for those with a bachelor's degree. Statistically, educational attainment and income access are highly correlated. Yet, in 2010, the federal budget only allocated 3% for education spending versus 20% towards defense. Given the government's data, one has to wonder what additional evidence needs to be offered to policy-makers to get more educational investment.

There is something to be said about pushing the education and poverty alleviation message. Yet, many of us know that education is more than investing dollars in schools. There is also something important about the relationship that schools have with their surrounding communities. This is not a new idea but one based on an age-old cross-cultural idea that people are not socialized and educated in a vacuum detached from broader social settings. Eleni Tedla, author of *Sankofa: African Thought and Education* (1995), highlights how indigenous African groups had little distinction between formal and informal education. In contrast to Western education models, the traditional African experience has been one where communities are continuously engaged in learning and teaching. Western education tends to disengage schooling from community issues, rather than embracing the idea that schools can be centers of learning and teaching for the community. *Sankofa*, Tedla explains, refers to the idea that in order to move forward into the future "we need to reach back into our past" and take with us ideas that work.

As this newsletter's stories suggest, integrating teaching and learning with community engagement is essential for improving our education system. The example of Spencer Technology Academy shows the value of such a move for parents as well as school and university students. It shows how a public school can be significantly improved through the hard work of teachers and administrators and through connecting with strategic community assets including university service-learning students. As Professor Horace Hall from DePaul's College of Education points out on page four, service-learning highlights how education is about making connections. Besides advocating for more public investment in education for students of all ages, making connections between educational institutions and the communities that surround them is well-tested wisdom that we need to reach back and take with us into the future.

2011-2012 Community-based Research Faculty Fellow



Dr. Lisa Dush

In a project designed to explore how personal, digital stories can prompt social action, Dr. Lisa Dush and her students are partnering with the public charter school network Chicago International Charter School (CICS). Dush's MA students in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse (WRD) will run an on-campus digital storytelling training workshop as a service component of WRD 530/NMS 509: Digital Stories in Organizations. In this workshop, students will teach charter school parents and teachers how to produce digital stories that express their values about and priorities for education. Teams of Dush's students and CICS constituents will then explore ways to insert these digital stories into public spaces—both face-to-face and online—where the stories might prompt different forms of social action. Graduate students John Domanico and Neftali Morales, in the New Media Studies MA program in WRD, are assisting Dush with the project. Dush has also brought her digital storytelling workshops to Haiti where she works with women working to confront gender-based violence.

DePaul wins national civic award

Nationally recognized for its commitment to service and community engagement, DePaul is among six institutions from across the country honored for its civic and community engagement programs by



The Washington Center (TWC) for Internships and Academic Seminars. In October, DePaul was honored with the Higher Education Civic Engagement Award for its commitment to public service and community involvement at TWC's annual awards luncheon at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. President Holtschneider accepted the award with DePaul staff, Trustee Trish Parsons and former Congressman Marty Russo.

DePaul's civic and community engagement programs are coordinated through three departments, the Irwin W. Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning, University Ministry's DePaul Vincentian Community Service Office, and the Monsignor John J. Egan Urban Center.

For the seventh time in recent years, DePaul is listed as one of the nation's top 25 schools for service learning programs by U.S. News & World Report's annual higher education ranking.

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As a key component of DePaul's work with Spencer, the Steans Center places service-learning students strategically in classrooms to assist teachers in raising reading and math scores in preparation for the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). CPS elementary

"Our approach is an asset-based methodology that involves utilizing major assets in the community and looking at the community from the inside-out"

schools with an ISAT composite score less than 50% are placed on probation, which initiates a school improvement plan, but could also lead to a school closing. CPS rates schools using a three-tiered system from Level 1 to 3, ranging from "excellent standing" to "good standing" to "probation".

Like many schools in underserved communities, Spencer has been hampered by a dearth of technology resources. Now, through the grant, they feature state-of-the-art technology and a myriad of other resources as well as new staff. DePaul's grant—formally titled the Voluntary Public School Choice Magnet Makeover—is an initiative of the Office of Academic Enhancement of the Chicago Public Schools. "With the partnership between Academic Enhancement, DePaul, Spencer and other schools, we've tried to enhance, expand and create a sustainable community and parent engagement program," says David Schwab, Project Manager with the Office of Academic Enhancement at CPS. According to Schwab, DePaul "has really been on the ground level, managing the community components and doing a lot of training. They have a long history in these communities." Schwab adds that "the spaces themselves are



being used in some outstanding ways. In that respect, it's really taken off." One example is the parent resource center at Spencer, a place for parents to meet and mobilize while being part of the school's community. "Parents are coming out more to the school," says Anna Ferguson, a parent who volunteers at Spencer

during the day. "It's so important that they have a presence here."

According to Cynthia Smith-Peterson, who works as community liaison coordinator at the school, through the grant, the partnership has paid off. "The students have a lot more available to them – they've been exposed more to technology. The same is true of parents." Spencer Principal Shawn Jackson, who is from Austin, says that before the grant, there "was a lack of resources and less community involvement." What students—and families at other schools may take for granted in 2011, Spencer and other schools served by the grant may experience as major challenges. "We see technology as a key to the social divide," says Jackson. "Less than half of the families whose children come to our school get internet at home. That has so many implications—for example, you can't give assignments to families if they don't have a computer."

Numerous DePaul students have participated in service-learning activities at the schools since the grant began. According to Charlotte Phillips, Steans Center Student Development Coordinator, DePaul students have a unique opportunity to work with Spencer students toward discovering innovative ways of thinking about community engagement." Karen Zumba, a junior who is majoring in history, did her service learning at Spencer through CSS 201: Perspectives on

In my class we are learning about communities that appear to be needy, but it's not good just to see the problems—you have to look at the assets.

Community Service, the foundation course in DePaul's Community Service Studies minor. The class echoes the asset-based approach to communities. "In my class," Zumba says, "we are learning about communities that appear to be needy, but it's not good just to see the problems—you have to look at the assets. If you look at a community as a glass half empty, it's going to create more problems." Zumba adds that a key part of her work at Spencer is to "find out what the strengths of students are."

Phillips notes that "with a heavy emphasis on college readiness, partnership with Spencer Tech means that DePaul students learn to understand why tutoring sessions are critically important assets for preparing students for high school and beyond. Zumba worked with about thirty first-graders at Spencer, helping the teacher, sounding out words, working with

students on math assignments, and more. In the classroom, she explained, "I was paired up with one student who needs extra help. He is working at a kindergarten level. I got to know his personal situation, and I worked with him one-on-one. He's trying, and it's important to find intuitive new methods to get through to him and other students." Gary Daniels, a finance major and graduating senior who also took CSS 201, says he comes from a situation similar to many students at Spencer. "When I help a kid



and they greet you with so much love—those are unique experiences. I hope I can volunteer here after the class is over." Spencer Principal Sean Jackson says that students at the school through the Steans Center provide valuable one-on-one assistance to Spencer students—and serve as role models for them as well.

Jackson adds that changes at Spencer in recent years—whether that means new technology, greater participation from parents, more staff, support from the community, and the involvement of DePaul students—are making a difference at the school. "It's easy to get behind a winner," he says. "When you see positive things happen at the school, more people in the community are going to notice." Meanwhile, between 2009, when DePaul service-learning students began working at Spencer, and 2011, the school's ISAT scores increased from 51.6% to 62%. During this period, 59 service-learners and a paid coordinator were placed at Spencer to improve learning outcomes in math and reading. As a result of increased ISAT scores, during fall 2011, CPS elevated Spencer to a Level 2 school in good standing and off probation.

For more information on DePaul's partnership with Spencer Technology Academy, contact John Zeigler (jzeigler@depaul.edu). For more information on DePaul service-learning partnerships with Chicago Public Schools, contact Chad Williams (cwilli48@depaul.edu).

College of Education Service-Learning

The mission of DePaul's College of Education (COE) states "with a commitment to the poor and disenfranchised in society, we believe in education as a force for social justice." According to the Dean of DePaul's College of Education, engagement with underserved schools is at the core of the college's vision for educating education majors. As Dean Paul Zions notes, "we're definitely going to ramp up the School's commitment to service-learning in the next two or three years. Our programs need to be more practice-oriented. Defining what that means is in the early stages, but it's something

"Teaching is more than just about instruction—it's about connection"

we are going to expand on." Zions points to the positive work of the Steans Center and Egan Urban Center at DePaul. More importantly, the Dean points out that many faculty in the college support service-learning in their courses and that there are plans to offer more.

Meanwhile, Horace Hall, Assistant Professor of Educational Policy Studies and Research, who currently integrates service-learning into his COE courses, says there's a real fit between the Steans Center and what education students at DePaul do.

"The whole idea of service-learning is about going into communities that are considered disadvantaged or fragmented," says Hall, who founded REAL, a Chicago-based, youth-centered program. "When students learn how to become teachers, they may not be in these communities. With the Steans Center—which has connections in Lawndale, Englewood and other (Chicago) communities—students can engage in these environments. Teaching is more than just about instruction—it's about connection."

"I have seen for the last 20 years that people come to DePaul because it's clear to them that there will be opportunities to have real-life experiences," says Jim Duignan, Associate Professor of Visual Arts and Secondary Education and founder of DePaul's Stockyard Institute, which brings the arts to youth in underserved Chicago communities. Duignan, who grew up in Chicago, says that "it's a reasonable expectation for me that students who will be urban educators need to be exposed to experiences where communities can provide insights into their preparation to be teachers."

DePaul established its education department in 1911 and elevated it to the School of Education in 1962. Reflecting expansion in programming, the school was renamed the College of Education in 2012. For more information, please visit education.depaul.edu.

Expanding Support of Catholic Schools

As the Steans Center and the College of Education (COE) strengthen collaboration to support underserved schools throughout Chicago, one reflection of their partnership is a transition in DePaul's America Reads program. America Reads hires students eligible for federal work study to provide weekly tutoring in reading for elementary school students. The program originated in the College of Education in 1997, following support by the U.S. Department of Education's to fund local agencies to pay work-study eligible college students as tutors for elementary school children. By receiving funding through Chicago Public Schools, DePaul became one of 1100 colleges and universities across the country with America Reads. Under the leadership of Dr. Dolores Eder, who retired from her COE position this past Fall, the program expanded and was enhanced in recent years by funding from the Big Shoulders Foundation to support DePaul students tutoring at Catholic schools. CPS funding ended this past Fall, and, as a result, America Reads is only supporting Catholic Schools.

Newly administered by the Steans Center in 2011, America Reads will support 48 college students on top of the 31 students already working at Catholic schools as part of the Center's Catholic School Initiative. The America Reads program has significant potential for growth as part of DePaul's ongoing effort to support underserved Catholic Schools.



Father Patrick McDevitt, former Assistant Professor of Human Services and Counseling in the School of Education and now President of All Hallows College in Dublin, Ireland, speaks of the "cooperation and collaboration" reflected in the work of the Catholic School Council (CSC) in the College of Education. McDevitt founded CSC to enrich educational and real world opportunities for students in Catholic schools and DePaul. The Council includes representatives from the university as well as principals and presidents of Catholic high schools.

Collaboration is really the heart and soul of our work

Now supporting approximately 80 paid Catholic school interns annually through the Catholic Schools Initiative and America Reads programs, the Steans Center plays a key role in CSC. "Collaboration is really the heart and soul of our work," says Father McDevitt. "One end result, we believe, is that high school students will know more about DePaul, and DePaul students will have opportunities for internships, student teaching and service learning at Catholic high schools."



MISSION STATEMENT: The Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning provides educational opportunities grounded in Vincentian community values of DePaul students. The Center seeks to develop mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationships with community organizations in order to develop a sense of social agency in our students through enrollment in CbSL courses, community internships and placements, and community-based student employment.

Graduate Education Students and ESL

In a city with more than two-and-a-half million people and a university with thousands of students involved in service learning each year, it can be a challenge to document the impact that you are making in the community. That is not the case, however, for DePaul students in College of Education Professor Jason Goulah's course "Methods of Teaching ESL."

"Many people I worked with were interested in learning English in order to stay connected with their children and families"

Through service-learning activities with long established community organizations like Erie Neighborhood House and Association House on the city's northwest side, students have a chance to work one-on-one with adult learners. The result is an experience that makes a difference to them as education students and residents of Chicago; to the adult learners they support, it means improving their economic opportunities, enhancing relationships with family and neighbors, and gaining the capacity to attain citizenship.

"The class," says instructor Jason Goulah, "is about learning ways of teaching language - and teaching language learners. The service learning component creates a wonderful and practical way for students to do that." Goulah is an assistant professor of Bilingual-Bicultural Education

and the Director of World Language Education, which prepares people who want to be K-12 foreign language or world language teachers. He adds that the service learning experience is "more about human education than methods." Students come to a fuller understanding of learners that they interact with in the community.

The experience not only gives DePaul students a chance to learn more about ESL in a community-based setting. It also provided a window into issues faced by families. Ryan Zak, who completed a master's in education last year at DePaul, worked at Erie Neighborhood House, an organization founded in 1870 that provides a range of programs for low-income primarily Latino families. Erie House serves about 400 people through its ESL program, including 20 to 30 in each of three classes that have welcomed DePaul service learners. "Many people I worked with were interested in learning English in order to stay connected with their children and families," he says.

Mara Dillon, a graduate student in bilingual cultural education, also engaged in service learning activities at Erie Neighborhood House. "Being with adults of a different background gave me a better perspective on children I will be teaching and what their parents need and want to know," she says. Dillon likened the



experience to "tutoring by the moment. We had a lot of conversations, worked on vocabulary, took game pieces and put them together to make a sentence."

Susana Ortiz, ESL Literacy Coordinator at Erie House, adds that ESL students often form a bond with DePaul students and can apply what they learn in the class in a range of practical ways. In some cases, DePaul students will work with adult learners who want to enhance language skills before they take citizenship tests. "People want to speak English better in their jobs and so they can communicate with their children's teachers," says Ortiz. She added that after getting a traffic ticket, one student didn't understand a police report and wound up in jail. "I don't know what he was telling me, so I signed," the man told Ortiz.

"The students I worked with had as much an impact on me as I had on them," says Dillon. "ESL tutoring informed how I looked at what I learned in the classroom; and the classroom informed how I approached ESL tutoring."

Zak noted that one ESL student he worked with "would pay attention for three hours straight. His capacity to learn and his memory were amazing. I'm part of this computer age, and I don't always see that with people of my generation. During the first week, I wondered 'How is he going to remember all this stuff?' But he made significant improvements from week to week."



OPPORTUNITIES

Fifth Annual Service Speaks Conference 2012 | SAVE THE DATE - May 11, 2012

DePaul students, faculty and community partners present on their service and social justice experiences. Participate in a day-long conference featuring panels, presentations, workshops and posters that reflect the impact of university-community engagement on critical social issues in Chicago and internationally.

