Community Service-Learning in the Faculty of Arts: an evaluation of the Arts CARES 2009 program
Summary Report

In February 2009, the Community Research Unit (CRU) in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Regina piloted the Arts CARES program: Arts Community Action in Regina for Educational Service. Fostering such a program was among the early goals of the Community Research Unit; the program fit well within the CRU's mandate to act as a bridge between the community and the University of Regina. This program garnered a largely positive response from organizations, instructors and students as it was developed: anecdotally, this program seemed to fill a gap in current university teaching and learning.

Community service-learning (CSL) is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development (Jacoby, 1996, p5). Action and reflection is the essence of community service-learning. Its programs are often structured to meet specific educational goals and foster learning about larger social issues. In the spirit of reciprocity, both student learning and community needs help define the service-learning goals and program: in this way, a sense of mutual responsibility and respect is fostered. CSL encourages students to do things *with* the community rather than *for* community, a distinction which separates service-learning from charity work (Jacoby, 2006).

To better understand how community service-learning could be encouraged and fostered in the Faculty of Arts, a team of U of R Teaching and Learning Scholars evaluated the Arts CARES program and identified ways of fostering community service-learning in the Faculty of Arts. It is our hope that this report will lead to an expansion of community service-learning in the Faculty of Arts over the short-term and the University at large over the longer-term.

The following summary is excerpted from the larger report, available from the Community Research Unit at www.arts.uregina.ca/cru.

Arts CARES 2009

A pilot Arts CARES program was offered in 2009 to Arts undergraduate students seeking a week-long service-learning experience. The pilot was modeled as an alternative reading week, or February break, open to all undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts free of charge. Arts CARES was based on a daily structure of morning community service and afternoon reflection. For four days during the university's February break (17 through 20 February 2009), participating students undertook 12 hours of service at partner organizations in Regina and participated in 8 hours of facilitated reflection and learning during the afternoons. Each student was based at the same community-based organization for the week, which allowed them time to learn about the organization, their work and the community it serves, or to complete special projects. Matches were made on the basis of student interest, registration in participating classes and learning objectives

established by instructors. The afternoons were a time for students to learn from each other through discussion and reflection, and to interact with guest speakers.

The success of the Arts CARES program required collaborative effort among three partner 'groups': the instructors who incorporated the program into their courses, the students who volunteered to participate, and the community partners who provided the service opportunities. An in-depth presentation of each partner group is available in our larger report.

Instructors:

Geography 491AF (Hydrology II: Surface Waters) - Dr. Kyle Hodder[1]
Human Justice 355 (Food, Hunger and Social Justice) – Dr. Annette Desmarais
Interdisciplinary Studies 101 (Global Citizenship) – Dr. Bryan Hillis
Political Science 361 (Local & Community Politics) – Tina Beaudry-Mellor
Women's & Gender Studies 301 (Women & Health: Local & Global) – Dr. Wendee Kubik

Community partners:

AIDS Program South Saskatchewan (APSS)
Four Directions Community Health Centre
Planned Parenthood Regina (PPR)
REACH (Regina Education and Action on Child Hunger)
Regina & District Food Bank
Regina Open Door Society (RODS)
Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM)

Student Participants:

77% of students were enrolled in participating classes
74% of students are enrolled in the Faculty of Arts, representing 11 different programs and departments
Median age of student participants was 22 years old
85% of students were female

Arts CARES Evaluation

As a part of the CRU's efforts to encourage community service-learning in the Faculty of Arts, an evaluation of the Arts CARES program was undertaken in March 2009. All participants had the opportunity to fill out an online survey designed to investigate impacts and outcomes on partners and participants. The overall survey results point to a high level of satisfaction and partner engagement, with a few areas that could be modified to increase the effectiveness of the program. Students responded positively to the overall Arts CARES experience, as seen by the following graphs.
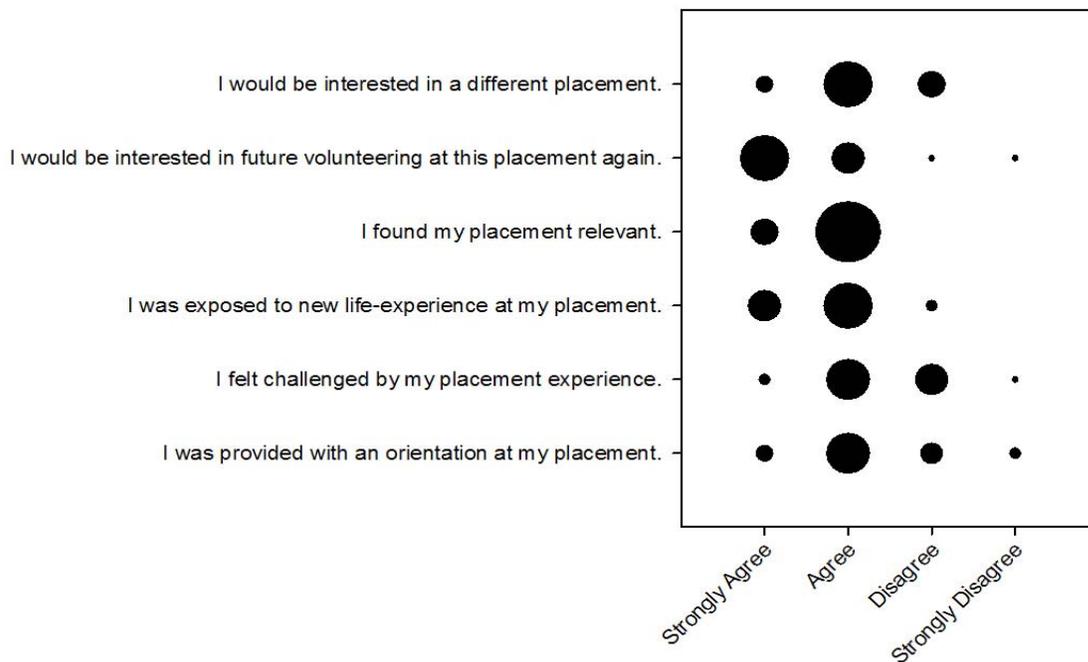
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[1] Although Arts CARES was incorporate into GEOG 491AF's syllabus, there were no student applicants from this class.

Overall Student Experience
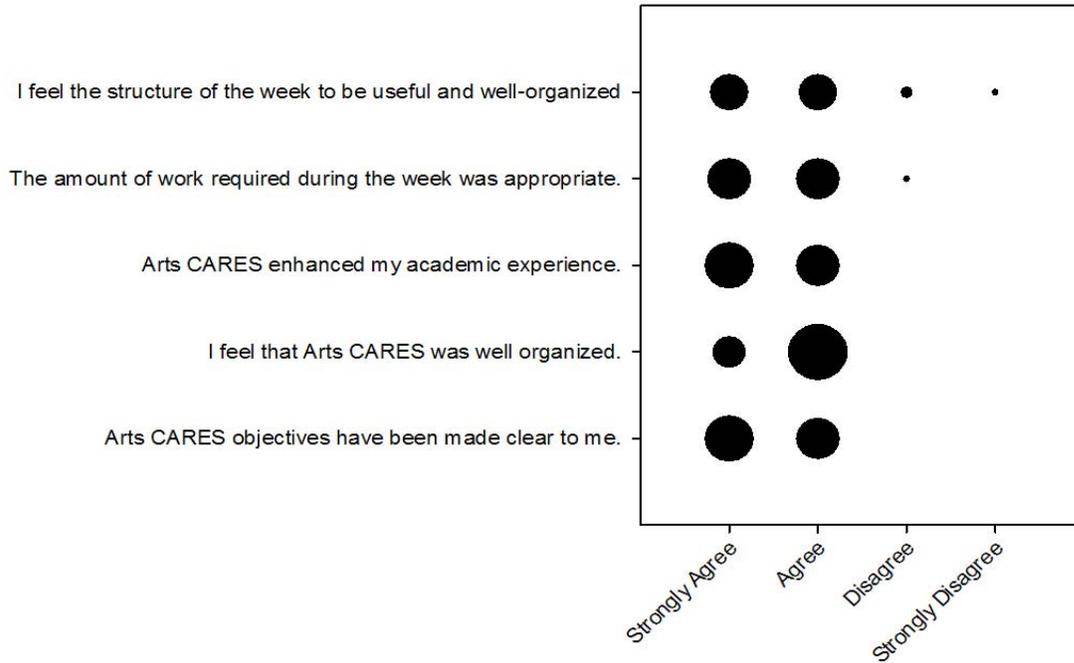
Overall Community Placement Experience

Many students cited that they were challenged at their placements and were given a new life experience through Arts CARES. Students identified numerous benefits and positive outcomes and made suggestions on how the program could be more effective and enjoyable. The benefits of the experience depended, to a large extent, on the degree of preparedness of the organization, having meaningful tasks for the students to do and beneficial interaction with staff and clients of the organization.

Positive outcomes gained from their experience included:
- ➢ positive interaction with staff and clients
- ➢ gaining a new appreciation of the community organization, its work and the challenges and issues they face
- ➢ new knowledge
- ➢ the value of hands-on learning or active volunteering.

The organization of afternoon sessions included both presentations by university and community speakers as well as time for facilitated discussion among student participants. Both of these aspects of the afternoon were well received. In evaluating the afternoon speakers, students rated speakers from the community, or people speaking about specific community projects, very highly in terms of interest and information. Students also rated interactive sessions with university administrators highly: for some, it was the first time an administrator had ever asked for their thoughts and ideas.

Students were asked what they appreciated most about Arts CARES in an open-ended manner, which garnered responses with similar themes.
- Being able to volunteer or take action.
- The afternoon presentation and discussions, particularly the opportunity to learn new things and interact with other students.
- A new or increased awareness of local issues and challenges.
- The opportunity to apply theory to practice.
- Meeting new people

82% of respondents indicated that they would participate in Arts CARES again, while 88% of students said they would recommend the program to a friend. When asked about participating in future events, 70% of students indicated interest in participating a one-day event (e.g. day of service) and 70% were interested in a semester-long community-service learning course.

Instructor responses

Instructors responded positively to the Arts CARES program, with all indicating interest in participating again, or recommending it to another instructor. They identified a number of benefits for their students, including:
- Opportunities for networking and interaction with other students
- Awareness of the value of community organizations
- An opportunity to connect theory to practice
- A compact community service-learning experience
- Cultivating a sense of responsibility

The community organizations were quite enthusiastic about the program, particularly because it allowed them to access a willing pool of young volunteers. Not only were organizations keen to promote an ethic of volunteering, but they also gained the practical benefits of new ideas and extra sets of hands to help on projects or regular work. A few organizations pointed out the benefit of being able to expose students to new situations or to teach them about the community. In this way, these community organizations saw themselves as important teachers. They also saw Arts CARES as an opportunity to establish a longer term relationship with the University of Regina. All respondents strongly agreed/agreed that Arts CARES benefited their organization.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations to strengthen the Arts CARES program and encourage other community service-learning opportunities in the Faculty of Arts and University of Regina. They are not ranked in order of importance.

A. Arts CARES Improvements
  I. Consider an Arts CARES planning committee that includes community and faculty representatives
  II. Streamline time not spent at organizations or in reflective discussions:
    - shorter time period for lunch
    - hosting one orientation session with email follow-up
  III. Redesign the afternoon sessions:
    - incorporate more challenging discussions, particularly critical reflection about service and linking theory to practice
    - offer students the option to spend more time at their community placement on the last day

B. Foster Partner Communication
  I. Emphasize the importance of an organizational tour and orientation for students
  II. Facilitate the meeting of instructors and community organizations to learn more about each others' work and their expectations of students
  III. Encourage discussion between instructors about their expectations of students and helpful resources
  IV. Encourage students and organizations to discuss their expectations and tasks to perform. This can also include an explanation of why certain tasks are relevant or important for organizations

C. Community Engagement
  I. Develop strong partnerships and involve community partners in more steps during the Arts CARES program. This can include:
    - involving community partners in the planning phase
    - building a relationship with community umbrella groups like the United Way to reach more community partners
    - encourage community partners to share their knowledge with participating classes or during afternoon sessions

II. Encourage community partners to meet and create a relationship with instructors
III. Share information with community organizations on CSL and its benefit beyond volunteerism

D. Instructor Support
   I. Offer opportunities for greater communication with other partners
   II. Encourage instructor input and participation in afternoon workshops
   III. Encourage instructors to help students link their classroom experience with community placement experience after the Arts CARES program. This could include further reflection or students sharing their experience with classmates who didn't participate.

E. Student CSL Opportunities
   I. Explore existing university programs and opportunities like the Arts Work Experience Internship as ways of encouraging CSL
   II. Encourage the integration of CSL into more Faculty of Arts courses
   III. Organize a day of service for interested students, instructors and university staff as a means of introducing CSL and encouraging community engagement; consider partnering with interested student and campus groups
   IV. Consider an international alternative spring break

F. Building a Positive University Environment
   I. Encourage ways of sharing CSL information, building relationships and collaborating on CSL programs with other U of R faculties and units
   II. Seek sustainable program funding
   III. Encourage faculty research on CSL
   IV. Advocate for recognition of CSL in faculty annual performance review
   V. Recognize CSL on student transcripts or create a Certificate in CSL