



HYDRA

Civic Engagement At and Beyond Southwestern University



Thank you for your efforts towards change! 17,891.7 civic engagement hours were counted for the '09 fall semester, and 20 courses currently integrate community-based-learning.



Photo taken by Diana Parra '09 while in Peru

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FEBRUARY 2009

Reconciling with a Sweat

By Leland Spencer (www.rmnblog.org)

My advisor in college, Dr. Jamie Capuzza, used the phrase "Feminism with a Sweat" whenever she taught gender classes. It was probably three years ago that I first heard her say that, and I admit that I didn't really get it. She explained that feminism requires more than belief; to be a feminist, one must act (i.e., work up a sweat, hence, "Feminism with a sweat"). On a cognitive level, I understood that, and if you asked me as a sophomore or junior in college to explain what she meant by it, I would say what you just read in the sentence above. Even so, I still didn't get it. I didn't understand it experientially.

Now, a couple years later, I'm glad to say that I think I do get it--or, I am in the process of understanding it experientially. I suppose the point of the statement was lost on me because I connected activism and feminism in my mind, so I had no ground for understanding feminist beliefs and feminist behaviors as distinct. Similarly, it never occurred to me that people would identify as feminists without endorsing feminist beliefs or exhibiting feminist behaviors. In many ways, feminism is still castigated as "the other f word," so why would anyone want to claim that identity without embracing it and living it out?

I'm not sure, but it happens, and I recognize that now in ways that I didn't a couple years ago. Dr. Capuzza also often said, "Let's not be naive." My assumption that feminism and sweat were inherently connected was naive. I've been corrected.

So what's the point of this post? I guess it is to encourage all of us to own the identities we claim, and to choose the optional ones carefully. No one is forced to call her- or himself a feminist, so if you do, do it with a sweat worthy of the label. If I call myself a feminist but do nothing to advance human dignity, advocate for justice, and work for equality, am I really a

ACTIVISTS SPEAK

Thursday, February 19th

6:30-9:30pm

DLC Community Room

Come take a closer look at local activists, their work, and the drive behind their actions!

6:30 Dr. Alison Kafer, Feminist Studies

7pm Karen Wilson, SafePlace

7:30 Aaron Rohre, Religious Life

8pm Students Lindsey Smith, Travis Norton, Carly Morris

8:30 Civic Engagement/Green Hall

feminist? I'd say no. I know some people think I'm being patriarchal when I insist that feminism has a definition, but to say that anyone who claims to be a feminist is automatically a feminist actually waters down the movement, does it not? After all, if I say I am a giraffe, that doesn't make me a giraffe, and just because I stand in a garage does not make me a car.

This applies to our movement, too. What does it mean to say that I am a Christian? A United Methodist Christian? A Reconciling United Methodist Christian? What beliefs and behaviors are connected to those identities?

I want to close with Sonja Foss's wonderful definition of feminism. It includes some good goals for Reconciling with a Sweat: I am a feminist, and, for me, feminism is the effort to disrupt the ideology of domination that pervades Western culture and the effort to transform it into a culture and relationships characterized by mutuality, respect, self-determination, and equality. Feminism is the effort to disrupt oppression wherever it occurs, whether of women, people of color, old people, gays and lesbians, friends, or family.

Untitled

By Diana Parra '09

Growing up I used to see kids selling candy at the stop lights of my native Bogota. They were there all day sometimes, making money for someone else, and often not going to school at all. I did not know it then, but that was my first encounter with child exploitation. Since then I've learned about many other injustices, discussed their causes, implications. I used to think that although it is easier to live with your eyes closed to certain realities, we all must face them, acknowledge them, or they will go on forever.

Things have changed. I now believe that merely facing, acknowledging, discussing the problem will not make it go away, though it can be productive, but that real change will only come of action. I believe in activism and service at the local level, but this summer I was ready to venture into Latin America, my native land, and at least attempt to offer whatever help I could. Thanks to Nexus Voluntarios I found a way to do exactly that: travel to Peru and work as a volunteer with a group of people that have dedicated their lives to improving those of others.

The poverty of the region, the exclusion of particular groups and the unequal distribution of wealth, cultural factors, particular family situations, such as violence or dysfunctional dynamics, and, of course, a limited access to a quality education are all factors that exacerbate the already problematic reality of sexual and labor exploitation of minors in Peru. Capital Humano y Social Alternativo is a non-profit civil association that seeks to promote human and social development throughout Peru, and Preparete Para La Vida, the program I worked with, is one of its sponsored projects.

The premise of Preparete Para La Vida is that a good education can give children the tools to face life with dignity and a full knowledge of their rights, duties, and how to defend themselves; rather than merely combating the symptoms of exploitation, the project seeks to empower the children themselves.

I went to Peru wanting to help these kids to leave their jobs and dedicate themselves to school completely, knowing full well that possibilities for advancement and a better life are limited without a proper education. But things were not that simple. The reality I found was very different from that ideal scenario of easy solutions. If the kids worked, it was most often not by choice, but because of necessity. When the combined income of both parents was insufficient for even the most basic of necessities, it was up to the children to contribute monetarily. Although in some cases the working hours that the minors held were so onerous that school was out of the question, plenty of kids simply worked before or after school. Though not ideal, that is their reality. They have no choice, because without that little extra money, they would not be able to buy school supplies or to replace the shoes they outgrew. So the recurring theme was this: we cannot force children to stop working, so how are we going to help them while keeping their realities in mind?

As I mentioned before, empowerment was the key. Because it was often hard to keep up with school and six to ten hours of work each day, Preparete Para La Vida offers tutorials in language and mathematics free of charge, to help the kids keep up with their school work. Moreover, to help meet the demands of an increasingly technology-oriented world, the project also offers free computer classes, where the students could become proficient in the use of Windows, Word, Excel, Power Point, and the Internet. Psychological support and counseling were also available.

What most inspired me about the work that Preparete was doing were the Skills for Life workshops. These consist of 12 different sessions that dealt with self-esteem, assertiveness,

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the rights and duties of children, sexual and reproductive health education, conflict resolution, managing situations of risk, making a life plan, and labor and sexual exploitation. These are also offered free of charge, and because they are dynamic and entertaining, teaching mostly through various games and lively activities, children really benefit. The results were not necessarily evident overnight, but they were most certainly immense. While I was in Iquitos, I had the chance of participating in these workshops with a group from a home for girls that had been sexually exploited or had been in situations of violence. Before we started working with them, many ran away from the home because of internal conflicts, returning to a life of prostitution. They were mostly maladjusted, and they had severe behavioral problems. Though slowly, the workshops seemed to help. Some still wanted to run away from the highly structured institution, but their new skills in conflict resolution helped to improve their internal dynamics. Their better self-esteem and newfound knowledge of their rights became a motivator in school. It was incredible to see the changes, albeit small, that made a big difference for many of the girls, girls that had been neglected or abused most of their lives. It was there that I discovered the enormous effect that empowerment could have on young lives.

Though it is impressive how much the people of Preparete have accomplished, especially when considering the few resources they have. It is promising to think of how much more they can achieve with some help. There is no lack of enthusiasm among the dedicated professionals and volunteers, and the little funds they do have are very well-allocated, but more is still needed. For example, part of their strategy in combating minor exploitation is sensitization, that is, raising awareness about the issue itself, and problematizing child labor, but they have very few resources to do so. They have no cameras to gather visuals or record testimonies, and very little funds to print materials.

I definitely learned more than I contributed to Preparete's effort in rescuing children from exploitation. The program, the realities, the experiences all changed me, they inspired me, and now I hope to continue to help any way I can. Because they are in need of funds to expand their capabilities, I plan on raising funds. They have a very small library (if the few books they do have can be said to constitute a library), so book drives are in the works as well.

The project taught me about the immense benefits of empowerment through the children I worked with, and I can't help thinking how much other kids could also accomplish with the right tools. I believe that any child, whether in a situation of risk or not, can profit from the Life Skills workshops, so I hope to be able to replicate them in the town where I attend college. It won't be easy, but I believe it's worth it. The success stories I witnessed in Peru are proof.

* I kept a blog while I was there. It has a more detailed description of the work we did in Iquitos.
blogabond.com/poweroflove

DESTINATION: SERVICE --- Spring Break 2009

Social Services Outreach: Goodwill Houston (Houston, TX)
Hurricane Relief: Episcopal Diocese of Texas (Galveston, TX)
Hurricane Relief: UMCOR Disaster Response (Orange, TX)

Applications available in the Office of Religious Life; due February 20th

Why It's Good to Be SMArT

By Suzy Pukys & Dr. Romi Burks

The Need for SMArT

S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education represents a priority nationwide for many reasons, most of which underscore the U.S. struggle to keep pace with other nations in developing scientists, engineers, and professionals with technological expertise, and, most importantly, qualified teachers to educate them. A 2005 report commissioned by the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF), *A Commitment to America's Future:*

Responding to the Crisis in Mathematics and Science Education, connects lackluster student performance in science and math with predictions of this country's rapid loss of competitive edge in the global marketplace. Key data cited in the report include:

- The 2004 Program for International Student Assessment, showing the problem-solving skills of American 10th graders was significantly lower than their peers in 25 countries.

The U.S. Department of Labor predicted that from 1998-2008, jobs requiring science, engineering, and technical training will increase by 51%, and that by 2008, there will be some 6 million job openings for scientists, engineers, and technicians.

- Attempts to recruit and retain science and math teachers at the secondary level have been largely ineffective, and in 2008, the data suggests that the U.S. public education system will need between 260,000 to 290,000 new high school math and science teachers.

Statewide, a recent report by the Fordham Institute blames the public school science curriculum for inadequately preparing students for work in math and science, and gives the Texas science standards the third worst score in the country. The report also cited that approximately half of all students in Texas' state colleges and universities need remedial classes in science and math.

The Mission of SMArT

With its fusion of mentoring and question-based inquiry, Southwestern's SMArT – Science & Math Achiever Teams – has the potential to spark the interest and imagination of students in ways that have far-reaching impact. Through this program, both Southwestern and public school students stand to make gains in their understanding around certain scientific and mathematical concepts, build new relationships, and think critically about how to apply their learning.

SMArT is a mentoring program that gives Southwestern University students the opportunity to share their interests in science or math with elementary school students. The program pairs college students one-on-one with 3rd-5th graders to complete a math- or science-related project of their choice over the course of ten weeks. The elementary school students come to our campus for these sessions, and love working in a "real lab" with their college counterparts.

SMArT's design allows students to explore an area of interest with personal attention and ample resources, which typically are not available to them in the regular classroom setting.

SMArT creates an environment of cooperative learning. Elementary school students, with help from their college mentors, begin their exploration with a question. Below are the questions from last semester around which each SMArT pair developed their respective projects:

- What happens when Earth plates move? By Ashlyn & Anna
- How fast can a solar car go? By Nathan & Mallory

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- What blocks a magnetic field? By Escher & Meredith
- Can a Lego bridge hold as much weight as a wood bridge? By Brandon & Sierra
- How do different materials change the tone of a drum sound? By Parker & Liz
- Which muscle contributes more to a frog jumping? By Kaitlin & Michael
- Is the liver in the same place of every animal? By Hannah & Julia
- Can you make a pickle glow? By Tommy & Megan
- How are animals classified? By Casey & Jesse
- How does a bird build its nest? By Alyssa & Sarah
- How does a caterpillar turn into a butterfly? By Gabby & Victoria
- Do longer rockets fly higher? By Nate & Dr. Burks

SMArT pairs meet once a week to work on their project. The program culminates in an Achievement Party during the 10th and final week when students display their projects in an open house poster presentation on campus. Here, elementary school students present their inquiry-based projects and findings to their families, teachers, school administrators, and to the Southwestern community.

This semester, the program launched its 5th semester on January 26, and will meet every Monday afternoon until the Achievement Party/Poster Presentation on April 20th in Bishop's Lounge. Please come to the Party to support these young scientists, our students, and this program that, in its own small way, encourages this community to be more intentional and proactive about science and math education.



The 2nd annual "Arts Festival" was held at Southwestern in February for local children. Senior Natalie Moore designed and organized this event out of a need she saw in the community surrounding the arts. Activities were enjoyed by all!

Escape

by Lexie Cooper '11

I am an upper middle-class, white female. My life could hardly be improved by society's standards, yet I still feel the need to escape.

I do not have a flame inside of me, unlike so many great leaders of the past who fought to overcome enormous obstacles, just to obtain some sort of normalcy to their lives and the lives of others: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Susan B. Anthony, and Harvey Milk among them.

No, there is no flame in me – there is only a timid, muted yearning for something more – something that I cannot name, but which calls to me nonetheless. It gets stronger every day, while I continue spinning haphazardly through a world in which everything is handed to me, because I do not know better. This is the most dangerous life. Here, everything is paid for, everything is safe, everything is healthy. Everything can be exactly how I want it if I just ask. While a drug addict may have troubles his entire life trying to kick a habit that may never fully go away, I will spend my entire life trying to find a logical reason to give up this cushy life I was born into.

It is much more difficult to give up something comfortable than to give up something terrible.

Engaged

is the new SU Radio program that tells the stories of civically engaged Southwestern students in a NPR-type format. This wonderful and inspiring bi-weekly show can be listened to via podcast thanks to creator Brooke Lyssy!

<http://suengage.libsyn.com/>

Don't miss out on the first show highlighting the Rainbow Foods Nutrition Program designed and implemented by senior Gillian Graham.



Office of Civic Engagement

The Office of Civic Engagement collaborates with students, faculty, and the greater community to move beyond traditional practices of volunteerism, service, activism, and community-based learning. We promote passion and action that strengthens and ameliorates one's community.

Hydra is assembled and published by the Office of Civic Engagement. The views and opinions expressed here are not necessarily held by the office. To voice concerns, please contact Suzy Pukys at pukyss@southwestern.edu or at 863.1987. To submit articles, photographs, art, volunteer opportunities, or other relevant material, please contact Jessica Hager at hagerj@southwestern.edu or at 863.1215. All are welcome!