



HYDRA

Civic Engagement at and Beyond Southwestern University



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Hydra Turns Two

by Suzy Pukys

Much like the mythical creature for which it is named, the *Hydra* seeks to represent myriad, diverse voices speaking, shouting, and singing from multiple constituencies – students, faculty, staff, and members of the greater community – and, at the same time, to be mindful that we are all part of the same “body”. The image of one body, many heads, embodies our vision for this medium: many voices, ideas, needs, interests, articulated in multiple iterations, all representing something or someone different, but ultimately, operating within the system to which they are attached.

Last year, we launched the *Hydra* and simultaneously retooled the name of our office as the Office of Civic Engagement. Now that the Office of Civic Engagement and the *Hydra* have been around for a full year, I have been asked multiple times to define “civic engagement”. As the Director of Civic Engagement at Southwestern, you’d think I would have a single, solid, working definition of the term.

I don’t. Instead, I interpret “civic engagement” as an idea that has to be defined from individual to individual. It seems almost counter-intuitive to say this; after all, isn’t civic engagement about getting involved with/caring about other members and issues of and within society? Well, sure. However, authentic civic engagement, however it’s defined, must originate from an equally authentic desire to figure out how to weave oneself into the larger social fabric. How this happens is entirely dependent upon each individual.

When I look around campus, I see students defining and actualizing civic engagement in ways that are very much structured around their passions, interests, and values. Climate change. Durfur.

Animal rights. Domestic violence. Peace. Cancer. Education. Poverty. The issue areas and target populations seem infinite, spanning local to global contexts. To make sweeping generalizations about what individuals want to understand, want to discuss, want to figure out how to change would grossly oversimplify the diversity of civic engagement practices and interpretations we see on this campus and beyond.

When truly pressed to provide a definition, my responses are typically “the active practice of citizenship” or “anything that has to do with life beyond oneself” (if the two can be extricated from each other); neither of these is particularly helpful, and I’m sorry about that. But even attempting to put parameters around what an individual member’s notion is of “doing good,” or to streamline how one makes meaning of how to live in the world would be, in my view, an imposition of perspective – mine over yours. That doesn’t sound like good civic engagement to me. Whatever that means.



Summer Experiences

At The Core

By Carly Morris '09

To date, the most interesting class I took at Southwestern was Dr. Dan Hilliard's "Visions of a Good Society" in the fall of 2008. I was taking this class simultaneously while doing my Sociology capstone, as well as preparing for a semester abroad in Ireland. I remember one day distinctly in the Visions class. We were discussing civic responsibility and activism, and suddenly we were all at a loss for words when Dr. Hilliard asked us about Southwestern's Core Values. Did our professors and fellow students discuss these values? Were they being integrated into our studies and experiences? After about five minutes of somewhat vague answers from students about how the core values were posted on the wall outside the Commons, I raised my hand and said, "I think the fact that no one knows what they are is testament to how we feel about them." We all laughed and then Dr. Hilliard read them out to us:

Promoting lifelong learning and a passion for intellectual and personal growth; fostering diverse perspectives; being true to one's self and others; respecting the worth and dignity of persons; encouraging activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good.

That was the first time I actually took a moment to really think about those five values. Okay, so we don't recite the values at the beginning of each class and no one knows them by heart, but in class that day, we agreed that the overall sentiment of Southwestern's Core Values was being communicated quite well to the students. Especially that last one about activism.

This past summer I finished up my degree at Southwestern with an internship coordinated by Suzy Pukys through the Verizon Grant Foundation. Several students were placed at various non-profit domestic violence and abuse agencies in the greater Austin area for the summer. Each week we met in the atrium of Mood-Bridwell for a communal dinner, venting session, and discussion about our very different experiences. I was placed at STARRY, a crisis counseling center in Round Rock, formally known as "Services to At-Risk and Runaway Youth." They have since expanded their services to include family conflict and delinquent services. I was doing everything from client in-takes and follow-ups to coordinating counseling group sessions with other counselors and graduate interns. The STARRY family took me right under their wing, treating me as a valuable asset to their team, always asking for my input and opinion on issues concerning the agency. The summer was an amazing experience, because for once, I was working on a micro level, directly impacting and improving people's lives on a day to day basis. It pushed me to reflect upon my Capstone as well as my semester abroad.

My capstone topic with Dr. Maria Lowe was "Social Movement and Activism." I chose to research the little-known ex-gay movement in the Austin area by examining LifeGuard Ministries in Georgetown, Texas. This research was more exploratory for me because I was just so interested in the subject. It baffled me and appalled me simultaneously. I guess my inner Sociologist saw a challenge and I decided to research this movement, which happened to collide with my own personal value system. After my research, I did feel as though I had accomplished an amazing feat, but I struggled a little bit with my chosen topic. Should I have worked with an agency that I felt motivated and passionate about? In the end I presented a valuable piece of research that has informed numerous individuals.

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Summer Experiences

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I decided that the next piece of research I would do would be for me - something I was so fired up about that would align with “encouraging activism in the pursuit of social justice and the common good.”

Luckily, I traveled to Ireland the next semester and was introduced to peace, mediation, and conflict studies. My semester in Ireland was concluded by an independent study project. We were given one month to research a chosen topic, write a lengthy paper and present our research to the group. While visiting Belfast in Northern Ireland, I remember hearing insane statistics about the high teenage pregnancy rates in Northern Ireland. I began to research sexual health and teenage pregnancy and was shocked to find that sexual education in schools was sporadic, patchy, and inconsistent. Reminded of my own sexual health education in rural Texas (aka abstinence), I decided to do a profile of sexual health education in the Belfast area. I spent a month traveling all over the city, interviewing researchers, teachers, and sexual health advocates within the community. I finally felt like I had found my niche. I was researching a topic that I felt passionately about, I was able to inform and educate others along the way, and I was honing in religion and sexuality, my two favorite social variables.

Once I returned to Texas, I was able to create a sexual health database for parents at STARRY. I worked one-on-one with Toniya Parker, the parenting specialist at STARRY, to develop and implement a sexual health information database for both parents and middle school students. For me, this has been the culmination of my experiences at Southwestern. I was drawing from my academic background, my knowledge of social research, my study abroad experience, and the Southwestern “activism” core value. This past summer I experienced that feeling that you get when you contribute to something you care about. It is an amazing feeling, and I directly credit my time and experiences at Southwestern to strengthening that way of thinking.

During one of our weekly internship meetings at Mood-Bridwell this past summer, we discussed what our roles would be post-internship. How could we continue to work for social change? We discussed several different venues, but a sentiment arose that if we as students wanted to make an impact, we would have to pick some aspect of our society in need of change and work to address that issue.

Just yesterday I gave my friend Eva a ride home from work. We were discussing my experiences in Ireland, and, low and behold, she has been involved in the peace process for fourteen years hosting Irish students in America. In addition to that, Eva has been a sexual health educator for several years as well. As we drove home, we had a wonderful discussion about the political agenda in Ireland, the necessity for informed and consistent sexual health information for young adults, and her experiences as a health educator. It seems that as each day goes by, something reminds me of my time and experiences at Southwestern and once again I become motivated and invigorated to make a positive difference in this world. I guess I knew Southwestern’s Core Values all along, I just needed a few amazing experiences to back them up.



Carly in Amaugh, Ireland after trekking up to the top of a mountain

20 Things I Learned During My Sea Turtle Summers

By Anna Frankel '09

1. Some of the most unique and passionate people in the world work with sea turtles.
2. Living in a tiny trailer is totally worth it when you live on the beach.
3. Watching a sea turtle hatchling release makes all of the beach patrols worthwhile.
4. On tours, people are always shocked when they're told that poaching nearly wiped out sea turtle populations. What they have a harder time understanding is that just like any doctor, biologist or surf instructor, all that poachers were trying to do was support their families.
5. One of the most important aspects of sea turtle conservation is education.
6. No visitors to Sea Turtle, Inc. can ever ask too many questions or too silly of a question. Education is education and if they learn to love sea turtles, I did my job.
7. Watching the joy on a kiddo's face when they see a turtle swim over to the window is enough to make me optimistic about marine conservation.
8. Sea turtles are beautiful animals, but they are much more beautiful live and swimming than stuffed and lacquered.
9. When patrolling at 5:30 am in Mexico it is possible to watch the stars and the sunrise at the same time.
10. Often patience with a little visitor can turn their fear into wonder.
11. The Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle project is a success story. Conservation efforts for an animal with such a long life span are slow, but we've gone from less than 300 in '85 to over 12,000 today.
12. Biologists work really strange hours.
13. The sand is inescapable. I've learned to live with it.
14. Only about 0.3% of the sea turtle hatchlings we release survive to adulthood.
15. Working with animals means that unexpected and amazing things happen every day.
16. Being nose to nose with a sea turtle can make you forget everything else in the world.
17. Sharing a sea turtle moment with someone is an experience no language barrier could ever take away from.
18. How to properly hold, tag, feed, identify, scratch, force feed, give pills to, vacuum a tank for, draw blood from, give shots to and remove barnacles from a sea turtle all while only getting a little dirty.
19. Being around turtles make people happy. And I'm convinced that even though lots of teenage boys act too cool to visit Sea Turtle, Inc. with their families they love our turtles too.
20. My work these summers have actually made a difference in the world.

Sea Turtle, Inc. is a sea turtle hospital on South Padre Island dedicated to the care of sick and injured turtles and the protection of the sea turtle species native to the Texas coastline, the Kemp's Ridley. Over my two summers as a sea turtle intern I played a role in protecting approximately 7,600 sea turtle hatchlings and educating thousands of visitors. Do you want to visit or know more? Visit our website www.seaturtleinc.com.



What Began Around a Dinner Table

by Leigh Ann Mingle '07

I have always been passionate about politics. Growing up, my family would discuss and debate the latest political news around the dinner table, so it is not surprising that I am involved in Barack Obama's political campaign. What is surprising is that my first foray into political activism was through College Republicans. I came to Southwestern, as I suspect many do, with the thoughts and political orientation of my parents. Throughout my three years these thoughts were challenged, questioned, examined, discussed and ultimately changed. I think the moment I realized that I was a democrat was in February of 2007. I stood in line for several hours to see Senator Obama speak in Austin and I have been volunteering with his campaign ever since. At that speech, I realized that this man was the real thing. He would be able to evoke change and not just talk about it. I was surprised at how involved I became in the campaign. I thought when I started that I would make a few phone calls and put a bumper sticker on my car and then be done, but as I was talking to potential voters I found myself getting more and more passionate about what we were doing.



Presidential Candidate Senator Barack Obama shaking the hands of supporters

During the primary season, I found myself organizing my precinct in Austin as well as working in Williamson County and my home county of Jefferson. I also organized an early voter's rally at Southwestern in an attempt to promote students to get out and vote in the primary. Throughout my work with the other volunteers and staff members, I realized how amazing Senator Obama's campaign really is. This campaign is the first in history that is really run by the people. The network of volunteers and supporters is so extensive and so passionate that we form the backbone of the campaign. For me, this is one of the main reasons I love being involved. I feel like I am actually making a difference.

I feel like when Senator Obama gets elected that I, and hundreds of thousands of others, will be responsible. His candidacy is built on our hopes and idealism. If people didn't believe that things could be better, then he wouldn't have gotten this far. It is a great feeling to know that you are working to improve the world, and I suggest that everyone find a cause or a campaign that you are passionate about and get involved. You may be surprised how effective you are.



Leigh at a Barack Obama Presidential Campaign Rally in 2008

Local Issues

untitled

By Alex Hall '11

me•di•a (mē'dē-ə) n. 2. the means of communication, as radio and television, newspapers, and magazines, that reach or influence people widely.

bi•as (bī'ās) n. 2. a particular tendency or inclination, esp. one that prevents unprejudiced consideration of a question; prejudice.

em•dash (ēm'dāsh') n. a symbol (—) used in writing and printing to indicate a break in thought or sentence structure, to introduce a phrase added for emphasis, definition, or explanation, or to separate two clauses.

brack•et (brāk'īt) n. 3. either of two punctuation marks ([or]) used to enclose textual material.

ex•ple•tive (ĕk'splī-tīv) n. 1. an interjectory word or expression, frequently profane; an exclamatory oath. 2. a syllable, word, or phrase serving to fill out.

de•lete (dī-lēt') tr.v. -let•ed, -let•ing, -letes. to strike out or remove (something written or printed); cancel; erase; expunge.

brack•et (brāk'īt) n. 3. either of two punctuation marks ([or]) used to enclose textual material.



Five First-Year students chose to spend their last day of summer volunteering at Stonehaven Community in Georgetown and at the Capital Area Food Bank of Austin.

JUST A HOP, SKIP, AND JUMP AWAY

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES IN WALKING AND BIKING DISTANCE FROM SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

BOYS & GIRLS CLUB 868.3700

www.stonehaven.cbgbclub.org

Primarily serves neighborhood youth, giving them a safe place after-school and during the summer to play, to study, and to develop relationships with peers and adults. The Club's programming is designed to create developmental assets for youth.

FAITH IN ACTION 868.9544

Comprised of over 100 volunteers who provide basic transportation services to Georgetown's older population. Such services include visits to the doctor, grocery store, and beauty parlor.

LONE STAR CIRCLE OF CARE 863.9208

Provides affordable healthcare services to patients who may or may not be insured.

WILLIAMSON COUNTY REGIONAL ANIMAL SHELTER 943.3322 www.wilcopets.org

Houses rescued and surrendered dogs and cats. The shelter also offers adoption services once animals are spayed or neutered.

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!