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Service-Learning with Native American Communities

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Service-Learning with Native American Communities

Abstract

The International Partnership for Service-Learning along with South Dakota State University engages North and South Dakota Native American Communities with service learning. College students from the United States as well as foreign countries participate in 2-13 week sessions in service learning. Students have a two week orientation session on Native American Culture. Students meet with SDSU Faculty as well as Native American Cultural Presenters. Orientation concludes with a one week academic field trip visiting historical sites and SD Reservations. Students then spend up to 10 weeks living and serving in Native American communities. Students may earn up to 15 credits from SDSU in Anthropology, Sociology, English, and Geography.

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Service-Learning is a process through which college students are involved in community work that contributes significantly to positive change in individuals, organizations, neighborhoods, and/or large systems in a community. It also contributes to students' academic understanding, civic development, personal or career growth, and/or understanding of larger social issues.

Service-Learning is located in the middle of a continuum where internships/practica from one end (primarily focused on students' career development) and volunteer activities (primarily focused on service to others) from the other end. Thus, Service-Learning is unique in its equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring.

Service-Learning:

- is a powerful means of learning
- addresses human needs that would otherwise remain unmet
- advances the personal growth of students as members of the community
- gives expression to the obligation of public and community service by educated people.
- sets academic institutions in right relationship to the larger society
- is experiential learning

The Service-Learning Program at South Dakota State University by way of the International Partnership for Service-Learning is a semester long program. Students earn up to 15 credit hours in our 13 week program.

The program is set up in 5 sections. **Section one** is the required reading of 6 textbooks prior to start of the program. The textbooks give the students an overall sense of Native American Culture.

Section two is program orientation at the start of the semester. A week long intense orientation on Lakota Culture begins with South Dakota State University faculty lectures and classroom sessions on literature, sociology, anthropology, and geography of South Dakota. Native American cultural presentations are also part of orientation such as Lakota Language, Traditional Foods, Medicinal Plants Identification and *Uses*, Native American Spirituality and story telling.

Section three is the field trip in which the students and program director journey through the state of South Dakota via van to visit significant historical sites important to Native Americans including South Dakota Indian reservations. We travel to Wounded Knee, Crazy Horse Mountain, Black Hills, Bear Butte, Badlands, Devils Tower, Akta Lakota Museum, *Journey* Museum and visit service agencies and host families on reservations.

Section four is service placement on reservations with host families. The students will volunteer service hours at tribal agencies. Service agencies:

- . day care centers Headstart programs .
- after-school programs.
- . boy's & girl's clubs
- . tribal economic development offices .
- tribal cultural preservation offices .
- domestic abuse shelters
- . tribal school teacher aid/tutor

Volunteer hours average 20-30 hours per week. Service placement is determined by student's interests, skills, experience, major, and community needs. Students also live in a native community with a host family. Students spend a total of 10 weeks on a Native American reservation. During the service experience students submit academic work to SDSU faculty.

- . weekly reports
- . agency reports
- . critical book summaries
- . article reviews
- . experience journal

The service element of our program has been designed to help students achieve the goals of Service-Learning, namely (1) to allow life experiences to inform one's learning, (2) to apply academic knowledge in real-life settings, (3) to broaden one's understanding of various realities, (4) to encourage reflection, including the examination of one's assumptions and values, (5) and to recognize one's connection and responsibility to their local communities and to the larger society.

Section five is reflection of experience. Students spend the final week of the program on SDSU campus. Students write a final paper, answer academic essay questions, and submit experience journal and all academic work. Student also present on their experience to faculty, fellow students, and guests.

Academic work is graded and credit issued by SDSU. Students earn up to 15 credits in, or a combination of English, Anthropology, Sociology, Geography, and Education. Cost of Service-Learning Experience is \$8,400.00 per semester fall/spring/summer.

Special programs are offered to international student groups, high school groups, and honor societies, and faculty. Sessions are 1-6 weeks and prices vary.

As one student put it:

Beth, Fall '97: *"The most difficult experiences are those that remove you from your context and alter that reality, either shattering it or expanding it. These experiences are also the most rewarding."*

...
- *"It say the least, living on the Standing Rock reservation changed my life. Through living with an elder Hunkpapa woman and working at a children 's center, I came to understand the grace and travesty of the situation on the rez. I came to question my own values and my own fears while listening to stories of a way of life in tumult."*

"What I learned there did not occur in the stale confines of a university classroom, but in the gestures and moments and traditions of the everyday. I learned how little I really know, and how an education is a life-long process."

"This program transcends the typical college experience. In its richness, its depth, 'and its knowledge, it gives participants what schooling has taken away."

Web site: <http://coldfusion.sdstate.edu/users/ThrIronsV/index.htm>

Presenter

Valerian Three Irons is the Diversity and Service-Learning Associate at South Dakota State University. In that position, he delivers Native American cultural presentations to the SDSU faculty and staff. His topics include family dynamics, spirituality, the boarding school era, and traditional herbs and healing. Valerian's other responsibilities at SDSU include being an instructor in the American Indian Studies program and serving as advisor to the Native American Club. Valerian is also SDSU's on-site coordinator for the International Partnership for Service-Learning. In that role, he works with tribal agencies to develop service sites and, coordinates host families for student home stays on reservations. Valerian lectures throughout the U.S. and abroad on Native American culture. He has spoken at tribal middle and high schools and at tribal Boy's and Girl's Clubs. He is also a speaker for the South Dakota Humanities Council.