

Major Service: Combining Academic Disciplines and Service-Learning in Women's Studies

STEPHANIE Y. EVANS WITH JENNIFER OZER AND HAVREDE HILL

Between Spring 2004 and Spring 2005, I transformed my "Interdisciplinary Perspectives of Women" class by incorporating community service-learning (CSL) in order to improve student participation, enhance my approach to feminist pedagogy, effectively partner with local community agencies for mutual benefit, and strengthen the students' quality of scholarship in the course. Here, I chronicle insights gained through transforming an introductory women's studies (WST) course at a large research university in the South and provide tips for incorporating students' academic majors and CSL into a traditional WST foundation course. First, I discuss the disciplinary focus of the class and show the advantage for students who consider their own chosen academic major through a "gendered lens." I then highlight how incorporating community service-learning enhanced the students' academic and critical perspectives by offering an applied setting in which to observe how gender and their major intersect. With this joint approach, the classroom discussion and community experiences reinforced student interests and exponentially expanded

understanding about the practicality and gender dynamics of students' chosen academic disciplines. I document how these two complementary components enhanced the course and created a stimulating environment not present in my prior women's studies foundation classes.

In addition to outlining the theoretical and practical aspects of redesigning the course and revealing how the course unfolded during the semester, I incorporate reflections from two undergraduate teaching assistants (TAs) who played an essential part in the class transformation. In 2004, these two students were enrolled in my introductory class, without the service-learning component. In Spring 2005, they participated together in the class as TAs. They helped facilitate both the classroom learning and the agency partnerships, which greatly enhanced the dual course structure. After laying out aspects of the class transformation, I revisit the benefits of this dual approach to a women's studies foundations course and provide suggestions for those interested in implementing similar changes.

Disciplinary Focus

Students' majors in the Spring 2005 women's studies course included psychology, animal science, women's studies, political science, business management and finance, health science, journalism, microbiology, and history. Such diversity is common in an introductory course; what was essential, then, was to employ students' disciplinary perspectives in their work. I found that if students can see women's studies' relevance to their chosen academic major, they may be less likely to dismiss gender analysis as a tool to promote the political agenda of the stereotypical "liberal" or the mythical "feminazis."

The textbook I used for the class, Gwen Kirk and Margo Okazowa-Rey's *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*, was a natural facilitator of critical investigation. I used the book in both semesters of the class because the text begins by defining "theory" as "an explanation" and then demonstrates how the theoretical frameworks of women's studies are academically rigorous, not merely "opinions" of a few disgruntled women. In the 2005 class, I immediately connected women's studies with students' majors by requiring that they bring in theories from their chosen disciplines to assess those disciplinary ideas from a gendered lens. Applying gender criticism to the theories of their own majors interested students because the process was grounded in their self-defined interests. They engaged theories like Vygotsky's ideas of mental development (education), nature vs. nurture (animal science), essentialist identities (queer studies), punishment models as deterrents (criminology), and math anxiety (education). Each student shared their theory and either supported or refuted

the ideological assumption based on how class texts allowed them to use gender as a gauge for a theory's viability. Basically, the students asked, "How does gender impact the fundamental assumptions of my academic discipline?" By using WST texts, they interrogated their majors.

I demonstrated that not all examinations of academic disciplines ran contrary to feminist perspectives. As a historian, I used an example of African American history's theoretical framework to demonstrate how disciplinary theory from "traditional" fields like history can operate in tandem with women's studies theories. I shared with the students my disciplinary research focus: African American women's educational and intellectual history. I explained how I rely heavily on theories of leading historians to guide my research. For example, in order to organize the vast amount of information available on Black collegiate women's history, I created a methodology based on John Hope Franklin's observations about historiography. In his essay "On the Evolution of Scholarship in Afro-American History," Franklin outlines four stages of scholarship: (1) the 1800s, when historians offered a basic demographic record of Black presence in the United States; (2) the early 1900s, which represented Black "firsts" and contributions to national development; (3) between the 1920s and mid-1930s, a period which documented violence, oppression, and discrimination; and (4) from the late 1940s to the early 1970s, when scholars traced African American traditions of revolt and resistance. Franklin does not assert that these stages were neat or static; rather, he outlines the general tendency of historians to approach Black history from certain perspectives with specific assumptions based on the

era in which they were writing (13–18; See also Sitkoff 6–13, V. P. Franklin 433–46).¹

I explained to the students that, significantly, feminist research supports the use of this framework. For example, Sandra Harding identifies three types of feminist scholarship: work that recovers women’s theories, research that examines contributions, and history that exposes women’s victimization by male dominance. Resistance narratives, mirroring approaches in Black Studies, accompany these themes in feminist methodology (Kirsch 21). Throughout the semester, students searched texts, lectures, and class discussions from their own majors and brought those theories to the classroom. Sometimes their theories supported those from the women’s studies texts, and sometimes they provided vast contrast; either way, students looked at their chosen academic interest from a gendered perspective and engaged women’s studies from a position of immediate interest and relative authority. Proceeding from disciplinary and theoretical frameworks, students then engaged in community service that further challenged their understanding of both their major and gender studies.

Community Service-Learning Component

In the past, the disciplinary approach to my WST courses had been generally successful, gauging by the student evaluations. However, I found that there were many more concrete “aha!” moments for students when I added service-learning to the course. To prepare students for community engagement, I changed the structure of the course by adding an additional reading that addressed how to combine theory with practice, Ann Oberhauser’s

“Examining Gender and Community through Critical Pedagogy.” This article, which describes students at West Virginia University in a community service-learning (CSL) feminist geography class, allowed my students to anticipate some issues that might arise in their own community agency placements. Oberhauser considers pedagogical practices in higher education, tracks her students’ experiences through a service-learning project, highlights power dynamics of geographical space, and argues that service learning works more effectively than conventional methods to equalize classroom dynamics. With tools like these, students in my class began their introduction to service-learning with a multilayered understanding of their discipline, gender studies, and service-learning as a combination of traditional and nontraditional approaches to the college classroom.

As Pat Washington describes in “From College Classroom to Community Action,” women’s studies and service-learning are natural partners because service-learning grew out of the same desire to address social inequalities that feminist pedagogy represents. Much as Washington observes, I noticed that incorporating service-learning into a class positively impacted both the students’ and my own experiences. My students admitted that the initial requirements of filling out university paperwork, choosing a community placement, filling out agency paperwork, enduring agency training, and volunteering for three hours of service per week was definitely intimidating. However, they were up for the challenge and eventually found themselves steeped in fascinating stories that tied their major, the course reading, and their service experiences in a tight web.

In her article “From Theory to Praxis in Women’s Studies: Guest Speakers and Service-Learning as Pedagogy,” Tamara Agha-Jaffar presents a convincing argument for offering service-learning as an option rather than making service mandatory. She argues, for example, that students often have family or work obligations that complicate their weekly service requirements. However, because the same introductory course without the service component was simultaneously offered in the semester that I taught the CSL course, students who couldn’t put in the required hours were still able to take the class from a different instructor. Although I was flexible with how students fulfilled their time requirement, I was firm on the thirty-hour minimum so that the agencies, which invested in training the students for service, received a substantial amount of service time. Many students exceeded the required thirty hours, and a few continued connections with their agencies after the semester ended.

A deeper issue in incorporating service-learning classes was deciding what community agencies to offer as service options. Initially, I intended to choose four to five sites so that I could guarantee close relationships with each site supervisor. However, Trysh Travis, a WST colleague also experienced with CSL, commented that I was gravitating toward choosing sites that reflected my own political agenda. Although I struggled with this choice, offering a wider range of service-learning options turned out to be very beneficial and rewarding. Fortunately, our university’s Office of Community Service (OCS) had an experienced staff and dedicated leadership with long-standing ties to local agencies. With help from OCS staff, the students were able to choose among

more than ninety agencies with which the university had already established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The professionalism and organization of the campus OCS was vital because they had online forms for students, faculty, and agency supervisors, as well as standing agency agreements that addressed issues of liability, supervisory responsibility, role definition, and service expectations. Although each site presented various challenges with staff availability, scheduling, or providing clear directives for student volunteers, the administrative part of the agency partnership was greatly facilitated by the OCS. This allowed students to choose a site with which they were comfortable rather than one I assigned or one of a few choices they did not desire. The only stipulation, to highlight the centrality of disciplinary focus, was that the site had to relate to their major.

According to their scholarly, professional, and personal interests, students chose sites including a Christian women’s shelter, a local PRIDE center, a news reporting service for blind citizens, an animal shelter, a drug rehabilitation center, a cancer survivor advocacy group, an elderly daycare facility, a juvenile detention center, a psychological treatment center for abused children, an exercise program for the mentally disabled, and various after-school programs for children or adolescents. Had I chosen the agencies, surely there would not have been such a range. In these settings, students were able to consider psychology, health science, journalism, and other disciplines while incorporating critical feminist analysis offered by lectures, course texts, handouts, films, guest speakers, and discussion. The combination of academic major and community engagement enhanced the students’

understanding of the social construction of gender, social inequities based on sex, and political ramifications of apathy, as well as the challenges of historic and contemporary feminist activism. What the students shared from other courses in their majors and from their community agency experiences was ultimately more effective than a semester of lectures and readings from course texts alone. The two students who had experienced the course before, without the CSL piece, offer clear examples of how dynamic the service-learning aspect was to student learning.

Teaching Assistants' Reflections

HavreDe Hill and Jennifer Ozer enrolled in my standard WST "Interdisciplinary Perspectives of Women" course in 2004. Like many students, they kept in touch with me after the course ended, and both expressed interest in pursuing a career in higher education and advocacy. After a series of discussions, I told them about transforming the course into a CSL class, and each expressed interest in assisting in the process. I was fortunate enough to be a TA in a women's studies program during my undergraduate years, so I was familiar with the positive opportunities created by professional mentoring and peer learning. After consulting the Academic Affairs office to clarify the procedures for working with undergraduate TAs and outlining confidentiality and grading concerns, I incorporated HavreDe and Jenny into the planning process of the course. I was simultaneously teaching a "Mentoring Local Youth" service-learning course in African American Studies and incorporated TAs in that course as well, so there was a small cohort of four to train together in pedagogy and CSL classroom administra-

tion. After I clarified ground rules, roles, expectations, and responsibilities, each TA went through training provided by the Office of Community Service. Their primary role was as contact people for the students who needed assistance navigating the community placement web site or agency paperwork. Communication was vital, and I was kept informed of the inevitable problems (such as student confusion or agency supervisor unavailability), in the initial stages of the class. There was a deadline to find service sites, after which students would be dropped from the class if they did not have a placement, so the first few weeks were a bit hectic and stressful for the students, the TAs, and me. A mandatory drop date may seem drastic, but it ensured that students find placements early in the semester. The one semester that I did not have this in place, two students had still not found placements in week ten of a sixteen-week course. Since I implemented this policy, no one has been dropped from a class I have taught and all have found placements by week four of the class. (Since then, I have decided against the drop policy and opted for a stiff point penalty instead—this lowers student stress level while still upholding accountability.) With the 2005 assistance of OCS, agencies were flexible and plentiful, and assistance was immediate. Students enjoyed the range of options and took seriously the commitment to show up. HavreDe and Jenny were helpful in fielding questions, contacting hard-to-reach supervisors, and mediating deadlines with required agency training sessions. As a team, the TAs, students, agency supervisors, OCS staff, and I managed to navigate the process with no major disasters, and students found placements that fit their personal schedules and their individual interests.

In addition to the administrative aspect of their duties, each TA facilitated groups during three class sessions, and each delivered a guest lecture. These duties helped prepare them for the professorate by giving them different kinds of talk time: they learned to mediate and listen in group settings and practiced handling the pressure of a formal lecture in a setting that might resemble their own classrooms in the future. Their final papers incorporated the course materials and the “service” of being a TA, as well as their own majors and professional interests. The papers revealed much about the power of feminist pedagogy, particularly the value of peer learning. Below are excerpts from their papers that demonstrate the frustration and efficacy of CSL in women’s studies from a student perspective.

JENNIFER

Before the students began volunteering at their sites, it was essential to establish a dynamic in the classroom that allowed the students to feel comfortable in a space where controversial issues were to be discussed. As Oberhauser notes in her article, “The second area of feminist geography that intersects with critical pedagogy examines contested space in the classroom and specifically power-laden dynamics among students and teachers” (21). Because my class was all women, I think the gender dynamic allowed a certain comfort level that enabled the students to talk freely with one another on topics such as health, sexuality, and body image. Tamara Agha-Jaffar’s article “From Theory to Praxis in Women’s Studies” asserts that it is vital to move from theorizing about what needs to be done to actually doing or practicing the theo-

ries. She states, “The theoretical basis of Women’s Studies is that what constitutes significant knowledge—how we define it, arrive at it, and value it—has been socially constructed and defined for us by those in positions of power, primarily white males.” She goes on to write, “I embrace a collaborative, decentralized style of teaching that is designed to empower students to become active participants in the learning process” (1).

Although extremely frustrating for a number of the students, I believe the work put into getting hired at a site helped cultivate a better sense of public interaction. The students were forced to have their signatures by a certain date or they would be dropped from the class. This added pressure motivated the students not to dawdle, and motivated them to work extra hard to confirm their preferred site. The syllabus was very efficient in outlining specific deadlines so that the students were forced to act quickly and accurately. In this sense, Oberhauser is correct in stating that the syllabus is also an important tool within the pedagogy of feminist teaching. The syllabus set an initial outline so that the students were able to get a sense of what was required of them from the start. In a service-based learning class, it is important that the syllabus be thorough in outlining deadlines so that the student can be aware from the start of the semester what is expected of them, not only from the instructor, but also from their selected volunteer site as well as from their fellow students.

Once the site was selected, gender analyses were done in class to make sure that the students were aware of why exactly they were required to incorporate service-learning into the classroom environment.

Oberhauser states, “The community project developed in this course is an application of critical feminist pedagogy because it shifts the hierarchal nature of classroom learning to a participatory approach where students apply their knowledge to gain further insight about gender issues in society” (23). My experience in observing how the students felt about their sites parallels Oberhauser’s statement. After the first time volunteering at their sites, many of the students in class discussion were able to draw key insights into why their particular site was set up in such a way that allowed for gendered behavior observation. Agha-Jaffar notes, “The critical reflection component of the service-learning assignment promotes intellectual growth: develops skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and communication; and, in very tangible ways, encourages students to see the transformative power of education” (5). Once the class was comfortable in examining gender issues within their site, other issues were subject to much more critical discussion.

The idea that classroom discussions and analyses called for theories from a number of disciplines was, in my opinion, the most important element of the class semester. In her article “Feminist Pedagogy and the Integration of Knowledge: Toward a More Interdisciplinary University,” Diana M. A. Relke writes that, “In some universities, interdisciplinarity functions largely as a generic term, rather than an actual practice—a rubric encompassing a variety of disciplinary reconfigurations, some of which suggest integration but never actually achieve it” (2). Having the class share with one another their different fields of study and how their disciplines related to their sites, made a huge

impact on how the students were able to grasp some key components of feminist theory.

HAVREDE

Once students began to work at their sites, they were instructed to view them through a gender lens, to observe how their organizations were structured, how they performed gender, and reinforced or broke gender norms. This wasn’t immediately evident for all students. Through class discussion, other students were able to voice their conceptualization of gender within their own sites, which enlightened unsure students with critical insights into the nuances of gender. In some cases, other students were able to identify ways in which gender may have played out in their peers’ sites by their own informed micro experiences. This type of welcoming discussion, which Tamara Agha-Jaffar refers to as a “collaborative, decentralized style of teaching,” embraced all the students at their differing locations and allowed them to find common ground (1). In this sense, there was community within the classroom and classroom in the community. Once gender was perceived in the service-learning opportunities, students began to realize how it shifted, transformed, and created differing aspects of gender along the lines of race/ethnicity, class, age, ability, orientation, and other characterizations. The complexities of gender were becoming understood and allowed for students to begin thinking of ways in which gender could be deconstructed when considering their sites. But conceptualization and theory are not the same as action and activism. Just as students learned that “we *do* gender” they also learned, through

Lorber's guided reading, how they could undo it.

Application of the theory behind the social construction of gender relied on the students' ability to evaluate it on their own within their service sites. The reflection journals, class discussions, and final assignment revealed how students began to see gender constructions and challenge them. As noted in my own journal, some classroom discussions based on the readings or students' reflection journals indicated how gender constructions were practiced. A student working with The Easter Seals, a care facility for the elderly, noticed that the organization was comprised mainly of women; it was founded and maintained by an all-female staff. We discussed this fact in relation to societal implications of women and aging, such as beauty ideals and the devaluation of women as they age. In another case, the reverse happened: a student who worked with an organization that did radio broadcasting for the blind noticed that she was the only female working with the organization and accommodating a primarily masculine interest in the news stories/features she had to read on air. She also mentioned that the listener base was comprised mainly of men. A gender analysis by a student who worked with the Youth Services at Alachua Regional Juvenile Detention Center for Girls revealed complex issues about teen pregnancy as it related to women's health, crime, and incarceration. The discussion led to further analysis of how, as a minor in detention, a young pregnant woman may face compromises in health care and parental rights.

In other discussion groups, we talked about how the *Women's Lives* chapter on work related to the service experiences of students. The responses were interesting

and focused on different elements of the chapter. For one student, who fulfilled the service requirement at PRIDE Community Center, the experience of which assigned duties and tasks were considered "women's work" revealed complexities of gender role performance even within overtly gendered space. The student was expected to feed the fish, answer phones, and take out the trash, among other things. A male volunteer, on the other hand, was asked to maintain the web site and to work on the newsletter—much more technical than feeding fish. This student related the experience to the text, citing the commentary on progressive groups in Hattie Gossett's poem "The Cleaning Woman/Labor Relations #4" (Kirk and Okazowa-Rey 332–33).² Another student, who worked with the Boys and Girls Club, noticed that the encouragement of the boys' and girls' future plans varied based on their gender, race, and class. Students evaluated their sites with gendered lenses and with relative issues/questions/concerns brought up in the weekly readings.

The very specific ways that the issues in the text were connected to the community provided opportunities for students to enact change. The question of why more girls are being incarcerated when juvenile crime is decreasing was addressed by a criminology student working at the local detention center for girls. Another student, also working at the Youth Services at Alachua Regional Juvenile Detention Center for Girls, led a discussion with the young women about beauty ideals, based on her readings in class, after noticing the ways in which beauty ideals had negatively affected the young women's self-esteem. The student at PRIDE Community Center wrote the final paper on ways in which the organization perpetuated gender inequal-

ity. The focus of another final paper was on the disparities among women in education and will, hopefully, be used to enhance tutoring programs for after-school care offered by the Boys and Girls Club. These are a few of the many ways in which students used the feminist theoretical framework of the class to suggest and implement social change.

• • •

I was floored by how the two TAs were able to facilitate learning of the students and present such insightful responses to the question of how service-learning impacted student learning in the course. Although their papers mainly focus on using the reading to highlight their peers' experiences, they also comment that adding the service-learning component to the class made topics like work, violence against women, healthcare, political criminalization, and feminization of poverty "come to life." Jenny and HavreDe did have the advantage of having taken the WST class before and this experience greatly influenced the depth of their analysis. However, I had taught some form of an interdisciplinary WST course for five semesters and I also felt that my understanding of feminist teaching increased by adding service-learning. Below, I offer lessons learned while incorporating CSL into a traditional class and suggestions for those who have similar interests.

Comparative Course Construction: Transformation of a Course and a Professor

I believe the combination of service-learning with a focus on academic discipline has improved my students' quality of learning and their understanding of femi-

nist work; I believe the course transformation has improved my pedagogy; and overall, I think that the combination has allowed all involved a greater appreciation of what a foundation women's studies class can be.

The last chapter of *Women's Lives* is entitled "Creating Change: Theory, Vision, and Action." Before I added CSL, I would have a panel of feminist activists present their stories to the class in the final week as examples of how academics and activism were linked. After I added CSL, I still incorporate testimonials from community scholar-activists; however, now the students had their own lived experiences to reference in combining feminist practice with academic study. The "action" part is no longer something that other people do. Although each student comes to the class with lived experiences that inform course themes, and although the self-selecting nature of a WST class assumes at least some willingness to engage feminist approaches, not all students made a personal connection with the social situations that called feminism into being. With CSL, students "get" feminist imperatives from an immediate, first person perspective. I used to feel like I was "selling" feminism, and although I was never overbearing in my teaching style (in fact, I very rarely offered students my own opinion of subjects), I still felt like I was trying to convince them of something. With service-learning added, students brought their understanding of their major to bear on their study, but they also brought their lived experiences in the "field" to bear on the class reading. Not only did students "get" themes of patriarchy, misogyny, hegemony, ableism, heterosexism, race and class intersections, and such, they interacted with these realities in a much

deeper and more immediate way than without CSL. Students also felt less helpless, depressed, or overwhelmed by the information in the class; they knew they could do something about women's oppression . . . because they already had.

As an example of class transformation, the student who volunteered at the PRIDE Center went on to apply to law school to advance transgender rights. S/he was clear about identity formation and professional goals prior to enrolling in the class; what the CSL experience did was to give more practical experience to identify specific areas of transgender discrimination that s/he was passionate in addressing. By being assigned to sweep up and feed fish while a male volunteer was assigned technical tasks, she (who identifies as a he), was made more aware of the need to deconstruct gender, even within queer communities. The student interested in criminology who volunteered at a detention center became much more versed in how, as a woman of color, she shared much with the incarcerated women she worked with; however, she also became much clearer on how race interacts with economic and educational class variables to impact women's life chances and choices.

For me, the technical aspect of altering my syllabus was a key exercise in conceptualizing the meaning of changing the class. One of the most important lessons I learned during this process was to utilize available curricular resources as guides. For example, Kerri Heffernan has offered an invaluable resource for those seeking to incorporate community service-learning into their college classroom. In *Fundamentals of Service-Learning Course Construction*, she provides six developmental models for CSL courses:

- “Pure” service-learning: a course built on the investigation of CSL practice
- Discipline-based CSL: stemming from an academic field (such as history, biology, etc.)
- Problem-based CSL: viewing the community as a “client” to be assisted
- Capstone course: a major course that synthesizes disciplinary expertise
- Service internships: intensive internship with reflection
- Community-based Action Research: researches an issue with community agency

According to this typology, my WST course was a discipline-based CSL course, incorporating mainstream disciplines as well as the interdisciplinary field of women's studies. Keeping this typology in mind was helpful when transforming my syllabus, and it alerted me to other possibilities for restructuring future classes. Also important in this process was maintaining clarity around four core principles of CSL that Heffernan outlines:

- Engagement: has the community been consulted?
- Reflection: how will the students engage in the meaning making process?
- Reciprocity: do all parties take seriously the roles of teaching and learning?
- Public dissemination: how does the information return to the community?

These four areas, along with appropriate evaluative grading measures, were central in the effective incorporation of service-learning. Although the agency supervisors did not “grade” the students, the mid-term and end-of-semester evaluations were considerations in my grading process.

Another key component of addressing these four principles was how students worked with their community agency to compose and then answer a question for their final paper. Not only did the students' final papers go to their community partners, the *question* that the research paper answered was generated by the agency itself. I certainly understood that the gender analysis and the students' disciplines were central to the final paper; however, equally important was the applicability of the final research paper to the agency's stated missions and goals. I figured that if the partners helped to form the question, the answer would more likely be of interest and relevance. In some instances, the agency incorporated student observations into their volunteer recruitment, training program, or grant-funding materials. With this in mind from the beginning of class, students were much more invested in constructing a quality final product: writing a paper for an agency's use was much more exciting—and compelling—than writing a paper for a grade.

The major differences in my syllabus construction were that in the first class, quizzes and question journals were part of the grade. For the 2004 class, students considered *Women's Lives*, the theoretical and thematic course text, then participated in a group reading of women's autobiographies that reflected the issues raised in the text. The course was well received by students and deeply satisfying for me; however, including CSL put students face to face with community members who breathed life into the "issues" raised in the text and made the discussion and analysis richer, more intricate, and more immediate than the written narrative of autobiographies. The revised course

replaced group presentations on narrative texts with a conference-style presentation by students on their agency placements. The oral and written discussion about actual events with girls and women they met in person proved more interesting to the class than panelists' perspectives of an autobiography that not all students had read. Incorporating CSL into a class with an understanding of various models, clear course objectives, and principles of good practice garnered significant interest from the students.

Fortunately, my campus has a well-established tradition of community partnerships that smoothed the transition of the course to one requiring community service. Many campuses nationwide offer similar assistance. Online resources are also abundant. Although not all classes should be CSL courses, the growing resources available through organizations like Campus Compact, the National Society for Experiential Education, or the International Consortium for Experiential Learning offer ample opportunity for professors to engage in a transformative classroom experience for themselves, their students, and their community partners. For those campuses that do not have a community service office, I suggest three points to consider:

- Find out what other methods of student engagement are already in place. This may be in the form of internships, practica, or volunteer services. Somewhere on campus, there should be a model for constructing a memorandum of understanding between the university and a community agency to address roles, expectations, and liability issues. Perhaps nursing, education, or law will be good places to start.

- Spend time building partnerships with community agencies. Attending meetings and community events are great ways to find out about organizations that may be natural partners for your class. *However*, it is imperative not to limit partners to areas with which you are already familiar or toward whom you are politically inclined. The students taught me that allowing them to choose an agency based on their own academic interest and their political disposition is more effective than mandating they adhere to agencies within my definition of feminism. This is a hard choice, but worthwhile—especially since it puts you in contact with community partners that you may not have met without staying open.
- Start slow and expect bureaucratic bumps. Inevitably, something will go “wrong” with an agency placement and the student will find that dealing with nonprofit, governmental, or public agencies is not always smooth going. Anticipate long wait periods for registration, training, or policy issues and build that into the syllabus.

My syllabus is available online at http://plaza.ufl.edu/drevans/Courses_Taught.html. This detailed syllabus also addresses aspects of course development that will come up in this process.

Adding CSL and an applied aspect to academic majors made the course more academically rigorous. I required students to do a mock Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) training and Institutional Research Board (IRB) protocol and certification. This ensured their awareness of academic institutional norms, research protocols, interview limitations, and an increased sensitivity to confidentiality issues in their service work. It also informed the students’ final

research papers by familiarizing them with the language their agency supervisors would use to shape the questions, thereby allowing students to offer more professional responses to the agency questions. Incorporating practical aspects to the women’s studies class acted as a tool for professional development, but also encouraged students to prepare a final paper that may be used as an outstanding writing sample for graduate or professional school applications in their field.

In addition to CSL models and principles, professional development proved to be an essential benefit of community service-learning. As Washington’s work demonstrates, students in CSL classes interacted with agencies in the “real world” in a way that expanded the abstract feminism of a course reader. Observing and measuring the community’s actions enhanced their critical thinking skills, but they also developed their communication skills, collaboration experience, and appreciation for the finer points of inevitable bureaucratic procedures. Beyond collaborating with agency supervisors and clients, students engaged with each other in a deeper way than if reading about others who did this work. When a staunch Christian and a transgender advocate can debate complex women’s issues respectfully in a classroom—based on their community experiences—vital lessons about professionalism emerge. Although I constructed my classroom as a “safe space” where everyone was free to talk, I didn’t assume that consensus was the goal; I encouraged debate, but the debate necessarily took into account a wide range of students’ interpretation of their environments and experiences. The service-learning women’s studies classroom was a hotbed of critical dialogue, dynamic lead-

ership, and empirical analysis. I employed undergraduate students as teaching assistants; their reflections throughout the semester provided an additional perspective of the enhancement CSL offers to feminist pedagogy.

I began working with service-learning as an undergraduate student at California State University, Long Beach, and since then, I have remained connected to experiential education. I have worked with service learning centers in California, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, and each year that I gain experience as a teacher, I am more convinced that CSL offers an effective tool to complement traditional approaches to both research and teaching. Women's studies, like African American studies, is an interdisciplinary field. As exemplified in Oberhauser's article, women's studies professors bring their disciplinary perspectives into their classrooms. Building a course upon the foundation of students' chosen academic majors heightens student interest, course connection, and sense of competence. Considering theories from their major discipline enhances students' abilities to see gender assumptions embedded in their major, and adding CSL experiences shows them how gender is operationalized in their professions. The focus on disciplinary theory and application of theory through CSL clearly placed students at the center of their learning process.

In the course transition, the dual structure allowed for professional interaction with agency supervisors based on students' academic scholarship and community expertise. The exchange distinctively contextualized the student approach to academic disciplines. Combining student majors with community service definitely resulted in "major service." The exchange

of information between student and community agency throughout the semester, the collaborative design of a research question, and the students' dissemination of the final papers for the agencies' use reflected the transformative nature of experiential course construction. This experience reinforced my excitement for the pedagogy of community service-learning and offered my women's studies class effective learning that is grounded in the roots of radical feminist teaching.

NOTES

1. In my research, I converted this theory into a typology: rather than record the presence, firsts, barriers, or resistance in Black women's educational experiences, I constructed three categories—"presence," "oppression," and "contribution and creative resistance"—as guidelines by which to record this history.

2. Gosset, an African American woman employed as cleaning staff, questions the progressiveness of an alternative health clinic after she is mistreated by the physician who owns the clinic.

REFERENCES

- Agha-Jaffar, Tamara. "From Theory to Praxis in Women's Studies: Guest Speakers and Service-Learning as Pedagogy." *Feminist Teacher* 13.1 (2000): 1–11.
- Franklin, John Hope. "On the Evolution of Scholarship in Afro-American History." *State of Afro-American History*. Ed. Darlene Clark Hine. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986. 13–18.
- Franklin, V. P. "New Perspectives on African American Educational History." *Journal of African American History* 87. Special Issue (2002): 433–46.
- Heffernan, Kerri. *Fundamentals of Service-Learning Course Construction*. Providence, R.I.: Campus Compact, 2001.
- Kirk, Gwen, and Margo Okazowa-Rey. *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004.

- Kirsch, Gesa. *Ethical Dilemmas in Feminist Research: The Politics of Location, Interpretation, and Publication*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Lorber, Judith. "The Social Construction of Gender." *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*. Gwen Kirk and Margo Okazowa-Rey. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004. 21–24.
- Oberhauser, Ann. "Examining Gender and Community through Critical Pedagogy." *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 1 (2002): 19–31.
- Relke, Diana M. A. "Feminist Pedagogy and the Integration of Knowledge: Toward a More Interdisciplinary University." Department of Women's and Gender Studies, University of Saskatchewan. 1994. 1 March 2005. <<http://www.usask.ca/wgst/journals/conf3.htm>>
- Sitkoff, Harvard. "Segregation, Desegregation, Resegregation: African American Education, A Guide to the Literature." *OAH Magazine of History* 15.2 (2001): 6–13.
- Washington, Pat. "From College Classroom to Community Action." *Feminist Teacher* 13.1 (2000): 12–34.