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Introduction to SPACE

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Introduction to SPACE

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Welcome to the inaugural issue of SPACE. Student Perspectives About Civic Engagement is an online academic journal where university students write about civic experiences that have been intentionally integrated with academic learning. Our challenge to students is to write about a service-learning or other civic experience that generated profound questions for them. We asked the students to connect their civic experience and their academic course to extant research or to conduct their own original research as part of the process. Their writing, as you will see, reflects a deep engagement with issues they faced in their civic experiences from academic, social, vocational, civic, moral, and ethical perspectives.

Colleges and universities across the country and around the world have been building both capacity for engaged learning and expectations that students will serve in their communities as an important component of their academic experience. In the Chicago metropolitan area, seven universities (public and private) have come together because of their interest in civic learning and the important gains that it can generate for students. The Service-Learning and Civic Engagement Consortium (SLCEC) has chosen to develop this online journal to enable students to write about their experiences. We believe that service-learning practitioners can learn from our students' experiences and can hone their pedagogical craft through understanding how students experience the civic world. We also believe that other students can be inspired by the depth of experience and even transformation of our writers. SPACE is a new contribution to the field that provides a space for students to reflect and write and for other students and service-learning scholar/practitioners to learn from these experiences.

The editors of SPACE are excited to release this first edition. We believe we are providing a diverse and timely series of articles that speak to important issues in our communities: affordable housing, urban education, LGBTQ older adults, food justice, community technology centers in urban neighborhoods, and teaching English as a Second Language.

Sarah Valoven, a student at Loyola University Chicago, addresses the problem of access to affordable housing based on her experience in organizing with

SLCEC is...

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a social justice organization through her course entitled Community Power and Social Change. Sarah shares keen insights of her own trepidation as she enters the civic world and the injustices experienced by residents of a single room occupancy building slated to close to make room for upscale development. Maria Escobar from Northeastern Illinois University engages LGBTQ older adults in her service-learning experience for her Social Work Course. Escobar discovers and examines the discrimination and oppression experienced by these adults and finds strengthened vocational commitments in the process. Rebecca Stack from Northeastern Illinois University explores another timely and disturbing issue in Chicago – food deserts. Food deserts occur when geographic communities are bereft of quality, affordable grocery stores that offer fresh fruits and vegetables. Stack conducts original research to explore the question of how the health of individuals living in food deserts is impacted when compared to individuals living in communities with accessible groceries. Gloria Mullons, a student at National Louis, explores community technology centers in urban neighborhoods. Mullons offers a narrated power point presentation to her readers as she explores the importance and impact of local technology centers as they attempt to bridge the digital divide with and for young people.

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Three writers explore experiences in education in this issue of SPACE. Matthew Brill from Illinois State University participated in the school's urban immersion teacher training program. Matthew lived in the community with a family where he taught in Chicago's Auburn-Gresham neighborhood and discusses his experiences as a white teacher working with African-American students during summer school. Brill discovers how critical mutual respect is in the learning experience. Michele Lee from Northeastern Illinois University explores Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning as she provides English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction with adults during her service-learning experience. Lee argues that language instruction must be accompanied by socio-cultural awareness and experiences to be effective. Finally, MacKenzie Beisser, currently a student at National Louis University as well as a high school teacher, accompanies urban high school students to El Salvador and observes how this experience opens new vistas for students to understand and develop empathy.

We offer this diverse selection of articles to faculty members, students, administrators and others who might be interested in how students navigate and make sense of civic engagement experiences. Their experiences expose students to the very real problems, complexities, and injustices of modern urban life. But they also present opportunities for students to understand, to dialogue, to engage, and perhaps to contribute both now and in the future to their neighbors and communities. Service-learning offers the promise of engaged, experiential learning that can have a high impact on student development. But it also offers the hope that through these learning experiences our students will become more engaged, more empathetic, more likely to work towards the common good in collaboration and in solidarity with community members and organizations in Chicago.

Writing in *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, Parker Palmer notes: "If we

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remain clear about the gap between America's aspiration and its reality, our founding myth can continue to energize movement toward our goal. But when we imagine or pretend that it describes America's reality, the myth becomes an enemy of its own aspiration" (Palmer 180). Steadfastly encouraging our students to engage in public, civic space moves us closer to our ideals and aspirations as a nation. We hope that you find words of thoughtfulness, encouragement, and meaning in this first edition of SPACE.

If you are a student, please consider submitting an article about your service-learning experience to SPACE for our next issue, scheduled for publication on September 15, 2016. If you are a faculty member, perhaps you will recommend or encourage a student build on their writing in your course and seek publication in SPACE.

References

Palmer, P. (2011). *Healing the Heart of Democracy*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.