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Teaching Macro Practice Through the Use of Experiential Instruction and Collaboration: A Formula to Create Sustainable Community Resources

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Abstract. While delivering an organizations and communities class to a cohort of students in an outlying rural area, a social work program explored ways to educate students effectively while simultaneously exploring and devising strategies to fill local gaps in community services. The project utilized evidence-based learning strategies focusing on experiential instruction and collaboration with local community agencies. Using aspects of the flipped classroom as well as service learning, the course was particularly interested in engaging with community stakeholders to identify issues arising from the realities of a rural service environment. Students identified a project, worked with community partners, and delivered recommendations at completion. The findings were then used to write a grant to assist with prisoner reentry into the community. This resulted in an award nearing $300,000 to bridge gaps in services. The grant funded two social work positions to provide strengths-based family centered case management, funds for community mentor/volunteer training, released prisoner group meetings aimed at improving released prisoner social and moral functioning, and funds aimed at transportation assistance. The article discusses all aspects of the project and provides an outline to assist social work educators to integrate similar projects into other programs. The project was completed in and is especially well suited for rural areas, where services, resources, and expertise are often lacking. The authors specifically discuss the challenges and strategies of completing a project of this type in a rural setting.

Keywords: social work education, organization and community, pedagogy, rural social work

In an effort to bring social work education to diverse and isolated areas of a geographically large state, a state assisted masters comprehensive university collaborated with a rural community college to host an outreach social work bachelors program roughly 150 miles from the parent institution. This program, though identical in content to the program in the main campus, differs in several important ways. Students on the main campus tend to be traditional age college students and mirror the cultural background of the local community. The outreach program however, tends to attract nontraditional students, both in terms of the age and the cultural background of the individuals. The parent social work program is located in a rural section of northwest portion of the state, whereas the outreach program is located in rural southwest portion of the state. These two areas differ significantly in many important metrics. The northwest portion is experiencing significant changes similar to many other rural areas in America. In many ways, these rural communities display the epitome of the two primary metamorphoses found by Barcus and Simmons (2015) in their comprehensive study of the changing population on the Great Plains. The northern section of the state is slowly depopulating, as its population is aging and its youth slowly urbanizing. The southwest portion on the other hand, has a steadily growing population dissimilar from the traditional populace. The increasing population is largely the result of immigration and the relatively higher birthrates of the Hispanic community. As a result, the two sections of the state face very different issues, resulting in significantly different cultures.

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One of the consistent challenges of offering an offsite cohort program in a rural community diverse from the originating institution is accounting for how these differences result in divergent attitudes and environments with respect to higher education. At the parent site, the program enjoys much support from the community through the connections and resources built over the century or so the university has resided locally. The community has a higher professional population because of a much greater rate (32.3%) of its population receiving post-secondary education in comparison with the southwest cohort community. In the cohort community, connections to the university system are much less robust. Additionally, there is a difficulty in recruiting and retaining professionals to staff local agencies, as the percentage of the population receiving a post-secondary education (17.2%) is far lower (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). These factors present several mundane challenges to the student educational experience. The relative sparsity of social work agencies and professionals results in an environment in which agencies are not used to dealing with students and are not aware of the benefits of interacting with the university. The social work student is often seen as an outsider and frequently has as much education as the local staff member.

Faculty with experience teaching students in this environment report struggling to engage students effectively with academic material alone. This anecdotal finding is generally consistent with studies documenting that students typically learn more effectively through hands-on and collaborative learning (Springer, Stanne, & Donnovan, 1999). The enhancement effect of hands on learning is even more pronounced with minority students (Cabrera et al., 2002). With these issues in mind, the social work program decided to experiment with the design of a core practice course particularly amenable to a collaborative approach to learning in a resource sparse rural community.

As the last of five generalist practice courses in the social work curriculum, Generalist Practice: Organizational and Community Systems, provides entry-level theory, knowledge, research, values, and skills for social work practice with organizations and communities. This course builds upon the concepts/processes of problem-solving, planned change, and intervention methods from previous practice courses with an emphasis on organizational and community knowledge, skills, and strategies of change. An ethno-cultural perspective with a particular focus on rural regions is also emphasized.

Community Based Service Learning

In an effort to engage the students more effectively, each aspect of the course was designed using evidence-based strategies. This began by shifting from a traditional lecture based course, to a hands-on experiential learning opportunity. Service learning, in which students learn academic material through the meeting of community needs, has demonstrated significant advantages to students, in that they tend to learn and apply theories more effectively and integrate these into a wider array of settings (Hahn & Hatcher, 2014). These strategies are well suited to an outreach program in a rural environment. Since learning and service are integrated, the utility of the material can be demonstrated quickly by identifying and filling service gaps in the local community. These changes also align well with the trend toward competency-based education, since they correspond to the development of required skills and knowledge necessary to work as a professional social worker as demonstrated in specific practice behaviors (CSWE, 2008).

The project was envisioned to be community-based both to increase the visibility of the program to the local agencies as well as to provide a tangible product to exhibit the value of social work education. It was designed to both enhance the scholarship and knowledge of the students while concurrently providing valuable information to social service agencies and governing entities. The project began at the beginning of the semester as a conceptual process with the end goals identified at that time. Due to the experimental nature of the course reorganization, classroom learning methods, and strategies were not set in stone, but were developed and implemented throughout the semester based on student learning needs and the need to complete a comprehensive and valuable end product.

To learn the academic material, students were required to prepare for each class by taking an active role in the class time. Students alternated roles to create an agenda, facilitate a large group discussion, or take minutes from the large group discussion to disseminate to the large group participants the following week. The students participated in both large group and small group activities in each class. Between classes, students completed homework assignments in large groups, small groups, and as individuals. At the conclusion of the course, the students created a capstone paper using an outline developed by the instructor (Appendix 1). This paper was designed to be a comprehensive summary of the course. It included all previous writings submitted by individual students, the task groups, data gathered from the survey, focus group information, and data provided by stakeholder agencies throughout the semester. The culminating summary resulted in a 49-page document detailing the findings of the project and providing in-depth recommendations to the community. These recommendations were then disseminated to the stakeholders by the course instructor. In addition to this information, students were required to write a reflection paper about their own experience, including their thoughts, emotional experiences, and an evaluation of the course related to the course learning objectives and competencies. They were also asked to reflect on their thoughts relating to what extent the experiential learning strategies incorporated into the course were relevant and applicable to tangible social work practice experiences. Some of these comments are presented later in the paper (Appendix 2) to add a student experiential dimension to the pedagogical delivery of the course.

Conceptualization and Implementation

An experienced tenure-track instructor taught the course, but it was the first time the instructor taught this specific course. While reviewing the syllabus with the assigned instructor at the parent institution, a consensus emerged that the assignments needed to be modified both to better align with the then current Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, or EPAS (CSWE, 2008) and to meet the needs of the rural setting where the course was to be delivered. There was a sense that the current assignments lacked a concrete link to real world applications of macro practice. As a result, the initial syllabus was abandoned and a new conceptualization for the class was developed, including a new model for classroom learning, experiential opportunities, and end goals. The students were told that the course was a work in progress and flexibility was necessary from both the students and the instructor in order to maximize success.

One of the hopes of the project was to incorporate as many aspects of macro practice into the course as possible, integrating and focusing the activities of the course with the hosting rural community. This was accomplished through the use of traditional textbook, lectures, guest speakers, and through the use of macro and micro assessment and survey tools. Underlying the

assumptions in the course was the need for students to incorporate practice skills and knowledge learned in previous social work practice courses as well as the cognate courses required by the social work program. The semester long project was broken into numerous segments consisting of specific activities and objectives (Figure 1). Each student was assigned to one of three task groups for collaborative work. Every segment concluded with summation assignments that were completed both individually and in group formats.

The project began with members of the class participating in a brainstorming nominal group exercise facilitated by the instructor. The nominal group process has distinct advantages over less structured variations of brainstorming. Specifically, the nominal group approach first developed by Delbecq, Van de Ven and Gustafson (1975) is less prone to groupthink and can generate consensus quickly without sacrificing diversity of ideas. Students eventually selected prisoner reentry as the target project for the course. This decision was then vetted through consulting with the faculty of the program to ensure likelihood of success in collecting information and recruiting key stakeholders to participate. Authorization to conduct the associated research project was secured through the university Institutional Review Board.

Once the basic parameters of the project were established, students were introduced to the PREPARE and IMAGINE models as a way to assist them in quantifying and preparing for the steps of the planned change, as well as guide them toward a realistic plan of implementation (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2014). The PREPARE model helps identify problems, review macro reality, establish goals, identify people, assess cost and benefits, review risk, and evaluate potential success of macro change in regard to a research project. The IMAGINE model was also introduced to teach students strategies that focus on intervention and evaluating planned change at the macro level. The IMAGINE model uses the steps of starting with an innovative idea, mustering support, identifying assets, specifying goals, implementing the plan, neutralizing opposition, and evaluating progress. These models were essential for providing direction and structure to the instructor for class and lecture preparation and identifying the necessary next steps to complete the research project.

Each week, students began class in a large group. Throughout the semester, one student was assigned the responsibility to facilitate the group process for a specific week. This student was also responsible to develop a weekly agenda through soliciting agenda items from the other students and working collaboratively with the instructor. Two students were assigned the responsibility to record the large group minutes and to disseminate the information to the instructor and the other students. Assigning two students to this task helped assure that important information was documented. In addition, because the students could compare notes and solicit feedback from the instructor, they could improve skills of listening and documentation. In this manner, critical information was passed along to the subsequent facilitator, in order to create the agenda for the following week.

Figure 1
Gantt Chart of the Semester Learning Activities

	January					February				March					April				May	
WEEKS	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	3/5 - 4/1	2	3	4	1	2
Activities																				
Assigned to Task Groups				X								SB								
Brain Storming Exercise					X							SB								
Large Group Participation						X	X	X	X	X	X	SB	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Task Group Participation						X	X	X	X	X	X	SB	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop Agenda						X	X	X	X	X	X	SB	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Guest Speakers					X		X		X		X	SB		X		X	X			
Large Group Reporting						X	X	X	X	X	X	SB	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Conduct Literature Review						X	X					SB								
Asset Mapping								X	X	X		SB								
Identify Stakeholders								X	X	X		SB								
Develop Survey								X	X	X		SB								
Develop initial e-mail, phone script follow-up e-mail script										X	X	SB								
Data Collection											X	SB	X	X						
Review survey data in task groups												SB			X	X				
Focus Group Development												SB		X	X	X				
Focus Group Participation												SB					X	X		
Focus Group Data Analysis																			X	
Course Experience and Reflection												SB							X	
Capstone Assignment												SB								X

Much of the project was organized around the concept of collaboration in the group process. The value of group work to student learning and preparedness for the workplace has been long recognized (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008; Allen, Crosky, McAlpine, Hoffman, & Munroe, 2006; Hansen, 2006; Hernandez, 2002). As is the case in many rural settings, students enrolled in

the course lived in various outlying communities. To account for this reality, the instructor used geographic location to assign members to tasks group in order to maximize the ability of students to meet outside of scheduled class time. Three task groups were formed and each was asked to complete assignments that were assigned weekly during the large group meeting. Students used class time to meet in their assigned group, discuss their current task, and to assign work amongst task group members. The first assignment for the task groups was to conduct a literature review for the reentry population. Reflecting the importance in understanding the reentry population and recidivism rates from both mezzo and macro frame of references, one group was designated to conduct a literature review at the local level, another at the state level, and the remaining group at the national level. These individual reviews were later combined into a single literature review which provided direction for the project and was included in the capstone paper.

Asset Mapping

Following the literature review, one group was assigned the task of mapping assets to identify strengths of the community in order to build on services currently available in the area. The students were guided using the asset mapping model developed by Fuller, Guy, & Pletsch (n.d.) The assets were recorded using the five broad categories enumerated by Kirst-Ashman & Hull (2014). These include built assets, natural assets, social assets, economic assets, and service assets. Once the community assets were identified, they were divided amongst the task group members for documentation and classification. This information was then aggregated into a single document. Consistent with the literature, to maximize the collaboration, the student groups were encouraged to set timelines and goals, discuss tasks, maintain communication throughout the process, and divide the work evenly (Cumming, 2010).

Identifying Stakeholders

The task group assigned with identifying stakeholders used various means for identifying key players. These included data from the asset mapping task group, suggestions from other students, personal knowledge of key players, community resource guides, and a stakeholder mapping tool developed by Chrislip (2002). The task group originally identified a pool of more than 100 possible stakeholders which was presented to the large group. Again, the decision making processes discussed in Zastrow's group work text (2012) were used to pare down the final list. This resulted in a list of 72 stakeholders. Each student was assigned to contact six stakeholders whereby they were asked to call and follow the previously approved telephone script developed by the survey task group. If the stakeholder agreed to participate, the students requested their email address and best phone number for a follow-up contact if necessary. Of the 72 stakeholders originally identified, 50 (69.4%) key players agreed to participate.

Survey Development and Data Collection

In order to reach the maximum number of participants in a reasonable amount of time, the class decided to use a web survey tool available through the university to create, develop, and disseminate the survey to identified stakeholders. Because there was no local expertise available, an instructional technology support specialist from the university's Center for Teaching Excellent and Learning Technologies (CTELT) facilitated a webinar during class time. Students were educated in the use of a web survey tool capable of creating a wide array of question structures,

including multiple choice, true or false, anecdotal comments, and others. The software allowed for data analysis and the creation of accompanying charts and graphs. CTELT also provided ongoing support to the task group assigned with creating the survey.

Prior to developing the survey instrument, the instructor of social research methods at the primary campus presented a review of research methodology with a specific focus on scientific survey methods to the class through videoconferencing technology. Using this technology has been demonstrated efficient and effective while making it possible to bring experts into the classroom when not otherwise feasible (Walsh & Brown, 2013). To develop the survey, each student was required to submit between two and five questions for consideration by the large group. Through processes familiar to the students as taught in a previous social work with groups course textbook, the final list of questions was developed through the use of multiple votes, simple majority, delegated decision making, and finally consensus (Zastrow, 2012).

To assist in safeguarding the data collection process from contaminating variables, the students created a specific email script that was sent out along with the survey link to each stakeholder. Furthermore, the students developed a telephone script which was used when making follow-up calls to stakeholders about participating in and completing the survey. Finally, a follow-up email script was developed, which was sent as a reminder to participate in the survey. The survey participants were offered the opportunity to participate in a focus group scheduled toward the end of the semester. If a stakeholder desired to take part in the focus group, they were asked to contact the instructor who provided them with the date, time and logistics for attending the focus group.

The 50 participating stakeholders were sent an initial email which included an approved cover letter, a link to the survey, and password to access the electronic survey. One week after the initial emails were sent, students made follow-up calls to all participants using the previously approved phone script as a reminder and encouraging completion of the survey. Two weeks after original dissemination of the survey an approved reminder e-mail was sent out to all stakeholders. Because the survey was anonymous, the reminder email was sent to all participants. The completion rate of the survey was 68%, with 34 of the 50 participants completing the survey. Of the 34 participants, 20 stakeholders contacted the instructor indicating a desire to participate in a focus group. Because of the large number of stakeholders agreeing to participate in a focus group, a decision was made to divide the stakeholders equally and to host two focus groups consisting of ten participants each.

Once the data from the survey was gathered, students met in their task groups and reviewed each survey in an effort to identify patterns in answers and to rank responses. For the sake of time, the surveys were split evenly amongst the three task groups and the surveys were rotated between the groups until each group had reviewed every survey. The task groups pooled their data and compared findings in a join meeting. This data, along with the automated graphs and charts from the electronic survey were included along with other data in the capstone paper and final recommendations to the community.

Focus Group Development, Participation, and Experience

A guest lecturer from the local County Economic Development Office provided information about the benefits of a focus group for gathering useful information. Engaging the class with expert voices adds practical experience and aids in student engagement (Cooke, 2013). Using a local expert when available reinforces the ties to the community and further integrates the students with existing resources. The speaker provided direction for developing appropriate questions and direction to facilitate a focus group effectively. The expert facilitated a mock focus group with the class which provided a competent example and direct experience for the students. In an effort to continue providing best practice experience and to gather unbiased data, the students and instructor enlisted the expert's assistance to facilitate the focus groups. During this process, she worked closely with the students to hone their focus group questions and to identify the best questions to use during the focus group. Each student was required to submit three questions formatted similarly to the samples provided by both the guest lecturer and the instructor. These questions were then honed down to a final list during the large group process with the assistance of the instructor and guest lecturer.

The effort of the students resulted in an extremely diverse and voluminous pool of participants for the focus groups which included criminal justice professionals, clergy, social service providers, law enforcement officials, attorneys, city and county government officials, and members of the unified school district administration.

The two focus groups were scheduled during the students' regular class time. The focus groups were held one after the other and were scheduled for one and a half hours each. The guest lecturer facilitated the focus groups while the students observed from the back of the room to document the process. Sixteen of the twenty community stakeholders who originally committed to participate attended. Each student was required to take notes during the focus groups to document responses and comments of the participants. Once the second focus group dismissed, the facilitator and instructor processed the experience with the students. The students pooled their documentation during large group, and one working document was created. This data was included in the final report and recommendations.

An Unforeseen Benefit to the Community

Following the project, one of the students involved in the course took the capstone paper to a local community agency in an effort to identify funding sources to enact the recommendations of the project. This effort resulted in a grant proposal for a small start-up organization, essentially consisting of one individual and a Board of Directors, hoping to scale up efforts toward providing support for those reentering the community upon release from jail or prison. This proposal was greatly aided by data collected during the class project and organizational partnerships developed as a result of the participation in the focus groups. The proposal requested funding to support a new reentry initiative, calling for the creation of two new licensed bachelor level social worker positions, funds for training community volunteers to be mentors, money to support a process group aimed at improving social and moral functioning, funds for transportation assistance, strengths-based family centered case management, and a group to improve social skills. The student submitted the grant proposal to the U.S. Department of Justice: Office of Justice Programs (2010) and was awarded nearly $300,000. As a result, the ability of the organization to provide

services grew considerably and the agency was able to accumulate data to support the effectiveness of its programs in reducing recidivism for program participants.

Discussion

Beginning as an experiment in pedagogy to increase engagement of a cohort social work class, the resulting outcome greatly exceeded expectations. Perhaps even more importantly, it demonstrated a notable impact on the students, the community, local social service organizations, and the southwest region of the state as a whole. One of the most gratifying aspects of this process from an educator's perspective was the amount of motivation displayed by the students. Hall and Buzwell (2012) find that across disciplines, *free-loading* is one of the greatest concerns faced by educators and students alike when assigning group work. In this experience, it appeared that the division of labor was equal, as no one member did more work on the project than another. The students approached the project collaboratively but also each brought unique experiences into the final document. The tasks ran smoothly, and the task group members kept each other involved in the learning process for a smooth flow of tasks and timelines.

One of the key advantages of the project was that the endeavor naturally flipped the classroom. As Roehl, Reddy & Shannon, (2013) describe:

> Flipping the classroom employs easy-to-use, readily accessible technology in order to free class time from lecture. This allows for an expanded range of learning activities during class time. Using class time for active learning versus lecture provides opportunities for greater teacher-to-student mentoring, peer-to-peer collaboration and cross-disciplinary engagement. (p. 44)

In an analysis of 24 previous studies of the flipped classroom, Bishop and Verleger (2013) found that students not only tend to prefer the flipped model but they also tend to register better learning outcomes.

Flipping the classroom allowed the students better prepare; but as importantly, it allowed for a more hands-on pedagogical model. Learning and retention are often improved when students concurrently enroll in both academic coursework as well as hands-on laboratory experiences (Matz, Rothman, Krajcik, & Holl, 2012). Though the authors would argue that the project was successful even beyond expectation, its success, however, may be somewhat difficult to replicate in a traditional program. Having previously taught various practice courses in a more traditional delivery structure, the instructor suggests some factors that contributed to the success of this project. It is important to note that these factors are conditions and not causes (Hackman, 2012). In previous research, Hackman (2011) identified six key factors for successful groups that seem to align well with this class. These students were a real team.

The course was delivered in a cohort program in which the students had been studying together in the same classes, many with the instructor of this course, over the previous two years. As a result, the relationships built in the classroom were likely stronger than in a traditional classroom. By allowing the students to choose the project, they identified a compelling purpose that both engaged and energized them. The group was also composed of the right people. The students' mean age was approximately 38 years old and long-time members of the target

community. Previous research indicated that adult learners, particularly those matriculating as a cohort, have higher levels of self-direction, motivation, and commitment to the community (Twail & Kochan, 2000). Further, the class consisted of 12 students, which resulted in enough members to share the load but not too many for any one individual to get lost. As social work students, the group had clear norms of conduct. The NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008) provided clear guidelines of conduct as well as many years of established class norms. Since this was a BSW course, the instructor and greater program worked to provide a supportive organizational context. Resources were allocated as needed and the class was motivated not only to get a good grade but also to make a difference in the community. The instructor made many additional trips to the area and spent many extra hours providing technical and educational assistance to the student teams. The instructor served individual students using a team-focused coaching model. By making connections between the groups and assisting the class as a whole, it provided a synergistic aid to the project particularly when the complexity of the issues required more than the students were able to provide alone.

Factors related to the faculty may have played a role in the success of the project. The instructor demonstrated a willingness to commit to additional work outside the realm of classroom teaching to make connections and attend meetings. Though the course was an evening class meeting one day a week, meetings for key participants and student group work was necessary outside this time frame. The instructor's existing relationships with community agencies were utilized to add legitimacy to the project and secure commitments within the agencies. Even with these favorable factors, the instructor suggests that this level of effort and commitment might be difficult to sustain over many years.

Conclusion

Using community based service learning provides robust opportunities to engage students in experiential learning while having a positive impact on the community. Given the lack of resources often evident in rural areas, service learning provides a collaborative environment for students and local professionals who are distinctively positioned as change agents to fortify their home communities. Through newly implemented course instruction strategies, the project strengthened the community and social service agencies. Students not only increased their macro practice skill set and knowledge base to a greater extent than might have been otherwise achieved, but they will eventually provide the professional workforce necessary to increase the community capacity desperately needed in underserved rural areas.

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Appendix A: Outline of the Capstone Paper

I. Abstract
II. Intro
III. The making of a class project
  a. Brain storming a topic – decision reentry
  b. Breaking into task groups (Individual group process)
  c. Literature review – each group discusses their own process
    i. Local -
    ii. State
    iii. Federal
  d. Identifying stakeholders
  e. Asset mapping
  f. Built survey
  g. Individual response to learning process/project
    i. Talk about all our guest speakers and the purpose of, ask to return, provided good information or not.

IV. Research
    i. Introduction
      1. Validity concerns/issues
      2. Survey statistical data and details
    ii. Literature review
    iii. Asset Map
    iv. Extra Data (provided by participants)
  b. Survey
    i. Coming up with questions
    ii. Sending out survey/follow-up
    iii. Analyzing data
      a. Graphs from survey
      b. Processing results from survey
  c. Focus group
    i. Contacting possible people
    ii. Holding the meeting
      1. Determine objectives
      2. Establish timeline and budget
      3. Generate questions
      4. Identify participants
      5. Identify facilitator and recorder
      6. Generate script
      7. Solidify logistics
      8. Conduct focus group
      9. Analyze and report conclusions – see iii. below
    iii. Summary of findings
    iv. Insert all research here
    v. Outcome

V. Conclusions

Appendix B: Student Comments

Classroom Pedagogy

"The added benefit to this process was in the weekly meetings, note taking, processing information, actively listening to each other, sharing passions, and learning to communicate with a level of professionalism" (F. Waldren, personal communication, May 10, 2009).

"I learned the importance of active listening, cooperation and organization amongst fellow students, the instructor and the community at large" (L. Woods, personal communication, May 5, 2009).

"I never experienced hands on learning of this type before, but I would recommend all social work students be provided the opportunity to participate in this learning experience" (L. Mesa, personal communication, May 1, 2009).

"I was able to see how to organize a plan that promotes the change process at the macro level. The large task group and the subgroup that I was part of was an exciting process for me in that I was able to learn in a hands-on manner. I feel this class hands on project was more beneficial to me than any other assignment I had to complete throughout the entire bachelor of social work program" (L.Woods, personal communication, May 5, 2009).

"One of the most beneficial components of this class was information shared by guest speakers, they provided a broad range of information relevant to social work and specific to our community that could not have been gained in a text book" (B. Thomas, personal communication, May 8, 2009).

Factors Related to a Successful Team

"I would attribute the accomplisments of the project to the "Cohort" students being non-traditional students and having experience working in human services in combination with the education received in the social work program" (J. Shadrick, personal communication, May 12, 2009).

"Although working together as a class was challenging, I feel that our project has been successful in demonstrating how collaboration between agencies and community members is worth the extra effort it takes because it can have a synergistic effect. We experienced positively impacting our community as a catalyst for progress in addressing a relevant issue. I'm glad I had the opportunity to be part of this meaningful and productive learning experience" (B. Thomas, personal communication, May 8, 2009).

"I think all of the class pulled together very well, and when one student was struggling, the other students pulled together and I think the process lead to greater group cohesion for the entire class" (L. Mesa, personal communication, May 1, 2009).

Strengths and Weaknesses

"Before the project I did not like macro practice and had no interest in it and in fact felt somewhat scared about macro practice because I didn't have any macro practice experience. Now I feel that I am much more comfortable with macro work and if I found something I was extremely passionate about I could see myself doing macro work" (K. Houser, personal communication, May, 9 2009).

"Previously, I was not confident in myself to work at the macro level, but now, I know I can be part of engaging the community in order to make change (L. Woods, personal communication", May 5, 2009).

"This course and the process was very time consuming and I found that being on top of assigned tasks was a constant necessity" (L Woods, personal communication, May 5, 2009).

"The most difficult part of the entire project was finding the time to get together in our individual groups. Another difficulty was compiling all of the information into one paper" (C. Connell, personal communication, May 8, 2009).

"Some of my initial concerns included the complexity of the project, the personality differences of the students, and whether we would have the ability to gain the community's interest in whatever social issue we decided to study. The instructor did have to give us limitations, which is exactly what happens in community projects" (F. Waldren, personal communication, May 10, 2009).