



Qué pasa?: ESL and Service-Learning Programs in Puerto Rico

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General Description:

This session helps close the lacuna that exists in service-learning programs regarding Hispanic institutions. In particular, Dr. MacPhee and her students will address several obstacles in the initial stages of a service-learning program in the Department of English, at an institution whose primary language of instruction is Spanish: engaging students in community-based learning activities whose English skills vary from basic to advanced, producing materials in English for clients whose primary audience speaks English as a second language, attracting professors in the Department of English to participate in such a program where the traditional pedagogical style dominates in Business Writing courses, and the success of the service-learning program in the Department of Business Administration whose clients may be on-campus or off-campus. Professor Humberto Malavé will discuss the different projects developed as part of the SAFE Program, their experiences with the institutionalization of service-learning and the impacts on the communication skills of the students.

Motivations/Foundations:

Our initial interest in this presentation began after reading an article by Elizabeth Grassi, Daniel Hanley, and Daniel Liston published in the *Journal of Experiential Education* in 2004 entitled, "Service-Learning: An Innovative Approach for Second Language Learners" and Marlene Ewell's paper "The Efficacy of Service-Learning for Community College ESL Students—English as a Second Language" published in the *Community College Review* in 2001. At Cayey, a liberal arts college in the mountains of Puerto Rico, these two elements—a Hispanic community and ESL population—capture what our institution truly is. In fact, a relatively small, young institution, we have only begun the search for a definition of what service-learning connotes (yet to be approved by the Board and academic bodies of UPR—Cayey). Our

institution is considering Bringle and Hatcher's definition: "a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that needs and reflects on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (112). While many others exist, the Department of English at Cayey, particularly, strives to fulfill Bringle and Hatcher's conception of service-learning in its Business Writing courses: Inco 3005-3006.

Perhaps our biggest motivation for the program's introduction and continuation in the Department of English has been to see the results of Grassi's own program in Colorado: "the Colorado second language learners who were involved in service-learning programs tended to increase their participation in class and earn better grades; they became more excited about and involved in school; and they also experienced increased self-confidence—all as a result of participation in service-learning programs" (87). These results are important for any class and professor, but they become increasingly important in a program that has never been attempted before in a Department of English at Cayey, where students tend to resist speaking English on a daily basis, even in English classes. The service-learning program at Cayey, in both the departments of Business Administration and English are successful to-date because the students not only see the benefits of this program, but have the opportunity to work on real world projects.

Potential Achievements of Session:

This session is multimedia and audience-interactive in an attempt to reveal not only the difficulties inherent in service-learning programs at Hispanic-speaking institutions, but also the rewards of completing a course where such a program is implemented. Two Freshmen—Barbara Diaz and Gabriela Rivera—majoring in Business Administration, taking a compulsory Business Writing course in the Department of English, will reveal not only their initial conceptions of the program in their course, but also discuss their projects: promotional materials for the English Club's inception, an English Club Newsletter (*The Torito Times*) and an English Week program brochure and the methodology they used to complete their work. Moreover, we hope to have the audience participate with both the professors and the students in a service-learning activity that will address issues inherent in a Second Language environment. Students, professors and the audience will openly discuss how they feel this activity has not only made them more aware of the link between language and environment, but also how both contribute to our development as teachers and business leaders and prepare our students for the real world.

Other Information:

The project is currently undergoing major renovations. The Departments of Business Administration and English are working in conjunction with each other on developing a database for all professors and students on-campus. Moreover, this database, while it is currently on the web, is still in its preliminary stages. This webpage provides copies of student work completed thus far in the program, as well as examples of various writing materials: research reports. We hope to complete all this material over the summer of 2006. We are also in the process of

developing our list of clients for the 2006-2007 academic year, both on and off campus, and trying to encourage clients to have students complete work in both Spanish and English so the Department of English can spread its service-learning program beyond the campus arena. Lastly, Dr. MacPhee is currently completing the results of an assessment of the 2005-2006 service-learning program. These results will be discussed at the conference session itself.