

Citizenship and GEMS at Guam Community College: Transforming Students into Island Citizens

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Introduction

Are our schools equipped to teach our students to become civic-minded? Robert Franco (2002) remains steadfast in his belief that community colleges, in particular, are well-positioned to take on this challenge. To do this, he says, “community colleges need to develop effective service learning pedagogies and authentic collaborations with community- and school-based partners. This is what he calls, “preparing students for the work of democracy” which demands strong commitment on the part of community colleges “to become more civically engaged in addressing and solving the problems that beset the communities that support them.” (p. xx).

Westheimer and Kahne (2003, p. 2) essentially endorse this position when they write, “for many educators, making the case for democracy and the important role for school in pursuing it is not difficult.” The issue in fact, they argue, should be: *What kind of citizen do we need to support an effective democratic society?* The authors then proceed to distinguish among three categories of citizens, as follows: (1) the personally responsible citizen; (2) the participatory citizen; and (3) the justice-oriented citizen (p. 3). In terms of these distinctions, they contend that “if participatory citizens are organizing the food drive and personally responsible citizens are donating food, justice-oriented citizens are asking why people are hungry and acting on what they discover” (p. 5).

Within the framework of such fine distinctions, we now ask the question, “What kind of citizens did our GCC students ultimately become, as a result of their active and systematic participation in the college’s service-learning activities? In an attempt to document the transformative power of service learning as pedagogy, this essay describes and reflects on the social and cultural value of the service learning modality towards the development of responsible citizenship among GCC students.

GEMS and the U.S. Territories

As an unincorporated territory of the United States, Guam is approximately 212 square miles and lies west of the International Dateline, thereby making it one day ahead of Hawaii and the Continental United States. It is the largest and most populated island of Micronesia with a multicultural population of 154,805 (US Census Bureau, 2000). The populace comprises of Chamorro (47%), Filipino (25%), Caucasian (10%), Chinese, Japanese, Korean and other ethnicities (18%).

Guam Community College (GCC) is a multifaceted public vocational education institution, established in 1977 to strengthen and consolidate vocational education on Guam. The college operates secondary and postsecondary programs, adult and continuing education, community education, and short-termed, specialized training. In Fall semester 2002, 3,656 students were enrolled in the college's programs. Of this number, 2,025 were enrolled in postsecondary programs and 1,613 were enrolled in secondary vocational education programs offered by GCC in the four (4) Guam high schools.

The service-learning initiative at the college traces its roots to an island-wide forum on community service, volunteerism and service-learning which was convened by Dean Jamie Mason of the School of Technology and Student Services in 1997. The overwhelming response from the community led to the development of a youth leadership summer program the following year which emphasized the valuable contributions of young high school students, as they were placed in several agencies of the government, through a local service-learning grant. Although the service-learning concept has gained gradual grounding on Guam since then, it was only in 2001 when GCC entered the GEMS (Global Engagement of Multifaceted Stakeholders) project (through a subgrant) did it gain greater impetus and momentum. This development came as a result of the growing realization of the Corporation for Community and National Service (CCNS) that the US territories needed service-learning opportunities which have not been hitherto provided in the past. A meeting arranged among the Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges¹ (CCNCCC) Director, Lyvier Conss, CCNS' Calvin Dawson, and various representatives from Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern

¹ Now called Community College National Center for Community Engagement.

Marianas Islands, American Samoa, and Virgin Islands during the 2001 CCNCCC conference was largely instrumental in the US territories' inclusion in the GEMS project.

Leveling the markers of diversity: GCC students “doing” service-learning

A sampling of service-learning activities within GCC classes is described below, including the course or courses in which service-learning components have been embedded:

- *AC 103 (Accounting Principles III)*

Students contributed their time and effort in coordinating two flea market fund-raising activities for the Habitat for Humanity –Guam Chapter where accounting principles were integrated in their tasks. Students also assisted the Guam Housing & Urban Renewal Authority (GHURA) by conducting the annual voting by association members for Association Officers in three polling sites: Agat, Dededo and Toto.

- *CJ 107 (Introduction to Corrections)*

Students were placed in the following sites: Juvenile Drug Court, Probation, YCF, United States Probation Office, and Cottage Homes Program. Students integrated corrections concepts in these settings as they got exposure to practices of juvenile and adult probation, institutional treatment, parole and community-based corrections programs.

- *HL 202 (Nutrition)*

Students coordinated a Special Education Workshop which focused on health and nutrition-related issues for the whole community. They sponsored a health fair with exhibitions, HIV AIDS presentations and lectures, in coordination with the Department of Health and Social Services. In addition, these students also worked in various capacities at the following sites: St. Dominic's Elderly Home, Adult Day Care Center, Elderly Nutrition Program, and Karidad Kantina. In these sites, they integrated their knowledge of nutrition concepts and practices as they interacted with clients, as well as with program staff.

- *EN100R (Fundamentals of English—Reading)*

At the Northern Regional Health Center, students read to disadvantaged children while the children waited to see the doctor in the consultation room. The Ayuda Foundation provided the books for the doctors and the students to give to the children during their medical visits.

- *MA 105 (College Mathematics)*

Students tutored elementary school children with their math lessons and assignments at Carbullido Elementary School. In particular, slow math learners were patiently guided by the tutor-students as the children completed their projects or assignments in class.

- *CD 240 (Cognitive and Creative Development)*

The whole class adopted Island Girl Power as its agency partner for the semester. Island Girl Power caters to the needs of “at-risk” young teens (aged 7-14). Volunteers from the community are sought to conduct Saturday workshops. This class conducted workshops –ranging from tie dyeing to first aid safety – from mid-February to mid-April. As part of the service-learning requirement, every training topic had a lesson plan approved by the instructor.

- *AC 250 (Federal Income Tax II)*

Students assisted the Guam Department of Revenue and Taxation with receiving, reviewing and stamping Federal Income Tax Returns from people filing their returns on April 15 of each year. Prior to this activity, students were administered an “oath” by the agency director to uphold the integrity of their role as tax preparers.

- *VETT 063 (Intermediate Foodservice Operations); SS 101(Guam History), English 11 (Applied Communications)*

These classes combined their resources in coordinating an event that integrated vocational (such as cooking) and academic (such as writing) skills learned from all three classes. The chosen community partner was Guam Trankilidat (House of Tranquility, an elderly home) where two dinner events were planned and implemented by the students. The first event allowed students to apply their food service skills in the selection, purchase, preparation and serving of a dinner menu for the elderly residents of the home. Guam History students conducted oral history interviews soon after the dinner, while the Applied Communications students took pictures and wrote brief biographies of the residents. These materials were subsequently compiled to create and produce a calendar which was given as a gift of appreciation to the residents in a culminating dinner event planned by the students.

- *VC 241 (Web Page Design)*

Students were paired with non-profit agencies so they could provide assistance to them in terms of website development and subsequent linking to GCC’s service-learning

homepage. These partner agencies included the Habitat for Humanity, Guam Preservation and Trust, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, Lutheran Church of Guam, and Erica's House (a family visitation center for victims of domestic violence). This experience helped the students apply the skills they learned in the classroom in an environment that demanded personal and social commitment to the cause or causes espoused by the agency itself.

In the various service-learning situations described above, students were put squarely in settings where their exposure to diversity was most pronounced. Three thematic patterns emerge out of these collective student experiences, namely:

- (1) the connectedness of young people with older adults, where age as a marker of diversity is leveled;
- (2) the transmission of technological expertise from the novice (i.e., students) to the experienced (i.e., workers), where the digital divide as a marker of diversity is lessened, if not diminished;
- (3) the experience of *connectedness* attains a practical, vicarious level only when students share in the world of Guam's disadvantaged sectors, where the poverty level as a marker of diversity is replaced by one's sense of humanity.

A systematic and careful content analysis of selected students' reflection papers reveal that positive outcomes of service-learning among GCC students variably focus on academic/skills learning, personal growth and introspection, and the development of civic consciousness. The first two outcomes seem readily apparent in the narratives analyzed. However, did our students acquire a more collective, deeper level of civic engagement that speaks of a broader social commitment beyond the personal? The last section below discusses the impact of GEMS on the collective thinking of the college community and its relationships with the Guam society at large vis-à-vis community service, volunteerism and civic responsibility.

GEMS and citizenship: Some theoretical musings

If the written reflection essays and group reflection sessions were used as a sole measure of success in this undertaking, it is perhaps fair to say that we encouraged our students, as they engaged in GEMS' service-learning activities, to become *personally responsible citizens* and *participatory citizens* (to borrow Westheimer and Kahne's terminology). Students who took part in a soup kitchen's rededication event, for example, may be categorized as participatory citizens. Their active engagement in this

collective, community-based effort to bring together various stakeholders in the community was reflective of their commitment to participate in the social life of the parish. On the other hand, the students who were placed in the senior citizens' home, adult day care center, probation office, doctor's office, housing clubhouse, and other similar sites turned into personally responsible citizens as they documented their personal growth in their reflection essays. Their personal growth moreover derives from a deeper realization of their individual identities vis-à-vis others as key players in the everyday unfolding of social life. This is what Westheimer and Kahne (2003) call "personal responsibility (that is) considered in a broader social context." (6)

The cultural gestalt that frames the development of these two types of citizens also deserve some discussion here. In the native Chamorro language, the word "ayuda" means *assistance* in a casual, informal level, but actually means *service* in a thoughtful, ruminative sense. This is where the Ayuda Foundation, a nonprofit agency based on Guam and a GCC community partner agency, derives its name from. In the Chamorro worldview, the notion of service is also intricately integrated with the value of "doing good works" as an integral part of the Catholic doctrine: that is, *servicing others* is "being Christian." It is no wonder then that a general air of religiosity usually permeates service-learning activities that involve soup kitchens and senior citizen centers, particularly those that are coordinated by faith-based organizations in the community.

Moreover, the concept of *I familia* (the family) among Chamorros is largely that of an extended nature. A cursory look at the obituary page of the *Pacific Daily News*, for instance, is very telling about this kinship structure. Not only immediate family members are listed by name, but so are in-laws, siblings and their children, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, special friends and sometimes even neighbors. Framed in this cultural practice, it is easy to assume that Guam society produces participatory citizens very early on. Yet, this informal socialization (albeit only in one's deeper cultural consciousness and may hitherto remain hidden) is eventually formalized through schooling and peer interaction all throughout the individual's growing up years. In Guam society, we theorize that the development of personally responsible citizens (as rooted in the Catholic practice of doing good works) precedes the development of participatory citizens. Since these are not mutually exclusive categories, however, they could also follow parallel development in an individual's life.

When GCC students get actively involved in service-learning activities, we posit that these two types of citizens attain full maturation. The GCC student who becomes a personally responsible citizen attains internal growth while situating him/herself in the social milieu, while the GCC student who turns into a participatory citizen is mobilized to organize and lead efforts to advance the common good. We saw both kinds of citizens among our GCC service-learning students this program year.

Though these two types of citizens contributed meaningfully to these students' democratic education at the college through opportunities of engagement with the community, the GEMS project however fell short of developing justice-oriented citizens among our students. Westheimer and Kahne (2003, p. 11) argue that "programs that champion participation do not necessarily develop students' abilities to analyze and critique root causes of social problems, and vice versa." Admittedly, this is an area of growth that future GCC service-learning faculty must consider, particularly when they design a curriculum or program that would develop students' skills that would encourage social participation, as well as skills required to critically analyze and act on root causes of social problems and inequities in the community. As Colby et.al. (2003, p. 7) succinctly put it, "education is not complete until students not only have acquired knowledge but can act on that knowledge in the world." Advancing this same argument, Melissa Snarr (2003, p. 1), questions the quality of education through community service itself when she contends that "the civic engagement of many young adults today is decidedly local, short-term, and apolitical." As a concrete example, she cites students who "flock in droves to reading and tutoring programs in local elementary schools. But few of those students can articulate how property taxes impact school resources –and even fewer will ever vote in a local school-board election" (p. 1). When GCC students have gone beyond the "character formation phase of service learning" (to borrow Snarr's phraseology), it is envisioned that their actions will include forms of participation that challenge Guam's existing governmental structures, particularly those that impede the processes of social change to occur. Yet, whether the religiosity (read non-critical) that is germane to the Guamanian's cultural psyche plays a key role in facilitating or impeding the development of the justice-oriented citizen on island needs further study and exploration.

The role of GCC GEMS in educating students to be thoughtful and engaged citizens remains a continuous challenge. As students find themselves journeying from the classroom to the soup kitchen, from the computer lab to a senior citizens center, from the library to a field ready for clearing, they will find ample opportunities to express their personal and social commitments to a democratic education that will allow them to think beyond themselves and their families. From becoming personally responsible citizens and growing to be participatory citizens, they will finally mature as justice-oriented citizens. When that happens, the myriad of problems that Guam is now reeling under --- from a debilitating government financial crisis to tragic natural disasters---will be more critically analyzed and thoughtfully framed in larger social issues that trace their roots to *structural (even federal policy)* inequalities. Such critical and engaged analysis will hopefully cultivate justice-oriented citizens who will seek action in a systematic, organized movement that will bring Guam's social and economic recovery to full fruition.

I acknowledge the valuable contributions of service-learning faculty Susan Seay, Cecilia Santos, Marsha Postrozny, Dennis Slyter, Wilson Tam, Barbara Bouchard-Miller, and Elaine Fejerang (as well as their students' thoughtful insights) in the preparation of this article.

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