Religion and Sustainability in Canoga Park: A Service-Learning Project for Religion and Ecology

Overview

In this service-learning project our class will conduct focus groups at two congregations in Canoga Park in order to ascertain the nature and interest of their concerns about the environment. We will analyze the data we gather and create a report for Neighborhood Partners in Action (NPA), a CSUN-based initiative that helps build bridges between community-based organizations and stakeholders. The data we gather will contribute to improving the lives of Canoga Park residents and will offer a real-world opportunity to test and apply concepts we discuss in class.

Learning Objectives

Students who complete this project will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of sustainability and understand how concepts of sustainability are connected to issues of social justice, the environment, and the economy at local, regional, and global levels.
2. Explain how issues of gender, race, and class contribute to religious outlooks and practices in general and specifically how in regard to matters connected to environmental sustainability.
3. Recognize that they can have an impact in the world, specifically with regard to pressing environmental issues.

What is Service Learning?

Service Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful civic engagement activities with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.

Through service learning, young people—from kindergarteners to college students—use what they learn in the classroom to solve real-life problems. They not only learn the practical applications of their studies, they become actively contributing citizens and community members through the service they perform.

Service learning can be applied in a wide variety of settings, including schools, universities, community-based and faith-based organizations. It can involve a group of students, a classroom or an entire school. Students build character and become active participants as they work with others in their school and community to create service projects in areas such as education, public safety, and the environment.

For resources and information on the Community Engagement Program at CSUN, including the Handbook, go to: www.csun.edu/communityengagement/

What is NPA (Neighborhood Partners in Action)?

NPA is a new initiative that helps build bridges between community-based organizations and stakeholders by fostering communication and collaboration. Established by the Institute for Community Health and Wellbeing at California State University, Northridge, NPA's objective is to partner with communities in using their resources to their fullest potential to address the communities' most pressing needs. The ultimate goal is for community-based organizations, businesses, leaders, residents and neighbors to optimize their effectiveness in strengthening community identity and improving quality of life.

The NPA and Canoga Park partnership began when community stakeholders reached out and expressed an interest in working together with CSUN on issues relating to community wellbeing. The partnership is a natural outgrowth of CSUN's extensive history with the Canoga Park community. Through university-community collaborations—such as the Veteran Theatre Project, financial literacy and collaborative community parenting programs with the Child Development Institute (CDI), and social work internships with an array of community organizations— CSUN has become a trusted and valued community partner. NPA: Canoga Park represents a further deepening of this relationship and promises to maximize the impact of university and community activities to address community needs.

For more information about NPA, go to http://www.csun.edu/wellbeing/neighborhood-partners-in-action-npa/.

Project Details/Requirements (200 points)

1) Data collection (70 points): After reading relevant background material, our class will develop questions to ask participants in the two focus groups. We will conduct the focus groups at the congregations on two designated days, then transcribe the conversations.

   Student roles: Each student will either attend a focus group (5 students per focus group – 10 total) to help facilitate and record observations, OR transcribe a portion of the transcript (20 students total). Roles will be assigned based on availability and interest.

2) Data analysis (70 points): In groups of 2, students will code a portion of the transcript. We will come together as a class to develop an overall analysis.

3) Report (70 points): In groups of approximately 5, students will create a portion of the report that we will submit to NPA. One group will compile the report into a single document and present it to NPA's Advisory Council.

Due dates:

Data Collection
   ➢ Focus groups will take place on Sunday March 22 (Congregation A) and Sunday April 19 (Congregation B)
   ➢ Transcriptions: Audio recordings will be available on Moodle on the Monday following each focus group (March 23 and April 20). Students responsible for transcribing must submit their transcriptions through Moodle according to the following schedule:
       o Transcripts for Congregation A are due by 11:55 PM on Wednesday April 1.
       o Transcripts for Congregation B are due by 11:55 PM on Thursday April 23.

<u>Data Analysis</u>
- ➢ Students will begin to analyze data during class on April 27. Reports are due on Friday May 1.

<u>Reports</u>
- ➢ Students will begin to write reports during class on May 4. Reports are due at the beginning of the final exam: Monday May 11 at 5:30 PM. Students must be present for the exam period, and will share their results with the class.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TRANSCRIBING FOCUS GROUP RECORDINGS:

1. Find your assigned segment in the file on Moodle. Click and download.

2. Create a word document with the title of your file, including the number before your name (for example, 8.Lindsay G).

3. Please use Times New Roman with 12-point font. Use single spacing but skip a line between each speaker. (See the bottom of this page for an example of how the spacing should look.)

4. Listen to the recording and type what you hear. This will require you to start and stop the recording often, and perhaps rewind at times.
   **You might want to use transcription software to help you with this. You can find free transcription software on the Internet. This will enable you to slow down the recording.

5. Please omit sounds like umm and uh. If a person repeats a word multiple times as he/she thinks about the point he/she is trying to get across, only type that word once.

6. When you have finished your transcription, read through it and make sure you use proper capitalization, punctuation, etc. In some cases a person might seem to be rambling on in one long sentence. Please give that person the benefit of the doubt and break up his/her thoughts into separate sentences. Remember, you want to write down exactly what the person says, but you'll make very minor editorial decisions to make the transcript easier on the eye.

7. Sometimes you might hear background sounds, someone talking out of turn, or someone making sounds of agreement, such as "aha," or "yes." There is no need to document these, unless you feel they are particularly significant for some reason.

8. Use the following abbreviations to indicate who is speaking:
   a. Professor Baugh – AB
   b. Male participant – MP
   c. Female participant: FP

9. Post your transcription to Moodle.

10. Be sure to delete the recoding from your computer when you have finished transcribing.

Your document will look something like this:

AB: So the first question that we have for you guys is, we're interested in the kinds of roles and responsibilities that your religion asks of you, so what can you tell us about that? The roles and responsibilities that your religion asks of you.

FP: Well, we talk about the fact that we have to respect the earth, and the people in it. It's a primary object of this faith, if you will.

MP: Yeah, one of the seven principles is the interconnectedness of all life.

Instructions for Coding Focus Group Transcripts

Due Date:
Submit to Moodle by Thursday April 30, 2015 at 11:55 PM. Submit one document per group, with all group member names listed at the top of the page.

The Task:
Please read through your assigned portion of the transcript and search for data that addresses the questions listed below. Include only quotations that come directly from the informants, not questions/clarifications mentioned by the researcher.

When you find relevant data, copy and paste the relevant response under the appropriate question. For each entry, include a citation to indicate where the response came from. Citations should be written like this:
- OLV p.12 (for Our Lady of the Valley)
- EUU p. 7 (for Emerson Unitarian Universalist)

Use bullet points to separate each entry.

It will usually help to include a brief commentary along with each quotation that you paste. You commentary will provide context for the quotation and help readers understand why you included a particular quotation in a particular category.

Categories/Questions:

1) What are the informants' top priorities/concerns, and where does the environment fit on that list?
2) To what extent do the informants identify as environmentalists?
3) To what extent and how do the informants connect environmental concern to their religions?
4) What kinds of environmental concerns did the informants mention?
5) How did the informants discuss the role of race/ethnicity when it comes to environmental concern (especially response to PRRI study)?
6) What language did the informants recommend for talking about environmental concerns?
7) How did the informants describe the quality of the environment in Canoga Park?
8) In what ways would the informants like to see quality of life in Canoga Park improved?
9) Other significant categories to add? Please describe the category and fill in relevant data.

Final Report

For the final report your group is responsible for writing a summary and analysis of your assigned portion of the data the class gathered and coded. The groups' reports will be combined into a single report that will be submitted to NPA, Congregation A, and Congregation B.

The goal of the report is to inform neighborhood stakeholders of the types of concerns that residents have, so that NPA and other neighborhood leaders can help address neighborhood needs.

Reports should be written in a clear, sophisticated, and professional manner. Please use Times New Roman, 12-point font, with single spacing.

Your group's portion of the report will likely be 2-3 paragraphs. It should be approximately ½-1 full page, single-spaced.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITING THE FINAL REPORT:

1. Read through your assigned data at least two times. (Recall that you can find a document with the data in the file titled "Coded Data" at the top of Moodle.) Do all of the responses point to a similar conclusion? Are responses all over the map? What patterns can you discern? Do the members of Congregation A conclude one thing while the members of Congregation B conclude something different? As a group, your goal is to analyze the data in order to respond to the question posed for your coded data.

2. The first 1-2 sentences of your report should indicate the topic you are addressing, and your summary conclusion of your findings. Additional sentences should elaborate. Include direct quotations to support your analysis.

3. Proofread, proofread, proofread! You are writing this report for submission to NPA. Grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc. all count. All group members should proofread the final report before submitting.

4. Submit your final report on Moodle no later than 5:30 PM on Monday, May 11 2015. Submit one document per group, with all group members' names listed at the top of the page.