

# Community Encounter

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## Purpose of Study

The purpose of this project is to inform more students about the baccalaureate social work degree and the possibility of a career in social work and also to provide students with an educational opportunity before they decide on or embark upon a career, to get a greater appreciation of the realities and hardships some people face in living and surviving (e.g. poverty, homelessness, immigration). This project will potentially increase student interest in a social work/human service career. The methods used will be discussion with students in their classes and at a reception and offering students a community experience for two days. Those who choose the experience will be introduced to some of the populations social workers serve as well as social issues that are often the focus of social work practice.

## Goals of Project

Outreach to a broad range of students such as those in CHHS who are pre any degree program, students just beginning college, and students in the university curriculum without declared majors, to increase enrollment in the BSW program

Assist students in learning about career options in the social work field

To familiarize and sensitize students to the harsh realities of poor and stigmatized people found in inner cities and service opportunities available

To bring social problems to a more personal level

To assist in the development of the social consciousness of students by understanding and seeing a different side of community life than what they may be used to seeing

## Potential Obstacles

Lack of student interest – Can be avoided with publicity and marketing

Social Work Faculty and Staff in the School may not want to be involved - Can be avoided by marketing the “Community Encounter” as an effort to increase enrollment

Faculty in the non-Social Work degree programs may see it as competition – Can be avoided by explaining that students are receiving information that will assist them in making their own choice of a career and that the experience will allow students to gain awareness that will be useful in any career they choose

BSW students not participating – Can be avoided by meeting with Eta Eta Sigma to discuss the value of becoming more proficient in public speaking and inform them that their efforts may increase student numbers and strengthen the BSW program

Human Service agencies may be resistant to taking the time to interact with students in groups – Can be avoided by placing emphasis on how valuable their contribution will be in raising the social awareness of students. Also, there will be various options for students to choose from so no one organization is overburdened.

## Raising Social Awareness – Common Beliefs about Social Issues True or False?

Poor people collecting welfare do not have to work

Corporations receive welfare from the government

Middle and upper class people receive more welfare money from the government than the poor

A primary cause of homelessness is a lack of affordable housing

An increasing proportion of the homeless population are women and children

Persons with mental illness are more violent than the rest of the population

Persons with mental illness cannot work

Undocumented immigrants who want to become citizens can apply and receive their status in a reasonable amount of time



## Sample Community Experience

Students provide lunch to members of Ministry with Community, which is an agency that provides food and services to persons with mental illness, ex-prisoners, and homeless people

Students learn about poverty via simulation and experiential exercises

Students dialogue about immigration issues with immigrants who may or may not be documented

## Participants

Advisors to students in the university curriculum agreed to provide information about these events to the advisees

Person in charge of Fall Welcome for incoming freshman will post announcements of the “Community Encounter” to be held Labor Day weekend of 2009...students will RSVP via email

Director of Freshman Seminar supports the “Community Encounter” and suggests that there be a second “Community Encounter” during Spring 2010

Dean of College of Health & Human Services has been approached for her support offering 1-day pilot “Community Encounter” experience to students living in the CHHS learning community dorm

Faculty in the School of Social Work will be approached for their participation at a pre-social work reception to be held during Fall 2009 semester and for their ideas about a “Community Encounter” experience

Students who are members of Eta Eta Sigma will be asked to participate in educating other students about social work and brainstorming ideas for the community experience

Human service agencies/organizations will be asked to speak with students and allow them to participate in service activities during the community experience



## Best Approach for Enlisting Support

I presented my ideas to the various aforementioned people and solicited their support, input, and ideas on what they think will work best. I've been very open, receptive and flexible because I consider what I do to be a pilot project to be evaluated and revised as needed.