

## Engaging with Global Justice through Internships

Global justice, on its face, seems like an impossible task. As individuals, even citizens of wealthy and powerful countries, the task of economic, social and political justice seems to outstrip our intellectual, practical and emotional abilities. Considering the scope of ‘global’ justice, it would appear that a massive coordinated effort would be necessary to overcome the problems of global injustice, yet it would seem such coordination may be impossible. The difficulties of seeking justice between nations led John Rawls to suggest that we can only hope for a kind of humanitarian goodwill between states, which in his view was less than a robust requirement for international justice. Amartya Sen, in *the Idea of Justice*, recently argued that it is not justice that we seek, since seeking justice in a global sense is impossible.

Given the capitulation of such philosophical luminaries, it is no wonder that philosophy students often find the problems of global justice and injustice to be intractable and indeed, overwhelming. However, when students engage with those whose everyday work involves chipping away at one or another specific problem of global justice, they learn not despair, but hope, and more importantly, they learn how issues of global justice are addressed in practical terms. Those who work on these local issues not only have an understanding of the connection between local, national and global aspects of these issues, they solve these problems, and can show students how everyday decisions on a local level affect issues of justice on a larger scale. Working with such individuals and organizations helps students understand the work of justice, and its local, national and global faces.

### **I. Experiential Engaged Learning in Philosophy to the Rescue!**

In my course ‘Global Justice’, I use internships with social justice organizations to give students a look at the everyday, often difficult, but essentially manageable work that goes into solving issues of injustice at the local, national and global levels. I call this work ‘engaged learning’. Engaged learning is a variety of experiential learning that seeks to integrate theory and practice through project-based internships that foster strong university-community partnerships. In my philosophy course ‘Global Justice’, each of my students is assigned a semester-long internship with a local organization working on issues of global justice. Through these internships, students work through larger theoretical questions while engaging in the everyday work of global justice practitioners. In what follows, I describe how I organized this class and what elements of the course work to both create good experiences for my students and community relationships that persist beyond the semester.

Like issues of global justice, the practical details of organizing a successful engaged learning course could seem overwhelming to many philosophy instructors. While such courses are not easy to organize, they are not impossible. In this chapter, I outline the practical details of creating courses where sometimes abstruse theorizing can join with active community engagement and learning to provide the kind of educational experience that can lead students to read the course materials differently and to ask more informed questions about theories of global justice.

In section II, I will set out the details of the course that I taught, starting in 2009. I will go through the different elements of the syllabus, paying special attention to the ‘internship’ and ‘final project’ components of the course, which is what makes this an engaged-learning course. In Section III, I will address the practical details and requirements for organizing and teaching such engaged-learning courses.

## **II. The Engaged-Learning Global Justice Course**

Thematically, I organize the course as focused on five areas: 1) War and Violence as Issues of Global Justice, 2) Human Rights, Development, and Global Institutions, 3) Immigration and Refugees 4) Gender and Justice in Global Perspective and finally, 5) Democracy and Communication. These five themes organize our readings and the internship projects. Each student chooses an area of interest from these five and chooses an internship project with an organization that works primarily on one of these areas.

The first assignment of the course is a short essay, described below, in which students choose their internship project from a list of organizations and internships and answer a set of questions about it. I post the organizations, along with a short description of possible projects that the students could work on, which are provided by the organization. These projects are related to the ongoing work of the organizations, but are shaped, through conversations with the person who will manage the student intern several weeks before the beginning of the term. There are three major requirements for each project. It must be 1) a project that can be completed or on which major work can be done in the space of a semester, 2) a project that is meaningful to the organization, and 3) a project that is related to social or global justice, such that it will enhance the student’s experience in the course.

Students choose an internship from a list of organizations and internships, which I organized in the previous term. Most of the organizations are local non-profits working in some area of global justice. Having worked as a volunteer for WRFG Community Radio, Sagal Radio and with the refugee organizations which it served, including the Refugee Women’s Network and the International Rescue Center, I had a strong connection to these community organizations. As I will discuss below, these personal connections are essential for developing substantial projects for my students. I worked with organizations to define project requirements as specifically as possible, so that students have a clear set of responsibilities and a tangible result for their final project.

Internship projects included:

- Interns with the *Radio Diaspora* program produced by the Latin American and Caribbean Community Center (LACCC) develop a radio program on issues of immigration in greater Atlanta
- Intern with the Georgia Coalition for the People’s Agenda assisting in their Citizen Education Program, and develop literature about voting rights
- International Rescue Committee interns work with high-school student asylees to produce radio programs about their experience in the United States.
- Interns with the Georgia Alliance for Children research and write grants while shadowing those working for the GAC.

- Interns with the American Friends Service Committee Truth in Recruitment campaign educate about the issues of military recruitment in U.S. Schools. The intern develops a pamphlet for high school students and travels to schools around Atlanta while working with other student interns and veterans.
- Interns with the Sutherland Law Firm, a law firm supporting the Advocates for Human Rights and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia through the Carter Center, organize educational materials for public outreach.
- The American Friends Service Committee Peace Building Program Intern help organize a Youth Convergence Project, bringing together 100 youth for a conference on peace and justice.
- Interns with WRFG Community Radio have the option of working with station volunteers to organize a fund drive or working with the radio program *Class Chronicles* to help research and produce a radio program on issues of poverty and justice.
- Interns with Sagal Radio HEARMe project work with volunteers to research and produce health related radio programs. Interns with web experience are also needed to support volunteers with local news bite section of Sagal Radio website.

Students were directed to research their organization and to write a short proposal answering the following questions:

1. How would this project and working with this organization support and enhance your personal, educational and career goals?
2. What skills do you bring to this internship and what would you like to learn?
3. What interests you most about the organization and the problems that they address?

Students submit this proposal and their resume, which are then sent to the internship organization of their choice. Students then meet with their intern coordinator, and design a project that can be completed in the time allotted. Students write up a final proposal describing this project.

After this initial development of their internship project, the class operates for the most part, just like a traditional philosophy class. Students read articles and books on global justice. Students write short papers on theoretical issues of global justice. However, some class time is reserved for discussing internship projects and addressing any worries or problems that came up with the individual internship projects.

To regularly check in with student progress, I ask the students to prepare 'Project Blogs.' Each student maintains a blog about his or her internship project. Each week we go through these blogs as a class and discuss the relevance of their experience in the field with the issues we are discussing in class. Students are encouraged to reflect on their experience both personally and philosophically. This was also a time when students can express any problems or frustrations they were experiencing and where they can receive advice from their fellow students.

For their final projects, students are expected to bring together theory and practice, by bringing insights from their internship project to bear on some theoretical problem of global justice. In their final projects, students choose one philosophical problem from our readings and a practical issue provided by their internship experience to write a final paper, which they then present for the entire class and invited community partners. Working with students one-on-one is essential for helping students find the right balance of practical explanation and philosophical analysis. This is time intensive, but this is where the real work of engaged-learning happens. Engaged-learning means that the students are bringing together the theoretical frameworks we have discussed in class while analyzing their own internship experience. To a certain extent, we practice this as a class during each internship reflection session and I try to bring in examples from the students' projects during lectures. Ultimately, this is a difficult task, but it is the kind of task where students can produce exciting and original work.

For the final class meeting of Global Justice, each student prepares a presentation of his or her final paper. Each presentation begins with a discussion of the student's internship project and an abstract of the philosophical problem the student engaged in their final paper. We invite community partners for the presentations afterwards and have a banquet for the final day of class. These presentations allow the students to present their philosophical-practical work for a more general audience than for their paper. This experience offers students another way to think about their ideas and their internship experience as an exercise in public philosophy. Students' final papers tended to focus more on the philosophical aspects of their experience; however, since they were intended for a public audience, the presentations focused more on the internship experience, allowing the students the opportunity to talk about the philosophical concepts that guided their practice. I highly recommend such a paper-presentation final project and inviting community partners, as these presentation meetings provide unique opportunities both for students and for community partners to see the results of their cooperation. These kinds of engagements with community partners also help sustain the partnerships for future courses.

### **III. Engaged Philosophy Courses – A How-to Guide**

Global Justice is just one of many philosophy courses that lends itself to an engaged-learning experience. I have developed courses in Social and Political Philosophy, Ethics and Human Nature (a staple of the Jesuit institution where I currently teach) with engaged-learning components. I have worked with others designing engaged-learning courses in Environmental Ethics, Religious Ethics, Feminist Philosophy and Philosophy of Race. The key element for the success of these courses is, I will propose, the engagement of the instructor with their community. This engagement allows the instructors to work with their community contacts to develop good projects for their students. Such engagement not only models the kinds of engagement we wish our students to have with their community partner, and more broadly with their community, but also is the building block of university-community trust upon which the best engaged learning courses are built. However, as instructors, we are not alone. In what follows I will outline the variety of resources available to instructors to develop engaged learning courses, and explain how the capacity for such courses can be built while teaching.

The course described above was supported and funded by the Office of University-Community Partnerships at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia (OUCP) as part of a graduate fellowship in Engaged Teaching. The OUCP is an innovative organization that seeks to build long-term relationships in the greater Atlanta metro area through program-based projects and through collaborative community research. Before teaching through OUCP, I had been a community-partners fellow working at a refugee community radio station in nearby Clarkston, Georgia, and had been a long term volunteer at a community radio station, WRFG, in Atlanta. With the support of the OUCP and my own network of non-profit contacts, setting up internships for my students was relatively easy. Not every university has such an institution, and not every faculty member has been a long-term volunteer in the community in which their academic institution resides. However, both institutional support and individual engagement in the community are essential for successful engaged-experiential learning courses. In what follows, I will present ways to build capacity for such courses by offering preliminary steps for instructors, and some proposals for identifying institutional support. There are many productive ways to build up to a full engaged-learning course with internships and the kinds of final projects discussed above. The main element of building capacity for such courses is identifying good community partners – nonprofits, etc., that can offer good internship experiences for your students.

#### **IV. Institutional Support**

While not all academic institutions have a full center of community engaged research and partnerships, most have some elements of such programs, e.g. service-learning programs, ethics centers, prison teaching programs, partnerships with local K-12 schools, affiliation with religious organizations, etc. These groups on campus can be excellent sources for identifying community partners. Colleagues, perhaps in other departments and perhaps in neighboring institutions, are also a rich source of information for what organizations are open to student internship projects. Colleagues are also essential sources of information about logistics, funding and ideas. Funding for innovative, engaged learning, service-learning and experiential learning is available at most academic institutions. Applying for this funding is often a first step to finding colleagues who work on such courses and identifying the key staff members who facilitate community interaction on campus. Whether one can obtain a mini-grant or a course release, such funding begins the process of building capacity through finding partners, and understanding how your campus works with faculty engaged in these projects. Depending on your institution, there may be legal issues with working with community partners, sending students off-campus, etc.

#### **V. Building (up to) an Engaged-Learning Course**

Given the often-itinerant nature of academic culture, instructors at all levels often find themselves in new communities and new colleges and universities. The engagement of the instructor in the community is the single most important element of successful engaged-learning courses with internships. However, instructors in new positions need not despair. Getting to know one's community can be integrated into one's pedagogy.

While building up to a full engaged-learning course, your students can help identify organizations that work on a specific issue. When I first moved to my current institution, my global justice students worked together on a project to identify local social

and global justice organizations. Their projects included interviewing the director of an organization, profiling the organization and analyzing the organization's contributions to the issues in our class, e.g. gender, violence, refugee and immigration, etc. A student volunteer, funded through an internal grant for student research, created a database of these projects. This student also followed up with these organizations to determine what kinds of projects the organizations might have for future student interns. This database then became the source of future community partners, and also for identifying good in-class speakers. I love this section!

Identifying good community partners is essential for fostering strong internship programs. Having students involved from the beginning gives them valuable experience engaging in community work. Often students will already be involved with local organizations or campus-based activism and volunteer organizations. They can serve as local experts and lead groups of students through the process. Those students who are local can also serve as local experts, which can build ties between commuter students and those living on-campus.

Engaged learning courses are some of the most rewarding courses to teach. They challenge students to bring their theoretical knowledge to bear on practical problems while working with local organizations that do the work of justice at local, national and global levels. These courses take time to plan and to build. Building the individual capacity of the instructor is the first step, that is: learning how one's institution works, applying for grants to support such projects, engaging with community organizations and getting to know the principals of these organizations is essential for knowing where the students will have a good experience.

A good engaged-learning experience is not necessarily one that is problem or conflict-free. Instructors need to be able to communicate honestly with the local coordinator of your students' internships so that if a problem comes up, it can be handled effectively. Problems will arise. These problems, while often minor, are to be expected given that students will be in new situations and are being asked to extend their intellectual skills into a new practical realm. Community partners, whether a non-profit organization or a local grade school, are hectic places where your student may feel ignored or out of place. These sorts of issues are to be expected and are why I reserve regular class time for discussing internship projects and project blogs. If one is lucky enough to work at an institution with dedicated staff to handle student community-partnerships, then these issues should generally be handled through these staff members. For the rest of us, knowing those in charge of the internship project is the best way to make sure that problems with the student or the organization are handled earlier rather than later.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Engaged experiential learning experiences in philosophy courses offer the possibility of integrating theoretical and practical studies, which, for many of us is the holy grail of the college experience. They are never without complications, and often bring up social, political, economic and emotional issues that are often unseen in traditional classrooms. However, these interactions and complications genuinely prepare our students to be thoughtful and engaged world citizens. Further, and this is the topic, no doubt, of another volume, these experiences allow our students to see the kind of engaged thoughtful

professions and careers which their work in philosophy prepares them to pursue. The experiential nature of this course shows philosophy students that a philosophical future may include but is not limited to graduate studies in philosophy. Our students are thoughtful and passionate. In courses like Global Justice, students want to know ‘what they can do’ about the problems and issues global justice theorists raise. Their internship projects allow them to ‘do something’, and to reflect on the kind of work done by organizations working for justice at the local and global levels. These courses allow them to use these qualities to engage in the world in a constructive way. Witnessing the activity of the organizations in which they are intern gives students a practical introduction to the work of justice. As such, engaged learning courses allow us to model engaged citizenship in the often far-removed context of the philosophy classroom.

Works Cited:

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