

Contemporary Moral Problems



Service-learning in an applied ethics course

Contemporary Moral Problems & UCA's Core



- ❧ Contemporary Moral Problems is a Humanities course in the Responsible Living area of UCA's Core program.
- ❧ For the Core, Responsible Living means “the ability to address real-world problems and find ethical solutions for individuals and society.”
- ❧ More specifically, it means, 1) Articulate ways ethical principles affect human choices; 2) Analyze the effect that decisions have on self, others, and the environment; 3) Evaluate and practice strategies leading to individual and social well-being.

Ethical Thinking is Not Enough!



Application is Needed!



- ❧ “Instead of learning logical analysis in a vacuum, students now learn to dissect the arguments they find in newspapers, to argue about current controversies in medicine and law and sports, to think critically about the foundations of their political and even religious views.”
❧ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (1997)
- ❧ Nussbaum expresses a goal for my course, one that my colleagues would also agree to.
- ❧ But service-learning allows me to expand the aim of getting students engaged in more than analysis, it allows me to provide hands-on opportunities to address the goals of the Responsible Living area.

Service-Learning: Civic Application

- ❧ Are there any problems in the world? Anyone want to make a difference?
- ❧ When I ask students these questions, the answers are Yes and Yes!
- ❧ UCA's definition of service-learning: "Academic Service-Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities."

Definition to Application

- ❧ Begin with some meaningful community service.
- ❧ Add a dash of instruction and (especially) a heavy dose of reflection.
- ❧ Outcome: more learning, increased civic responsibility, and a better community.
- ❧ And for some students, a transformed attitude toward their neighbor.
- ❧ Student: “ I felt joy in my heart when we prepared the meals for those at the Bethlehem House because they were so appreciative.”

Where are We Serving?



- ❧ Students in this class will help at **Bethlehem House**, a local homeless shelter.
- ❧ There will be opportunities to prepare, serve and share meals, and to sponsor “game nights” for families staying in the shelter.



Where are We Serving?



- ☞ Students in this class will participate in the Campaign for the Unseen sponsored by the City of Hope Outreach, a new Conway agency that serves the homeless in our community.



Why are We Serving?



- ❧ Who are these homeless people?
- ❧ Who is my neighbor?
- ❧ And, morally speaking, what do I owe him/her?
- ❧ This is perhaps the central question in social and moral philosophy.



How are We Learning?



- ❧ Our post-activity reflection consists of two parts:
- ❧ A written reflection in which students discuss their experience and *directly connect* it to the concepts and readings of the course.
- ❧ An in-class discussion of the moral implications of homelessness and poverty in Conway and in American society at large.
- ❧ The Director of the City of Hope Outreach has visited the class already to address these issues.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- ❧ The author of our text, Sandel claims that “the more we regard our success as our own doing, the less responsibility we feel for those who fall behind.”
- ❧ Do you think this is the case?
- ❧ Think about this claim in relation to our obligations to our homeless neighbors.
- ❧ How is it that the richest country in the world has a problem with homelessness and poverty?
- ❧ What are some plausible solutions?

More Questions



- ❧ Did you find any *moral value* in participating in the activity?
- ❧ Can you articulate it in moral terms, using the ethical principles we discussed?
- ❧ How do these organizations affirm responsibility while providing assistance?
- ❧ How did the service-learning experience change your view of homelessness in our society?
- ❧ How did our experience help you connect our academic subject matter (ethics) to the "real world?"