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GUIDELINES FOR PAPERS SUBMITTED TO *TEACHING SOCIOLOGY*

BREAKING GROUND: ENGAGING UNDERGRADUATES IN SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH SERVICE LEARNING*

This paper describes a service-learning project designed for an upper-level sociology course in Policy and Social Change. The project, Breaking Ground, had two main goals: to change students' perceptions about persons who are homeless and to increase students' sense of efficacy for engaging in social advocacy. Through Breaking Ground, students formed a partnership with advocates and homeless clients to raise public awareness about homelessness and to organize advocacy and fund-raising events for the agency partner. The research element of the project used pre-tests and post-tests to assess changes in students' beliefs about social justice, self-efficacy, and perceptions of homelessness. When compared to students who took the class, but did not participate in the described service-learning project, Breaking Ground students experienced significant changes in a positive direction in their perceptions of individuals who are homeless. There were also some small changes in student feelings of self-efficacy and opinions on social justice. I explain these results and provide suggestions for implementation of similar projects.

CATHERINE MOBLEY

Clemson University

RESEARCH FROM THE LAST TEN YEARS documents the numerous advantages of engaging students in service learning, including learning civic education and advocacy skills (Lewis 2004). Service learning encourages students to examine their beliefs about social problems and to consider participating in the political life of their communities after graduation (Batchelder and Root 1994; Forte 1997; Korfmacher 1999; Parker-Gwin 1996; Ward 1997).

The current article reports on a service-learning project designed to promote these and other benefits. In Fall 2001, students

enrolled in a social policy course formed a partnership with advocates for the homeless and their clients. I hoped that students would increase their commitment to advocacy and experience a change in their perceptions of homeless individuals and understand the causes of homelessness.

SOCIOLOGY, ADVOCACY, AND SERVICE LEARNING

Service learning is a natural choice for sociology faculty seeking innovative ways to bring the sociological imagination to life

*This project was supported by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's South Carolina Leadership in Public Service Program, based at Clemson University. This paper was presented at the International Conference on Research on Service-Learning at Clemson University in October 2004. I would like to thank Arina Gertseva, Amy Kracker, and Megan Linz, graduate students in Clemson University's Applied Sociology program, for their research support. Appreciation is also extended to Kathy Woodard, of the Clemson University Service Alliance,

who inspired and encouraged me to develop "Breaking Ground," and to the reviewers, whose comments were very helpful. Finally, the community partners deserve a special thank you for collaborating with us on this project. Please address all correspondence to the author at Department of Sociology, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 296341356; email: camoble@clemson.edu.

Editor's note: The reviewers were, in alphabetical order, Susan Corban Harris, Robert Hironimus-Wendt, and Tammy Lewis.

(Breese and Richmond 2002; Fritz 2002). A search for service-learning articles published in *Teaching Sociology* in the past five years reveals more than a dozen articles on this form of experiential learning. Authors report using service learning to teach specific concepts, including social stratification (Lewis 2004), research methods (Potter, Caffrey, and Plante 2003), small group dynamics (Rashotte 2002), and hunger and poverty (Sullivan-Catlin 2002).

Sociology courses are also important vehicles for expanding students' notions about civic engagement and social advocacy (Cox 1993; Schmid 1998; Johnson 2005). Hironimus-Wendt and Lovell-Troy (1999) claim that sociologically-informed service learning helps to nurture "citizen-scholars" and teaches students about the relationship between sociology and policy-making. Engaging in what Fritz (2002) calls a "revolutionary" or "advocacy" approach to service learning helps students to develop the skills and confidence to become advocates for social change (Stoecker 1996; Marullo and Edwards 2000).

However, there is little research on whether universities are actually successful in addressing social problems through community outreach (Kenny and Gallagher 2002), and even less evidence for the role of service learning in building civic engagement and participation skills (Eyler 2002). Service learning has been criticized for its emphasis on charity and volunteering, rather than citizenship and advocacy, and for the subsequent lack of attention to promoting social change (Kahne and Westmeier 1996). While some institutions have shifted from a "charity model" of service learning toward a collaborative and community-based approach (Lewis 2004), few service-learning programs provide guidance in advocacy and civic engagement (Hartman, Podolske, and Moeser 2002). Through my service-learning project, *Breaking Ground*, I attempted to address this gap by integrating advocacy and social justice elements into the project and investigating how this would impact student learning.

ADVOCACY, SERVICE LEARNING, AND STEREOTYPES

Policy advocates and researchers recognize the power of stereotypes in stigmatizing client populations and influencing public policy (Daniels 1997). For example, stereotypes of women as more emotional than men have impacted breast cancer legislation because female activists in this arena are seen to be irrational (Montini 1996). Beliefs about the more passive attitudes and behaviors of Asian-Americans have also influenced political organizing for Asian American children (Yu 1997). Advocacy efforts for the mentally ill also suffer from the negative stereotypes attributed to persons with such illnesses (Corrigan and Penn 1999).

Stereotypes have also impacted homelessness policy and advocacy. These beliefs, often based on generalizations about the causes of homelessness (i.e., individual vs. structural-level explanations), frame citizens' and policy makers' perceptions of the best solutions to homelessness. The common stereotypes of homeless individuals as "uneducated freelancers" who choose to live on the streets leads to different public policies than those based on beliefs that homelessness results from inadequate housing policies, high unemployment rates, or other contextual, macro-level factors (King 1989). The tendency to stereotype and group all individuals who are homeless into one category may lead to ill-conceived policies (Gibson 1991; Kosor and Kendal-Wilson 2002; Kutza and Keigher 1991).

Service learning has been promoted as an effective mechanism for reducing students' stereotypes of client populations (Rhoads 1997) and encouraging crosscultural understanding (Eyler, Giles, and Braxton 1997; Giles and Eyler 1994). When students have repeated contact with clients, they experience an increased ability to empathize with clients and their experiences (Eyler et al. 1997). As identified by Forte (1997), this empathy is crucial in service with the poor and disempowered. Evidence also suggests

that this form of experiential learning has resulted in less stereotypical views of the elderly (Greene and Diehm 1995), of individuals from different racial backgrounds (Vogelgesang and Astin 2000), and of the homeless (Rhoads 1997).

Service learning also encourages students to consider structural links to poverty (Hollis 2002). I hoped that allowing students to interact with homeless advocates and clients as co-participants in the project would help students to "listen to the voices of the marginalized" (Sigmon 1995:31) and "blur the boundaries between the server and served...." (Burns and Gentry 1998:147). I anticipated the partnership would also help students to see the homeless community members as sources of knowledge and not just service-recipients (i.e., "clients"). I hoped that such experiences would move our class closer to a "community-centered" approach to service learning that emphasizes "doing service with" community partners rather than "doing service for" them (Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2000). Through Breaking Ground, I aimed to assess whether students would perceive homelessness to be caused by structural factors (e.g., the lack of affordable housing) or individual factors (e.g., persons are homeless because they "choose" to abuse alcohol).

BREAKING GROUND: COURSE AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In Spring 2001, I was awarded a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for the development and implementation of a service-learning project entitled, "Breaking Ground: Engaging Undergraduates in Social Change through the Development of Learning Communities with the Homeless." The target class for this project was our upper-level Policy and Social Change course. This elective course aims to introduce students to the policy process and the skills and knowledge base needed to be effective advocates. In Fall 2001, 37 undergraduate and four graduate students were enrolled in the course.

Breaking Ground established a partnership between students, representatives from the "Coalition"—a non-profit organization, located in upstate South Carolina—and me. The Coalition, which has been in existence since 1998, coordinates support services and advocacy for the homeless for more than 100 agencies in 13 upstate counties. Breaking Ground partners collaborated to learn about national, state, and local housing policies and to advocate for an increase in the availability of affordable housing. The primary activity was to organize events for National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. All students were required to participate and they did not know about the service-learning project prior to the course.

COLLABORATING WITH CLIENTS AND ADVOCATES FOR THE HOMELESS

The literature on service learning describes a variety of options for designing projects, ranging on a continuum from an optional "extra" credit opportunity (and thus isolated from the class) to an intensive learning experience in which the project is the "centerpiece" of the classroom experience (Eyler and Giles 1999). As described below, Breaking Ground was organized according to the latter approach: the development and implementation of project activities were integral to the classroom experience.

At the beginning of the semester, I provided students with a copy of the funded project proposal so they would not only learn about the importance of proposal writing in social change efforts, but would also better understand the nature of our unique partnership with the Coalition staff and their role as active co-participants in the project. I also described the broader university context in which service learning was being strongly encouraged by the University Provost and President.

The project aimed to increase students' feelings of self-efficacy to engage in social

change efforts and to change students' perceptions of individuals who are homeless. I used five strategies to achieve the project objectives: (1) integrated lectures, (2) frequent project meetings with community partners, (3) policy research about homelessness, (4) the design and implementation of awareness-raising events, and (5) celebration and reflection.

By integrating course lectures about policy making and advocacy with the service-learning project, I was responding to Schmid's (1998) criticism of experiential learning classes which he claims often "do not include an active investigation of a sociological problem [and thus] do little to develop the student's sociological perspective, to promote the idea of sociologically informed action, or to effect social change" (p. 271). Most of the readings and the course lectures related to the topic of homelessness or to a specific task associated with the service-learning project.¹ I hoped this strategy would help students to see "policy in action" and thus teach them about the rewards and challenges of advocacy and activism. For example, during the lectures on the agenda-setting process, students learned first-hand about the methods that advocates use to encourage policy makers to devote attention and funding toward homelessness. When we discussed the importance of public relations to social change efforts, we used this information to develop methods for publicizing our advocacy project to policy makers and local citizens. Other themes addressed in class included the sociology of advocacy and the complex relationship between citizenship and advocacy, reasons for getting involved in social change, the social construction of policy issues, techniques of communication and policy persuasion, policy ethics and values, and policy research. I also presented students with basic data on the demographic characteristics of the homeless, the causes of homelessness, and policy options designed

to combat homelessness.

Frequent meetings with Coalition staff and clients comprised the second project method. Coalition partners attended several class meetings, approved project plans, and provided guidance throughout the project. Several students also attended a state conference on homelessness and others communicated with Coalition staff several times during the semester to obtain data for their research projects.

The four formal class meetings took place at the university and during class time. During the first meeting (week 2), students met with the Deputy Director of the Coalition and two of her staff members. Each provided background information about the Coalition's mission and goals. Students then asked questions about the issues of homelessness in general and the Coalition's activities in particular. At this meeting, we developed a strategy for achieving the project goals and developed a preliminary time line. Similar planning and discussion happened at the second meeting (week 4). Students who attended the state conference on homelessness (week 5) learned more about the extent and characteristics of homelessness in South Carolina and about advocacy efforts targeted at the issues of homelessness and affordable housing.

During the third meeting (week 5), students met with Coalition clients and caseworkers. By this time, each student had been assigned to a research team, with each team developing a list of questions to pose to the clients and caseworkers. Two of the clients, a single mother and a college-age woman, were currently living in temporary Coalition housing. Another client was living in a Coalition community designed for mentally-challenged adults. At the meeting, the clients shared their personal experiences of homelessness and the challenges of finding affordable housing on a limited budget. Caseworkers described their attempts to deliver services on reduced budgets and shared the challenges and opportunities posed when they merged their advocacy and service-delivery roles. The fourth partner

¹A list of readings is available from the author upon request.

meeting took place during the last class.

Aside from integrated lectures and project meetings, students engaged in sociological and policy research on homelessness (weeks 3-11). This third strategy required that each team investigate a specific topic related to homelessness, including the causes of homelessness, children and homelessness, health care for the homeless, homelessness in the Southeast, homelessness in South Carolina, and student advocacy and activism. As a part of this research endeavor, students were required to locate information about advocacy and policy initiatives for these different topics (rather than focusing solely on describing the current state of affairs). The goal was to show students the importance of research in social change efforts. The resulting data also provided students with background information for developing materials for National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, described below.

The fourth dimension of the project, which absorbed most of our time and energy, was the design and implementation of events for Awareness Week, which occurs each year in mid-November. Project organization took place mainly in weeks 4 through 12. Students organized several events, including: "Dine Out for the Homeless" through which several restaurants agreed to donate a percentage of profits to the Coalition, "Change for Social Change" through which students designed donation jars that were placed in businesses throughout the community, a canned food drive, an awareness-raising event targeted toward church leaders who were asked to address the issue of homelessness in weekly sermons and to donate to the Coalition, and an awareness-raising event at the student unions on campus. At this campus event, students distributed materials about homelessness (derived from their research projects), provided the university community with an opportunity to sign a petition to the Governor of South Carolina, and screened a short film on homelessness, "The Faces of Homelessness."

The fifth component of the project was celebration and reflection. The final class meeting (week 15) included an informal evaluation of the project and a celebration of the following student accomplishments: raising \$660 for the Upstate Homeless Coalition, initiating the first annual "Dine out for the Homeless" initiative, sending 200 signed petitions to the governor, signed by over 200 local residents, and initiating the Breaking Ground partnership. At this time, staff from the Coalition provided an update about state legislation on homelessness. Students then presented the project partners with the funds raised during the Awareness Week.

Periodic reflection and evaluation activities were also integrated into the project. The importance of reflection to service-learning efforts is well-documented. Indeed, when students have the opportunity to synthesize classroom learning with service experiences, service learning can itself be conceptualized as an act of public or civic engagement (Koliba 2000). Several times throughout the semester, I asked students to write response papers to various events, such as the client visits, course readings, and group activities. Students also developed a "policy portfolio" that included reflections on the service-learning project and various community events related to policy making and civic engagement.

PROJECT EVALUATION

To assess the learning process, I gave students a pre-test and a post-test designed to measure various dimensions of student attitudes, knowledge and skills as they relate to policy and advocacy. This survey also included items about perceptions of individuals who are homeless. I obtained approval for conducting research with human subjects through Clemson University's Institutional Review Board. Participation in the study was voluntary. The average time to complete the survey was fifteen minutes. For comparison purposes, I delivered the same survey to students enrolled in my Pol-

icy and Social Change course in Fall 2005. These students did not participate in Breaking Ground, nor did they have contact with the community partners. Instead, they completed team research projects on a policy issue of their choice. Topics covered included foster care, environmental policy, educational financing, and domestic violence. Lectures covered issues related to poverty and social policy, including the living wage and welfare reform. These students were informed about the Breaking Ground project, but discussions about homelessness and the project were not a primary component of course lectures.

The analyses presented are based on three sections of the original survey which began with basic demographic questions (e.g., gender, year in school, major and minor). The first section included seven Likert-scaled items (1=not important to 5=essential) concerning students' sense of civic responsibility. The next section included a 34-item, five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). These items assessed a variety of issues including students' opinions on social justice, feelings of self-efficacy and obligation to help others, openness to others, their opinions about group projects, assessment of self-confidence and certainty about career goals. The third section measured student attitudes toward homeless individuals and knowledge about the causes of homelessness with a 15-item, five point Likert scale (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).

RESULTS

Forty-one students were enrolled in the Policy course in Fall 2001 and thirty-four students were enrolled in Fall 2005. Students who completed both the pre-test and post-test ($n=31$ for the experimental Breaking Ground group and $n=30$ for the control group) made up the final sample of the reported findings. Both samples were similar: there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms of

gender, year in school, and race, or in their scores on each of the pre-test items. In both classes, females outnumbered males and whites outnumbered minority students. A majority of both samples consisted of juniors and seniors and sociology majors. The data also show that both groups began the class with relatively similar levels of self-efficacy and perceptions of the homeless.

For both samples, I conducted paired sample t-tests to determine if there were significant differences between students' pre-test and post-test scores on the survey items of interest. Table 1 presents the results for those items in which there was a change between the pre-test and the post-test for either or both the experimental group and control group. There was a statistically significant change in student perceptions between the pre-test and post-test for seven of the items from the first two survey sections analyzed for this paper ($p \leq .05$).

Breaking Ground students were more likely to rank "working toward equal opportunity" as being essential to them personally after the project than before the project ($t=-2.244$, $p=.032$). Also, these students were more likely than the control group to agree with the following statements, as compared to their perceptions at the beginning of the course: "Most misfortunes that occur to people are often the result of circumstances beyond their control" ($t=-2.244$; $p=.032$); "I feel that I can have a positive impact on local social problems" ($t=-2.559$; $p=.016$); and "Performing community service in my local community is easy" ($t=-2.353$; $p=.025$).²

Students in the control group (who did not participate in Breaking Ground) experienced statistically significant changes for two

²I also explored changes between pre-test and post-test in obligation to help others, personal growth and self-confidence, insight into career goals, openness to others, and opinions about group projects. I found no significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores for these items for either the control group or experimental group.

Table 1. Items Related to Social Justice and Self-Efficacy*

	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	t-value	Significance p-value
Importance of Integrating Social Justice into One's Personal Philosophy (1=Not Important; 2=Somewhat important; 3=Important; 4=Essential)				
How important is the following to you personally: Working toward equal opportunity (social, political, vocational) for all people.	3.13 (3.57)	3.35 (3.50)	-2.244 (.571)	.032 (.573)
Social Justice (1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Don't know; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree)				
Most misfortunes that occur to people are often the result of circumstances beyond their control.	2.94 (2.80)	3.39 (2.77)	-2.244 (.205)	.032 (.839)
If I could change one thing about society, it would be to achieve greater social justice.	3.42 (3.43)	3.71 (3.83)	-1.961 (-3.525)	.050 (.001)
Self-Efficacy/Ability to Make a Difference (1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Don't know; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree)				
I feel that I can have a positive impact on local social problems.	3.71 (4.17)	4.03 (4.03)	-2.559 (1.439)	.016 (.161)
Performing community service in my local community is easy.	2.97 (3.13)	3.39 (3.27)	-2.353 (-.626)	.025 (.536)
I have a good understanding of the needs and problems facing the community where I live.	3.03 (3.53)	3.48 (3.90)	-1.813 (-2.483)	.080 (.019)
People's jobs are much harder than they look.	3.45 (3.77)	3.81 (4.03)	-1.777 (-2.112)	.086 (.043)
Note: Numbers in parentheses are results from the Policy students who did not participate in Breaking Ground.				

items while the Breaking Ground students did not ("I have a good understanding of the needs and problems facing the community where I live" ($t=-2.483$; $p=.019$); and "People's jobs are much harder than they look" ($t=-2.112$; $p=.043$). For one item ("If I could change one thing about society, it would be to achieve greater social justice") both groups of students experienced a significant change in attitudes from the pre-test to the post-test ($t=-1.961$; $p=.050$ for the experimental group and $t=-3.525$; $p=.001$ for the control group).

Table 2 provides the findings for changes in students' perceptions of individuals who are homeless. Breaking Ground students

experienced statistically significant changes for 11 of the 15 items and all changes were in a positive direction (i.e., toward more positive perceptions of individuals who are homeless and toward more structural explanations about the causes of homelessness). The only four items (of 15 total items) for which a statistically significant change was not observed were: "Homeless people often 'graduate' or move from shelters to permanent housing;" "Homeless people are primarily single men;" "Substance abuse causes homelessness;" and "People who have been in foster care as a child are more likely to become homeless."

The results for the t-tests indicate that

Table 2. Perception of Persons Who are Homeless*

<i>(1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Don't know; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree)</i>	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	t-value	Significance p-value
General Stereotypes				
People who have full-time employment and who use their money wisely are never considered to live in poverty.	2.41 (2.30)	1.86 (2.27)	3.266 (.205)	.003 (.839)
Families who use food stamps do not know how to balance their budget.	1.90 (1.90)	1.66 (1.63)	2.254 (1.765)	.032 (.008)
Children who eat free or reduced-price lunches do not have fathers that contribute financially.	1.86 (1.60)	1.55 (1.47)	1.967 (1.000)	.050 (.326)
People who do not pay their bills on time waste money on things that are not important.	2.14 (2.10)	1.76 (1.90)	2.635 (1.533)	.014 (.136)
A person earning minimum wage can usually afford housing in South Carolina.	2.14 (2.30)	1.48 (2.03)	4.118 (1.765)	.000 (.088)
Public Assistance is too generous. The result is people want to stay on Public Assistance and not get a job.	2.66 (2.70)	1.97 (2.00)	4.372 (3.881)	.000 (.001)
Homeless people do not work.	2.07 (2.37)	1.66 (2.30)	3.041 (.701)	.005 (.489)
Money earned from panhandling is usually spent on alcohol or drugs.	2.69 (2.77)	2.24 (2.70)	3.822 (.441)	.001 (.662)
Homeless people often "graduate" or move from shelters to permanent housing.	3.10 (2.80)	3.07 (2.70)	.189 (.769)	.851 (.448)
Who Becomes Homeless				
Homeless people are primarily single men.	2.21 (2.43)	2.00 (2.20)	1.150 (1.651)	.264 (.109)
Homeless families are rare.	1.97 (2.03)	1.55 (2.10)	3.266 (-.403)	.003 (.690)
College students do not experience homelessness.	2.31 (2.73)	1.59 (2.53)	5.556 (.947)	.000 (.351)
Causes of Homelessness				
Substance abuse causes homelessness.	2.79 (3.17)	2.76 (2.97)	.171 (1.063)	.865 (.297)
People who have been in foster care as a child are more likely to become homeless.	2.59 (2.77)	2.69 (3.57)	-.722 (-4.738)	.477 (.000)
Lack of affordable housing does not contribute to homelessness because of the availability of shelter beds.	2.14 (2.13)	1.41 (2.03)	4.230 (.648)	.000 (.522)
Note: Numbers in parentheses are results from the Policy students who did not participate in Breaking Ground.				

students in the control group experienced significant change for only 3 of the 15 items pertaining to perceptions of the homeless. For one of these items ("People who have been in foster care as a child are more likely to become homeless") the control group of students experienced a statistically significant change while the Breaking Ground students did not.

DISCUSSION

The two main objectives of Breaking Ground were to: (1) increase students' feelings of self-efficacy in engaging in social change efforts, and (2) alter students' perceptions of individuals who are homeless. The findings regarding feelings about social justice were mixed. While both groups of students expressed that achieving social justice was an important societal goal (see response to "If I could change one thing about society, it would be to achieve greater social justice"), the change was stronger for the control group. However, only the Breaking Ground students expressed that it was important to them, personally, to work toward equal opportunity. It is not clear, then, that the service-learning project itself was responsible for this shift in attitudes for either group.

Breaking Ground students experienced a statistically significant change in two items related to performing community service and having an impact on one's community, while the control group of students did not (see Table 1). Interestingly, the control group expressed a shift toward a greater *understanding* of social problems and needs in the community, while the Breaking Ground group did not. This could be the result of the control group's completion of more in-depth research on a topic and presentation of their findings to their peers, as opposed to the Breaking Ground students, who completed some basic research into one dimension of homelessness and did not make a class presentation. These students spent the majority of their time and energy on organizing Awareness Week events

rather than on obtaining specific information about a wide variety of social problems.

Importantly, the results revealed a substantial positive shift in Breaking Ground students' beliefs about individuals who are homeless. For four of the items related to financial challenges faced by the homeless, the change toward more positive attitudes was statistically significant for the Policy students, but not the Fall 2005 students. This suggests that the Breaking Ground students moved toward a greater acceptance of the validity of structural (versus individualistic) explanations for the causes of homelessness. Results for the item "Most misfortunes that occur to people are often the result of circumstances beyond their control" indicate that Breaking Ground students experienced a statistically significant change in a positive direction for this item while the control group did not.

The control group also seemed to be impacted by welfare reform and poverty policy subject matter presented in this course. Both the control group of students and Breaking Ground students experienced a statistically significant change in two related items: "Families who use food stamps don't know how to balance their budget" and "Public Assistance is too generous. The result is people want to stay on Public Assistance and not get a job."

Breaking Ground students experienced a shift in common stereotypes about individual-level characteristics of the homeless (e.g., "Homeless people don't work," "Money earned from panhandling is usually spent on drugs;" "Homeless families are rare;" and "College students do not experience homelessness"), while the control group did not. This suggests that the direct client contact, which gave the Breaking Ground students an opportunity to hear the personal stories of the homeless clients, had some impact on students. Also, interacting with caseworkers and agency staff helped to clarify for students that some policy initiatives (e.g., providing more shelter beds) were less successful at ameliorating home-

lessness than other policy options (e.g., providing affordable housing), as evidenced by the change for the item "Lack of affordable housing does not contribute to homelessness because of the availability of shelter beds."

The control group experienced a shift in perceptions about the role of foster care in causing homelessness, while the Breaking Ground students did not. This may be explained by the fact that one of the Fall 2005 research projects was related to foster care policy. The control group was exposed to specific information (through a class presentation) about foster care and its impact on individuals who "age out" of foster care at 18 years old. "Living on the streets" was presented as one possible outcome for these young persons. This information about foster care was not a part of the discussions with the Breaking Ground students.

Importantly, Breaking Ground contributed to a change in students' attitudes and perceptions of persons who are homeless. The direct client contact through Breaking Ground seemed to be quite effective in reducing prejudice and stereotypes. Although it is difficult to attribute the change solely to the service-learning project, these results were similar to those Rhoads (1997) experienced in his community service project conducted in Washington, DC. This interaction is crucial for reducing stereotypes of client populations (Roschelle, Turpin, and Elias 2000). Rather than viewing clients solely as recipients of a "charity" project, students were able to interact with them as partners in the awareness-raising and fund-raising endeavors. In their personal essays, students indicated that they found the meetings to be invaluable in changing their perceptions about persons who are homeless. Students recognized that they are "three steps away from being homeless," that homelessness is not necessarily an "individual problem," and that society has created structures that "keep" individuals in a homeless situation. As one student indicated, because the clients shared their personal stories and successes, she was able to "see beyond" the personal

blame she had placed on such individuals in the past.

LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations to this study and thus the results should be treated cautiously. First, the survey is designed to measure short-term attitudinal change only. It is possible that the changes in attitudes toward individuals who are homeless have not been sustained over time. Also, the survey did not include specific questions about advocacy skills and actions. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether students gained an ability to use certain advocacy tactics (e.g., writing letters to the editor, lobbying state legislators for change to housing policies, etc.).

I also did not obtain formal feedback from the Coalition caseworkers and clients about their perceptions of the project and student involvement in Coalition efforts. It should be noted, however, that the partnership established in Fall 2001 is ongoing: in Fall 2003 and Fall 2004, I implemented Breaking Ground two additional times.

Studies have indicated a connection between intensive reflection and an increased commitment to volunteerism and civic engagement and greater feelings of self-efficacy for social change (Batchelder and Root 1994; Eyler and Giles 1999). Rhoads (1997) recognized that reflection helps students develop a "critical consciousness" which considers both political action and critical reflection. Breaking Ground students were required to write a response after the visits from Coalition staff and clients. We also engaged in verbal reflection throughout the semester. However, continuous reflection was not embedded in the class. Thus, the course may not have incorporated enough chances for students to reflect on the project itself or on how their personal lives were related to various dimensions of the project.

From a personal perspective, I learned a valuable lesson about service-learning and social change efforts. I structured Breaking

Ground assuming all students would “see the light” and understand the importance of advocating for the homeless. However, I quickly learned that this was not the case. Some students felt that poverty and homelessness are mostly experienced by individuals in major urban areas or isolated rural communities, not in communities like ours. Such perceptions persisted even after the advocates and I provided data about the growing number of individuals experiencing homelessness in the Upstate.³ This is a common challenge faced by faculty using service learning at universities in non-urban areas. Rhoads documents similar resistance to change in his book on service learning. Other students felt that people who are homeless did not “deserve” special attention. Or, they felt homelessness was not of relevance to their own personal experiences, even though one of the Coalition clients was a former college student and one of their peers enrolled in the class was formerly homeless. This personal relevance is an important motivator for successful experiential learning projects (Rogers 1986).

Faculty considering an intensive, partner-oriented endeavor like Breaking Ground may want to consider implementing the project over several semesters, or “across the curriculum,” by involving three to four courses in the sociology major. (See Berle 2006 for a description of this “incremental integration” model.) As suggested above, the research component of the course seemed to increase non-Breaking Ground students’ understanding of social problems in the community, while the active involvement of the community partners helped the Breaking Ground students to develop more

realistic perceptions about the homeless and the causes of homelessness. Including a more in-depth research project during the first semester, and then using these data to implement a related service-learning and advocacy project would provide a well-rounded, research-based experience and could ultimately increase feelings of self-efficacy. Longer term projects are becoming increasingly popular on college campuses. For example, Clemson University has implemented the “Creative Inquiry” projects which feature a “multi-semester commitment” by faculty to work with students on a focused research or service endeavor.⁴

CONCLUSIONS

Breaking Ground did not really “solve” the problem of homelessness in the Upstate: students did not actually build a house or provide funds for client bills. However, the project did have some tangible outcomes. Aside from the fundraising and letter-writing campaigns, our efforts created momentum for the second and third Annual National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Weeks in Fall 2003 and Fall 2004. And, in December 2003, the project was nominated for a state-level service-learning award.

A primary objective of Breaking Ground was to dispel stereotypes about the homeless and to increase students’ sense of efficacy for social advocacy. Results suggest the project was more successful with the first goal than with the second. The change in perceptions may help students become more aware that the *personal* trouble of homelessness is rooted in broader *public* issues of social policy that need to be tackled through advocacy rather than only through volunteering. Changing stereotypes is an important first step toward activism for students

³At any given point, approximately 1,400-1,500 individuals experience homelessness in Upstate South Carolina. One reason for homelessness is the decrease in the supply of affordable housing. A recent study showed that, in South Carolina, a single-parent minimum wage earner must work 88 hours a week to afford a 2-bedroom apartment—that same worker can afford a rent of only \$268 a month (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2006).

⁴Additional information about Clemson University’s Creative Inquiry project can be found at: http://virtual.clemson.edu/groups/ugs/creative_inquiry/index.htm.

who may not have otherwise considered such endeavors. That is, the project may have been successful in "breaking ground" for students to engage in advocacy in relevant areas of their lives after graduation. Students may then feel empowered to move beyond the "doom and gloom" of sociology (Johnson 2005) and become involved in efforts to create social change in their own communities.

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Catherine Mobley is an associate professor and coordinator of graduate studies at Clemson University. Her research and teaching interests include social justice and civic engagement, sociology of the environment, and sociology of food and nutrition.