

## EXPERIMENTAL LEARNING IN A MACRO SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE : A REVIEW OF SOCIAL WORK 410

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 ALLESSIA P. OWENS-KING, PHD, LMSW (MI)  
 SALISBURY UNIVERSITY

## Overview

- ▶ The Social Work profession
  - ▶ has a tradition of community engagement
  - ▶ has an ethical mandate to advocate for social justice
- ▶ Yet, within social work education there is a limited emphasis on macro practice - political engagement, system change efforts, community organizing and community education
- ▶ Some students graduate without skills needed to enact systemic change in their agencies and communities.
- ▶ The following is a case study of an experimental learning experience

(Rothman, 2013; Carey,2007)

## The Case Study

An experimental learning experience focused on:

- ▶ Mass incarcerations as a social problem
- ▶ Addressing interactions between police and persons vulnerable negative police encounters
- ▶ Organizing and facilitating Know Your Rights (KYR) trainings in collaboration with the Americans Civil Liberties Union of Maryland (ACLU)



## Know Your Rights Trainings



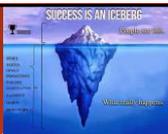
- ▶ Educates community members about their Constitutional rights when interacting with the police
- ▶ Focuses on prevention of extensive involvement with the criminal justice systems.



## Course Planning

- ▶ Pre-semester consultation among instructors revolved around selecting a substantive and socially relevant theme.
- ▶ Mass incarceration, extreme rates of imprisonment, was chosen as a theme for multiple reasons namely, timeliness of the topic, limited content on topic in other social work courses, and the high likelihood that social workers will assist persons involved with the criminal justice system (Wildeman, 2012)

## Course Planning



- ▶ Students were asked to pick a specific issue that intersects with mass incarceration to help narrow the topic. The intersecting issues included aging out of foster care, income inequality, and unemployment.
  - ▶ Students were randomly assigned groups. Faculty decided to preselect groups to mimic real world circumstances. It is essential that students learn to interact with colleagues and issue stakeholders who may have different world views.
- Illustration by Unknown Author licensed under CC BY-SA

## The Assignment/Activity

- ▶ Teams of students were asked to complete a macro planned change project assignment that involved collaboration with ACLU volunteers and local lawyers.
- ▶ Initially the students' role was to organize the event by recruiting the participants, securing the venue and managing other event logistics.
- ▶ However, scheduling events became a challenge because there were few local KYR's trainers. After brainstorming session among the faculty, we requested that ACLU conduct a "train the trainers" session with students. The training would give students both the substantive and additional organizational tools needed to organize and facilitate of this macro planned change project.

## The Assignment/Activity

- ▶ The faculty members recruited local lawyers to attend sessions
- ▶ The community trainings are very timely given the rise of police brutality, and unfair treatment towards traditionally marginalized groups
- ▶ During the final class session of the semester, students were asked to discuss their experience with this macro practice assignment. The following is a summary of the challenges and successes identified during this process review.

## The Student Experience

### Challenges

- ▶ Practice working in groups. There were concerns among group members with different personalities and work habits.
- ▶ Managing the unexpected such as low event attendance, locked doors, equipment failure, down internet, disruptive participants, unengaged participants, and late group members or participants
- ▶ Unexpected costs, incentives for participant, advicesments, copies



## The Student Experience



### Successes

- ▶ Gaining valuable macro practice skill and job skills namely, community organizing and project development, presentation, becoming a KYR trainer
- ▶ Student reported learning a great deal more about mass incarceration particularly its connection with other social problems- H.I.P
- ▶ Based on the feedback from community participants, the KYR trainings were informative and well received
- ▶ Additional opportunity to engage and intervene with communities

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