

Education 491/V91
Education in the West Indies: A Service Learning Course
Spring 2007

Instructor:

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Room: to be announced

Time: to be announced

Course Description: ED491/V91 is an elective course that spans a full academic year and includes a two-week service learning trip to the West Indian island of Bequia. While on Bequia, students collaborate with course instructors and community partners to develop and implement needed community services. Most of these services will be provided within island schools; however, contact with other community partners such as government officials and hospital staff is also possible. The course requires students to actively reflect upon (through journal writing, group discussions, and class presentations) the relationship between island culture and education. Specifically, students will explore the influences of factors such as gender, race, economic status, and disability on educational experience in both the West Indies and the United States.

Course Objectives: ED491/V91 is a service learning course. Service learning is a form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students work with others through a process of applying what they are learning to community problems and, at the same time, reflecting upon their experience as they seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves (Eyler & Giles, 1999). By integrating both academic learning and community service, service learning courses differs in focus from both practicum/internship experiences (which focus primarily on student knowledge/skill development) and volunteer experiences (which focus primarily on meeting the needs of the community). The teaching methods and learning activities in service learning courses are more student-directed than is typical in traditional lecture-based courses. Specific course objectives for ED491/V91 include:

1. Increasing knowledge about educational practices in the West Indies
2. Developing understanding of the interrelatedness between a culture and its educational system.
3. Developing an appreciation of the influences of gender, race, economic status, and disability on educational experience in the West Indies and United States.
4. Increasing understanding of other groups and cultures (diversity)
5. Building skills for engaging in relevant and meaningful service with community partners.
6. Increasing ability to integrate academic and experiential knowledge.
7. Building collaborative work skills.
8. Increasing understanding of personal values, beliefs, and ideologies

Required Readings and Materials:

Blouet, O. (2002). Chapter 10: The Caribbean. In B.W. Blouet and O.M. Blouet. *Latin America and the Caribbean: A Systematic and Regional Survey*. Fourth Edition. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons. pp. 311-366.

Additional readings will be required as assigned by Group Discussion Leaders (see assignment description below).

Course Requirements:

Fall Semester Activities: During the Fall Semester, students are required to meet with the group for at least one orientation meeting and to complete several readings related to Caribbean culture and education (these are posted on the course Blackboard site for easy student access).

Winter Break Activities: During the Winter Break, students are required to be in residence on Bequia from December 31st through 13th and to participate in daily community service. During this period, students are also required to keep a reflective journal that will be used as the springboard for many spring semester activities.

Spring Semester Activities: During the Spring Semester, students are required to attend monthly group meetings, to collaborate with at least one classmate to lead one whole group discussion, to actively participate in whole group discussions, and to complete a 10-page paper. Details related to graded assignments are provided below.

Graded Assignments:

Reflective Journal: While on Bequia, students are required to keep a daily journal in which they reflect upon specific topics. This journal is to serve as the tool with which students structure their reflections about similarities and differences they experience between their Caribbean and American experiences as these relate to the core topics of the course. There is no page or word requirement for each day's entry; rather entries need to be substantive on the core topics related to this course. (Note: students may, of course, keep a separate journal that chronicles sightseeing itineraries, meals, etc. that will not be used as part of this course). These core topics specifically include: gender, race, economic status, and disability constructs and the influences of these constructs within the education system and culture of Bequia. Students are encouraged to compare and contrast their own personal experiences with those of Bequians and to describe particularly relevant interpersonal interactions they either observe or experience while in the Caribbean. The Reflective Journal is due to the instructor on January 13th (the last day of the on-site portion of the program) and will be returned to the students by February 2nd.

Group Discussion Leader: Students will be assigned to pairs or small groups in order to prepare to lead a whole class discussion on a topic of interest to the students leading the discussion. (The choice of topics is wide, so Group Discussion Leaders should be sure to choose something that especially interests them). This discussion must (a) relate to one of the core topics of the course—specifically gender, race, economic status, or disability and the influence of the chosen construct on an education system within a culture, (b) balance personal experiences and reflections with published literature on the topic, and (c) engage classmates in an active discussion of the topic. The instructor will develop a discussion schedule for the semester and will post to the course Blackboard site a schedule of deadlines related to group discussions.

Prior to their discussion, Group Discussion Leaders are responsible for providing classmates with (a) the title of their talk, (b) a brief (e.g., 100 word) abstract overview of their talk, and (c) one or two key readings to complete as preparation for the discussion (Note: the instructor will post all of these materials to the course Blackboard site for dissemination to the whole class). Group Discussion Leaders should meet several times prior to their scheduled discussion to share readings they have found, compare and contrast personal experiences they have had (both in the U.S. and while on Bequia) that relate to the topic, and organize the structure of their discussion. Besides didactic information relevant to the topic, Group Discussion Leaders should prepare a series of discussion questions to use to prompt active participation from classmates around their topic. Discussions should last between 45 and 60 minutes; and each group member will receive the same assigned point value for this assignment.

Group Discussion Participant: Students not acting as Group Discussion Leaders will be actively involved in each discussion as Group Discussion Participants. Group Discussion Participants are responsible to (a) read all posted material relevant to a discussion prior to the day of the discussion and (b) actively participate in the discussion by making comments, asking questions, and offering ideas. Group Discussion Participants can draw their discussion contributions from their own personal experiences, their subject knowledge of the topic or related topics, and/or the readings they were provided by the Group Discussion Leaders. Students who are not present for discussions earn no points (i.e., a 'zero') for that discussion.

Paper: Each student must submit a 10-page paper that presents the information from the discussion they led. This paper should be reflective and balance recently published professional literature with personal experiences related to the topic. Personal experiences of classmates that are known to the student as well as points made during the discussion may also be included in the paper. All papers must follow APA style guidelines (5th Edition) and are due on or before Monday, April 16th.

Participation on Bequia: Ten percent of the total grade will be based on the student's active involvement in the schools and community while on Bequia. Students are responsible for keeping the instructors informed regarding the projects and activities in which they are involved and for professional behavior at all times. As representatives of both The College of William & Mary and the United States, students must take seriously their roles as ambassadors and respect the expertise of the school professionals and community partners with whom they interact.

Grading:

Reflective Journal (1 x 10 points)	20
Group Discussion Leader (1 x 20 points)	20
Group Discussion Participant*	20
Paper (1 x 30 points)	30
Participation on Bequia (1 x 10 points)	<u>10</u>
TOTAL	100

*The 20-point total will be divided equally by the number of presentations made during the semester so that participation in each discussion will be worth the same point value.

DESCRIPTION OF READING/WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

A. FALL SEMESTER REQUIRED READINGS

1. Read the Blouet survey chapter about the Caribbean. As you read, note any similarities and differences between the United States and the Caribbean region (particularly the West Indies) on---
 - a. settlement patterns
 - b. immigration patterns
 - c. economic status of the countries

B. FALL SEMESTER REQUIRED REFLECTIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

2. Construct your EDUC491 Journal using a 3-ring binder with removable pages (removable pages are important as you will need to submit some entries individually to the instructors).
3. Write your first journal entry before arriving in Bequia (e.g., over the holiday break) by responding to the following prompt---
 - a. Describe your own background, focusing specifically on the core topics for this course: gender, race, economic status, and health/disability.
 - b. For yourself—How did these variables interact to provide you with advantages for successful development here in the United States? Did any act as disadvantages? If so, how?

- c. For one significant ancestor (parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, etc.)—How did these variables interact to provide your ancestor with advantages for successful development? Did any act as disadvantages? If so, how?

NOTE: The best way to gather the information for Part 3C is to interview the ancestor during the holiday break.

4. Turn in your first journal entry to Dr. Pelco on or before January 3rd. It will be returned to you to include as part of your EDUC491 Journal.

C. WINTER BREAK REQUIRED REFLECTIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

During your time on Bequia, you need to make at least 6 journal entries (approximately one every other day). Entries will be graded on quality not simply quantity. You may (of course) write more than the 6 required entries and/or address more than 4 prompts. ☺

Your journal entries must address at least 4 of the following 7 prompts. Label your entry with the prompt number and title (e.g., 1. Disability) as well as the date. A response to a prompt may continue across multiple journal entries (e.g., across multiple days).

1. **Disability**. Webster's Dictionary defines *disability* as "a disqualification, restriction, or disadvantage". Describe what *disability* means to you. How has the concept of "having a disability" changed since you have worked with the students at the Sunshine School? What complexities (new dimensions, nuances) do you see now in the concept of *disability* than you had not been aware of before?
2. **Gender roles**. Each culture reflects gender role differences. Describe the similarities and differences you have noticed between gender roles in Bequia and the United States. Describe specific examples of differences and similarities that were most striking to you? What additional questions need to be answered for you to make a more-informed judgment regarding the accuracy of your observations?
3. **Effective education**. What are the critical components of an *effective education*? Can the concept of *effective education* be described generically—e.g., outside the context of a specific culture. What do citizens of Bequia need to learn and how is this the same and different from what citizens of the U.S. need to learn? How well do you think schools in Bequia and schools in the U.S. are doing to meet the goal of effective education for all its citizens? What additional information/evidence would you need to gather in order to make a more informed judgment about this topic?
4. **Personal characteristic--strengths**. Identify and describe a personal strength that you have become aware of (or more aware of) since being on Bequia? How might this characteristic positively and/or negatively affect your interactions with others and/or your actions on Bequia? In what specific way(s) can you use this strength while on Bequia and (as applicable) in other areas of your live over the short term? What are the potential personal benefits and risks/challenges you might face as you do so?
5. **Personal characteristic—weaknesses**. Identify and describe a personal weakness that you have become aware of (or more aware of) since being on Bequia? How might this characteristic positively and/or negatively affect your interactions with others and/or your actions on Bequia? In what specific way(s) can you improve upon this weakness while on Bequia and (as applicable) in other areas of your live over the short term? What are the potential personal benefits and risks/challenges you might face as you do so?

6. **Service on Bequia.** Identify and describe the objective(s) that your service on Bequia was intended to meet. Describe the approach that was undertaken and how this approach might positively or negatively affect the fulfillment of the objective(s). What alternate approaches are available to meet the objective(s) and how might these alternate approaches positively or negatively affect the fulfillment of the objective(s)?

7. **Serving as agents of systemic change.** What would be involved in moving future action in the direction of long-term, sustainable, and/or systemic change? (e.g., change that addresses underlying causes and that does not cause inappropriate dependencies). What challenges or setbacks might future W&M groups face in this process and how might they deal with them?

Turn in all journal entries to Dr. Pelco on or before January 13th.