



The Scoop From the Stoop

Academic service learning integrates service with academics through immersion that nurtures understanding while addressing the diverse needs and issues within an area.

Who are we? Little tidbits about the students on the trip

by Erin Capitena

On August 18, seven ambitious students and one XU alum began our weeklong orientation to this fall's Urban Academic Service Learning Semester by moving into an apartment in Over-the-Rhine. This newsletter is a brief description of our first two weeks of the semester.

Austin is a sophomore business major from Denver, Colo. In his free time, he likes going on bike rides and drinking orange juice.

Chris, another sophomore, is especially adept at eating leftovers; he was almost full once, but that passed. He is from St. Louis, Mo. and is currently a PPP major.

Emily does not know what



The group sits on the front stoop of their apartment. Top row: senior My'e'ka Harkness, sophomores Erin Capitena, Chris Place and Emily TeKolste, and trip assistant Chris Goodman. Bottom row: Sophomores Austin Muller, Tara Immele, and Graham Wesley

she is studying; however, she does know that she comes from Indianapolis, Ind. for her second year at Xavier. She is especially talented at being right and writing.

Erin is a pre-med sophomore

Learning and living in Over-the-Rhine

by Graham Wesley

After attempting to describe Over-the-Rhine in just a few sentences, I've realized that it is impossible. While it is known by many for its rich history, we are getting to know Over-the-Rhine (OTR) through the people who live here. Cincinnati residents often associate OTR with violence, drugs, and homelessness, but these words do not define the many people who are proud to call Over-the-Rhine their home. In just three weeks, we have learned that OTR is a friendly neighborhood, known and loved by its residents for the stoop sitting and regular "How're you

doing?" as people walk past. We can't walk down the block without meeting someone new, and a simple smile and hello can turn into a long conversation about politics, faith, or life in general.

This is where we live. To be specific, we reside at 1324 Race Street in apartments #1 and #3. The gentlemen get plenty of exercise running upstairs to their small apartment, where we also keep the fish sticks and cantaloupe. The ladies sleep in the downstairs apartment, where we spend most of our time cooking, studying, board game-playing, and storytelling.

from Akron, Ohio. Among a myriad of minors, she is majoring in Spanish. She enjoys making people laugh and ending sentences in prepositions.

Graham dislikes wearing shoes, but does enjoy eating cookies. The Nashville, Tenn. native is studying theology in her sophomore year at Xavier.

My'e'ka, the lone senior, is a criminal justice major from Toledo, Ohio. When asked to describe herself, she responded "..."

Tara joins the group from Lima, Ohio. She is a sophomore studying social

work. Her interests include being comfortable and reading words.

Chris G., the trip assistant, graduated from Xavier a few years ago. The Salisbury, N.C. resident wants y'all to know he enjoys dressing up as Santa Claus. When he is not the jolly old elf, he is studying for the MCAT.

Christine, known to most studentes as Dr. Anderson, the head of the history department, is the returning trip leader. She teaches our African American Struggle for Equality class, organizes our lives, and makes a mean Sunday lunch.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- Oct. 3 - 12: Service trip to New Orleans
- Dec. 12, 4 p.m.: Community Presentation

For more information on the Xavier Academic Service Learning Semesters, contact Dr. Irene Hodgson at hodgson@xavier.edu or 513-745-3541.



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Our Orientation Schedule

We moved into our apartment in Over-the-Rhine a week before everyone else moved back to campus for a week-long orientation. Here is our schedule:

~Mon. Aug. 18: MOVE IN and meeting with parents.

~Mon. Aug. 18, 8 p.m.: Discussion of Safety Issues: The neighborhood isn't as bad as people make it out to be. Safety is a matter of common sense – don't get involved with drugs and don't go out alone after dark.

~Tues. Aug. 19, 8:30 a.m.: Neighborhood Scavenger Hunt: We split into groups and walked around the neighborhood noticing things. We also found banks to cash our stipend checks so that we could go grocery shopping.

~Tues. Aug. 19, 1:30 p.m.: Tour of Mill Creek Valley: Former Xavier ecology professor Dr. Stan Hedeon took us on a tour of the Mill Creek Valley. The Mill Creek is the reason that Cincinnati is located where it is along the Ohio River. During the tour, we explored the effects of the city upon the creek and the environment in general.

~Wed. Aug. 20, 9 a.m.: Urban Planning and Walking Tour: Liz Blume of Xavier's Community Building Institute offered us an alternative perspective to the negative views of gentrification by explaining how mixed-income housing can work in the community.

~Wed. Aug. 20, 1:30 p.m.: Urban Appalachian Council: Donna and Maureen talked to us about the mostly Appalachian population of Lower Price Hill and the services their agency provides.

~Wed. Aug. 20, 4 p.m.: Lower Price Hill Community School: Executive Director Jenn Walters told us about the school

that offers GED tutoring and early college classes as well as transfer services to the main campuses in ways that work for and with their students.

~Thurs. Aug. 21, 8:30 a.m.: Myers-Briggs Personality Profile: The Communication Department's Professor Jenny Tighe led us through exercises that analyzed our personalities and made us aware of how best to interact with each other.

~Thurs. Aug. 21, 11 a.m.: Journaling: The English Department's Dr. Trudelle Thomas led us through journaling exercises and ideas for journaling to help us record our experiences. Journaling is an essential part of our service learning class; these recorded experiences will be used in writing papers.

~Thurs. Aug. 21, 1:30 p.m.: Last year's ASLS group: Chris and Justin of last year's Urban semester group came to talk to us about some of their experiences and answer any questions we had.

~Fri. Aug. 22, 9 a.m.: Breakfast: Our service learning teacher, Dr. Jennifer Wies, director of the Women's Center, came to breakfast, and we discussed some things for class, including beginning to search out our service sites.

~Fri. Aug. 22, 1 p.m.: Drop Inn Center: Xavier grad Pat Clifford, executive director of the Drop-In Center, gave us a tour and talked about the different services it offers.

~Fri. Aug. 22, 2:30 p.m.: Over-the-Rhine Community Housing: Xavier grad Josh Spring talked to us and showed us videos about the purpose of OTRCH and the things OTRCH and its predecessors Over-the-Rhine Housing Network and ReSTOC did for the community.

~Sat. Aug. 23, 9 a.m.: Our first

session of Saturday morning service consisted of moving dirt in an attempt to raise a

flood plain and protect the foundations of the surrounding (continued on page 4)



An aerial view of Over-the-Rhine shows the largest historical district in America, including the churches of St. Francis Seraph (front clocktowers) and the steeple for the St. Francis Friary.

Over-the-Rhine (continued from page 1)

money and spend some quality time with each other; those of us who aren't chefs already are certainly trying to learn. To get where we're going, we ride the bus--mainly the #4 to and from campus. Occasionally one of us will grab a bike for a new adventure. When we have a free moment, and often when we shouldn't, we like to play frisbee or soccer with the kids down the street and chat with the neighbors on the stoop.

School is the main distraction from the quirks and adventures of everyday life. We're each taking one or two classes of our own, but we also take four classes together as part of the Academic Service Learning Semester: the African-American Struggle for Equality, Community Building and Urban Change, Contemporary Ethics, and Service Learning. Throughout the semester, we hope to use our experience to

complement our knowledge on the issues we discuss in these classes.

Much of this experience will come from the more familiar definition of "service." Each of us has chosen a service site where we will work about 15 hours a week. In addition to spending some time in these more direct areas of service, we will explore the issues that some of the people in Over-the-Rhine and all over America face, including poverty, joblessness, and homelessness, among many others. While we work to help the people who are suffering from such issues now, we will look at the system to find a solution from the top so one day the problems will no longer exist. We don't expect to fix everything; these are the beginning steps that we hope can lead to our participation in significant changes in the future.

Students take time to decide their service sites

By Austin Muller
and Chris Place

Service Learning – it’s something new to us. Who would have guessed that it is not about the number of hours you accumulate at a particular service site; as reading a book for a research paper it is not about how many pages you read, but what matters is the information you collect as a resource to bring about a greater understanding of the material. We as Service Learning Students are expected to do this. Our successes are contingent on what we take away from our sites and bring to the understanding of ourselves, the community, and urban issues.

There are over one hundred social service agencies in Over the Rhine; however, picking a service site wasn’t as easy as picking a name from a list. There were plenty of lists lying around the apartment, but the sight of them was more burdensome than helpful in

finding placement. Our first two weeks in OTR had been charged with emotions, pressures, worries, excitements, and questions. Surrounded by a new environment and continuously scheduled for daily speakers and exploration, we stayed plenty busy. Our excitement and expenditure of energy during these days left us strewn about the couches and floor of our apartment soundly napping by 4 p.m. As we began to adapt to living in community with one another, we discussed issues of housekeeping, budgeting, and general living arrangements. Amidst all of this discovery and discussion, we had to seek out a site that we thought would enhance our ability to engage in this new concept of service learning.

Some students came into the program with expectations of where and with which population they wanted to work, where others have found the selection process more difficult. However, neither

group escaped the anxiety, doubting, and stress of finding service placement. We sought out our passions, strengths, and weaknesses. Journaling, reflecting, dialoguing, and more journaling brought up constant questions and fears. When asked by our trip leader Dr. Christine Anderson, “So, how are your placements going?” we let several minutes of silence pass before responding. One of the more difficult parts of the process was just focusing. Thinking about service, in general, usually creates questions concerning why we do service in the first place, which only compounded issues of what service learning means. In order to push through and begin the looking process, blinders were a must! We considered how passions could not be the sole motivation for choosing a site. We reevaluated our motivations, focuses, and goals in correlation with our purpose of service learning. Many of us reconsidered our

expected service completely. Graham, who was so sure of her desire to work with the homeless population, now hopes to bring energy to adult education and literacy. My’eka finds herself drawn to St. Mary’s pregnancy center in contrast to her initial expectations of working with Light House youth center. Chris, who considered adolescent tutoring, will now be volunteering with recovering homeless addicts at the Drop Inn Center.

However, we have now (for the most part) solidified our service sites, but the fears and questions still have not ceased. The anticipation for our deeper service experience to begin limits our sleep, and the second guesses of how well we match our sites itches us constantly in the tiny, unoccupied moments of our waking hours. We know that our semester will be valuable. We know it will be a growing experience. However, we can not help but wonder about the next four months.

A Monday in the Life of Tara Immele . . .

by Tara Immele

I wake up slowly, hearing others up and about getting ready. I have the advantage of time; I do not need to be anywhere until 10 a.m. After enjoying a relaxed morning, I walk over to Vine Street. More specifically, I go to The Contact Center, my service site for this semester. This is a community organizing resource found in Over-the-Rhine. They work with the Ohio Empowerment Coalition and have several projects, including welfare reform, voter registration and education, The Kinship Program, and the Stable

Families are Safe Families campaign.

The day starts out in the back office for me, typing letters to politicians and candidates in the region. These letters contain invitations to a Forum in October about children’s well-being and how resources are distributed to childcare givers and schools. On an exterior level, this is busywork. Yet it is an important and valuable connection; I am rallying people behind a cause while trying to connect structural powers with those they affect.

Later on, I gain some personal interaction with a

woman who wants assistance drafting a letter. Her apartment is in a state of disrepair and the superintendent of the building has made a habit of ignoring her. This is a fairly simple task, but completing it takes an hour and a half. This is not due to difficulty, but rather, because we keep talking. She is interested in who I am and what I am doing and she describes some her family members and experiences in Over-the-Rhine. She is a Contact Center VIP because she helped form the group years ago. I may not have completed any letters to politicians during that time, but

we connected as fellow human beings, which means so much more.

Around 3 p.m. I leave for the day, returning to the apartment and the daunting task of homework. Little is accomplished before I assist my housemates with dinner. Our meals do not take too long because we rarely cook meat. Erin and Graham are practicing vegetarians and the rest of us oftentimes follow. We quickly transfer from hungry food consumers back to college students in order to make it to our 6 p.m. class located just *(continued on page 4)*

Too many social service agencies in Over-the-Rhine?

by My'eka Harkness

Have you ever been in a kitchen where ten people are there to help cook one meal? It gets really crowded and soon enough the helpers run out of room to maneuver. What if the meal is so big that ten people are not enough? People continue to come to help. Some people are there from start to finish and others come to help temporarily. Soon enough there are so many people in the kitchen that others on the outside, who have never been in the kitchen, cannot see what is going on in the kitchen. In the meantime, in the dining room other people come in to sell salt and pepper. Other people are getting in the food line twice. What do you do? Will taking helpers out of the kitchen make people stop selling salt and pepper or eating more than they are allotted? Or will it just slow down the production of the meals that need to be served? A similar thing is happening today in Over-the-Rhine.

Councilmen Chris Bortz has the idea that Over-the-Rhine has too many service agencies. "There are more than 120 social service agencies in Over-the-Rhine, more than one per block." He is really fighting to clear some of the agencies out. He says that they

are potentially attracting the wrong crowd. When a group of people in bad situations such as drug addicts and the homeless get together another group also gathers in the same area. The second group is made up of drug dealers, pimps, and people looking to prey on the agencies. As a council member, he must look out for the government and how the funds are used, right? The only thing is the majority of these agencies are privately funded non-profit agencies. The authority of the social service agencies say that the council members who have voted for the resolution, brought to the table by Bortz, have never even visited the agencies in order to know what is going on. What is even more shocking is that this is Bortz's second attempt at the resolution. His first attempt to restrict the number of human service agencies was a suggestion that zoning restrictions be placed in the area. Can social services really be attracting so many bad people that we need to limit the help given to the needy people who are in the area?

Chris Bortz believes that help, is help, is help, and, frankly, that Over-the-Rhine has too much of it. He believes that so many people have come to rescue Over-the-Rhine that they

overshadow those who come to hurt it. We all have to form our own opinions. I would like to think that people would accept our intentions in trying to help the neighborhood, but when no one is asking for the input of the residents of the community, who is really receiving the fruits of our labor?

There is a thin line between helping and hindering. The entire spectrum is so gray that I can hardly discern where the line is. I can help and help and help to the point that I can hurt and restrict the doings of the community members and create boundaries. When, instead, I can teach and guide the community with insightful information that I have accrued that they may lack and use as they will. If we teach what we know to the community members, they in turn will be able to run their own agencies and take back the control of their neighborhood. I am in a place where people are not asking for relief or help. They are simply asking for a chance; a chance to be given the tools to reconstruct their own

community. We often overlook the leaders in the community like our neighbors Ms. Liz Orlando and other community members who have watched their community transform before their eyes without someone ever asking for their input. At the same time, they have put good use to the help that is here. People do need the help until they are able to come to their own rescue. Problems like drugs and abuse of agencies cannot be blamed on the service agencies themselves. If people didn't need them or weren't using them they wouldn't stay open. If councilmen like Chris Bortz would come to see the organizations and the number of people they help (without Government Assistance) maybe there would be a better understanding of why there is such a high concentration of service agencies. Americans sure do have a way of going places thinking they have all the answers. How dare they, how dare we come down here like we have all the answers.

Orientation *(continued from page 2)*

buildings. (Chris Place assisted another group by driving a manual truck and cleaning up a local apartment).

~Sat. Aug. 23, 1 p.m.: Structural Inequalities: Vice Provost for Diversity Cheryl Nunez and NKU professor Dr. Michael Washington led us in a discussion questioning our purpose in service and the societal structures (including language) that perpetuate certain

attitudes and circumstances.

~Sun. Aug 24, 1 p.m.: Lunch: Christine made us lunch and came over for an informal discussion.

~Mon. Aug 25, 2 p.m.: Crossroad: Brook Gumm introduced us to Crossroad Health Center and their services, as well as certain health concerns that affect the community, especially children, because of low income.

Monday *(continued from page 2)*

down the street at the Emanuel Center. The class, as always, is discussion based. In some ways I feel like it goes over my head, but I continue to contemplate the issue as I walk out. This, of course, is the point of our education.

Our troop of seven travels back to our conveniently located apartment, taking maybe 90 seconds. Ironically, I do not make it inside until forty minutes after our class ends. I was easily distracted by a group hanging out near the corner of our street. Having ignored them all day, we socialize with the small crowd of about seven.

These individuals are not just random people; they are our neighbors. We exchange greetings, talk, and joke around with this group under a regular basis. We are on a first name basis and they have even given several of our members' nicknames. I finally make it inside for some homework with a side of procrastination. All of us are heading to campus early the next morning for two to three classes. As much as we should stay focused, several of us are still sitting at the kitchen table, books spread in front of us, well past midnight talking about anything and everything.