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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH CIVIC AGRICULTURE: USING FOOD TO LINK CLASSROOM AND COMMUNITY*

The maximization of productivity and labor efficiency has been a hallmark of the American agriculture and food system. The result of these twin processes is an industrial, concentrated, and consolidated provisioning system that produces cheap and plentiful food. Many view this model as a panacea for providing food to a modern industrial workforce, yet, increasingly, others are identifying cracks in this system. Research shows that an abundant food supply from an industrial model of agriculture has hidden costs to farm family stability, rural community well-being, and human and ecosystem health. A recent turn in this research has shifted away from the identification of weaknesses toward the exploration of viable options to redesign the food system in a manner that ensures long term sustainability. Civic agriculture is one such model that includes community-embedded initiatives to re-localize agriculture in communities of place, while enhancing food security, literacy, safety, and rebuilding rural communities. In this paper, I detail an exercise to teach the concept of civic agriculture through the development of community-based learning in the form of global and local public learning communities, service-learning advocacy, and international exchange. To demonstrate the comparative nature of agriculture and food system changes, as well as emerging models of sustainability, I developed a partnership with a Hungarian class which allowed students to compare and contrast approaches to sustainable development and probe the role of history and culture as causal forces in these endeavors. I describe my efforts to develop this partnership and weave opportunities for service-learning advocacy into the curriculum.

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SOCIOLOGISTS, SUCH AS those of the early Chicago School (Mooney and Edwards 2001), have long been drawn to the urban community to address the social ills stemming from industrialization, urbanization, and migration. Yet the sociological literature on pedagogy has been virtually silent regarding issues pertaining to rural community well-being. Social structures located in

rural communities are ripe for student investigation and engagement. Commodity agriculture has been the economic and cultural mainstay in many rural areas for generations, but in the new global economy, many find their markets less competitive, their social protections eroding, and their human capital appropriate for yesterday's workforce. Some communities are becoming ghost towns due to out-migration and others are languishing on the vine, but the

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entrepreneurial among them are pooling their assets in creative ways to build exciting, productive, and socially responsible economies.

The following discussion chronicles my effort to design a course to help students connect issues of rural community well-being to changes in our global food system through the development of a community-based curriculum. This curriculum consisted of a two-course sequence. I first developed a course infused with service learning opportunities and Web-based technologies to allow us to build a global learning community with a partner class in Hungary. Immediately following this course, I offered a capstone experience organized as a reciprocal international exchange that allowed both Hungarian and American students to take part in field schools in each others' countries to study the changing structure of agriculture, food, and rural community organization. The American contingent first traveled to Hungary for our Hungarian field school, and, upon our return, the Hungarian students visited us for the American field school. During each leg of this reciprocal exchange, students worked and traveled together throughout their respective regions. My goals in developing this curriculum were threefold: 1) to internationalize the classroom; 2) to invigorate civic engagement by infusing the curriculum with community-based learning components such as service learning, service learning advocacy, and out-of-classroom activities; and, 3) to demonstrate the links between the social organization of the food system and rural community vitality. I accomplished this final goal by employing the concept of civic agriculture. I can see others following a similar model as I construct here to accomplish much of the same goals in broader sociological fields such as health, migration, or social inequality. Food is simply the lens which I used to integrate students into local and global communities and engage them in communities of place. Communities of place are a constructive landscape for studying social change in any number of

topical areas. This two-sequence course taught students to understand the connections between food, culture, and community economic development, and to see that food is a tool that enables them to think about the world with a new lens. Before elaborating the design of this two-course curriculum, I provide an overview of the conceptual framework that underpins my strategy.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Civic Agriculture

Our contemporary food and agriculture system is undergoing a vast array of changes, both on the production and consumption end of the food chain. (Hereafter, I abbreviate food and agriculture system to agri-food system.) The fashionable "farm-to-feast" weekend get-aways and trendy French country cooking schools are evidence of the explosion of food in our consumption landscape. Celebrity chefs have taken on rock star status and artisan, organic, and regional specialty foods are increasingly becoming social markers to convey status and lifestyle. Growth in interest and activity around organic foods, farmers' markets, identity preservation (food labeling), direct marketing, fair trade, local cooperatives, and community supported agriculture are all evidence of changes in the production end of the food chain. These individual changes and activities collectively suggest larger qualitative changes in our relationship to food and agriculture. People involved in these locality-based production methods share a common interest in developing alternative-market streams that shorten the spatial distance of supply chains in an effort to provide access to quality and nutritious food, to enhance ecological health, and to re-embed humans in their communities of place.

As new locality-based food systems emerge, resistance to modern production techniques embedded in the conventional food system is also evident. The maximization of productivity and labor efficiency has been a hallmark of the American agricul-

tural and food system. The result of these twin processes is an industrial, concentrated, and consolidated food system that yields cheap and plentiful food. Many view this model as a panacea for providing food to a modern industrial workforce, yet it is becoming increasingly clear that this industrial model of agriculture has hidden costs to farm family stability, rural community well-being, and human and ecosystem health. Resistance to this industrial model can be seen in the backlash against confined animal feeding operations, genetically engineered foods, and bio-piracy, as well as dissent targeted at the World Trade Organization (WTO). Whether advocates are motivated to transform the food system out of ideals regarding health, safety, food security, or lifestyle, or whether they are reacting to the problematic dimensions in the current food system, locality-based efforts appear to be producing a moral or associative economy by demonstrating high levels of social capital and relations of care for those in their community—what Colin Sage (2003) calls a “geography of regard.”

To capture the remaking of our agri-food system I find Lyson’s (2004) concept of “civic agriculture” particularly useful. Civic agriculture refers to the “emergence and growth of community-based agriculture and food production activities that not only meet consumer demands for fresh, safe, and locally produced foods, but create jobs, encourage entrepreneurship, and strengthen community identity” (p. 2). Under the rubric of civic agriculture are production strategies with which we are increasingly familiar: community supported agriculture, community gardens, farmers’ markets, roadside stands, u-pick farm patches, local processing, neighborhood kitchens, and locally controlled cooperatives. Collectively, they constitute a ‘new agriculture’ that exists alongside commodity agriculture, or more accurately, exists *between* market and society. Civic agriculture is a hybrid production form because it is both a mechanism for profit making and a community-building tool at the same time.

Civic agriculture combines a need for profit with other societal needs such as solidarity, integration, literacy, equality, and democracy, thus blurring economic and social boundaries. The strength of Lyson’s (2004) theory of agriculture relocation is that it highlights the extra-economic elements emanating from production. It rejects the concept of an economically rational actor offered by neo-classical economics and recognizes the multiplicity of roles individuals play (e.g., producer, eater, neighbor, parent, church-goer, etc.), and the possibility that economic decisions may be made in a broad context and address concerns that surpass the economic sphere. Civic agriculture offers no metanarrative to food provisioning as the purveyors of commodity agriculture do. Lyson marshals an argument to conclude that multiple routes, whether through community-supported agriculture, farmers’ markets, or community gardens, can lead to profit-making and community-building but all routes lead to rich civic health.

I find this framework most useful for the classroom setting because Lyson’s (2004) concept of civic agriculture closely parallels the characteristics of a sustainable agri-food system. Sustainable agriculture integrates three objectives—economic profitability, environmental responsibility, and social equity (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). Civic agriculture captures each of these goals in a way that recognizes the limitations of natural resources and the non-economic value of local culture, at the same time advancing social responsibility and civic engagement. My goal in the current project was to help students see the interconnections between agri-food system restructuring and rural community well-being and how civic agriculture can be a significant social and economic development tool to repair some of the dys-

¹For those unfamiliar with the ecological and social impacts of the current industrial food system I recommend reviewing some of the agricultural sociology literature such as *From Columbus to ConAgra: The Globalization of*

function¹ caused by the industrial food system, and, moreover, how they, as citizens and consumers, can take responsibility for fostering civic agriculture initiatives in their community.

Community-Based Learning

A theme that runs through the agri-foods restructuring literature is the role of relational networks for building vibrant communities (Flora 2001). Similarly, scholars of pedagogy have argued that student learning is closely correlated to student engagement. Community-based learning has become a popular approach to achieve this engagement (Carter et al. 2002; Hollis 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Raskoff 1994; Jacoby 1996; Lewis 2004; Marullo 1996; Mooney and Edwards 2001; Scarce 1997). Community-based learning also provides the context for a demonstration of reciprocity. I sought to incorporate community-based learning in this curriculum in two ways: by developing global and local learning communities and by providing students with service-learning opportunities aimed at bringing about social change in the agri-food system. This is similar to those efforts Lewis (2004) discusses, which aim to shift service learning away from charity toward institutional social change.

In the current project, I incorporated community-based learning into the curriculum in order to apply the principles of reciprocity embedded in the civic agriculture concept. I followed the definition and classification system offered by Mooney and Edwards (2001). They contend that community-based learning “refers to any pedagogical tool in which the community becomes a partner in the learning process” (p. 182). They differentiate community-based learning from service learning by insisting that

Agriculture and Food (Bonanno et al. 1994) or *Hungry for Profit: The Agribusiness Threat to Farmers, Food and the Environment* (Magdoff, Foster, and Buttel 2000). More accessible reading written by journalist Eric Schlosser includes *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (2001).

the latter is a more specific form of community-based learning. Mooney and Edwards define service learning “as a method of learning in which students render needed services in their communities for academic credit, using and enhancing existing skills with time to reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (Bingle and Hatcher 1995:112, quoted in Mooney and Edwards 2001:186).

At the same time, Boyer (1990) has argued that we need “a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar—a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice and through teaching.” My approach to this mandate was to incorporate community members as experts in their respective fields—what some would call “community intellectuals”—into the learning process and to allow students the opportunity to engage themselves in inquiry, synthesis, and teaching. Students undertook a variety of service learning initiatives such as conducting interviews and giving presentations. In completing these tasks, they engaged in reflexivity, assimilating lessons learned and producing them in such a way that they could serve as conduits to inform community residents of the value of civic agriculture to rural community renewal.

THE COURSE

This section details the organization of the course titled Agriculture, Food, and Rural Community Development. This course was aimed at upper-division students and met in the spring of 2001 enrolling 12 students. Our university is located in a rural area economically dependent upon agriculture and imbued with an agrarian culture. Corn and soybeans, which constitute the grain-livestock-meat complex of industrial agriculture, are the agricultural mainstays. There are, however, emerging pockets of a more sustainable variety in the form of civic

agriculture. Most of the students from this public liberal arts university of 2,000 knew nothing of corn and soybeans or civic agriculture. They were largely from outside the region, and many were raised in metropolitan areas where the closest relationship to the source of their food prior to this class was walking down the supermarket aisle. Part of my motivation in designing this seminar was to introduce students to the complex issues pertaining to the economy and culture in which they were living, even if they were interlopers.

On the first day of class, I informed students that this would not be a traditional academic experience. On the contrary, they were embarking on an experiment in international curriculum collaboration with an Environmental Economics class from a Hungarian university. I selected a Hungarian institution because I had previously worked in that country and was well acquainted with the changing structure of agriculture and food systems in East Central Europe.

Why a partnership? I had three goals. First, I wanted to teach students to develop comparative skills so that they might challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about their agri-food system. Second, I wanted students to clearly understand how different parts of our current food system are interconnected via global trade and policy networks, and I wanted them to ask critical questions regarding why certain practices and policies have arisen in the United States and how very different provisioning systems have taken hold in other countries.

Third, I undertook a comparative approach and established a relationship with a Hungarian university because I wanted to create a productive global learning community, bringing together assets of our university and those of the Hungarian institution so that students could learn from one another about the merits of civic agriculture. Many proposed solutions related to agri-food system change and rural community renewal (such as those promoted by civic agriculture) have been contested in the

United States. Internationalizing our classroom allowed students to gain analytical insights into the political nature of these proposed solutions and fostered an understanding of the role culture and history play in shaping food and agriculture systems.

Learning communities have long been a curriculum staple. In a review of the literature on learning communities, Dietz (2002) discovered five different models: linked courses, learning clusters, freshman [sic] interest groups, federated learning communities, and coordinated studies. None of these models illuminates the merits of a global learning community possibly due to the logistical difficulty prior to the launch of the World Wide Web, which has shortened geographic distances and made global learning communities a possibility. Our first effort toward establishing such a collaboration was the development of a Web component for the course. Web-based courses, as well as Web components within traditional courses, have become an increasingly popular pedagogical choice to serve students at a distance and to expand teaching repertoires (Dietz 2002; Edwards, Corday, Dorbolo 2000; Jaffee 1997; Persell 2004). Although I share some of the apprehensions represented in the literature on technology in the classroom (e.g., fragmenting human communities), in this instance the students and I would have been unable to interact with another university outside the United States without this technology (Jaffee 1997).

The technology allowed the coordinating faculty and students at each campus to interact and exchange knowledge and analytical insights. The Web-based component of this course allowed students to begin to develop relationships so that when they met one another face-to-face in the summer capstone course they were able to move directly toward the collaboration needed for successful service learning and advocacy to take place.

The instructors began the Internet collaboration by exposing students to reading material that detailed the major forces that have shaped agriculture and rural development in Hungary and the upper Midwest.

We placed articles and discussion questions on the class Web site as well as links to regionally-specific sites of interests, plus photographs and biographies of each student. We required students to exchange ideas on the course readings, agri-food and rural development matters, and other pertinent cultural issues in the others' country. They seemed to enjoy this component of the course immensely, quickly developing friendships with their on-line student partners. As others have reported (Persell 2004; Scarboro 2004) we found that Web-based instruction elevated the students' engagement with the lessons as they became more active with the material. Students were eager to explore empirical topics with their international student partners, often punctuating discussions of topical material with references to student Internet exchanges (e.g., "Agi told me that in Hungary they....").

COMMUNITY AS CLASSROOM

In order to accentuate the relationship between agri-food system restructuring and rural community well-being, my second strategy was to immerse students in local community-based learning opportunities. I began by adopting "short-term experiential learning" (Scarce 1997; Wright 2000) in the form of out-of-class field trips where we saw farm after farm of monoculture row crops, viewed land erosion, observed the lack of markets in the vicinity, drove by boarded up Main Streets, counted the "For-Sale" signs in front lawns, smelled the horrific odor from animal feedlots, and heard the desperation in the voices of rural residents as they recounted the challenges they and their communities face as their young people out-migrate along with their jobs and way of life. In this way, we were able to draw upon the local pool of creative experts in our community. These community experts helped animate abstract social science through their lived experience (Scarce 1997).

To drive home the importance of reciprocity and interdependence in civic agricul-

ture, I required students to develop their own service-learning initiatives that would allow them to contribute to renewing rural communities. They organized and hosted a Community Food Expo that brought civic agriculture entrepreneurs within our community to campus to help promote food system literacy and teach the broader campus community how local food purchases could contribute to regional economic development. The students personally recruited nine farms and nine rural-based organizations for the event. The Expo was held on a warm spring day on the campus lawn and attracted approximately 300 students, faculty, staff, and community members. Producers grilled brats and shared sumptuous samples of homemade apple crisp, locally processed cider, cheese, jams, and jerky. Students are often attracted to the possibility of free food, but on this day faculty and community joined us on the lawn to re-connect with our rural heritage and celebrate the bounty of our region. The fact that community members participated in the event and continue to extol the merits of this exercise suggests that this effort may have contributed to bridging the 'town/gown' divide which is particularly acute in our community.

During the event, students functioned as food ambassadors, milling through the display booths and sharing what they had learned about civic agriculture, introducing producers to consumers, and explaining the benefits of using food system localization as a tool for community development. They also set up their own display table and distributed brochures they had produced extolling the merits of civic agriculture and taught visitors to their display about the economic disparities and ecological consequences embedded in conventional food systems (e.g., they used the concept of "food miles" to teach others that food on Midwestern dinner plates travels an average of 1,500 miles from the point of production to consumption and that this is possible only because it relies on nonrenewable fossil fuels).

One of the advantages of working in a small town of 5,000 is that news in the area often revolves around youth and the campus. As the afternoon wore on, a local radio personality and newspaper reporter interviewed students, allowing them to disseminate to a broader audience the merits of community renewal through civic agriculture.

The second service initiative students undertook was the organization and hosting of a Local Foods Supper. To demonstrate that nutritious, high quality foods—not simply corn and soybeans—could be located in our community, the students invited 20 guests to a banquet where the entire meal was made from foods produced in the surrounding area by neighboring farmers and prepared by the university food-service staff. Between each of the courses, students presented information about the social history and production process of each dish. In other words, students “put a face on the food” they were serving by connecting the meal to the broader social forces in which it was produced, in this way helping guests to see themselves as integral elements of the food chain and awakening diners to their options to buy fresh, quality foods locally. We hosted this meal to show our appreciation to those who provided assistance with the Food Expo, but, most importantly, we wanted to help broker consumer/producer networks and lay the building blocks for a local food economy.

The impact of our efforts has been rewarding for both the rural community and for the consumers of campus food. As a result of the success of our Community Food Expo, the campus dining services has committed to procuring a portion of its food locally. Putting local food on the college dining services table has been a virtual growth industry in the past few years, as university after university has been compelled to confront the politics of eating. Farm to cafeteria projects around the country are networking collectively to provide safe, healthy food for campus diners while supporting local economies. In an era when

over 64 percent of Americans are overweight and 30 percent are obese (American Obesity Association 2005), serving fresh, local foods provides one healthy alternative to counter this trend. (For more insight, examine the web page [<http://www.kenyon.edu/x25189.xml>] of Ohio’s Kenyon College which has been a leader in this movement.) In these projects food becomes more than food. It not only provides nourishment and commensality, it also provides an opportunity to encourage all dining service patrons to think about the politics of food and place.

CAPSTONE FIELD SCHOOL

Following the initial spring course, the American students and I packed our bags and boarded an airplane for Hungary. We were met by our Hungarian counterparts who served as our hosts for two and a half weeks. We lodged in the university residence hall on campus and ate most of our meals in the campus dining facility.

Hungary’s capital, Budapest, is an impressive blend of old world Baroque architecture, a thoroughly modern arts scene fused with pop culture, and a pulsating financial district strictly poised toward the capitalist west. It is without a doubt one of the great cities of Europe. But, while the city surges, agriculturally dependent rural communities in transition from communist-style collective agriculture struggle to reinvent themselves, bearing in mind ecological sustainability and the political and social requisites of European Union membership. Although we allowed students free time to explore the seductions of the magnificent city, our primary tasks were to uncover the differences and similarities between Midwestern and Magyar rural communities and agri-food systems.

In spite of its grand urban centers, this country of 10 million maintains a large rural population with 35 percent of Hungarians residing in the countryside and 10 percent engaged in agriculture (United Nations, Food and Agricultural Organization 2002). This is a striking contrast to the 17 percent

of Americans who inhabit rural areas and the mere one percent who make their living from farming (United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service 2005). Hungary's legacy of collective agriculture, the economically and socially turbulent 1990s, and a dire lack of capital have presented unique opportunities for observing initiatives devoted to civic agriculture. Without the capital to invest in achieving economies of scale, purchasing chemical inputs and mechanization, much of Hungary stands ready to embark on a smaller-scale, more ecologically-benign agri-food system. Thus, since the transition to a democratic government and a market economy, many in the country have experimented with embracing a more sustainable model of locally based agriculture.

Szent István University, our partner institution, is located in the Babatpuszta Valley and collaborates with community members to manage the one of the first community-supported agriculture projects in East Central Europe, called the *Nyitott Kert Alapítvány*, or the *Open Garden Foundation*. Our investigation of the *Open Garden Foundation* and the history of organic production and consumption networks allowed students to learn how political resistance to communism and collective agriculture manifested itself in the form of organic and community gardening from the 1980s. This partnership has become a model of sustainable farming in the region. Students also explored the Dorogdi Basin and the Badacsony wine region to learn how viticulture is being used to fuel rural development, infusing communities with needed capital in a manner culturally and ecologically appropriate to the region. We experienced traditional Hungarian rural culture as we toured the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site of Hollókő Village and learned how rural tourism can invigorate rural economies, providing jobs while celebrating and maintaining rural heritage. Students attended lectures on rural development from leading intellectuals; they learned of the challenges Hungarians face as they make

the transition from a communist to a post-communist agri-food system and they toured environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and universities doing cutting-edge work on issues of sustainability. Undoubtedly, one of our highlights was a visit to the Galgafarm Cooperative, one of the first NGOs in the country following the fall of communism which is devoted to the development of a 740 acre organic farm and eco-village. These excursions gave the students the chance to discuss the historical and cultural origins of these efforts and debate the extent to which the adoption of a civic agriculture will prove beneficial for the environment and rejuvenate rural communities.

These are only a sampling of the activities embedded in the Hungarian curriculum. The aid of a partner in the collaborating country is most helpful in orchestrating such a curriculum. The Hungarian instructor planned a full menu of tours and lectures that allowed us an intimate view of Hungarian agriculture and rural communities. From the initial stages of planning we aimed to strike a balance between scientific background information about the technical and historical forces that have shaped Hungarian agriculture and on-site field excursions. During each of the field trips or classroom presentations, we required students to take notes so that they were fully prepared to present their findings upon returning to the United States to fulfill their service-learning requirements.

Upon completion of the Hungarian field school, we returned home and hosted our academic partners in the United States. Nine Hungarian students and one instructor arrived for a similar two-and-a-half-week field school. The students stayed in the residence halls on campus and took their meals in the campus dining center or prepared their own meals in their private kitchen in their dormitory. The United States field school included excursions to organic operations practicing the integration of farming and ecological practices with a focus on vegetables and grains. The American and Hungarian students together attended work-

shops on socially just distributional models being pioneered by NGOs and universities; they examined market and policy drivers in food regulation, they visited area vintners, and they met with rural development experts to learn more of the challenges rural American communities face. We explored efforts to build linkages between farmers, processors, retailers, and consumers in order to better understand the needs of each sector of the food chain.

This reciprocal exchange provided students with the chance to gain a comparative perspective in agri-food systems and rural development. We were fortunate to have an abundance of community intellectuals in each country who gave invaluable of their time and energy. Students showed their appreciation to their educators/hosts by giving them a small token of their culture after each visit. But most significantly, the service-learning component in the classes required students to continue to practice reflexivity and to educate others about civic agriculture. While the students were in the United States, we were fortunate to have a national society for agriculture and food meet in our state. We were able to attend and hear academics and activists present their research and outreach scholarship. The students also participated in the meeting by presenting a poster on Community Supported Agriculture as a demonstration of civic agriculture, thereby fulfilling part of their service-learning requirements. Both the American and Hungarian students were interviewed on two radio stations regarding civic agriculture and a local newspaper article profiled their partnership and their civic engagement work. The last project they completed was the publication of civic agriculture brochures to be disseminated in appropriate outreach settings.

LESSONS LEARNED

The orchestration and execution of this class was time-consuming and fairly costly given the higher than average need for resources. I had the luxury of having a good deal of

institutional support to administer the course and I had a partner in the Hungarian instructor in the capstone phase. Looking back over the course, I can suggest a few ways to reduce an instructor's time commitment to this exercise. If possible, hire a graduate student assistant and, if finances allow, consider taking the assistant along on the field school to help organize events and manage day-to-day logistics. Even though we had two faculty members in each of our field schools a third assistant proved invaluable from time to time. To reduce reliance on resources, consider embarking only upon the traditional class/Web partnership sans the capstone field school or vice versa. Or consider reducing the number of service-learning projects. Finally, consider inviting guest lecturers to take the place of field trips.

The success of my classes was, in part, due to my ability to secure financial support to offset the costs of this project. I sought financial support for modest honoraria to compensate the local community experts. Internal competitive university grants earmarked for programs advancing civic engagement allowed me to pay producers 75 dollars per day for their efforts. I also secured external funding from NGOs.

The costs of the Community Food Expo were minimal. Our department provided the funding for publicity flyers as well as small amounts of money for advertising in the local newspaper. Students wrote a nice article in the campus newspaper which garnered us free advertising. Students also wrote and sent emails to faculty, staff, and students announcing the Community Food Expo the week before the event and they mailed personal invitations to faculty and staff university mailboxes. The only other expense associated with the Community Food Expo—the students' own display booth—required modest funding to pay for the tri-fold display board and handouts.

We also needed some financial assistance to support the Local Foods Supper. The university provided the skilled labor to prepare the meal, and some of the local pro-

ducers graciously donated food. We purchased the remaining items with funds from a small grant.

I also secured grants to help offset the costs of the travel abroad portion of the class. The two faculty members secured a total of 15,000 dollars, helping reduce the financial burden on both the Hungarian and American students. Given the grant subsidy, each American student paid only 1,400 dollars for the field school (including airfare) and the Hungarian students' costs were reduced to 500 dollars per person. This does not include tuition fees which American students were required to pay.

Evaluative Data

To assess students' experience with the class I gave them traditional class evaluations at the end of the two-course sequence. The responses on these assessments indicate a high level of satisfaction on the part of the majority of the students. Ninety percent of the students responded that they were satisfied or highly satisfied with their experience. Students' written comments suggest that they found the courses personally and intellectually fulfilling in both their sociological content and their ability to help them develop applied skills. One student wrote:

I can't tell you the opportunities that this class opened up for me. But to name a few, the local food project, my internship, the trip to Hungary and the new perspectives that offered me, my new job, and so much more...At a time in my life when the only outlets for action I saw were student groups, this class provided tools and introduced me to people and opportunities that allowed me to discover what real activism can accomplish.

Students were also pleased that they were able to expand their awareness of trends shaping the global food system and other globalizing trends. For all but one of the American students, this was their first trip outside of the United States. Such opportunities can be invaluable for developing or solidifying a sociological imagination if the student is prepared for the encounter with a

new culture.

While these evaluations gauge satisfaction and enjoyment, there is other evidence that the course had profound effects on students' lives. One student, for example, returned to Hungary the following year to continue to cultivate networks developed while on our initial visit. A second student began an internship in organic agriculture in Italy. A third student began an internship the following year with a NGO devoted to ecological sustainability. Several Hungarian students have charted similar commitments to a career path in sustainable agriculture or environmental issues. Three of the participants are expanding their agri-environmental knowledge in graduate school and one student is working for the Hungarian government as an environmental policy advisor. These commitments suggest that students were significantly influenced by the course. Students have encouraged me to continue the collaboration with our partner institution and offer the class again.²

A final assessment measure must consider the institutional change that came about as a function of our service-learning efforts. Part of the success of this course is measured by the fact that the Community Food Expo is now in its sixth year due to the on-going efforts of student activists who have continued the tradition. One of our students took the lead in organizing the Expo the following year at which time he simultaneously trained another student to assume responsibility upon his graduation. The trainee has now graduated and passed the torch to younger students who continue to work successfully with the rural NGO partners in the area. Even though I am no longer at that institution I recently visited the Expo and found that, while I knew none of the stu-

²Due to the academic culture of our partner institution, we did not give evaluations to the Hungarian students. We highly recommend developing an evaluation instrument that can be used to monitor learning and access feedback and administered to *both* sets of students for comparative purposes, if this is in keeping with the customs of both universities.

dents charged with organizing the event, our class had become quite famous and the students carrying on the tradition had done a fabulous job of maintaining our original goals and institutionalizing our efforts. Students have also begun sponsoring a Local Foods Supper each semester that now serves the entire campus population and is open to the community as well. Clearly any efforts to measure learning must account for such transfer of knowledge. These continued efforts provide the data that substantiate my course goals and suggest that patterned social change resulted from our course.

Exercise Adaptations

This course was aimed at sociology students enrolled in Agriculture, Food, and Rural Community Development and its follow-up capstone course. I can imagine, however, that it would be appropriate for courses in Environmental Sociology, Community Development, or a course on Civic Engagement and Community Organizing. With slight modifications, this exercise would nicely serve a Food Security course as well.

In addition the organizational template for the two courses that I have laid out in this article could easily be molded to suit the objectives of a number of sociology courses. I merely used food as a topical lens to explore issues of community development and economic regeneration. In essence, these are basic questions raised in every sociology class about the nature of social change and its impact on humans and social structures. Consider partnering with community intellectuals to communicate changes and challenges taking place in transnational migration, poverty alleviation and hunger, or other timely issues. Particularly in an era of globalization, such topics are salient.

An alternative strategy to address similar issues would be to exclude the international component, creating similar learning communities within a state or with a colleague at another institution. To establish a working relationship with a person in another country talk with personnel in your campus

Study Abroad Office and explore international non-profit organizations dedicated to the global exchange of knowledge and culture such as the directory of Fulbright Scholars.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a case for the significance of learning communities in a local and global context infused with civic engagement strategies to illustrate the merits of civic agriculture. I have sought to identify some of the key organizational priorities and prerequisites for the development of such a curriculum. Our experience revealed that using the assets of Web technology, service learning, global and local learning communities, and reciprocal international exchange proved to be an effective way to foster academic and community collaborations for the advancement of civic agriculture. Linking concepts of civic agriculture in this way allows students to understand the global and local dynamics of food system change and to learn to embed themselves in these networks.

Rural policy has historically been synonymous with agricultural policy, and, increasingly, agricultural policy is more private-sector driven and less supported by public-sector investments. In light of the devolution of the state, agricultural and rural communities are increasingly in need of new partnerships to renew rural development. A community-based curriculum provides students with not only a fuller understanding of the relationship between agri-food system organization and rural community well-being, but a civic engagement impulse to lead this rural renewal.

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