COMMUNITY LITERACY PROGRAM

ENGLISH 298 OR 498 SEMINAR + ENGLISH 491 INTERNSHIP

The Community Literacy Program is an 8-credit program combining an on-campus seminar jointly offered as English 498 for Senior English Majors and English 298 for all other UW students, linked with a 3 credit English 491 internship in one of our partner K-12 public schools. All students register for both the on-campus seminar and the linked internship course, and select a specific internship position from among a wide range of volunteer positions at our partner schools during the first week of class. Add codes are required.

In English 298/498 (5 credits) Community Literacy Program students meet twice weekly on campus in a seminar focused on building community, understanding equity and difference, working effectively with each other and with K-12 students, exploring central challenges and opportunities for transformative public education, and examining the role of mindfulness, compassion and emotional intelligence in learning. Students gain skill and confidence in using writing, discussion and presentation to develop and share their thinking, and to relate class and internship experience to their academic, personal, civic and career goals. Students may register in one of two ways: English 298 is open to all UW students, and may be used toward either the "Composition" or "W" requirement. English 498 is a Capstone for English Majors and counts toward the advanced composition for ELA.

In English 491 Internship (C/NC; 3 credits) students put what they learn on campus into action, volunteering (@4 hours a week, on a schedule they arrange, in schools one bus away from campus) at one of our partner public schools. Internship positions are available at elementary, middle and high school levels. Students select a specific internship position during the first week of the quarter. English 491B appears on students’ transcripts as an internship, may be used toward the field work requirement or as an elective in the Education, Learning and Society (ELS) Minor, as an elective in both the Education, Communities and Organizations (ECO) Major and the Early Childhood and Family Studies (ECFS) Majors, and toward field work requirements in some other departments. English 491 also provides documentation of school-based experience needed for application to Teacher Education programs.

Over 1200 students have participated in the Community Literacy Program (CLP) since it began in 1992. CLP is one of the longest-running community-based ("service-learning") programs on our campus, and is also part of the Phoenix Project, a partnership including the UW English Department and Shoreline and Seattle Public Schools, designed both to prepare future language arts teachers and to support K-12 language arts students. While many Community Literacy Program students have gone on to work in education or related fields, CLP also appeals to students interested in experiential education, civic responsibility, a small workshop-based course, global citizenship, careers in law or medicine or social work, or a deeper connection to the Seattle community. Students often form strong bonds with the schools where they volunteer and with our learning community on campus. Many CLP students continue volunteering on their own or through independent study project after the quarter ends.

Curriculum

The Community Literacy Program offers a unique opportunity to combine academic research with experiential learning, bringing the two together through discussion, presentation and writing. Participants re-examine their own lives as students in addition to reading and writing about current issues in American education, such as equitable and anti-racist pedagogies, the nature and purpose of schooling, Common Core
State Standards, literacy, conflict resolution and discipline, assessment and accountability, rapidly changing demographics, the nature and construction of “at risk” status, the importance of early childhood education and out-of-school literacy, and the role of civic engagement in public education.

Field notes document and reflect on students' community-based work. Short essays and student-led discussions put readings and experience in creative critical dialogue. Group projects focus on presenting and analyzing the programs where students volunteer, and on designing and teaching lessons to classmates on campus. Individual projects allow students to define a subject for in-depth research. A final career-related assignment sequence relating students’ experience to job and grad school applications is taught in partnership with the UW Career Center.

All major writing assignments are discussed in conferences with peers and the instructor, and training in relevant research methods is provided by UW Education librarians.

PARTICIPANTS

The Community Literacy Program welcomes students at any stage of their UW education, and from any department on campus. Past students have ranged from 18 to 67 years old, from first quarter freshmen to graduating seniors, in majors including English, Psychology, Art, Math, Biology, CHID, Social Work, Biochemistry, Classics, Informatics, Communication, Economics and International Studies. Students need not have volunteered with K-12 students before, and need not be planning to become teachers.

Community Literacy Program is, however, an excellent way to satisfy the field work requirement for the Education, Learning and Society Minor, to fulfill a required elective in the Education, Communities and Organizations or the Early Childhood and Family Studies majors, to work toward classroom hours required for application to Masters in Teaching Programs, or to complete a Senior Capstone requirement for English majors. CLP alumni have gone on to teach in many of the United States as well as in Brazil, Mexico, China and beyond.

Because of the frequent conferences and small class size for the Community Literacy Program, instruction is individualized. CLP welcomes all students through the combination of experiential and academic approaches, the diversity of student participants, student agency in defining projects, and the program’s focus on learning with and from each other.

IN THE WORDS OF CLP PARTICIPANTS

CLP school site principal: "The Community Literacy students are full members of our school community by the second week of the quarter.... It is a pleasure to see how insightful they are, and how dedicated to the educational process they become. Elizabeth is caring and candid in working with her students and with me throughout each quarter so that we can collaborate on solving problems. Normal situational challenges become tools for learning for her students, as well as ours. The benefits to our students are enormous. Our faculty has come to depend on the Community Literacy students as true partners in teaching."

CLP international student: "Since the second quarter of my sophomore year, Community Literacy Program has developed my sense of belonging and my connection to other passionate tutors in this vast campus.... Apart from the theoretical support from the textbook and instructor, I am greatly motivated by my passion for growing with these young students. They quickly helped me get incorporated into the class, and as we read together, they fully understood that I might not be familiar with American children's must-read books, and introduced them with great patience. Their eagerness to share what they have recently read and their writing assignments enriched my limited tutoring time....Volunteering in their class was the best decision I have made in my college career so far, and it will surely have inspiring and emotional impact on my study and attitude toward diverse perspectives."

CLP partner school classroom teacher: "My students love having a college student come into the classroom, especially since I am an older teacher. They love the youth and energy. They miss the CLP student when the time is over, but the benefit of having them in the classroom over-rides this problem."

CLP student: CLP made me constantly look at myself as a learner and a potential leader. The instructor was extremely stimulating and her experience was very clear. She was a very patient, calm professor who truly seemed as if she was interested in learning from the students.
CLP partner school classroom teacher: "[This CLP volunteer] has worked with me since last spring, and we are practically in a symbiotic relationship. She works with small groups, she manages the entire class, she does a large amount of prep work and anticipates what is needed. She is such a positive influence in my class and a help to me. I'd be sunk without her."

CLP student: "I'm writing from my first teaching job to thank you for introducing me to foundational concepts in education, for sparking my passion for teaching, and for providing me with many practical lesson ideas."

CLP partner school student, first grade: "Dear [UW CLP student], thank you for all the hard work for us. I apprechiat all the Science you taught us. I felt lerning all over me it felt like antennas growing on my head."

CLP student: "Community Literacy Program was truly an unparalleled success in my learning here at UW. Never have I experienced a wider range of issues, attitudes, beliefs and people. My new-found appreciation for and understanding of education and society stems directly from my experience with CLP."

CLP partner teacher: "In addition to the wonderful literacy support, having a college student in the classroom has been an inspiration to my kids. I've heard more questions and excitement around going to college with the CLP student here than I have the whole rest of the year."

CLP student: "CLP has opened my eyes to issues I have never really thought about, and given me a new way of viewing issues in education. I feel like I am a better informed citizen after taking this class."

CLP partner school librarian: "I wish I'd known about the CLPreader when I switched from an expensive private school. It covers much of what every new teacher to the school district should read: journal articles and information on school testing, classroom issues, diversity, economic and health issues, students of poverty and much more. It has taken me thirty years working with a wide variety of students and avidly reading about educational issues to work as effectively as I do, and Dr. Simmons-O'Neill has distilled that reading and experience into the CLP class and its reader, sending out students who are strong and effective helpers in the classroom."

Schools

The English Department's Community Literacy Program and Phoenix Project work closely with partner public schools and programs in the Seattle and Shoreline districts. Detailed information about school and program placements is updated each quarter.

The Community Literacy Program's current partner schools include: Olympic Hills Elementary, a "high needs" public K-5 school in Seattle's Lake City neighborhood representing diverse students (over 30 home languages are spoken at Olympic Hills) facing structural challenges (over 75% of students qualify for free/reduced price lunch); Shorecrest High School and Kellogg Middle School AVID programs (for potential first-generation college students), ELL programs, and Reading Intervention courses (for underprepared readers); and Franklin High School's ELL program.

ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

Initial orientation for working with children is supplemented by training in the schools where students volunteer; through Community Literacy Program readings, workshops and curriculum; through ongoing mentoring by classroom teachers; and through optional focus workshops offered through the UW Pipeline and Seattle All-City Tutor Trainings.

Throughout the quarter, CLP students have access to online resources for tutoring, and work closely with UW's Education Librarian to locate curriculum and research resources. The CLP curriculum features ongoing discussion and problem-solving during class meetings, individual discussions with the instructor, and ongoing mentoring at our partner schools.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Visit the CLP Research Guide for links to online resources.

CONTACT

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