

Community Studies Center

Mission Statement

The mission of CSC is to create more opportunities and support for interdisciplinary and collaborative field work based in the social sciences and extending across disciplines; to enhance training for faculty and students in qualitative research methods and multi-media presentation of that research to various audiences; to archive and make accessible the products of research for current and future scholars; to bring together the academic and experiential ways of knowing and learning; and to encourage meaningful interactions among people of diverse backgrounds on campus and in the world beyond. The broader public mission embraces a commitment to diversity and community collaboration.¹

Community Studies Center

Objectives

To coordinate, support, promote, and highlight interdisciplinary, community-based field research among faculty and students in collaboration with communities both close to home and across continents.

To develop academic programs for students to meaningfully apply what they are learning both theoretically and methodologically in the classroom to the world beyond; to challenge students to ask significant and relevant questions as they design research that addresses the needs and interests of their partner communities; and finally to present what they have discovered in thoughtful, effective, and ethical ways to multiple audiences.

To encourage understanding of the connections between inter-cultural and intra-cultural communication and experience – and the intersections between the global and the local. To encourage students to think reflexively about the diverse world in which they live as they engage in collaborative work with local, transnational, and international communities.

To address issues and problems in ways that are mutually beneficial to students' training and education and the interests and needs of community partners. (See "Community Studies and the Liberal Arts:" <http://www.dickinson.edu/departments/commstud/LibArts.html>).

To provide support (including equipment) and training for faculty and students to conduct interdisciplinary fieldwork, especially ethnographic and oral history methods, and use relevant technologies that enhance research for production and use. These include workshops in analyzing qualitative data, web design, video filming and editing, and audio podcasts.

To disseminate the research products and the ideas generated therein through a variety of mechanisms including, but not limited to presentations on campus and at professional meetings, audio podcasts, video documentaries, peer-reviewed research papers, and multi-media websites, and conferences.

To archive and make accessible the research products, including transcripts, video and audio tapes, documents, photographs, reports, documentaries, and published papers.

To encourage authentic conversations and facilitate rapport among people of diverse backgrounds on campus and the communities with whom we interact.²

¹ This collaboration can take many forms, including: participating in the development and implementation of community-based educational and social initiatives; enhancing communication between the college and the community on issues of mutual concern; facilitating access for the community to the Center's archives and resources; providing co-sponsorship for academic and cultural activities on campus and in the community. For example, see reference to the 2007-2008 CSC visiting scholar Jackie Fear-Segal and the collaboration between CSC, the Cumberland County Historical Society, and the Lipan Apache in the Self-Study; CSC Newsletters:

www.dickinson.edu/departments/commstud/PDF_files/newsletters/fall07win08.pdf
www.dickinson.edu/departments/commstud/PDF_files/newsletters/Spring2008.pdf; Dickinson Magazine article at <http://www.dickinson.edu/magazine/article.cfm?article=20>; and enclosed email correspondence

² Many of the Mosaic projects take a Participatory Education approach to teaching that values every individual's capacity to be both teacher and learner, and to participate. In Brazilian educator Paulo Freire words, "a dialogic exploration toward knowing and understanding." In this participatory model, students, faculty, and community members work together to co-construct meaningful learning experiences and interpretations. As a result, participants expand their critical consciousness, learn to appreciate multiple perspectives, and recognize that their actions and inactions help define social reality. Students move from learning in the classroom to practical experience to reflection to analysis and back to the practical, learning that complex problems require not only commitment and "heart" but also knowledge, interdisciplinary research, teamwork, and action. Responding to the postmodern criticism of all knowledge as determined by power, recent fieldwork seeks to go beyond the relativist bind that post-modern understandings create, to explore the complex and multiple ways that people make meaning. This necessarily involves scholars (be they students or professors) to in what Clifford Geertz has called, "thick description," by which he means cultural analysis that is extremely self-conscious in methods, detailed in observation, rich in content, attentive to the individuals as well as the group, and complex in interpretation: Because such work is taxing and time-consuming, it has often been left to graduate study. We have found, however, that it offers much to undergraduate students and is perhaps uniquely able to develop some of the attributes that Dickinson desires to instill in its graduates.