

Career Connections

Community Organizing and Advocacy

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

The field of Community Organizing focuses on mobilizing a community for political or economic action. Working with a Latino community to get the government to respond to the social and economic needs of recent immigrants, for example, deals not with individual needs but with structural problems in the society. There are city neighborhood watch programs, advocacy programs for the homeless or for mentally retarded adults, and an international organization devoted to stopping modern day slavery (and slavery does, indeed, exist in the United States). All of these are social advocacy programs. There are many groups and categories of people who need help accessing resources, mobilizing change, or addressing a host of needs.

A variety of career paths are possible for successful work in the field; however, to go very far in the profession, a master's degree is essential. Typically people in this field are employed by a human services agency in a local community, a hospital, a school or college, a court system, or an agency of a city, state, or federal government.

The Career Connections program on Community Organizing and Advocacy is meant to give students who are interested in this field some guidance. No matter what your major or what specific profession you hope to pursue, completing some or all of the elements of the program described here will prepare you for working in the field and will give you the experience and credentials you will need to get a job or to go to graduate school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Exploring Options

As soon as you determine that you would like to pursue this program, you should make an appointment with the Career Center (3rd floor of the Campus Center). The Career Center has a variety of books and pamphlets in this area.

It is also a good idea for you to talk to people who have experience in this field in order to get a sense of how they approach the field. You might want to talk to Dr. Keith Roberts or Dr. Jim Crone (both of whom are in the Sociology and Anthropology Department) if you want more insights on this field.

Every year, several Hanover graduates pursue a career in community services. Therefore, there are a number of alumni in different stages of their careers who would be available for you to talk to about what they do. The Career Center keeps an active list of these alumni who have agreed to talk with students. Give one or more of them a call; typically they are very eager to share their working knowledge and experiences, especially with current Hanover students. In some cases, job shadowing is even a possibility.

The Lilly Vocational Mentoring program is suggested for facilitating reflection on various career options, and especially for those interested in human services work. If your faith is important to you as you think about your future, you might consider having a vocational mentor. Many members of the faculty and staff are prepared to meet with you outside of class on a regular basis to discuss how your life and future relate to your faith. For more information on this kind of mentoring, contact Dr. Mike Duffy.

Academics

There is no single major you must choose if you are interested in pursuing a career in the community organizing/advocacy field. There are many ways into it. In general, most liberal arts degrees would be helpful in preparing students by giving them skills in critical thinking, writing, and speaking. Sociology, communication, and political science are typical options, but a major in a field like Spanish could be a powerful background for work with some ethnic communities. Instead of feeling like you need to pick the “right” major, it is usually better to pick the major in which you are most interested and then plan your co-curricular experiences to complement the major and your career goals.

In terms of course work, Hanover currently offers a number of courses that would be exceptionally helpful for a career in community organizing/advocacy. The following are some suggestions; they should not be understood as requirements. Consider these as possible electives and discuss them with your academic and/or career program advisor.

- Soc 226: Law and Society
- Soc 318: Race and Ethnic Relations
- Soc 319: Urban Sociology
- Soc 336: Crime and Corrections
- Soc 338: Social Class and Inequality
- Soc 349: Social Change
- Com 319: Organizational Communication
- Com 327: Interpersonal Communication
- Com 328: Cross Cultural Communication
- Pls 213: Introduction to Public Policy
- Bus 321: Basic Law
- Psy 244: Childhood and Adolescence
- A Directed Study on Community Building
- Spanish language courses (mental health professionals proficient in Spanish are in high demand).
- Philosophy or Theology courses (especially those dealing with ethics and social conditions).

Co-Curricular Activities

There is much more that you can do while at Hanover to help prepare you for a career in Community Organizing/Advocacy than just academic work. The activities suggested in this section are where you can really get the *feel* for whether working to empower people and groups is right for you. There are too many possibilities for any one person to do all of them. Therefore, you will need to pick and choose those that best meet your particular needs. It may be helpful to think of the different ways that on- and off-campus activities can be helpful to you. First, they can supplement the knowledge that you are getting in the classroom. Second, they can give you first-hand exposure to some of the processes

and skills that will be a part of your array of tools needed in this field. Third, they can provide you with an opportunity to act as an associate in situations that will be invaluable experience. Fourth, they can provide you an opportunity to gain self-understanding as you reflect on your enjoyment of activities similar to the experienced on the job. Deliberative selection of the following—in consultation with an advisor or Student Activities staff—should provide you with the skills and experiences you need.

On-Campus Activities

There are numerous clubs, organizations and activities that already exist on Hanover's campus that can be useful. Several academic departments have clubs associated with them that might be interesting to you and might cultivate leadership skills, even if you are not majoring in that area—

Sociology/Anthropology, Psychology, and Communication. LINK (Love Is Needed by Kids) and CMFK! (College Mentors For Kids) are both student organizations that involve working with young people in a helping capacity. People for Peace, Love Out Loud, and clubs affiliated with political parties also help participants develop organizational skills, while Student Senate encourages the development of leadership skills. Third, campus theme housing based on a topic related to service to the community is another possibility for those willing to take some extra initiative. All of these activities are particularly beneficial if students take on active leadership roles.

Off-Campus Activities

There are several outstanding local opportunities for volunteering and working in settings that will prepare you for the field of community organizing and advocacy. There are also several community and state agencies in the immediate area where one could do volunteer work or an internship

- ◆ For youth: Girls Inc., Youth Services Inc, Jefferson County Youth Shelter, Jefferson County Even Start, Child Protection Services.
- ◆ For abused women: Turning Point.
- ◆ For Latinos: *Casa Amiga*.
- ◆ For delinquency/criminal justice: the Jefferson County court system.
- ◆ For gerontology services: the Hanover Nursing Center or Thornton Assisted Living.
- ◆ For the poor: Salvation Army, Goodwill Industries, the new homeless shelter that is being planned for Jefferson County.
- ◆ For the disabled: Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- ◆ For the mentally challenged: Sandstone Industries.

Those students with cars and a little extra time should be aware that the city of Louisville is only an hour away and there are ample opportunities for experiential learning in such agencies as Wayside Mission (a homeless shelter), the Fairness Campaign (working on gay and lesbian rights), El Americana Community Center (a community organizing agent for Latinos). Columbus, Indiana is also only an hour away and it has organizations like *Su Casa*, a center serving the needs of Latinos.

Work Experience

You should seriously consider spending the summer between your sophomore-junior and/or junior-senior years working in a setting that is directly related to the field. Any work in a setting that provides exposure to working with people and with community organizing is likely to be the best way to decide if this field is for you. It is also impressive to employers and graduate schools. If you have the financial resources to volunteer or work for limited pay in your summer position, you will find that you have many more options available, but there are some positions that do pay reasonably well.

On-Campus Employment

A great way to gain work experience and skills during the academic year is to find a student worker position on campus. Peer Advising and, especially, Resident Assistantships are both activities that have many advantages including the opportunity to learn strong interpersonal and communication skills. Additionally, if you can work as an assistant to a professor who is doing research in some area of the social sciences or who needs someone to work as an editorial assistant with a writing project, this could enhance your skills and your credentials.

Summer Jobs

Some of the most common settings where students have found summer work in the past include the Fifth Judicial Circuit in Indiana, VA centers, summer camps for special populations (such as Camp Kysoc in Kentucky), community social service agencies, half-way houses for adolescents (such as the Jefferson County Youth Shelter) or for mentally-handicapped adults, shelters for battered women, and juvenile detention centers. In these settings, students can work in both direct care and research capacities. Summer jobs in social work facilities can be approached in the way most other summer jobs are, that is, by looking at advertisements in the newspaper and sending out resumes to places that are likely to hire students.

Internships

Internships are another outstanding way to gain summer experience. An internship can be distinguished from a regular summer work experience by the presence of activities that are specifically designed for your educational purposes. While these programs will expect work from you, they are also likely to be more thoughtful about what you are getting out of the experience. While *paid* summer internships are not plentiful, if you are willing to put some effort into the search and are geographically flexible, there are some exciting opportunities available. For example, consider spending a summer in an interesting city, working with an abolitionist group such as *Free the Slaves*. Other internships in community organizing and advocacy include working for organizations such as Reach For Youth, Inc., Center for Women and Families, Information and Referral Network, Inc., Amnesty International USA, or the Institute for Community Empowerment in Chicago.

If you do find an internship site, you should think about the possibility of making it an official Academic Internship in which you do background reading, write a paper, and publicly present your experience. David Harden in the Internship Office can help you organize this kind of experience if you are interested. Finally, there are stipends available for unpaid internships meeting certain criteria. Contact the Career Center to learn more about these opportunities.

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