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Long-term Impact of Community-based Learning on College Graduates: Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp Qualitative Study

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Long-term Impact of Community-based Learning on College Graduates: Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp Qualitative Study

**Report to the UNST Assessment Office
30 June 2010**

Purpose: The purpose of this study is two-fold: First, the researchers intend to explore what college graduates report as they most important learning experiences and the impacts of those learning experiences in later life. Secondly, the researchers expect to learn the impacts that a community-based learning course focusing on direct service with persons with disabilities—namely, the Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp Capstone course—have on participants' subsequent life experiences.

Method: As of this writing, the researchers are in the final stages of conducting a qualitative study involving 30-minute phone interviews with PSU graduates who were students of the Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp Capstone. Potential interviewees were initially located through the PSU Foundation database cross-matched with course information from Banner. As of 2009, more than 2,000 graduates comprise this group, with about 60% of those possible participants because a) current contact information is available and b) they have given permission to be contacted by the University. Stratified random sampling was used to identify 60 potential participants from a variety of time periods (14-16, 9-11, and 4-6 years after they completed the Capstone course).

To date, 15 phone interviews have already been conducted, with another 6 interviews pending. Transcription of those taped interviews has begun, and a very preliminary read-through of the data from the earliest interviews has been initiated for the purposes of this report. Analysis of the data conforms to the processes described by Creswell (1994) and involves the review of the data by two readers, who identify the predominant themes in the interviews, code the data according to these themes, and compare their results with each other. A third reader confirms these themes through an independent analysis of the data.

Findings: A casual analysis of the first several interviews confirms that graduates report powerful and positive impacts resulting from both their key learning experiences in college and their participation in the Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp Capstone. The findings include the following themes identified in this preliminary analysis:

- Graduates report that many of their memorable and most significant learning experiences result from working across difference in groups with others.
- Graduates express that the opportunity to attend university in a vibrant urban setting opened their learning beyond the confines of the classroom.
- In several instances, graduates identify their participation in the Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp interview as one of their most significant learning experiences, naming this particular Capstone course in response to a general question about key learning experiences before the interviewer asked any questions explicitly about their participation at Kiwanis Camp.

- Kiwanis Camp participants articulate that a meaningful impact of their experience in the Capstone has been overcoming a previously-unexamined tendency to “other” those with disabilities and learning to see those persons as subjects. Interviewees repeatedly express that the “24/7” nature of the camp, in which they engaged in an immersion experience that necessitated the building of relationship in order to navigate difference, contributed to this kind of personal growth and learning.

Reflection: It has been a pleasure for each of the researchers (Ann Fullerton, Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp faculty supervisor; Seanna Kerrigan, Capstone Director; and Vicki Reitenauer, Women’s Studies/Capstone faculty) to collaborate on this project. The quality of graduates’ reflections during the interview process has been quite rich and revealing. In particular, the researchers have been struck by participants’ articulation of positive impacts in ways that align with the intentions of the Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp Capstone in particular and with PSU’s institutional commitments more generally. With few exceptions, interviewees voice deeply positive regard for PSU and for the Kiwanis Camp Capstone and quite easily identify a number of concrete examples of significant learning experiences that have impacted them constructively in later life.

Future steps: Interviews and the transcribing of these interviews are scheduled to be completed by the end of Summer term 2010, at which time formal data analysis will proceed. The researchers plan to complete their analysis, write up the data, and produce one or more articles and presentations in order to disseminate the findings. Project assistants are currently identifying a number of potential markets for this dissemination.