

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH SOCIAL SUPPORT:

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT

A. Course and Time lines

The proposed service learning project would initially be offered in conjunction with COR 423: A Topical Seminar on Women in Corrections. This course is currently being developed as an elective and will be offered for the first time in Summer 2008. Service-learning will be integrated into the course for a Fall 2008 offering. The course will be revised based on course assessment results and be offered again in Spring 2009. COR 423 is the avenue that the Department of Correctional and Juvenile Justice Studies uses to pilot new courses. Once the course is established and has demonstrated positive learning outcomes, we would pursue a unique course number and approval through Academic Affairs and offer the course each semester thereafter.

B. Instructors

The service learning project will involve collaboration among faculty in the Department of Correctional and Juvenile Justice Studies and the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences.

Ms. Joyce Carmouche, an adjunct professor with the Department of Correctional and Juvenile Justice Studies, will serve as the primary course instructor. Ms. Carmouche is currently developing the Women in Corrections course to be delivered in Summer 2008. She has extensive experience in working with female offenders at the local, state, and federal levels.

Dr. Cherie Dawson-Edwards, Dr. Betsy Matthews, and Ms. Lou Martin, all full-time faculty within the Department of Correctional and Juvenile Justice Studies, will serve as advisory board members for the project, providing support and feedback throughout the course development, delivery, and evaluation process. They will also participate in the classroom and service learning activities upon the request of Ms. Carmouche.

Ms. Carol Patrick and Dr. Susan Willis, full-time faculty members within the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, will offer their expertise on family-related issues and nutrition. They will participate on the advisory board with other community partners, serve as guest speakers during classroom sessions, and refer students for participation in the course. We anticipate that the level of collaboration will expand as the project evolves, possibly to the point of team teaching and a cross-listed course. Please see the attached letter regarding their interest and support for this project.

C. Community Problem to be Addressed

Managing offenders' reintegration to the community can be challenging. Correctional agencies are charged with the tasks of addressing offenders' needs and keeping communities safe. Prominent needs among offenders include substance abuse, housing, and employment; the resources required to address these needs are often scarce. Because of their role as single mothers and caretakers, the challenges for women coming out of prison are often amplified. They must work to regain parental authority and relationships while encountering other reentry challenges. What they most need is a system of social support that will work with them to negotiate the confusing bureaucracies associated with many social services and help them access much needed services for them and their children.

According to Mark Davis, Supervising Probation Officer, there are approximately 80 women under some type of community correctional supervision within Madison County, many of whom are returning from prison, jail, or residential treatment. According to Mr. Davis, the primary focus of probation is the monitoring and treatment of substance abuse. Therefore, the capacity for addressing family-related and employment issues is limited by time and resources. The proposed service-learning project is designed to begin filling this gap by developing and delivering advocacy services designed to empower women and facilitate their successful reintegration.

D. Service Activity

The primary goal of the service project is to facilitate offender reentry through the development and delivery of advocacy services for female offenders. To achieve this goal, students will engage in the service activities described below

- Assess/reassess women's needs through focus groups and interviews – students will develop focus group and interview protocols that are designed to discover the common needs of female offenders. They will conduct the focus groups and the interviews and prepare a report on the results of the assessment. Through this activity, students will gain an appreciation of the research process and develop a better understanding of how this type of research can inform practice within the community.
- Develop/maintain a directory of community-based resources for women – students will identify the community resources that are available in Madison County and identify specific contact persons within each agency. They will prepare a written directory that includes name of the agency, contact information, services provided, and cost. The primary purpose of this activity will be to harness resources for female offenders; students will identify service gaps and advocate for service development. Additionally, students will gain valuable information for future career decisions.
- Engage community partners in the service learning experience – through the above-referenced contact with community agencies as well as contact with other ECU faculty, correctional agencies, and community advocacy groups, students will be instrumental in developing a network of support for female offenders in Madison County. They will also learn about the value and processes associated with effective collaboration. Community partners will be involved in a variety of ways, including as guest speakers and members of the advisory board. Students will keep them engaged through meetings, personal contacts, and newsletters.

- Deliver advocacy services – Women in need of assistance will be referred to the advocacy services through various community partners (e.g., probation and parole, substance abuse treatment agencies, mental health agencies, churches). The specific type of services provided will be driven by the above-referenced assessment process; we expect them to range from helping them to secure basic needs to helping them access needed mental health treatment. Our intention is not to duplicate services that are already available. Instead, we intend to train students how to serve as liaisons between the women and the service agencies. For example—a woman and her family wake up to a dark and cold house and discover that their electricity has been turned off. She does not have the money it will take to get the electricity restored. She can turn to us for help. A student will know who to contact, and what steps must be taken to restore her electricity. The student will also know what kinds of emergency assistance is available for families in this situation. With appropriate training and guidance, the student will then work with the woman to make the appropriate connections and ask the right questions. In other words, the student will walk the woman through the steps necessary for resolving the problem and for preventing it from happening again. This is a typical scenario that can throw women into a downward spiral. Although we will not be successful in resolving all of the problems that women encounter, we believe that, in many cases, a bit of instrumental and expressive social support may do the trick.

The emphasis placed on each of these activities may shift from semester to semester based on the earlier class accomplishments and the changing needs of the women and community.

E. Reflection Activities

Reflective discussion questions, journaling, case studies, and inventories identifying and matching community resources will be used to enhance student learning in this course. First, each class meeting will include both a service-oriented and content-oriented reflection question

to prompt reflective class discussion. Second, student participants will maintain a journal throughout the course with journal entries focusing on different topics and utilizing a variety of journaling methods such as: ‘the critical incident’, ‘double-entry’, ‘different perspectives’, ‘the free write’, and ‘guided imagery’. Third, case studies will be presented to students in order to gauge their critical and creative thinking skills through ethical decision making. Finally, students will develop and compile several inventories that will serve to identify and match community resources upon assessment of client needs. Please see a list of anticipated reflection activities in the sample course schedule that is included in the syllabus and attached to this document.

F. Sample Syllabus (Please see attached).

G. Action Plan

Table 1 reflects the major tasks to be completed and the target date for completion. The tasks here reflect major project activities during the first year of the project.

Table 1: Action Plan

TASK	JAN 08	FEB 08	MAR 08	APR 08	MAY 08	JUN 08	JUL 08	AUG 08	SEP 08	OCT 08	NOV 08	DEC 08
Contact Community / Faculty Partners												
Second Draft of Syllabus												
Convene Initial Partner Meeting												
Select Course Material												
Finalize Reflection Activity												
Finalize Syllabus												
Departmental Course Approval												
Convene Monthly Partner Meetings												
Deliver Course (Fall 2008)												
Evaluate Course												
Revise Course for Spring 2009												

INTENT TO ENGAGE IN SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY

Dr. Betsy Matthews and Dr. Cherie Dawson-Edwards will pursue two areas of scholarly activity. The first will include a comparison of learning outcomes between matched groups of students in a traditional, lecture based corrections course and students in the service-learning course. Specific learning outcomes to be examined include knowledge of subject matter, critical thinking skills, sense of civic responsibility, participation in service, and changes in correctional ideology. Pre and post-tests will measure change in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Post tests will be administered upon completion of the course and six months later to measure both short and long-term outcomes. A paper will be prepared for submission to the *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*.

The second area of scholarly activity will involve an assessment of outcomes among the women served through the service-learning project. Quantitative pre- and post-measures will be used to measure changes in the women's attitudes, skills, mental and physical health, and quality of life. The measures will be implemented pre-service and six months later. Qualitative data will be collected to supplement and explain the quantitative data. A paper will be prepared for submission to a peer-reviewed scholarly journal (e.g., *Prison Journal*, *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, *Crime and Delinquency*).

Drs. Matthews and Dawson-Edwards will also present papers on both studies at the two premier academic conferences in this field—the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences and the American Society of Criminology.