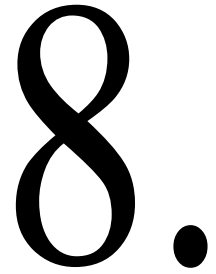


# Learning from Difference: Sustained Impact of the Law and Diversity Program



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## **Cohort and Integrative Seminar-Learning Community Model**

Most of us develop our identities, our sense of culture, and our beliefs in how things “ought to be” in the homes and communities where we grow up. During our early years, we learn about power—who has it and who doesn’t—and we develop our ideas of what we might become as adults. As we begin the schooling process, increasingly we come into contact with those who are “different,” those who have grown up with different values, different traditions, and different languages. We typically use these contacts with difference to solidify our own sense of gender, sexual, ethnic, racial, and class identity. We learn to articulate categories of difference, to organize our understanding of social structures and interactions by them, and to recognize the ways in which our identities are either “centered” in the dominant culture or excluded from it. Students, whose cultures and identities are not part of the dominant society, increasingly find it difficult to validate their experiences and to bring their identities into the classroom. The curriculum and their experiences in school often devalue their cultures, both through the omission of their traditions or history in the curriculum and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. Schools urge them to leave behind the traditions and values of their cultures and to adopt the ideas and attitudes of the dominant culture.

Schools also fail those from the dominant culture by neglecting to challenge them to examine the benefits of privilege they have enjoyed. Without a curriculum well grounded in issues of diversity, oppression, and power relationships, these students frame all examinations of “difference” from their own strong experiences at the “center,” never questioning their perceptions that all others are “other” or “marginal.” By the time students enter college, this process accelerates as they move from homes to new environments that may offer increasingly diverse points of view and notions of truth. For higher education to succeed in preparing students to successfully interact with diverse cultures and perspectives, we must actively assist students to examine their own origins and identities and to recognize how these specific identities fit into a matrix of social relations influenced by history, economics, politics, and prejudice.

The intersection between the pedagogies of learning communities and the impact of service-learning can provide a powerful space for students to struggle with perspectives other than their own and to consider the multidimensional nature of cultures. For the past decade, faculty and students in Fairhaven College’s Law and Diversity Program have struggled with the conflict and tensions engendered when diversity becomes a central part of the learning environment. Students recruited for this program have a self-identified interest in the issues of law, diversity, and legal representation for under-represented groups. They are also chosen to participate because they showed promise for successfully

The Law and Diversity Program at Fairhaven College at Western Washington University (see page 76 for a description of Fairhaven College) is designed to facilitate admission of selected students to law school and to enhance their likelihood of success there, in legal practice, and in public life through a cohort-based Integrated-Seminar Learning Community model. This upper-division, multidisciplinary learning community brings students together for two years to provide a background in a number of disciplines designed to build and hone the skills necessary to succeed in law school, in careers in law, and related fields. This program serves as a major for the enrolled students. Originally funded by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE), the program admitted the first fifteen students in fall 1991. Since then, a cohort has been admitted every two years, with the fifth cohort graduating in the fall of 2001.

The cohorts have been very diverse, with a rich mix of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and diversity in gender, age, and sexual orientation. Their life experiences and perspectives have been as varied as their backgrounds. The students have been immigrants, single parents, from middle-class and blue-collar families, products of Asian, Mexican and black gang life, victims and survivors of poverty and abuse, and activists from ethnic, disabled, and gay/lesbian communities. The exploration of ways to develop the skills to bridge these differences has been both the primary challenge and the power of the program. Working within a cohort that has made a commitment to work together for a significant

amount of time around themes and issues that are very real and present in our society, and then working in community settings in which these issues are present “on the ground,” provides the context where these skills can be developed. In the cohort-based community model, the students take a cluster of classes, some self-contained and others in which they participate with additional students not in the cohort, chosen for their content relationship around issues of law and the American society.

Each quarter of the program, the students in an integrative seminar are encouraged to bring together and synthesize the major themes of the quarter, discuss issues in greater depth, practice learning skills, and provide support for each other. For example, one quarter’s curriculum might include courses in American Government, the American Legal System, and Politics of Inequality, with an integrative seminar emphasizing writing skills. (See curriculum model in Figure 1.) During the second year of the program, students participate in service-learning options and internships that provide hands-on field experience in legal institutions and other community agencies that serve communities of people often disenfranchised or underrepresented in the law. More information about the program can be found on its website: [www.ac.wvu.edu/~dp/](http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~dp/). Marie Eaton is a faculty member at Fairhaven College, Western Washington University, and was the project director for the FISPE grant that funded the development of the Law and Diversity Program. The current director of the Law and Diversity Program is Julie Helling.

completing law school and contributing to the betterment of their communities.

Because of the content studied in the program, the demographics of the members, and a model that sustains a cohort over two years, faculty were forced to develop strategies to foster increased dialogue about racial, ethnic, gender, and class differences, sexual orientation, social and economic disparities, social justice, and questions of difference in the curriculum. Students are challenged to listen to each other’s diverse histories and cultural roots, and to examine the ways their own attitudes, perspectives, and beliefs were shaped by their backgrounds. Graduates of the program<sup>1</sup> often cite this examination of their own perspectives and the challenge to listen to others as the most profound learning experience of the program and as an influence they carry out into their later work and study, in law or graduate school, in community settings, or on the job. As one student from the first cohort said:

The group I went through the curriculum with was very diverse, from all walks of life, all ages. I think that was a benefit to me because I really have become sensitive to things that I wasn’t sensitive to before. (1st cohort—interview)

This chapter will explore the ways in which both the sustained cohort model of the Integrated-Seminar Learning Community and service-learning and community-based internships created a powerful learning environment for the students and developed perspectives and skills that continue to influence their work after graduation.

### **Learning Community/Cohort Model: Support, Challenge, and Long-term Impact**

When the Law and Diversity Program was first planned, we hoped that the sustained two-year cohort structure would provide both academic and emotional support for students who did not see themselves often represented as successful in higher education settings. We also intentionally planned the curriculum to contain elements of an interdisciplinary examination of the issues of justice in the American society, and to build the skills necessary to succeed in graduate or law school. Figure 1 summarizes the courses commonly found in the two-year curriculum.

**Figure 1. Sample Law and Diversity Curriculum**

Courses in **bold** are open only to the LDP cohort. For all other courses, the cohort is enrolled along with other students.

<b>Quarter 1</b>		
Fairhaven 211	American Legal System	5 credits
Political Science 250	American Political System	5 credits
Philosophy 107	Logical Thinking	3 credits
<b>Fairhaven 307</b>	<b>LDP Seminar: Conflict Resolution</b>	<b>3 credits</b>
<b>Quarter 2</b>		
Fairhaven 224	LDP Writing Logical Arguments	3 credits
Fairhaven 396	Power, Privilege and the Law	3 credits
Economics 206	Microeconomics	4 credits
Fairhaven 262	Swimming with Sharks: The Life of a Lawyer	2 credits
<b>Fairhaven 308</b>	<b>LDP Seminar: Legal Writing</b>	<b>4 credits</b>
<b>Quarter 3</b>		
Fairhaven 395	Commercial Relationships	4 credits
Fairhaven ISP	Critical Reading and Thinking (LSAT)	4 credits
Elective	by advisement	x credits
<b>Fairhaven 309</b>	<b>LDP Seminar: Legal Research</b>	<b>4 credits</b>
<b>Quarter 4</b>		
Fairhaven 398	LDP Political Economy and the Law	4 credits
Fairhaven 415	Constitutional Law I – Gov’t Powers	5 credits
Elective	by advisement	x credits
<b>Fairhaven 407</b>	<b>LDP Seminar: Advanced Legal Writing</b>	<b>3 credits</b>
<b>Quarter 5</b>		
Fairhaven 416	Constitutional Law II - Individual Rights	5 credits
Elective	by advisement	x credits
<b>Fairhaven 408</b>	<b>LDP Seminar: Oral Advocacy</b>	<b>4 credits</b>
<b>Quarter 6</b>		
Fairhaven 480	LDP Internship	10 credits
Elective	by advisement	x credits
<b>Fairhaven 409</b>	<b>LDP Seminar: Legal Profession</b>	<b>3 credits</b>

*The cohort-based Integrated-Seminar Learning Community model provided fertile ground for other kinds of profound learning. Because the students entering the program agreed to work together for a two-year period, they had multiple opportunities to practice the engagement of conflicts and differences and to learn how to participate in collective deliberations about issues where participants have radically different convictions and may not ever reach agreement.*

We also planned the program so that students would participate in hands-on field experience, including moot court and a sustained internship with agencies, law firms, and legal departments. Students from successive cohorts in the Law and Diversity Program have been placed in a wide variety of settings, such as a battered women’s shelter, the juvenile court system, various city, state, and federal offices, a lawyer referral service, the public defender’s office, the ACLU, and a disability rights organization. The common element in all the internship placements is that students have an opportunity to become involved with justice-seeking for those often not well-represented in the legal system.

The integrative LDP Seminar offered each term serves as the locus of reflection, intellectual integration, and important skill-building work. This seminar has been critical to the success of this model as it provides a clear space

*The learning community cohort model strengthened each student's abilities by providing a shared environment where peers both in and outside of class reinforced the learning.*

in which students can connect the varied threads they explore in the curriculum. Themes from the other courses surface and are discussed, and the intersections between these themes and the larger issues of justice in the American society are examined. Each seminar also focuses on a particular skill essential in later legal or graduate education. This seminar also has become an important vehicle for building community, exploring the nature of difference and the ideas of justice-making. This aspect of the seminar was developed after we were caught off guard by student responses in the first cohort.

We're studying about diversity . . . but we (didn't) deal with each other's cultural uniqueness until the last minute . . . We all come from different backgrounds, linked to our culture or ethnicity, but we never sat down and talked about it. (1st cohort—S&E)

As this student implies, with the first cohort we naively assumed that if we recruited a very diverse group of students, we would automatically create a classroom tolerant of diversity. Quite the opposite occurred. We found, instead, that students often developed a kind of “competing” diversity—almost vying to see who had been most marginalized. This kind of feedback from our students led to some significant changes in the curriculum, particularly in the structure of the Integrative Seminar, to overtly surface and struggle with the questions of difference early in the program. These changes are described in more detail in the next section.

**Support.** The cohort learning model was generally a positive experience for students. For the most part, students worked effectively together, forming study groups, working on group projects for classes, and providing valuable academic and personal support for each other through challenges they face together. Although all the students admitted to the program showed considerable intellectual promise, many had histories of marginal academic success. Most students reported that they felt supported by the other members of their cohort and perhaps were able to accomplish more within the group than they might have individually.

I have more responsibility than if I were just doing it by myself . . . There are lots of times I wouldn't have studied as hard, just because I'm lazy, but because I had this commitment to the group, I went to my study groups. (2nd cohort—S&E)

The learning community cohort model strengthened each student's abilities by providing a shared environment where peers both in and outside of class reinforced the learning. Connections between classes and concepts became more obvious because opportunities existed to discuss and synthesize material, and confidence grew from working with a familiar group towards a common goal.

Another student commented about the important role the responsibility she felt toward the others in her cohort played in keeping her on track academically in the program when she might otherwise have fallen back into her old, unsuccessful strategies for learning.

I don't think I would have graduated if I hadn't been in the program. I don't think I would have gone to a class on a regular basis if it had been just in an auditorium where it's easy to be missed out of a class of 200 people as opposed to 15. I don't want to imply when I say I wouldn't have made it, that it was easy. It was the way it was set up—the structure and the support . . . I knew that these fourteen other people would be there every day going through the exact same things as me. Even though not everyone was applying to law school, even those who weren't were there to support those who were . . . I know that played a big part in helping me through that last year because I was just really worn out. (1st cohort—interview)

Further, the learning community fostered closer working relationships with faculty, providing a learning situation more specifically responsive to their individual needs. Faculty members were able to observe a student's work, and then help the student set and work to achieve goals for each term throughout the two-year period. For example, the following student recognized that the program helped him develop his "voice." Notice how he uses the language of "support and challenge" to describe how his faculty member persistently prodded him to talk, to use his voice. The context of a long-term learning community provided the opportunity for that reminder and prompt to be given enough times that the seed of truth in it finally took root.

I knew I had a voice in me, but [the Law and Diversity Program] helped that voice be heard. I felt that I was really . . . silenced a lot in my life, and now I'm really a strong voice and I'm very opinionated . . . I think a lot of that had to do with the program because I think that, for the first time in my life, others believed in me and believed that I had something to say and wanted to hear what I had to say . . . the support and the challenge and the constant reminder through evaluations that I wasn't talking—all of those things were planted seeds, and it basically helped. I could have developed my voice in other ways, but it happened because I was challenged in so many ways in the program, and made to believe in myself and believe that it's okay to have this voice. I do not have to be the same as everyone else in the room; so that's the highest compliment I can give the Law and Diversity Program. (2nd cohort—interview)

The cohort-based Integrated-Seminar Learning Community model provided fertile ground for other kinds of profound learning. Because the students entering the program agreed to work together for a two-year period, they had multiple opportunities to practice the engagement of conflicts and differences and to learn how to participate in collective deliberations about issues where participants have radically different convictions and may not ever reach agreement. They explored varied points of view, experienced each others' biases, opinions, and convictions, and began to use each others' perspectives in the formation of their own interpretations. The path to understanding difference was not always smooth. Any number of integrative seminars, especially in the first term or two, ended with

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students angry and frustrated. Issues of race and racism, of homophobia and ablism, are emotionally charged. Faculty demanded that they move past their essentialist understanding of their own experience with being marginalized in the American society and examine the structures and forces that support that marginalization. These discussions often required that students learn to actively listen to others' experiences as well as relate their own. As one student in the second cohort reflects:

*Through the study of the critique of the legal system and the questions about justice in the American society, the classroom became a place where difficult discussions about prejudice, racism, and privilege were engaged.*

I think the team [cohort and faculty] matched up really well. It was very positive overall. It may have been frustrating or offensive or hurtful, but it was a learning experience that was necessary . . . It would be difficult to get that anywhere else. The positive thing about it was that everybody was heard and I gained confidence . . . When you're trying to understand and learn about people's diversity, I think you have to stay with people for a long period of time. It took some time, a year, for us to trust each other and to discuss things that were pretty controversial. Things came up like prejudice and racism, and unless you know somebody, you're not going to feel you have the freedom to express your views. So, in that sense, I think being with everyone for two years was good. (2nd Cohort—interview)

**Challenges.** The cohort model and the program's curriculum were designed to examine the consequences of prejudice and discrimination, including those which arise from confrontations with difference, otherness, or foreignness—including culture, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, age, sexual orientation, and ability. These issues not only provided students with new information and ideas, but also engendered some strong emotions associated with diversity and conflict. Through the study of the critique of the legal system and the questions about justice in the American society, the classroom became a place where difficult discussions about prejudice, racism, and privilege were engaged. Students and faculty in the program found that struggling with issues of difference was often challenging and painful.

The cohort [learning community] model? I have a mixed reaction to it. I didn't like it while I was in it, but I could sit here and tell you so many things that I got out of it. I didn't like it because of the stress it caused me. There were lots of different types of people and personalities involved in a competitive type of field [law], so if you get knocked around a lot you don't like it. The positive thing was learning to like different kinds of people and to compromise to avoid conflict—learning to understand differences. You try to walk in the other person's shoes. I learned how to work through things with other people. (2nd cohort—interview)

As this quote implies, there were significant challenges and areas of conflict that the program faculty had to address as they worked with each cohort. Some of the issues were typical of those found in most learning communities. Students

found both benefit and challenge in learning “in tight quarters” with the same students and faculty over a number of quarters. When a learning community sustains over a longer time-frame than a term, finding ways to help students learn to disagree and deal with conflict is critical, and the faculty in this program learned over time that it was necessary to deal with the conflicts and differences up front and in the beginning.

Nevertheless, we were caught off guard by the number of other challenges that this particular sustained cohort model also presented. Feedback from students made it clear that although the program’s curriculum was clearly organized around the issues of oppression, social justice, and the economic, political, and social results of prejudice, there was not enough work done to connect these themes with the very real life experiences of the students nor to examine the ways in which issues of “difference” were evident within the cohort. The challenge was to find ways to give students extensive opportunities to practice strategies for discussing issues about which they cared intensely, and challenge them to learn to listen to others’ experiences and challenges, explore multiple ways of knowing and forming knowledge, and open themselves to experiences of modifying their own understandings based on what they learned from others’ contributions.

**Long-term Impact-Cohort Learning Community Model.** A number of sources exist that have allowed us to assess the long-term impacts of this program on the graduates. A follow-up study was conducted as a dissemination project for the original FISPE grant (Bannai & Eaton, 1997). Graduates from the first two cohorts were interviewed in depth, and faculty in law schools our graduates attended were also contacted for their perspectives. In addition to these interviews, the final Summary and Evaluation (S&E) essays and the internship reports written by the graduates of each cohort provided reflective statements and insights into their experiences.

In both the interviews and the essays, graduates from the Law and Diversity program reported that they were able to carry their enriched perspectives about difference into their work worlds. These abilities were particularly evident in comments from the FISPE follow-up study. As we interviewed faculty and administrators in law schools and asked them to comment about the LDP graduates enrolled in their schools, they identified some powerful intangible/non-academic outcomes. The most illuminating of the responses dealt with how our students related to others, contributed productively to discussions of diversity in the law, and assumed leadership positions in their schools. For example, one law school faculty supervisor particularly noticed this graduate’s “open-mindedness” and his ability to represent a wide spectrum of individuals.

He [the LDP graduate in law school] has the confidence and ability to relate to all kinds of people and to be able to advocate on their behalf in court. He was really outstanding in those terms. He had a number of clients who were very, very different, not your run-of-the-mill people that we run into on the street or we associate with. He had some very different clients. One of them was a client who was dressed very outrageously, was very openly gay, and it was an issue in the case that he

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handled. He did a wonderful job working with that client. Another client had mental health problems and was accused of attacking police officers. He did a very nice job representing that client. He was very non-judgmental in his approach to representing individuals. We also had a number of discussions in the class as we discussed cases. It was good to have his perspective on these issues and to see his open-mindedness. (Faculty from the University of Washington law school in an interview about student from the 1st cohort)

Another faculty member commented on two graduates’ abilities to build alliances and coalitions across racial lines. These graduates seemed to have developed perspectives that help them move more easily across the boundaries and borders that often separate different ethnic groups.

What strikes me about both of them [two LDP students attending Hamline Law School] is that they draw friends from across racial lines. They don’t just hang with other students from their particular racial group or just with other students of color. I think that they have a strong commitment to the whole idea of the law school community being a community that values diversity. They started a Multicultural Law Students Association to create a forum where issues related to diversity can be discussed. (Faculty at Hamline Law School in an interview about two 2nd cohort students)

In addition to their enhanced abilities to work across differences, graduates of the program also report that their experiences in the cohort taught them the ability to form alliances and work with other types of groups in their graduate programs. Because they had successful experiences working through the difficulties of working collaboratively, they were more likely to stick with group projects that were not going well initially, and offer some ideas about how to make the group work more productively.

Our [law] school’s effort to have a sort of a cohort situation is not working very well, but I think that having been in cohort learning situations that work a lot better gives you a way to say that this group is not working right. If I hadn’t hung out in some kind of a cohort learning group, I would have done what I usually would have done, which is to say, ‘I just won’t participate. I’ll learn what I have to know by myself, I’ll do what I have to do.’ [Instead] I’m able to say this is not how this is supposed to be working. I can influence other students who have the same thoughts to speak up and say that this isn’t right. I don’t think I would have ever come to that and been willing to say it and encourage others to contribute to that if I hadn’t known there are good ways to learn in groups. (2nd cohort—interview)

Graduates also reported that these skills transferred to their subsequent work settings and professional organizations. They found themselves more able to put aside personal differences in order to work toward common goals.



It [the cohort model] was a really positive thing. I think it's positive for me presently because again I'm in sort of a cohort situation. There are 12 staff people who go through a decision-making process, problem solving, and different things together, so I've already learned how to function in a group, because I think it's a learned thing. It really applies to what I'm doing now. It makes it easier to not be personal about things when you work in a group and things become personal, but [instead to] set aside those personalities and move forward in a group towards something. (1st cohort—interview)

### **Service- and Community-based Learning: Making Theory Real**

From the inception of the program, the faculty planned a significant community-based component as an essential strategy to make the issues of justice-seeking “real” for the students. Graduates of the Law and Diversity Program cited this community-based learning as a critical part of the success of the program, allowing them to practice the theories and skills they learned in the classroom setting in agencies working with varied aspects of the law.

The internship gave me information that my classes could not give me about “being” a lawyer, about thinking like a lawyer. That information could only be gained by paying attention to lawyers as they did their jobs. But beyond being an informed observer, my internship gave me the opportunity to participate in the process with the skills that I had, while also assisting me to acquire new skills. (3rd cohort—S&E)

Their feedback makes it clear that the community-based work strengthened and—deepened the learning they had begun together in the learning community. The field experience helped build a connection between the abstract theories and legal case studies to how these concepts play out in application. They also found that their internships provided experience that made them more attractive candidates in the very competitive law school application process.

The internship allowed me to move from studying legal theory to being a part of the practice of law. Studying legal theory generated my initial interest in the law, being a part of the practice of law cemented my interest in the law. Had there not been an internship, my experience would have been immensely more shallow and the picture incomplete. Additionally, the terrific letter of recommendation that I earned from my internship sponsor helped me to both get into law school and get a job while in law school. Without the internship the program would have been less effective in its ultimate goal of getting more underrepresented citizens into the legal field as practicing attorneys. (2nd cohort—e-mail communication)

The internship also gave students access to role models practicing law. These sponsors were often minorities themselves and were typically professionals who have dedicated their careers to building a more just American society.

My experience with the Lummi Tribe's Public Defender's Office contributed to a better understanding of my goals to use the law as a tool for social change. I learned that lawyers can be tremendously helpful to people simply by the knowledge and resources they have access to. [My sponsor] always took the time to talk with anyone that called or came to his office with legal questions. I know that regardless of the specific field of law I go into, that is the kind of attitude I will strive for. (2nd cohort—internship report)

Not only did the internships and other service-learning opportunities provide the opportunity to practice skills learned in the classroom setting, they challenged students to view the legal world through new lenses. Through their work with clients, they were able to move beyond their own experiences as a member of a group that may have been marginalized by our society to a broader understanding of the experiences of others whose experiences were dissimilar. The service-learning experience also strengthened their commitment to work for others through the law or related professions.

My internship provided me with the opportunity to experience something that I never would have in my lifetime. I believe that some people will never know what it feels like being in jail. I think that people never get to know the other side of the law, as an inmate does. (3rd cohort—e-mail communication)

I have taken my internship at Sun Community House seriously and know that I have affected my client's lives and they have changed my outlook on life. When I think about my first perceptions about Sun, mental illness and the people in particular, I think of how ignorant I was when I began. I can't believe that I was once scared of working with this population. Mental health was outside of my comfort zone, but no longer seems to be so . . . My experience with assistant case management for the mental health community has given me all the more reason to pursue my education in law and become an advocate for the less fortunate. (2nd cohort—S&E)

**Service-Learning–Long-Term Impact.** The intersection of the community-based component with the deep learning about differences in the learning community was also cited by students as a source of their current commitment to community action work and their sense of engagement in the world.

The [LDP] program reinforced the value of respecting differences. By learning to listen, value, and respect other people's opinions and life choices, I was better prepared to step into a role with the Public

Defender's office in which I dealt with incarcerated people of all walks of life, accused of everything from vandalism to 1st Degree Murder. The internship helped me get into law school and get a job while in law school, but more importantly it gave me a sense of what it's like to roll up my sleeves and get "down and dirty" with what society sees as outcasts. I valued the role of being a part of society's safety net and it has encouraged me to pursue unpopular but necessary causes in our society." (2nd cohort—e-mail communication)

Their community-based experiences also helped to solidify some of the values that brought them to the program initially. Witnessing others working in professional capacities in community agencies affirmed their choices.

This internship program reinforced what I've always wanted to do, which is working to eliminate the problems individuals face in our society. I don't know what the future holds for me, but I know one thing for sure. You don't need money, fame or a great amount of education to lend a hand to someone who desperately needs it. (2nd cohort—internship report)

Graduates recalled the integrated seminar with the rest of the members of their learning community as an important component of their community-based learning experience. Not only did the seminar provide an opportunity to problem solve some of the challenges of service-learning placements, but it also helped deepen the learning from the internship.

The integrated seminar was useful in that I was able to verbalize the frustrations I was having in my internships. I was able to communicate my frustrations as to why I felt the "systems" didn't work. I was able to listen to my classmates and think about solutions that would make the "systems" work. (3rd cohort—e-mail communication)

The seminar forced me to address the conflict issues that arose from being cast into tight quarters with other people [in my field placement] who were so different from me. This was a blessing because it forced me to learn how to successfully embrace the value in differences and recognize the ease with which miscommunication and misperception can occur. The seminar was also a good opportunity to learn and benchmark my internship experience via the experiences of my cohort. (2nd cohort—e-mail communication)

Community service has become an important aspect of their professional lives even after graduation from law school. A significant number of the graduates referred to continued community service in their interviews.

I've started volunteering at a teen center that's giving teens in the Renton and Kent areas a place to go so they're not running around in the streets

*Additionally, this program reminds us of the power of diversity as a vehicle for interdisciplinary learning and teaching. The issues woven through this program—oppression, social justice, conflict mediation, class, race, gender, sexual orientation—all have direct connection with students' lives, bringing the power of connected learning into the classroom.*

causing trouble. [1st cohort graduate currently working as a juvenile rehabilitation counselor—interview)

I'm on the board of directors of Association of Gay and Lesbian Youth Advocates who run a facility called Lambert House on Capitol Hill—a safe house for gay and lesbian teens, 14-22, many who are homeless. I also do contract reviews for contractors who do work through the house, and do shifts there pretty regularly, so I'm actually at the ground level working with the youths. (1st cohort graduate currently attending graduate school—interview)

Although many graduates might have volunteered in community settings even if they had not participated in the program, many referred to ways in which they use the skills gained in the program to enhance their community service work. They often described the varied ways they were able to put both their legal perspectives and their deepened understanding of differences to use to help others.

In law school, I continued my community action work by working as the president of my school's Public Interest Law Program and volunteering at a free legal clinic. I also taught classes for students and professors who worked at the legal clinic. In short, I continue to work in areas where I can use the law and what I have learned in the LDP, to actively participate in multi-diverse communities! (3rd cohort - e-mail communication)

In 1997, the American Association of Colleges and Universities made recommendations for curriculum transformation relating to diversity in their report *American Pluralism and the College Curriculum: Higher Education In a Diverse Democracy*. These recommendations included four essential areas.

**Each student's education should include explorations of the following:**

**1. Experience, Identity, and Aspiration:** The study of one's own particular inherited and constructed traditions, identity communities, and significant questions, in their complexity.

**2. United States Pluralism and the Pursuits of Justice:** An extended and comparative exploration of diverse peoples in this society, with significant attention to their differing experiences of United States democracy and the pursuits—sometimes successful, sometimes frustrated—of equal opportunity.

**3. Experiences in Justice-seeking:** Encounters with systemic constraints on the development of human potential in the United States and experiences in community-based efforts to articulate principles of justice, expand opportunity, and redress inequities.

**4. Experiences in Multiplicity and Relational Pluralism in Majors, Concentrations, and Programs:** Extensive participation in forms of learning that foster sustained exploration of and deliberation about contested issues important in particular communities of inquiry and practice.

Taken together, these complementary forms of learning—personal, societal, participatory, dialogical—constitute a strong curriculum for diversity and democracy. The forms of learning we recommend here take it as a given that students must learn to grapple, in every part of their learning, with multiplicity, ambiguity, and irreducible differences as defining conditions in the contemporary world.

The combination of the learning community model and community-based learning has provided a venue for Fairhaven College’s Law and Diversity Program to reflect all four of AAC&U’s principles. As the program is intended to prepare students for the study of law and justice, the essential elements of principles two and three are woven inextricably into a curriculum focused on issues of justice and reciprocal obligation, which is both academic and experiential. In the both the curriculum and in their field settings, students examine issues of poverty, race, racism, and economic and social justice. The curriculum is both interdisciplinary and skills-intensive to familiarize students with basic legal terminology and concepts, and help them view the law in a larger social, historical, and political context. The program also gives them the opportunity to hone the learning, reading, writing, research, analytical, and verbal skills essential for the study of law, and to practice these skills in a substantial field component.

Additionally, this program reminds us of the power of diversity as a vehicle for interdisciplinary learning and teaching. The issues woven through this program—oppression, social justice, conflict mediation, class, race, gender, sexual orientation—all have direct connection with students’ lives, bringing the power of connected learning into the classroom. They are also issues that lend themselves to inquiry across disciplines. The faculty in this program use not only the obvious tools of political, economic, and sociological analysis to engage the students, but also literature, biography, autobiography, and communications theory as methods to foster increased understanding and dialogue about issues which now divide our nation.

Many interdisciplinary programs seem reluctant to include issues of oppression and justice-seeking as the central themes in their programs, perhaps because of faculty members’ real fears of confrontation, resistance, or entrenchment in old ideas, patterns, or stereotypes that may occur for students from both minority and majority communities. From the beginning, the Law and Diversity Program has focused on justice-seeking and building empowerment to foster solution-finding. Through the program and the community-based internships, the students encounter people who are trying to make the world a better place for those who are disenfranchised. Through the experiential part of the program, they begin to see hope and to find a role to play in the field of law.

Perhaps this hard work requires the sustained effort of a two-year program and could not be accomplished in a one-semester learning community. We still have a great deal to learn, but our graduates' voices tell us clearly that the investment of time and resources required to make diversity and issues of oppression and justice-seeking the center of a program may have long-term learning benefits far beyond the content covered.

From my experiences in the community, I have seen many people in our society who are victims of our social and economic system. I want to be a child[ren's] advocate because I have seen how abuse, neglect and violence can make children helpless victims, and I understand that long-term help of my community must start with the next generation . . . Many parts of my community desperately need help that can come in part through a greater voice in the legal system. I want to be a part of that voice. (2nd cohort—S&E)

Over all, I learned a great lesson in life. I know now that in order to effect changes in public policy, you must go through the government or the court system. I know that I have the ability to effect significant changes as a single individual in our society; one person can make a difference. (1st cohort—S&E)

Through their work in the learning community and in their field settings, our students are learning to become “border-crossers.” They are developing the capacity to see another's point of view, even when it differs from their own. These graduates will be better prepared to become citizens of this increasingly diverse nation—engaged citizens who can make a difference.

### **Notes**

1. Four major sources of feedback from graduates of the Law and Diversity Program were used to prepare this chapter. First, all students at Fairhaven College write a Summary and Evaluation (S&E) paper as part of the final Senior Seminar. In this document, students reflect on their college experience. Second, all students at Fairhaven write a reflective report about their senior projects. For all the Law and Diversity students, the senior project was a community-based placement in an agency or government office that worked with clients impacted by the legal system. Third, as part of the final dissemination report for the FIPSE grant, graduates from the first two cohorts were interviewed one to three years after graduation. Some faculty from the law schools graduates attended were also interviewed. Finally, in spring 2001, all graduates of the Law and Diversity Program were e-mailed a questionnaire to solicit feedback about how the Law and Diversity Program currently affects their work or community service.

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