

**POLITICAL EDUCATION PROJECTS:  
Transforming Frames, Narratives & Relationships to 'Place'**

**Application for Liberal Arts Research Collaborative**

**Submitted by:**

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**December 7, 2012**

## **POLITICAL EDUCATION PROJECTS: Transforming Frames, Narratives & Relationships to 'Place'**

Political education projects equip people to hold competing and contradictory thoughts, to think critically about dominant and marginalized narratives, and at their best, enable people to understand their own place in a larger community. Such projects come in many forms, ranging from a day spent at the Zena Forest, or a one-time tour of farmworkers' homes, to a year-long campaign for marriage equality, or an effort in a building sustainable community food system. But no matter their form, they all seek to raise public consciousness about issues related to access, resource allocation, and what is necessary to build economic, social and environmental justice.

Each of the research projects proposed through this application attempts to understand the approaches and models communities use to shift others' thinking and facilitate social change. We are each asking a set of research questions that center around understanding the methods and effects of political education projects that transform people's consciousness from knowledge, to taking "everyday" personal action, to working on larger issues for community change. In each case, these changed perspectives can result in a transformed relationship to place. Both of the teams in our research community comes from the social sciences and will utilize the scientific method. While the larger group does have methodological consensus, each team is at a different stage in the research process and will be conducting literature reviews and original data collection and analysis. All of the participants in the community have a demonstrated investment in the research of other members and anticipate great opportunities for collaboration, not only in sharing and reviewing sources of information but also in reciprocal site visits, critical analysis of each other's work, and shared "teach-ins" around the focal point of each of our research projects.

Through our analysis of political education projects, we will develop and deepen our academic interests in how to create models of experiential education that aim to provide transformative moments, whether these transformations happen in a classroom or field setting, in areas of intense research or in everyday life. The aim of each team within our larger research community is to analyze and/or create models of political education with the most effective outcomes. LARC provides the unique opportunity for faculty and students to collaborate across and within disciplines and themselves, to engage in dislocation and new relationships to rhetorical and physical place. Each of our research projects will be strengthened through the feedback of those who are not necessarily "insiders," and who do not take-for-granted the issues that the research might. Collaboration through LARC will allow us all to be stretched theoretically, methodologically and interdisciplinarily, hallmarks of the liberal arts tradition.

To facilitate our collaboration as a community, we will meet two times in April (the first time for a "kick-off"/planning meeting and the second time to collaborate on our IRB applications). Our project will span from May 23 until August 1, and during that time, we will meet both in our paired research teams and as an integrated learning community. These community gatherings will include discussing articles from each of our respective fields to get a basis in the research issue, visiting each others' "field" sites for a personal engagement with everyone's research project, and providing feedback on the work products of our colleagues during the final weeks of the summer. We believe that this model for a research community will allow us demonstrate the importance of collaborative work within the liberal arts.

**Emily Drew**, Associate Professor of Sociology & Ethnic Studies

*“Farmworker Reality Tours: Challenging Assumptions About Oregon’s Latino Immigrants”*

While many residents and visitors to Oregon are familiar with the Woodburn Outlet stores, the state’s second largest economy, most are unfamiliar with the conditions that exist directly behind the mall.

In the agricultural fields west of the mall, workers are subjected to unsafe working and living conditions, including exposure to pesticides, unregulated labor conditions, and substandard housing.

Amid the strategies that community leaders are using to challenge these conditions, one deserves critical and scholarly attention. Through the “Farmworker Reality Tour,” outsiders participate in a political education project that seeks to transform their thinking about issues of immigration, labor, family, and community development.

For more than a century, tourism into neighborhoods has provided a channel through which tourists “experience” the ethnic Other. Through the “gaze,” tourists consume a version of communities of color that maintains their own social position, and that “publicly declares and perpetuates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgement and enjoyment of racial difference” (hooks 1992: 21). However, amid criticism that ethnic tourism maintains essentialist construction and even exacerbates social stratification, political education projects emerge in which knowledge producers from marginalized communities construct representations of their “home” that allow for self-definition, agency, visibility and voice. Through Farmworker Reality Tours, visitors to Woodburn experience a tourism educational project that complicates the stories about immigrants that dominate public discourse. Community organizers represent immigrants as hard-working and major contributors to local and national economies. Guides from the Farmworkers’ Development Corporation act as knowledge producers who disrupt the prevailing narrative about immigrants in general, and Latinos in particular. As Santos and Buzinde assert: “Such representational practices have the power to reorganize people’s sense of self, build alternative conceptions of realizable futures, and consequently function as agents of social transformation” (2007: 323).

As a sociologist, I am interested in understanding what compels non-immigrant people to take these tours, what they believe pre/post-tour, and what they do with the education received through these tours. During my participation in LARC, I will gain access to this research site, engage in ethnographic observations of the tours, and conduct interviews with participants and project organizers. I am interested in understanding how these “reality” tours inform and challenge the thinking of participants, and the extent to which participants’ thinking changed (moving knowledge into action) following the one-day “experience” of the living and working conditions of farmworkers.

Funding: I do not currently have any grants, but have identified two potential funding sources. The first is through the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality (Hispanic Initiative) and the second is Russell Sage, both of which offer small research grants for community-based research.

Collaboration with Undergraduate Mentee: The undergraduate I will work with is a strong critical thinker and writer, and well-equipped to engage in independent and original research. Katie’s critical analysis about politics and social (in)equality is so laser, that I am usually the one learning from zir (and lamenting that I have lost my own “edge”). Ze is conversant in several interdisciplinary discourses, namely ethnic studies and queer theory, which are at the centerpiece of zir research. I say all of this simply to acknowledge that ze is as likely to challenge and teach me, as much as will collaborate and mentor. The area I think I will best be able to support Katie is through the research process itself, helping zir to develop a sample, collect data, and analyze results.

**BUDGET REQUEST**

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| <b>Research Travel: Roundtrip Mileage</b> | <b>\$1335</b> |
| Salem to Washington (x3)                  | \$525         |
| Salem to Woodburn (x8)                    | \$320         |
| Lodging & Food (x3)                       | \$450         |
| <b>Research Participation Incentives</b>  | <b>\$320</b>  |
| Interview Incentives (9 people x \$30)    | \$270         |
| Survey Participation Lottery Drawing      | \$50          |
| <b>Research Expenses</b>                  | <b>\$270</b>  |
| Survey Monkey (90 days, >10?'s)           | \$90          |
| Tour Ticket (discounted, x8)              | \$80          |
| Central texts (x4)                        | \$100         |
| <b>Related Conference Expenses</b>        | <b>\$637</b>  |
| Registration (June 12-14, 2013)           | \$125         |
| Lodging (3x \$124)                        | \$372         |
| Travel (280 roundtrip miles)              | \$140         |
| <b>TOTAL:</b>                             | <b>\$2562</b> |

**Budget justification:** Both researchers on this team will engage in low-cost ethnographic work; one will travel to Washington (the site of the recent marriage legalization campaign) and the other will travel to Woodburn to experience the tours. We both plan to offer people incentives to be interviewed, providing them with a minimal stipend in gratitude for their time and participation. Additionally, in order to get participants to take a survey after the tour, I will offer two \$25 amazon certificates prizes (names will be drawn from those who took the survey). Under research expenses, we have included the cost of hosting an online surveymokey, ticket cost to attend the tours, and four books that will become central to the project and eventually senior thesis. Finally, I have included expenses for local travel to the 9th Biennial Farmworker Housing Conference in Redmond, OR from June 12-14, 2013.

**Katie Buonocore**, American Ethnic Studies junior

*“Dominant and Subordinated Narratives in Queer Communities and the Effects of the ‘Marriage Equality’ Movement”*

At the turn of the century, the legal battle for gay marriage in the United States began to gain ground with the legalization of same-sex domestic partnerships in some states and, in others, even same-sex marriage. Within the past decade, marriage has become increasingly visible and publicized, culminating recently in a ‘marriage win’ in four states. For some, the narrative of the modern struggle for LGBTQ rights is centered around the symbolic significance and the civil rights conferred by marriage, with same-sex marriage representing the primary or even single most important modern cause. For others within the queer community, gay marriage is neither a priority nor, for some, even worth pursuing. Other issues, such as AIDS education, the provision of safe shelters and appropriate services for homeless queer youth, and violence prevention may be much higher priorities. How is it, then, that ‘marriage equality’ came to dominate mainstream rhetoric about LGBTQ issues?

To explore this question, and to delve deeper into the narrative about the continuing struggle for queer rights, I am interested in examining the way members of the queer community represent and understand themselves, both within their communities and in the context of ‘mainstream society’ (or, for my purposes, a dominant narrative).

My project has several goals. First, I will conduct a review of several major gay rights organizations’ literature regarding their goals, particularly as they relate to gay marriage. In doing so, I hope not only to understand how these organizations prioritize different issues, but whom they understand to be the constituents of the queer community. Second, I will conduct a similar review of the literature of several local, grassroots organizations, focusing especially on those which serve marginalized people in the queer community (e.g. people experiencing homelessness, queer people of color, queer youth, etc.). Finally, I will conduct interviews with individuals, from representatives of organizations to, especially, the people these organizations seek to serve. To understand the effects of large-scale prioritization of gay marriage, I want to acknowledge both those who benefit from this effort and those who have experienced detrimental effects (e.g. youth experiencing homelessness who have had services reduced because of budget cuts funneling funds toward the marriage ‘push’).

Having come into an understanding of myself as a queer person around the turn of the century, I have been strongly influenced by the push for ‘marriage equality’ and, for years, understood this to be the single most important LGBTQ issue. As a person of great privilege within the queer community (a white, economically secure, college-educated, able-bodied citizen), I have never feared marginalization by the priorities of the mainstream. As an American Ethnic Studies major, I have begun to interrogate my own positionality and question the centrist/assimilationist focus of the dominant voices within the queer community. I aim through my LARC research acknowledge the diverse and often-marginalized voices that exist within and outside the legal battle for gay marriage, and to re-center the narrative of the struggle for queer rights.

**Jennifer Johns**, Visiting Assistant Professor of Biology & Associate Director of Sustainable Agriculture Programs at Zena Farm

*“Personal and political transformation through new understandings about food”*

Political education begins with a process of unlearning, of critically assessing what we think we know about a subject and a coming to understand why we have come to these conclusions. This critical step loosens the grip of common perceptions by reframing conventional narratives as the product both of systems and institutions and of customs and habits. Experiential education can be a vital component of political education because it confronts participants with their own assumptions and habits in real time, through real life encounters, and thus reveals the limitations of their thinking.

At Zena Farm students encounter the art and science of farming. They work the soil, water and weed the fields, and harvest, prepare and sell what they have grown. Students raise the chickens, collect the eggs, and eventually slaughter, prepare, cook and eat the birds they raised. Students do not just meet farmers (though they do) but at least for a short while, they become farmers. These experiences, ripe with careful cultivation and growth, also depend on a confrontation with death – not only of the weeds and chickens, but also of commonly held expectations about farming and the production of food: that farming is simple or only for rednecks, that industrially produced food is the only way to feed the human populace, that organic agriculture is all good. Critically engaging with these and other dominant narratives about farming requires foregoing blithe relationships with the earth, with our food, and with each other: it challenges students by altering consciousness.

In my work at Zena Farm, I have seen such transformations take place and am dedicated to this LARC project because I want to gain a greater understanding of these transformative moments so I can more fully appreciate the types of conditions that enable them to happen, the effects they might have on students and teachers alike, and how experiential education can be fully a facet of political education. I want to learn about the models and methods that can enable individuals to countenance their physical and theoretical place in the current food system and begin to imagine themselves, their communities, and “society” as changeable and then changed. Through my research I will create model curricula that can be implemented at Zena Farm for three categories of political education experiences: extended visits (4-6 weeks), multiple one-day visits over a season or academic year (3-4 visits), and one-time only visits. Additionally, I will create rubrics to evaluate the “success” of these curricula in bringing students to these transformative moments of understanding. Future research will then quantify the results of the effectiveness of these various curricula similar to work by Galt (2012) and will be presented at the Sustainable Agriculture Education Association meetings.

Funding: I do not have any current funding to support this particular research. External granting possibilities include the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative grant through the USDA, due in March of 2013 and the Environmental Education grant through the EPA due in October 2013.

Collaboration with Undergraduate Mentee: Surabhi Mahajan is an incredibly organized whole systems thinker who is dedicated to the work she pursues. Her ability to synthesize information, form a coherent plan, and engage her fellow students in executing the plan is both admirable and a clear indication that she possesses the necessary attributes to successfully complete the research she proposes. Surabhi and I will work closely together this summer in our exploration of the experiential education literature, in establishing a medicinal herb garden at Zena, and in building on the relationships she has begun to form with students from the Chemawa Indian School. We will also benefit greatly from our collaboration with Drew and Katie, particularly through their experience in conducting survey and interview based research.

## BUDGET REQUEST

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| <b>Research Travel</b>                   | <b>\$280</b>  |
| Salem to Chemawa Indian School (x10)     | \$60          |
| Salem to Zena Farm (x20)                 | \$220         |
| <b>Research Participation Incentives</b> | <b>\$320</b>  |
| Interview Incentives (9 people x \$30)   | \$270         |
| Survey Participation Lottery Drawing     | \$50          |
| <b>Research Expenses</b>                 | <b>\$1060</b> |
| Medicinal Herb Garden costs              |               |
| Medicinal plants                         | \$200         |
| Hardscaping and signage                  | \$350         |
| Equipment rental for garden prep         | \$80          |
| Demonstration Garden costs               |               |
| Seed and inputs                          | \$130         |
| Hardscaping and signage                  | \$200         |
| Central texts (x6)                       | \$150         |
| <b>TOTAL:</b>                            | <b>\$1710</b> |

**Budget justification:** To conduct the proposed research, both investigators working at Zena Farm will need to create additional gardens. Paths and raised beds will be created in the medicinal herb garden after an initial tilling. Similarly, the demonstration garden, established to complement the shorter term curricula designed by Jennifer Johns, will also include paths and raised beds. Signage identifying the plants and concepts in both gardens will enhance the visitor experience. We are proposing to incentivise participation in our interviews with students through payments of \$30 to thank participants and compensate them for their time. We will conduct a drawing for two \$25 gift cards for people who turned in their surveys about their experiences at Zena Farm. Lastly we hope to reimburse transportation costs to and from Zena and the Chemawa Indian Boarding School and buy a few books that are necessary for the initial research and can be added to the (small) library at Zena.

**Surabhi Mahajan:** Biology sophomore

*“Challenging assumptions about community health through place based education”*

Throughout an experience such as college—or living at a boarding school—students may undergo one large or several small clarifying moments that can change the way they may want to live their life at that moment and even change their life path. These moments are central to understanding political education because it is through these clarifying moments that students come to understand the competing narratives that provide a backdrop to their education. By exploring the different stories that they encounter about themselves, the things they are studying, or the world around them, students’ lives can be transformed.

As a biology major, I am interested in transforming people’s lives through medicine. I plan to pursue a medical degree, so that I can work to refute the dominant narratives in Western culture about personal and public health. Eventually, I want to combine what I learn through medical school with an understanding of traditional herbal remedies and lifestyle choices to teach others about alternative pathways to good health. As a first step on this path I would like to establish a medicinal herb garden at Zena Farm.

In *The Sand County Almanac*, Leopold writes, “There are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from the furnace.” I would add, respectfully, that it is also dangerous to believe that medicine comes from the pharmacy. Zena Farm already provides an alternative narrative for sustainable living through the production of food. With the addition of a medicinal herb garden, we could add to that narrative by bringing native plants that have both food and medicinal uses into the experiences of students who visit the farm. This would help students understand that there are alternative choices to industrial foods and medicines—and that both are essential to good health.

I would like to establish the medicinal herb garden at Zena with input from students at the Chemawa Indian Boarding School and study how their relationship with this project and their interactions with the medicinal herb garden itself can bring clarifying moments that influence their understanding of “good health.” As a tutor at the Chemawa Indian Boarding School, I currently take a weekly class with Prof. Dobkins where I learn about the history of the Chemawa Indian School and about how to effectively tutor the kids at Chemawa. Along with tutoring, I also serve on a special task force that is working with students who qualify to complete applications to 5 colleges. As part of this process, I helped organize a service learning project for the Chemawa students at Zena Farm this past October.

Through interviews and surveys, I would like to assess what narratives the Chemawa students are guided by when considering personal health choices. I would then like to assess their current recognition of native plants and natural medicines at Zena. The next step in this research project would be to understand how students from the Chemawa Indian School interact with the native plants and natural medicines we plant in our medicinal herb garden. Through gaining recognition of the actual plant and of its ethnobotanic properties, the Chemawa students might experience a clarifying moment that will illuminate not only a shift in understanding about pathways to good health, but also potentially a shift in understanding about their own history with these plants.

While my initial project is intended to be with Chemawa students, this work can be extended to Willamette students and others who visit the medicinal herb garden at Zena Farm.