Supporting the Community through Community Supported Agriculture

Introduction

Many students are introduced to the social sciences through ISS 1120 The Social Environment. As taught at the Wolfson Campus, ISS 1120 also incorporates elements of global citizenship and civic engagement, as well as Earth learning. Students are often disconnected from the food production system and often have no idea how food is produced and the role of agriculture in sustaining society. The following lesson introduces students to the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model and aims to show students that agriculture can be reintegrated into communities to promote the overall health and well-being of the natural and social environments.

Goals

The following exercise will introduce students to the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model through a trip to Verde Farms in Homestead, an extended service learning component, or a lecture on the work being done there. Many students have no idea where their food comes from or how food is produced, or what this means for the environment both at the local and global levels. Through this lesson, students will be reconnected with one of the most fundamental and essential activities for human and planetary survival: food production. Students will learn about the ways in which agriculture is being reintroduced and reintegrated into urban and suburban communities to promote healthier and more sustainable living for both the social and natural environments. Using Verde Farms as a model, students will learn that the location of CSAs within the community makes them more responsive to the community’s needs and health as opposed to disconnected corporate farms and grocery stores. CSAs provide the community with many benefits, such as green space, jobs and job training, reduced allergies through the consumption of local products, bees, a reduced carbon footprint, and educational opportunities.

Instructional Objectives
At the end of the lesson, students should:

1. Understand what Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is;
2. Understand the crucial role CSAs can play in revitalizing and sustaining communities;
3. Understand how agricultural production works and the differences between organic and conventional farming methods;
4. Understand the environmental impacts of locally sourced foods versus global commodity chains;
5. Feel empowered to make proper food choices by using their purchasing power to create change in the world.

**Assignment**

The following activity may be presented within the context of the discussion of global agricultural systems or the local supply of food to the community. It is designed to make students aware of how food is produced and the disconnect with farming systems that has developed through industrial food production. Students will learn about efforts to reintroduce food production into the local community and ways in which they can use their purchasing power to make choices that lead to a healthier planet and body. It can be designed as either a short lesson encompassing as little as one 50-minute class session, a field trip to Verde farms, or a prolonged (20 hour) service learning engagement.

1. Students are introduced to industrial farming practices and the many deleterious effects this system of production is having on the natural environment, human health and the social environment. “Food Inc.” provides a profound and provocative introduction to industrial agriculture.
2. Students are introduced to the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model through:
   a. a class presentation by a representative of the local CSA Verde Farms:
   b. a field trip the local CSA Verde Farms (be prepared for significant amounts of paperwork);
   c. or a prolonged service learning engagement (20 hours) facilitated by the Institute for Civic Engagement and Democracy (iCED).
3. Students are asked to form groups of 4-5 and generate a list of some of the environmental, public health, and social issues faced by their community.
4. Students will then list the ways in which a CSA, or other community based agricultural model, can address some of the issues.
5. For a prolonged project, students will design a model community integrating agriculture and discuss how this will be beneficial for the natural and social environments, pointing to the specific issues from their lists.

6. Finally, students will write a reflection paper in which they explore the following questions:
   a. What role can Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) play in the local community?
   b. How does this differ from industrial agriculture and commoditized food chains?
   c. In your opinion, what would be a more sustainable and healthier model? To what degree do you think the CSA model, and other models of integrating agriculture in the community, are feasible, i.e. what are some potential obstacles and how can they be addressed?

7. Students will be assessed relative to the lesson objectives through either the reflection essay, or a combination of the reflection essay and model community design.