

Exploring Future Careers with Community Based Learning 101

UW-Parkside student Katie Knoff entered the spring semester of her Junior year without a declared major, but leaning towards something in hard sciences. While she liked taking classes in this field, she hadn't had a chance to reflect on how these classes might prepare her for a future career. Luckily, she had enrolled in Community Based Learning 101 that semester, where this type of reflection was a major part of the course.

Community Based Learning (CBL) 101 is an introductory course that prepares students to find their place in the community by exposing them to different philosophies/theories, good practice and applied exercises related to civic engagement and community development. In the course, students must choose an organization in the community where they will complete at least fifteen hours of service. In addition to this, students read excerpts from Martin Luther King Jr., Maya Angelou and Robert Frost that discuss what it means to be an active member of the community. At points in the semester, they submit in-depth reflection papers that connect their service to the readings and discussion in class, i.e. the importance of engaging in your community.

CBL 101 also gave students an opportunity to "try out" their future careers with projects at community organizations, working with staff to service clients or customers. Even though it is a General Education course, students in CBL 101 are encouraged to connect with an organization that tracks close to either what they are majoring in at Parkside, or what they have a particular interest in, if they are undecided on their major, such as Kate. She decided to volunteer at River Bend Nature Center in Racine. Her duties at the Center consisted of helping with outreach and educational events for families, as well as maintaining the grounds-activities she found boring at first but soon grew to enjoy.

In her work with River Bend Nature Center, Kate found that she cared deeply about the welfare of our environment, and enjoyed helping a reservation organization. She also found that she loved being able to work outside. After speaking to an Environmental Studies professor about her service, Kate realized that her passion lies in that area. In her final reflection paper, Kate was thrilled that "I was finally able to decide to major in Environmental Studies and minor in Biology. Something that once seemed so mundane and boring aided in the biggest decision of my life."

*If you are interested in taking CBL 101: Introduction to Community Based Learning, contact deslauri@uwp.edu or talk to your advisor!