

Community Research Course Engages Sociology Students with Real World Experiences

One of the most important facets of any college course is that it offers students the ability to gain real world knowledge that can be applied beyond the walls of the classroom. This was paramount when the Sociology Department at CCSU began brainstorming for new course ideas, and what emerged was the undergraduate course **Community Research**.

Associate Professor of Sociology Beth Merenstein, who taught and coordinated the project in the fall 2011 semester, stated, "We wanted to get our students to do more service learning and community engagement work, and gain a stronger connection to real world experiences. It's important to be graduating and really understand what some of the possibilities are that you can do with a major in Sociology."

The program is split into two courses that are taken concurrently and are worth four credits each – which might seem like a large number when compared to a typical three-credit course – but the level of work and commitment involved surpasses most courses.

Last fall, students conducted research for the non-profit organization Middlesex Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Middletown. The organization had awarded small grants to low-income individuals and families who had experienced immediate crises that could lead to homelessness, such as their car breaking down, prohibiting them from getting to work. The students interviewed the recipients of these grants in order to determine the success of the funding. "The idea was that the students would do research for non-profit organizations out in the community that don't have the time or resources to do it on their own," Merenstein said.

Merenstein and Hans Mudén, one of the students from the class who went on to intern in the field, are in the process of analyzing the research and data collected during the course. Mudén had only positive things to say about his experiences. "This course encouraged me to step outside of my normal comfort zone and realize some of my own strengths and weaknesses as an interviewer and a researcher, and has helped me to realize my full potential as a sociology student." For Mudén, the course served as an introduction to many opportunities he would not have known existed.



Associate Professor of Sociology Beth Merenstein reviews data collected by her students as part of the Community Research course.

In addition to the hands-on investigative work and reporting, students were tasked with more conventional classroom responsibilities like keeping journals and writing final reflection papers, which all added up to one of the best experiences Merenstein and her students have had at CCSU. "It was definitely the most rewarding class I've ever taught, and I've been teaching for over 15 years. To see the students who just soared with this level of learning – as if they had just been waiting for this kind of connection between the real world and what they've been learning in class – was extremely rewarding for me and for them." Some students, like Mudén, were so engrossed by the project that they chose to continue their education in similar fields. Merenstein explained, "One student from the class is continuing to work on the project this semester, two of the students from the class are doing internships in that field because of it, and four of the students are doing their capstone projects based on that course."

Merenstein hopes to establish the course as a regular part of the curriculum. The topic for the fall semester has already been decided. "We'll be working at a homeless shelter that's interested in understanding what makes some clients more successful than others; why some people are able to leave and never go back, and yet some tend to be chronic users. The shelter is trying to understand their own resources, why they're able to help some people but not others." Students will conduct interviews with clients and use the collected data to help evaluate the effectiveness of the shelter.

– Adam Saucier

*In the field:
Columbus House
Family Shelter
Director Dave
Shumway (left)
addresses commu-
nity members and
students from
the Community
Research class
outside the shelter
in Middletown.*



Student Athlete in the Spotlight:

Aaron Radden On Track for Success

When CCSU junior Aaron Radden runs on the track, his passion for the sport is as readily apparent as his athletic prowess. What originally began as a warm-up for running cross country has turned into something much more.

"In high school, I originally ran cross country and I did track just for conditioning purposes; I ended up being good at it," says Radden. "Now it's my main sport and I love it."

Radden has been on the track team for the three years that he's been at CCSU, and his list of accomplishments is demonstrative of his exceptional dedication. He was the Men's Most Valuable Performer at the 2010 Northeast Conference Championships; at the 2011 NEC Indoor Championships, Radden won first place in both the 100 and 200 meter sprints; he won the 60 meter event and placed third in the long jump at the 2011 Yale Collegiate Invitational; and since the beginning of 2010 he has competed in over 30 indoor and outdoor competitions, earning high marks in all of them.

"Aaron Radden is a leader. He is not an excellent student and athlete by accident. He puts in long hours, organizes his time wisely, and thinks deeply about his training regimen and his class material."

"Aaron is one of the hardest workers I have ever been around. He continues to improve and excel at not only the 200 meter, but all of his events. He is a fine representative of the University," states head coach for CCSU men's and women's cross country and track teams Eric Blake.

Of all his accomplishments, Radden's appearance at the NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships in March stands out above the



rest. He says, "Seven years of dedication, hard work, and sacrifice finally paid off with an NCAA Division I appearance." His hard work led to NCAA All-American second team honors after he finished tenth overall. The road that led to the competition wasn't easy, but Radden's determination and the support of his coaches earned him the coveted spot.

"Freshman year I missed a spot in the championships by one place – that hurt a lot," Radden says. "After that, I sat down with the coaches, and we made the goal this year to run a national qualifying time, which I just happened to run a week before nationals. That was something special."

To the ever humble Radden, the athletic accolades don't matter as much as the personal and academic accomplishments he has achieved and the connections he has made in the CCSU community. A psychology major with a focus on couples therapy and family relations, Radden balances an intense practice schedule with a full course load, while excelling at both.

One of Radden's most influential instructors, Assistant Professor of Psychology Jason Sikorski ("Dr. J," as Radden affectionately calls him), had only glowing things to say about Radden as a student and a person. "Aaron Radden is a leader. He is not an excellent student and athlete by accident. He puts in long hours, organizes his time wisely, and thinks deeply about his training regimen and his class material. In short, Aaron is a very rare type of student who thinks critically

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Man Enough Awards Presented

On March 8 the CCSU campus community celebrated the Man Enough Support Initiative's Student Achievement Awards. Man Enough is a program of the Counseling and Wellness Center and operates in collaboration with the Office of Recruitment and Admissions, and the Africana University Success Program. The following honorees received the Ebenezer D. Bassett Achievement Medal in recognition of their demonstrated efforts to reach their personal potential: **Bilal Afolabi, Eric Bergenn, Philip Burnham, Noah Cass, Adamski Celestin, Boris Chevannes, Elvis Chidozie, Javier Fernandez, Robin Gagne, Ricardo Gibson, Raul Gomez, Matthew Heck, Benjamin Kegler, Andrew Klein, Joseph Lalanne, Andrew Nave, Dannel Petgrave, Francisco Ramirez** (pictured), **Christopher Richard, Zachary Roy, Thomas Russell, and Anhor Salih.**



Dorm Students Volunteer in DC

Fifty-two CCSU dormitory residents traveled to Washington DC for the last weekend of March to participate in a recycling project at the National Cherry Blossom Festival and Road Race. The students worked with the park ranger of the National Mall to collect bottles and cans and sort trash. The trip was coordinated by Resident Assistant **Jeff Labonte**, and led by the Resident Director of Carroll Hall **Robert Jost** and Associate Director of Residence Life **Ryan Baumann**.

Aaron Radden

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about things he learns in psychology so that he can really use these definitions and concepts to help other people."

Unlike many student athletes, Radden took the initiative to seek out CCSU without any prior scholarships or grants, and with the guidance and support of his family, he gained admittance. "One huge inspiration for me was my Uncle William. If it weren't for him, I probably wouldn't be running track here. He stood up for me and gave me a lot of opportunities, and I'm really thankful for that," says Radden.

In the Athletic Department, Radden has found a network of friends and teammates that inspire him to constantly push himself to be a better person on and off the track. Running for the track team not only gives him personal satisfaction but allows him to stand for a group of people that really matter to him. "To be able to go to Nationals and say 'I'm representing these people' is really important. They're some of the best people I've met in my life and I'll probably know them for the rest of my life. I consider them family."

- Adam Saucier