

Kansas Conference on Slavery and Human Trafficking (02/01/2013)

Teaching Group - Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The teaching group included students (undergraduate and graduate), faculty, staff, activists, practitioners, and state officials. The discussion generated six key topics related to teaching: interdisciplinary approaches, courses at KU, opportunities for engagement, career paths, resources, and the role of Kansas in human trafficking. This executive summary briefly details each of these topics in turn.

Interdisciplinary Approaches

A common thread throughout the session was the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to teaching. The group noted that multifaceted nature of the very issue itself (slavery and human trafficking) ultimately transcends departmental boundaries and requires interdisciplinary training. This led to a question of whether specialized training (in a single aspect of the issue) or broad training (with more coverage) is preferable. Undergraduate participants pointed to the importance of collaborative work conducted in previous KU capstone classes, where students pursued independent projects related to a broader topic (such as violence). In light of these experiences, the group came up with the mantra that it is “more than *thinking* interdisciplinary, it is *acting* interdisciplinary.”

Courses at KU

Currently, the University of Kansas offers minimal courses directly related to slavery and human trafficking (these appear in WGSS and History, among others). Next semester, a graduate level course will be offered for the first time. In general, the group noted that there is a huge demand for courses on human trafficking at KU, with various students at the undergraduate and graduate level completing projects on the topic each semester. Furthermore, the scope of issue is local and global. Thus, whatever the University pursues needs to be able to encompass the demand for courses and the scope of the issue.

Suggestions for future courses that attended to the scope of the issue included the following ideas: 1) courses could focus on the three p’s of human trafficking – protection, prosecution, and prevention; 2) courses could focus on different stages of human trafficking – primary, secondary, and tertiary, with training on each of these stages; 3) courses could be offered around a theme such as “from vulnerability to victimization.”

Suggestions for future courses that sought to attend to the demand for courses included the following ideas: 1) offer courses through the area studies centers; 2) incorporate practitioner visits into courses offered on campus; 3) develop fieldtrips and out of classroom experiences to visit practitioners; 4) develop a certificate program following the model of the graduate certificate in WGSS, with two core courses and a menu of offerings to receive certification.

Opportunities for Engagement

Following this line of thought, the group offered insight on additional opportunities for engagement. One idea focused on encouraging the development of innovative projects that could engage students from a variety of backgrounds – collecting oral histories, written histories, visual histories, that center around the issue. There are also a number of volunteer opportunities available to undergraduate students. There are also several models on campus for engaging undergraduate students in research. The psychology department offers research positions to undergraduate students, who work together with graduate students and a faculty advisor on surveys, interviews, data analysis, etc. One idea was that the journalism school could offer opportunities to shadow reporters and cover events or trials. The KS Department of Revenue or other bureaucratic entities may offer internship positions to help sift through records and build cases. For law students, KU and Washburn both have prosecutor internship relation programs with the major counties in Kansas, which provides an opportunity for students to litigate in the presence of a barred attorney. In spite of the opportunities, the group also considered the difficulty for small institutions (NGOs, etc) to absorb an overwhelming number of volunteers: at a certain point, these groups cannot accept more volunteers, especially those who lack skills and training in the area.

Career Paths

One common concern, especially among undergraduate participants, was about the career paths available with a specialization in slavery and human trafficking. These students noted that it is difficult to persuade students (and parents) that pursuing a controversial degree is worthwhile. Suggestions to deal with this challenge included: 1) providing information to students to make them realize it is worthwhile to pursue issues about which they are passionate; 2) direct students to courses and resources already available at the University; 3) emphasizing the interdisciplinary nature of human trafficking – where it can be pursued with any degree (political science, law, etc); 4) marketing the specialization with focus on applied learning, internships, and hands on experience.

Resources

With all of the solutions proposed, the group noted the paucity of resources available for taking these measures. For example, the creation of new courses and programs does not allocate more resources to the library system. Second, the area studies centers have suffered federal budget cuts by around 46% in recent years. The group suggested that internal university grants may

incentivize the creation of new courses related directly to human trafficking. The Department of State issues annual calls for grant proposals. Participants also suggested that corporate financing from local businesses may supplement university resources. Finally, the library currently possesses a collection of materials on slavery and human trafficking (mixed media) that could supplement course resources.

Role of Kansas

Finally, the group shared a general sense that the state of Kansas is uniquely poised to confront slavery and human trafficking and emerge as a leader on the issue. First, Kansas City currently boasts an impressive community of forensics experts. The University's School of Nursing has the opportunity to educate future nurses in evidence of sexual abuse and potential cases of human trafficking. Second, Wichita is a red spot on the map of human trafficking, drawing attention to the state. Wichita has gained some renown for being a hotspot of human trafficking. Third, the University of Kansas already houses strong programs in city and local management, as well as area studies centers. Additionally, KU's institutional capabilities allow the university to research the issue at all levels. Fourth, the state government, especially the executive, has a longstanding interest in issues related to human rights.

To capitalize on these strengths, the working group made the following suggestions: 1) develop a niche focus at the University to attract grant support; 2) alternatively, develop a general program since there are not many centers for the study of human trafficking; 3) focus generally on human rights, in line with state executive goals; 4) establish Lawrence as the first slave free and slave proof community in the nation; 5) found a periodical or open access journal for publication of work related to slavery and human trafficking; 6) consider funding from corporate sponsors/political entrepreneurs.

The teaching group concluded with a general consensus that one strategy was critical to combating the issue of slavery and human trafficking: awareness.