



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Interdisciplinary Off-Campus Experiences

Harford Community College serves students in and around Harford County, Maryland, a part of the Baltimore metropolitan region. The location provides an abundance of opportunities for field trips to culturally significant areas in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. These interdisciplinary off-campus experiences help keep students psychologically invested in course content.

This abstract presents examples of off-campus experiences, outlines how student learning and experiences are assessed, and provides practical suggestions for including off-campus experiences in the curriculum.

Scavenger Hunts

A field trip to the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian began with a scavenger hunt. After meeting with their instructor at the museum, students were handed a scavenger hunt card and a list of clues that guided them from exhibit to exhibit, where they applied course concepts such as key words, phrases, and sociological or anthropological theories to solve the next clue. Students examined issues related to systemic racism, colonialism, and Native American rights and activism, using the scavenger hunt to guide them through the museum.

Holocaust Museum

In a field trip to the National Holocaust Museum, sociology and psychology students analyzed the *Some Were Neighbors: Collaboration and Complicity in the Holocaust* exhibit and applied core concepts from their respective courses. The activity was divided into three sections. First, students answered questions about the facts contained in the exhibit, such as the different ways that Jewish people were targeted by the Nazis, major events leading up to the Holocaust, and examples of individuals who aided or ignored victims. Next, students explored questions about the same exhibit through the application of sociology course material, using sociological theories about racism, socialization, social norms, and deviance. Then, students applied psychological concepts to understand the role of outgroup, dehumanization, defense mechanisms, and other concepts relevant to the Holocaust.

"Next to Normal" Theatrical Production

Another field trip centered around a showing of the Broadway musical *Next to Normal* at Baltimore's Center Stage Theater. This musical explores the story of a wife and mother who lives with bipolar disorder, and highlights how the members of her family are affected. Students answered specific questions about the plot and the staging of the musical in terms of sociology or psychology. To prepare, an evening session was held for students who were planning to attend the performance. Professors gave a general explanation of how students could watch the musical through a psychological or sociological lens. The students were required to show proof of attendance, such as a ticket stub or a program.

Assessing the Activity

Two main areas of the off-campus trips were assessed: content knowledge and practical experience. Content knowledge was assessed through students' ability to complete the related course work. Ninety-two percent of students demonstrated competence at the 90 percent level or above with the material from the Holocaust Museum. This is higher than what is normally seen with the same content in "classroom only" learning activities.

Assessment of the experience mainly took place through student anecdotal evidence. This ranged from learning more about public transportation to going to a theater for the first time. Off-campus field trips help students develop soft skills such as confidence in traveling and navigating an unfamiliar place outside their comfort zone.

The Administrative Aspects

As with any activity, there are a few administrative details to keep in mind. It is important to be aware of institutional policies for off-campus activities. If a policy is not in place, it is suggested to use best practices for off-campus activities. This may include collecting a liability waiver, formal permission document, personal identification, and emergency contact information. A good resource to consult for off-campus experiences is ecampusnews.com.

Consider that students may be missing other classes and should have a formal excuse for their absence. If a trip is a voluntary experience, this should be communicated on the excuse letter or email. Students should have clear instructions, including when and

where they are meeting, any fees associated with the experience, dress code, and behavioral expectations. Additionally, students should have contact information for the instructor and know what to do in case of an emergency. They will also need to understand the learning objectives for the off-campus experience.

While it may seem overwhelming, off-campus experiences are very manageable with a little organization and preparation. Partnering with a peer who has done off-campus experiences is an excellent way to start integrating this type of learning experience into your curriculum. Student feedback concerning the content learning and life experience they gained has demonstrated that the preparation and commitment are worthwhile.

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