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Immigration and Refugee Plunge: A Social Justice Learning Living Cohort Community Project

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Abstract

The Building Community through Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort is an opportunity for first-year students to get involved with many aspects of social justice locally, regionally, and globally. One of the greatest current challenges to our democracy is the issue of immigration. There are several issues that confront our society and the people wishing to immigrate to the United States. Our group explored this issue first-hand by participating in The Immigration and Refugee Plunge, an event sponsored by the Center for Social Concern in the spring of 2012. This plunge was designed to give participants a better look at the process and the problems many foreign nationals face navigating their way through the US Immigration Service. We will be reflecting on the principles and practices of the system; the benefits of the current system; the negative aspects of the process; and, how maintaining the status quo can impact immigration and our democracy.



Expected Outcomes

- We thought we were going to do hands on activities
- We were expecting to raise awareness on immigration in our country
- We thought we were going to do service for the immigrants in the United States
- We expected to learn

Social Justice LLC Mission Statement

We are a living learning community that:

- Engages in a process of intellectual inquiry
- Productively negotiates and creates space for critical listening and the free exchange of ideas
- Holistically integrates academic, residential, and co-curricular experiences
- Deploys the particular methodologies of the Humanities disciplines, specifically those associated with the study of English, Philosophy, and Religion
- Fosters an interdisciplinary approach to fundamental human concerns, e.g., what it means to be human
- Focuses on apprehending and addressing issues of Social Justice, such as stewardship, solidarity with those different from us, commitment to the integrity and equality of all human life, and dedication to the common good
- Encourages undergraduate research that is informed by the experience of service learning

American Friends Service Committee Mission Statement

The American Friends Service Committee is a practical expression of the faith of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Committed to the principles of nonviolence and justice, it seeks in its work and witness to draw on the transforming power of love, human and divine.

We recognize that the leadings of the Spirit and the principles of truth found through Friends' experience and practice are not the exclusive possession of any group. Thus, the AFSC draws into its work people of many faiths and backgrounds who share the values that animate its life and who bring to it a rich variety of experiences and spiritual insights.

This AFSC community works to transform conditions and relationships both in the world and in ourselves, which threaten to overwhelm what is precious in human beings. We nurture the faith that conflicts can be resolved nonviolently, that enmity can be transformed into friendship, strife into cooperation, poverty into well-being, and injustice into dignity and participation. We believe that ultimately goodness can prevail over evil, and oppression in all its many forms can give way.

Sites we visited



St. Mary's Parish Center



American Friends Service Committee

The Cave

The Greek philosopher Plato wrote "The Allegory of the Cave" in his work called *The Republic*. This allegory is about how people have a narrow mind-set based on the things they have learned in their whole life. These people only know what they have learned. People need to learn to be open to new ideas and opportunities. This relates to the Immigration and Refugee Plunge, because of our aspect before and after the plunge. Before we had little knowledge of the immigration system in the United States. This system was not affecting us and that is why we did not care as much as we did after the plunge. After the plunge, we learned about immigrants and refugees and how unjust they are being treated.

A Theory of Social Justice

John Rawls, who is the most distinguished moral philosopher in the 20th century, believed that justice must be fair and that the rights of the individual should never be sacrificed for the greater good of society. He states that people are equal and should be treated equally. The immigration process in the United States is unfair to immigrants residing in our country. Some of these people are being forced to move back to their country without their family just because they came to the United States undocumented. It also takes years of waiting for people who want to live in the United States to actually be allowed to. John Rawls would feel that the current immigration system is very unjust and needs to be fixed. These people deserve to not be treated as criminals.

Reflections

Victoria Lewis

I felt the Immigration and refugee plunge was an inspiring experience for me. It helped me to develop an understanding of the struggles immigrants are facing. We listened to speakers who are immigrants and refugees from Mexico, Equator, and Africa. These speakers helped me to realize how unjust our immigration system is and how it is affecting the lives of immigrants today. I got a first hand experience of what it is like to be an immigrant and refugee.

Ian Fitzpatrick

What I will take away from the Immigration and Refugee Plunge is simply knowledge. I have learned how hard it is to be an undocumented immigrant in the United States and the fear minorities have of being deported. I also learned of the challenge of African refugees, and what they must go through here in our country.

Nick White

The immigrant and refugee Plunge was a great opportunity to see the struggles immigrants face dealing with an American culture. I developed more sympathy for immigrants after hearing a few personal stories from the presenters. The Plunge did a great job of showing what we can do to change the problems in the United States Immigration problem.