

Individual Plans

Two pursuits helped me to prepare for the PAR course that Maria, Jason and I decided to create. In scanning the Internet for resources, Maria discovered information about [Mosaic International](#), an organization based in Ottawa, Canada, which holds annual workshops on Action Research and Assessment Strategies through hands-on training. A WWU faculty development award made attendance possible. The design of the week-long workshop provided much inspiration for the PAR course. Along with other workshop participants, I engaged in an intensive two-day preparation for a three-day community-based project with [Dovercourt Community Center](#). My team of five workshop attendees worked with members of the community center to investigate what they liked about the center and what they wanted to see included. We reported back to staff of the center who constituted the Core Stakeholder group. It was an exhilarating and, at times, exhausting experience. The workshop as a whole provided me with:

- many practical research skills
- intensive, brief PAR experiences
- a network of colleagues
- a notebook full of resources

Another helpful strand in preparation for, participation within, and evaluation of the PAR class came from becoming a member of Western Washington University's [Faculty Fellows Program](#) sponsored by the Center for Service Learning and led by the Center's Director, Lisa Moulds, and Dr. Angela Harwood, Distinguished Fellow and former CIIA Showcase participant. In addition to participating in the monthly sessions of the Faculty Fellows Program where we discussed best practices for community-based learning for our courses and received the support and recognition for our efforts, the Center for Service Learning provided support for some of the necessary aspects of a functioning community-based course such as follow-up calls to community organizations and group mailings.

Individual Plan - Maria Hicks

I took Joyce's Fieldwork Methods class in the Fall of 2002. My collaboration in the Participatory Action Research class really began at that point. I spent my fieldwork time with a local girls' program, Girls on the Run. At the end of the quarter, I had realized that similar research would be good for my thesis topic and wanted to continue with the organization. I decided to interview women volunteering with local girls programming. Along with other students, I expressed a desire for the Fieldwork Class to be longer.

At the end of the Fieldwork Class, Joyce gave me two individuals to contact that she thought might help with my thesis research. One of these women happened to be working with an Ameri-Corps volunteer to start a coalition of local providers for girls' programs. I volunteered to assist them in their endeavors in exchange for the contacts I could develop for my thesis. I had originally conceived of this as a more compensatory relationship rather than a PAR project. At the time I was not aware of PAR. Eventually I would realize my work with the coalition was a permutation of PAR, and I began researching PAR to see how it might be applicable to this group.

When Jason and Joyce first began discussing the idea for a service-learning oriented class at the Society for Applied Anthropology Conference in 2003, I offered to assist in developing the community connection this course required. We left the conference with the idea that the class might be a service-learning or community-based learning class and with a brief introduction to PAR in our minds. We all soon decided we needed to do more research on this promising methodology. With three of us working together to collect information and learn, we were able to quickly bring a variety of in-depth resources and experiences together.

By chance, the lead anthropologist of a field school on PAR (Dr. Patricia Hammer) visited our university that spring. Joyce dragged Jason and me down to the presentation. I had not envisioned having the time or resources to attend a field school abroad and so I didn't want to go the presentation. After the presentation I obtained the course bibliography from Dr. Hammer, and I began more extensive research of this methodology. Eventually I attended the field school as well.

When Jason, Joyce, and I began planning the course together later that summer, I was able to bring to the table my experience working with the local coalition, my research, and my experience with learning PAR, as well as my observations of it being taught.

Individual Plan - Jason Miller

I don't quite remember where and when I "found" PAR. It seems like I wasn't looking for it, and, presumably, it wasn't looking for me. I first became acquainted with PAR by mistake—a chance happening that was the result of a conscious and an organic progression of events that just seemed to "take" me to it. I once was quite happy to do research and write papers thinking nothing of the impact that I was leaving on others. With a background in the arts, I knew of the strong power of culture as a tool of social change, but I had never thought to apply that to my own work. It all seemed too complex, surely too big, for just one person to do. I was no stranger to the ideals and goals of social justice. I received my undergraduate training from a Jesuit institution which strongly valued social justice and the democratic process. Looking back on it all now, I wonder if I really was looking for PAR, but didn't know what to call it. I wonder now if PAR was waiting there for me all along.

When I came to Western, I enrolled in Dr. Hammond's Fieldwork Methods course and completed a project that looked at community interaction. In November, I attended the meetings of the American Anthropological Association in Louisiana. As I wandered from presentation to presentation, I was struck with bewilderment. What does this mean? Why do you do this work? What is the benefit to anyone but you? As the quarter came to an end, people at my field site and I wanted to continue the work we had started. I completed another 10 weeks, but still had those same nagging questions from November.

In March, we headed south to the meetings of the Society for Applied Anthropology. This trip changed my entire outlook of both the Academy and of my own anthropological work. I had been talking with Joyce about the possibility of a new course that integrated community based learning, but we still didn't know how it would work. While at the conference, I attended a series of sessions that focused on integrating community into the classroom. At the SfAA meeting I also started to learn the lingo of this kind of research. My eyes were opened to the world of applied anthropology, a world with which I had previously had little contact.

In the process of this, I left for field school in British Columbia. During the Spring of 2003, I participated in the University of British Columbia's Field School in collaboration with the Stó:lô people. My time with the Stó:lô opened my eyes to how work could be focused on community need and genesis. PAR principles and skills were effortlessly integrated in the process.

Finally, over the summer I began my work with WWU's Center for Service Learning. As the Center's Project Manager, I had the opportunity to deepen my understanding of community/university engagement and the process of learning.

I like to imagine PAR as a companion. Over the past year and a half, PAR and I have gotten to know each other and have started on a path that I hope will guide my own development as a scholar and as a community member.

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