The Aggregate

CEEL Connects with South Side Non-Profits

The Community Embedded Experiential Learning (CEEL) program is an opportunity for students to connect with South Side Milwaukee community-based organizations through shadowing, hands-on projects, and other immersive experiences.

Throughout the semester, students participate with the organizations while learning and growing as members of the Milwaukee community.

Honors College Professor Benjamin Schneider coordinates the program that he initiated in Fall 2021, and the goals include encouraging students to apply their in-class educations in a community setting, connecting students with Milwaukee’s Latinx community, and discovering how and why non-profit service organizations operate.

In placements with community partners like the 16th Street Clinic, VIA, and Centro Legal, students gain a better understanding of the needs of Milwaukee’s residents.

This semester, Lizzie Adams (Psychology and Spanish), Lily Levrault (Math and Computer Science), Evan Miller (Psychology), and Amy Reyes (Biological Science) are the CEEL team, and each will earn three Honors College non-seminar credits for completing the program.

At 16th Street Clinic, these students contribute to the HIV preventative unit, a part of the clinic that educates the community about HIV and Hepatitis B outbreaks, drug use, and unsafe sex practices.

José Salazar, HIV Director at the clinic, helps establish strategies for individuals to move toward seeking healthy solutions.

“If we can provide a way to give people hygienic supplies and clean needles without prejudice, then we can help to provide a safe space and a safer community,” he says.

The students are also working this semester with VIA on neighborhood economic development projects. Brisa Van Galen, Community Outreach Director for VIA, sees clearly the impact on this community, and she is happy to be partnering with the Honors College.

“At VIA CDC is an amazing non-profit serving the South Side of Milwaukee,” she shares. “I’ve never met a more intentional organization; from the way we operate internally to how we carry out the work in the areas we serve. I would encourage anyone to volunteer and learn more.”

CEEL is providing exposure to the realities that some people experience in Milwaukee, and it showcases how to join the existing efforts attempting to bridge the gap between the sometimes harsh realities and a better future for all people.

“The work we do in the CEEL program has an instant impact on the community,” Amy shares. “Whether we are assisting a non-profit organization or directly speaking with a community member, the payoff of our time is clear.”

Past CEEL participant Lauren Wilcox (Social Work) recognizes the benefit of experiential learning in CEEL.

“CEEL challenges us to step outside of our bubble and immerse ourselves in a new environment,” she says. “We spend a lot of our time in college in the classroom, but so much valuable knowledge comes being in unfamiliar spaces and experiencing things firsthand.”

Lily concurs: “A significant part of CEEL is experiencing a side of Milwaukee, from the art to the businesses to the needs of the community, that might be unfamiliar and eye-opening.”

The Honors College offers the CEEL program every semester and is always looking for interested students.