Community Engagement Celebration Day  
2018 Community Engagement Celebration Day

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Panther Initiative for Environmental Equity and Resilience, PIEER

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Building Environmental Equity, Sustainability and Community Bridges: PIEER
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Abstract
This poster overviews the Panther Initiative for Environmental Equity and Resilience, PIEER internship program. Defining the PIEER experience and its pedagogical underpinnings, its structure and place in the curriculum, the depth and breadth of student involvement to date as well as detailing some of the community engagement efforts that PIEER interns have been involved in.

What is PIEER?
PIEER began in the Spring of 2014 as a partnership project in environmental resilience, PIEER internship program. It has continued since as a student internship and community engagement effort designed to offer PIEER interns the opportunity to explore the social/cultural, racial ethnic, technological, and equity aspects of environmental sustainability challenges. It’s goals are to expand knowledge and understand about and across ERE issues, to allow students to examine their understanding of differences and build bridges across difference, and to meaningfully engage the campus and broader community around ERE issues.

PIEER Experience Components
The PIEER experience is a 16 week structured experience consisting of the following major components:

- Weekly meetings
  - The entire PIEER cohort meets weekly to discuss assigned readings, plan engagement activities, participate in other campus ERE activities, and discuss ERE issues
- Structured reading assignments/discussions
  - Structured reading assignments focus on the history of ERE issues in the U.S., case studies of ERE issues, and working out how to recognize ERE issues, ERE privilege, and build bridges across difference
- 5-6 community, campus, or nationally structured activities per semester
  - Students are given latitude in locating and scheduling community engagement opportunities
  - Structured possibilities are provided early in the process but not proscribed
- If taken for credit, weekly reflections and a summary report
  - When taken for internship credit a weekly one-page summary and five-page summary paper are required components of grading.

PIEER Student Cohorts
Twenty-one students have participated in 41 unique 16 week experiences (50% rate of second semester experience). The Anglo to All Other racial ethnic make-up at UNI during the 2015-2016 academic year was 0.85/0.15 and the female to male ratio was 0.59/0.41. Comparing this data to the tables and graphs below illustrates that the gender ratios of PIEER participants are close to representative of UNI overall while the Anglo to All Other racial ethnic categories is significantly higher. The data illustrates a broad diversity of religious backgrounds. Students participating in PIEER tend to do so in their junior/senior years but all class standings including graduate students have participated.

Pedagogical Philosophy
The pedagogical philosophy (underpinning educational approaches) for the PIEER experience include the following overarching and interrelated themes of praxis:

- Systems thinking
  - Elaborated on and discussed through the use of select writings by Donella Meadows
- Education as transformation
  - As exemplified by the writings and praxis of Bell Hooks and Paulo Freire
- Science of consciousness
  - In the area of environment, equity, and consciousness
  - The scientific, compulsory and systems oriented writings of Lynn McTaggart are utilized
- Empathy education
  - Mirror neuron patterning is employed as exemplified by Nadine Dobly

Readings for the structured PIEER experience are drawn from the writings of the educational and scientific theorists listed above (see Bibliographic Resources).

PIEER Projects
PIEER has developed, delivered, and supported dozens of projects on campus and throughout the Cedar Valley region. PIEER interns are responsible for providing written synopses and quantitative evaluation reports of each event. Examples include:

- Collaborated with Tri-County Head Start, Operation Threshold, Birthright, and Young Parents Together to deliver lead education and awareness to their staff, volunteers, clients and parents of young children. Oral presentations as well as written materials were given.
- Partnered with Blue Zones, Healthy Cedar Valley Coalition and North Iowa Farm Partnership to organize the Cedar Valley Food and Film Festival. Local food producers and supporters were available to showcase their products and services to kick off the farmer’s market season. Four films were also shown followed by a discussion that included upcoming technology, healthy food choices, water quality, and food waste.
- Worked with the Northeast Iowa Food Bank, Blue Zones and the North Iowa Farm Partnership to find volunteers to glean fresh fruits and vegetables from local growers for the Food Bank’s recipients. Thousands of pounds have been collected.

PIEER Student Quotes
PIEER was a great experience for me because I not only get to meet amazing people from our university, but I also learned so much about current environmental, social, and political discourses. PIEER became like a family to me when I was new at the University...

Being part of PIEER provided opportunities to address important social and environmental health and justice issues in our communities in ways that make a difference. I gained competence and confidence in my work as part of a dedicated team...

Bibliographic References