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Learning Deep in Milwaukee: Community-Based Research in English 102

10/2/2019

By Chloe Smith

This semester, I am teaching two sections of English 102: College Writing and Research with a unique opportunity for community engagement. We are collaborating with a local organization called [Learn Deep Milwaukee](#).

Learn Deep is focused on building a community-wide resource for career exploration for high school students in the area, and providing students the skills they'll need for a rapidly changing workforce. According to Learn Deep's [website](#), to achieve this goal, "teachers and schools will need to adopt new methodologies that allow students to work in teams to explore real problems and how to get better at doing so."

This partnership was a natural fit considering English 102's emphasis on community-based research. The final project of the course asks students to research a topic or issue related to Milwaukee and produce an information product that could be useful to community members.

To gain more insight on issues facing communities in and around Milwaukee, the students in these 2 sections will be interviewing various professionals from the healthcare field who are associated with Learn Deep. Once the interviews are finished, we will transcribe them and code them to find topics for further research.

To prepare for these interviews, we have focused a lot on [oral histories](#) with an emphasis on ways in which they allow the person being interviewed to spend time reflecting on personal experiences and telling stories in their own conversational format. This focus will not only give students a greater chance to gain honest perspectives on issues facing the healthcare field in Milwaukee, but also allow them to foster a deeper connection with their interviewees.

Before choosing their interviewees, students spent time researching and discussing healthcare topics that interested them—with the results ranging from topics like the [effects of racism on public health](#) to [hospital initiatives](#) to the effects of [vaping](#).

Based on their interests, students chose their interviewees from a list of professionals who volunteered to be interviewed for the project. Students have since been hard at work setting up interviews and drafting questions. We'll spend the first week of October workshopping questions, practicing interviews, and even working with [Pete Reynolds](#) of Learn Deep and Joan Ward of [Employ Milwaukee's](#) Center for Health Care Careers to receive feedback on interview questions and advice on coding the interviews once they're finished.

I'll admit that I came into these classes feeling rather nervous. Of course, I was over the moon at the opportunity of leading students through community-engaged research, but I wasn't sure if they would share my excitement. Luckily, my worry was unfounded.

I'm blown away by how engaged these students have been, and how willing they are to work through a research process that, for most of them, is entirely new. They're approaching these interviews—and the prospect of the research that will come after—with enthusiasm and creativity.

The interviews will take place during the week of October 7th. To keep up with how they went, the research they inspire, and some student reflections on the process, check back later on in the semester.