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Span301s

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### Course Reflection

My service learning experience made me see aspects of our society that I was aware of but didn't really address. I completed my service learning at the Central Coast Citizenship Project in Salinas. I made the decision to complete my hours there for two reasons. One, I had become a U.S. Citizen myself two years earlier, which completely changed how I perceived myself. I also chose this agency because I really didn't know anything about Salinas. All the knowledge I had was simply based on what I saw on the news. I was surprised to see the growth of the Latino community and how there are certain resources that were not widely available as its residents would like.

The mission of the agency was to help adults get citizenship, while promoting them to become more active in their community and democracy. For that matter, my experience helped me see how we all have a role that will play in the community. Our social responsibility lies on not only being good citizens who obey the laws, but also to look out for one another. It was so touching to see how these adults cared for the wellbeing of their classmates. It showed me how compassion for another person can really make a difference in someone's life. When I saw this, I realized that by having compassion and empathy for everyone else, we can create a more accepting environment. I know that we might never be able to feel what that other person is going through but if we at least stop and make the attempt to understand; I know that it will certainly help in having a more unified community.

At the agency, most the adults were of Latino background. However, this should not be mistaken for being Mexican. I had the opportunity to work with adults that were from Central America countries such as El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. Some people assume that countries in Central

America are like Mexico, when in reality they are not. Working with people from different parts of Latin America made me embrace diversity. Their anecdotes showed me how diversity should not be seen as a threat but rather we should approach every situation with an open mind.

The hardest part that I had to address was justice. A lot of the adults felt as if they were not being treated fairly. Their feelings of mistreatment grew after the election results. Some of them voiced their concerns and made the point that they would never be able to achieve justice for the Latino community because they would always feel singled out. Some even went further and said that their skin color ended up deciding whether or not they would be treated fairly. Although the site supervisor tried to show them that there was still hope, a lot of these adults felt frustrated and incredibly worried. Therefore, this made me see that we still have a lot of work to do to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and that we should judge a person based on their character and decisions they make.

This service learning experience helped me with my language skills because I had to adjust to different levels of language proficiency. I say this because my experience with the students allowed me to expand my vocabulary. Every time the student said a word that I didn't know, I made a mental note and then I would go back and find the meaning. My language skills also improved in relation to the context that I was in. Upon graduation, I would like to work for a government organization so this allowed me to test my professional speaking skills and get a glimpse how similar organizations are run. Thanks to this organization I was able to become more tolerant to the differences that surround me. In fact, I fell in love with all the stories about different traditions that I am expecting to learn more about cultural differences through my upcoming study abroad experience. As I mentioned before, this service learning experience allowed me to know about Salinas and what it has to offer. Through the community scan that we did in class, I was able to see what efforts are being done to meet the needs of all the community participants.

Thus, I really enjoyed this class because I became more conscious about my responsibility in a social setting. It allowed me to share my perspective about recurrent issues like bilingual education, ethnic studies, racism, privilege, and marginalization. Above all, I learned a lot from my peers. I consider myself fortunate to have taken this course with individuals from all types of backgrounds who are as passionate as I am about our education and community. Although there were clear differences between us, it was gratifying to see that we shared similar values. I plan to continue participating in my community because I know that we can all make a positive change and even more so, when we work together.