

Future Generations Graduate School

Alumni Survey January 2009

1. How useful have the knowledge, skills, concepts and principles learned during your graduate studies been to your work?

Very useful

Somewhat useful

Not at all useful

Please explain your answer: Some of the ideas, training, and knowledge we gained through the program has been useful. Others have not been as directly applicable. So far the SEED Scale theory of development has not been applicable in my community.

2. Please describe how your community has benefited from your involvement in this Master's Degree program.

I am not sure how much my community has benefitted on account of this MA program. This is mostly because I was discouraged from working in the community that I applied to this program through, and pushed to work with another community which I am a part of. I had been saying from the beginning that this work was not as applicable to the second community, and found after going through the program that this was definitely true. If I had been allowed to work in the first community and focus on that one entirely, this program would have been much more useful.

3. Please describe your current activities to support community change and conservation and how the Master's Degree program has influenced this work.

I am involved in several different communities and projects to support community change:

- * working part time at a recently open pre-school and day care center, teaching values education to 3-6 year old students
- * working with my interfaith youth organization, now at the national level, to organize US-wide activities in self- and social- transformation
- * working with a youth-led organization in Detroit to inspire education reform around the drop-out crisis
- * working with a small group to start an institute to bring values education to public schools in Chicago and other areas, in partnership with corporations and other community agencies

The main contribution of the MA program to this work is in prompting data collection and evaluation strategies, and also in having exposed me to successful and well-run (if not well-funded) models of community development, especially SEARCH and Jamkhed.

4. From the list below please highlight the three courses from which you have learned the most (with a brief explanation)

Term One Courses

Pedagogy of Place: India

Healthy People, Healthy Communities

Sustainable Development: Theory and Practice

Introduction to Community Change and Conservation

Practicum: Research Design and Methods

Term Two Courses

Pedagogy of Place: U.S.

Nature Conservation and Management

Leadership, Group Decision Making, and Organizational Behavior

Strategic Methods of Social Movements

Practicum: Getting Started- Community-based Change

Term Three Courses

Pedagogy of Place: Peru

Food and Water Security

Empowerment and Program Evaluation

Going to Scale with Community Development

Practicum: Providing Quality Iteration and Change

Term IV Courses

Pedagogy of Place: Nepal and Bhutan

Human Ecology

Practical Applications of Nonprofit Management

Synthesis and Integration

Practicum: Applied Research II

I definitely learned the most from traveling and seeing how the concepts we studied were being implemented. Also from being with coursemates from around the world and learning to communicate and live with them. The models of community change that we saw, especially in India, were very eye-opening in understanding how to approach community change that extends beyond the grassroots (or SEED) level. Healthy People was a very valuable course in helping broaden my view and understanding on health and the many factors that were implicit in it, seeing the interconnections between “sectors” of social change, and in identifying underlying/root causes to a problem. The residential in Nepal/Bhutan, and the journal writing assignments done there helped synthesize all previous terms and helped me think a lot about what we were seeing and learning in context.

5. From the list below please highlight the three courses from which you have learned the least (with a brief explanation)

Term One Courses

Pedagogy of Place: India

Healthy People, Healthy Communities
Sustainable Development: Theory and Practice
Introduction to Community Change and Conservation
Practicum: Research Design and Methods

Term Two Courses

Pedagogy of Place: U.S.
Nature Conservation and Management
Leadership, Group Decision Making, and Organizational Behavior
Strategic Methods of Social Movements
Practicum: Getting Started- Community-based Change

Term Three Courses

Pedagogy of Place: Peru
Food and Water Security
Empowerment and Program Evaluation
Going to Scale with Community Development
Practicum: Providing Quality Iteration and Change

Term IV Courses

Pedagogy of Place: Nepal and Bhutan
Human Ecology
Practical Applications of Nonprofit Management
Synthesis and Integration
Practicum: Applied Research II

I really did not find much of value in the Peru residential or the PoP assignments we did. At that point, it felt like Future Generations had run out of things to teach us. In Empowerment and Program Evaluation some of the village survey assignments we did in Peru were helpful, but for the most part, spending a week in the basement working out kinks in survey software geared toward public health (Epi Info) was not at all applicable or enjoyable. I did not get too much out of Going to Scale because the class assumed that a universal methodology for community change was in order, and in the community that I was pushed to work in, it is not.

6. Please comment on each of the following parts of the blended learning pedagogy:

Online interactive learning

This part was okay, definitely picked up after the first residential. I would recommend that future cohorts begin with the first residential, rather than online learning. Not much of what you read/learn about your classmates makes sense until you have met them and understood their community contexts.

Residential learning

Other than Peru, I thought this was the most valuable part of the program. The best parts were being able to see working models of community change, like

Search and Jamkhed, Arunachal Pradesh, etc. I think more effort needs to be made to put the community learning into context of the actual country, its history, its social dynamics, and other factors specific to the country. I thought the USA residential should have been more about seeing working models of community change in the USA as well as looking at the communities (esp urban areas) most in need of change and community struggle. Instead, we were in class for much of the time, rather than taking advantage of being together in a particular place. I did not find most of the Peru residential to be useful, especially visiting site after site after site of CLAS offices, etc. because there were not many new concepts that we were introduced to there.

Applied practicum research

The practicum concept is very good, but I felt that it requires a little more pre-work than we had the chance for. Students should come into the program with a single question that their community wants answered, so that they have a sense of how to get started on their Practicum. In my experience, it was too open-ended, and I had (and am still having) an impossible time balancing what is useful to my community with what Future Generations wants to see.

7. What do you think of the following ideas to improve the program for future classes?

a. Lengthening the program to 2 1/2 or 3 years to allow more time between residentials.

This is a good idea. I would do the first year of the program as it is, and then have 6 months dedicated just to Practicum. Then do the second year as it is, and have 6 more months to complete the Practicum. It is impossible to do a meaningful community research project when you have to leave the community for a month at a time to learn how to do the research. The theoretical components of the practicum should be studied along with the coursework and residential, and then we should have several months just to develop and test a research model in the community, without other course/study obligations.

b. Offering five residentials from which students choose four to attend.

I would not recommend this. One of the most valuable parts of the residential was being with the same group of students each time, learning from them, understanding their communities, struggles, customs, etc. If you do not have the same set of people going through all of the residentials together, it limits the ability for this kind of learning, as your common base of experience is changed.

Instead, I think the 4 residentials are good, but we did not receive word on the dates of them until a few weeks before, and they were constantly changing by a day here or there, making planning for travel very difficult. Four residentials with

everyone there would be ideal, if they were better organized and planned well ahead of time.

- c. Reducing the courses taught by interactive online learning.

I'm not sure what this would accomplish. I do not recommend teaching courses face-to-face at the residentials. It is a waste of travelling to another country just to sit in a classroom and learn about communities, and defeats the purpose of this intentionally non-campus program. Instead, residentials should be planned in order to maximize the rare opportunity of seeing communities and of exchange with fellow classmates and professors. Coursework should happen online, and should maximize the theoretical foundations for the program.

- 8. What do you think we could do to make the Master's Degree program better?

Get more people of color and women on the staff/faculty. The meta-message of the entire program is that of white, Christian, missionary males. It is *very* problematic.

- 9. Do you feel connected to Future Generations as part of a *global learning community*? **YES** NO

Please explain:

I feel connected to the couple of dozen people that were in my cohort, whether or not they completed the program and all 4 residentials. I am a part of a global learning community because I now have friends and classmates all over the world that I am in touch with and constantly learning from. I feel connected to Future Generations' professors in the same way. But I do not personally feel connected to the work that Future Generations is doing in countries like China, Afghanistan, etc.

- 10. How would you like to continue to be involved with the work of Future Generations and alumni?

- a. Participate in online discussion groups Yes No

If yes, what topics are of most interest to you? Please list:

- b. Contribute updates/articles to an e-newsletter Yes No
- c. Participate in future training workshops when available **Yes** No
- d. Other

* Being part of creating a Future Generations conference on community development and conservation with students from my and previous cohorts.

* Being part of the US residential(s) for future cohorts to talk about or expose students to the realities of urban America and share the work I am doing or other good models of community change going on in my community.

* Keep the online forum/discussion board going so that we have access to the work/discussions we were already a part of, and can continue to discuss with our classmates, view discussions of future cohorts, and participate in an ongoing alumni discussion board.

* Have a reunion! One to two years after graduation, offer an optional alumni reunion somewhere so that students can get together, share what they've been working on, and look at new models/projects of community change.