Join us for an evening in celebration of our graduating masters candidates

May 7th, 2015
6:00 PM
Willow Bend Environmental Education Center
703 E Sawmill Rd, Flagstaff, AZ 86001

M.A. in Sustainable Communities

Public Presentations

Lauren Cain
Michael Chizhov
Emily Davalos
Katelin Eden
Mayleen Farrington
Sara Leibold
Jill Martinez
Ana ‘Lupita’ Salazar
The presentations for this evening are as follows:

Jill A. Martinez (video conferencing from remote location)

CHRONIC ILLNESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Abstract:

Higher education can present many challenges for students including managing and scheduling classes, assignments, projects, and professional and social obligations. This experience can be even more difficult for students living with chronic illnesses, many of whom face the additional challenges of debilitating pain, fatigue, social misconceptions, and frequent medical care. To be successful some students with chronic illnesses will need support and accommodation in order to achieve their goals and complete their degrees. In this thesis I explore the barriers I faced as a student with chronic illness in higher education and what accommodations may help remove those barriers for future students. With this thesis I hope to participate in social, political and academic conversations as a means to increase understanding among fellow students, faculty, staff, and administrators. It is my hope that these conversations will contribute to a movement that will help support and encourage students with chronic illnesses.

~ Special thanks to committee members:

Katherine Mahosky, Ph.D. - Chair; NAU Institute for Human Development
Scott Richardson, Ph.D. - Millersville University Educational Foundations
Matthew Wangeman, MA - NAU Institute for Human Development
Eleanor McTyre, MA - NAU MA in Sustainable Communities
Abstract:

The purpose of this thesis is to explore alternatives to the current waste paradigm of capitalist United States culture. This problem with trash is complicated by environmental injustice concerns, as some communities are located closer to landfills and waste sites than others. There is a need to better address this as a waste paradigm. Vital materiality is presented as an alternative way of thinking outside of this waste paradigm. In this research, I study how a specific group of first-year students process a course that requires them to engage more directly with the waste they make. I specifically ask the question: “What stories about value and connection do students within a waste-focused seminar tell about trash and non-trash, and how do students engage with these categories?” To answer this question, I utilized narrative inquiry to explore students’ stories. I analysed this data, and produced four ‘snapshots’ of students.

~ Special thanks to committee members:

Nora Timmerman, Ph.D. - Chair; NAU MA in Sustainable Communities
Emily Howard, Ph.D. - NAU MA in Sustainable Communities
Sean Parson, Ph.D. - NAU MA in Sustainable Communities
Abstract:

The purpose of this research is to identify landscaping designs which can be used to increase human-nature interaction on the Northern Arizona University Flagstaff campus. Increasing a person’s exposure to natural elements can improve physical and mental health by reducing stress responses, decreasing mental fatigue, and improving cognition. In order to have these benefits, however, people must be willing and able to spend time in nature. Northern Arizona University has a variety of landscaping elements already in place. What other landscape designs could be introduced that might entice people to spend time outdoors? To answer this question, I explored the landscapes of schools throughout the western United States. Popular designs included gardens, arboreta, and native plantings. Using permaculture principles, I identified particular designs that would be best suited to Flagstaff’s unique climate and geology and then chose two locations on campus that could be redesigned for better human-nature engagement.

~ Special thanks to committee members:

Kimberley Curtis, Ph.D. - Chair; NAU MA in Sustainable Communities
Susan Dietrich, BS - NAU Supervisor, Facility Services
Janice Busco, MS - NAU Campus Organic Gardener
Sara Leibold

RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOR: A CASE STUDY OF ARIZONA NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL THRU HIKERS

Abstract:

My thesis is based upon the idea that if humans start, or in some cases continue, to reconnect with the natural world than the disastrous effects of anthropogenic impact on the planet could lessen. I suggest that by viewing the self as part of nature rather than separate from nature individuals can see how their actions or behaviors impact their surroundings including themselves. Therefore, in order to move away from destructive behaviors and to shift the dominant paradigm we must look deeper into peoples’ fundamental beliefs. In order to explore these possibilities, I look at individuals’ relationship with nature as well as environmental behavior. What is Arizona Trail thru hikers’ relationship with nature and what is their environmental behavior? I use ecopsychology and theories around the social construction of nature to contextualize my findings. All the individuals I interviewed said they had a relationship with nature, and the majority expressed pro environmental behavior, mostly in their own personal lifestyle.

~ Special thanks to committee members:

Janine Schipper, Ph.D. - Chair; NAU Sociology
Pam Foti, Ph.D. - NAU Geography, Planning, and Recreation
John Lynch, MA - NAU Geography, Planning, and Recreation

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Abstract:

This thesis argues that critical collective action is necessary to address modern-day social and ecological injustices. While educational institutions have the potential to teach students how to exhibit agency towards structural social change, dominant forms of education fail to do this, and alternative education programs are better positioned to critically address potential avenues towards agency. To assess the relationship between alternative education and social change agency, four-month long participant-observation and ten semistructured in-depth interviews were conducted with participants and directors of the Finding the Good (FtG) high school semester program. Participants’ stories revealed that they gained self-knowledge through the awareness of socio-environmental injustices that FtG facilitated, and positioned themselves on a spectrum of social change agency. This thesis concludes that while alternative education can encourage agency towards social change, the qualities of those expressions may perpetuate a neoliberal and institutionalized understanding of social change.

~ Special thanks to committee members:

Nora Timmerman, Ph.D. - Chair; NAU MA in Sustainable Communities
Michael Caulkins, Ph.D. - NAU University College
Kim Curtis, Ph.D. - NAU MA in Sustainable Communities
Lauren Cain

THE GREAT TURNING: WHY NOW IS THE TIME FOR ECOCENTRIC MODELS OF EDUCATION

Abstract:

Our world is currently facing an ecological crisis that substantial literature is now showing to be directly caused by human beings. This environmental degradation has been directly linked to the dominant, industrialized western culture’s definitions of growth as progress, a systemic split from nature and a lack of awareness to the interwoven, connected ecological systems that we live within. This research focuses on the development of an ecological consciousness through alternative educational institutions, specifically the industry of outdoor education, in order to move away from the western ideology of separation and meet the challenges of the environmental crisis we face. The following work took a grounded theory approach through qualitative in-depth interviews, with participants of three different outdoor education programs and models, in order to determine the level and quality of ecological consciousness developed in students who spend extended periods of time in the wilderness.

~ Special thanks to committee members:

Rosemary Logan, Ph.D. - Co-chair; NAU University College
Michael Caulkins, Ph.D. - Co-chair; NAU University College
Jacob Dolence, MA - NAU University College
John Lynch, MA - NAU Geography, Planning, and Recreation

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Lupita Salazar

DECOLONIZING OUR FUTURE: RECLAIMING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN NORTHERN NEW MEXICO

Abstract:

Northern New Mexico is a unique region because of the connection that many of us still have to the land and our agricultural heritage. There has been a recent shift from self-subsistence to almost total reliance on the industrial food system. Along with other land-based peoples our lands, have been commodified and our minds have been colonized through standardized education. As our communities shift away from traditional lifestyles, we are joining the ranks of complacent consumers, feeding into the system that is destroying our bodies, as well as our culture. This thesis questions the viability of our present trajectory by working to better understand this place and its history by framing the study with three questions; What happened here? What is happening here now? And in what direction is this place headed? This is done by researching the history of the area, as well as the experiences of three groups that are using agriculture as a catalyst to mitigate the societal ills born of the legacies of colonization. Drawing lessons from the Northern Youth Project, La Tierra Montessori School, and AIRE, I examine a path of reinhabitation, in which people work to decolonize their communities and restore a connection to the land using local knowledge, past and present, to cultivate a better future.

~ Special thanks to committee members:

Miguel Vasquez, Ph.D. - Chair; NAU Anthropology
Kim Curtis, Ph.D. - NAU MA in Sustainable Communities
Gerald Wood, Ph.D. - NAU College of Education
Emily Davalos

SPEAKING OUR STORIES: THE COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH OF CHICAN@/LATIN@ STUDENTS IN A UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

Abstract:

Alarmingly, the experiences of racially minoritized students at predominantly White institutions have not been the focus of reforms in higher education; as a result, efforts focus on assimilation rather than interrogating the racial inequality inherent in PWIs. Efforts that seek to diversify PWIs that maintain the status quo can do little more than make students of color more comfortable guests in someone else’s home. The purpose of this study is to explore the educational experiences of Chican@/Latin@ students on predominantly White campuses, the community cultural wealth they bring, and how they navigate their identity. This study uses a composite critical race counterstory to the foreground the community cultural wealth Chican@/Latin@ students bring to disrupt cultural deficit ideology. Through collecting their stories and understanding the sociopolitical and historical contexts of their educational experiences, we can begin integrating their community cultural wealth as we move towards a sustainable, socially-just, diversity in education.

~ Special thanks to committee members:

Gerald Wood, Ph.D. - Chair; NAU College of Education
T. Mark Montoya, Ph.D. - NAU Ethnic Studies Program
Guy Senese, Ph.D. - NAU College of Education