

David Project for Peace Proposal
College Bound Summer Camp for Holyoke's GED Students
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Objective:

To interrupt Holyoke, MA's cycle of poverty that propagates violence by offering a summer program that equips adult learners preparing for the GED with the motivation and inspiration, concrete skills, and mentorship to pursue post-secondary education.

Background Situation:

Holyoke, Massachusetts bears the all too common story of the declining post-industrial city. Once internationally recognized for producing the highest quality paper in the world, it is now plagued by significant racial and ethnic inequality. Puerto Rican migrant populations began arriving in the 1970's just as the majority of industrial jobs fled south and abroad. Since then, Holyoke's Puerto Rican community has faced unemployed, racial and linguistic discrimination, and intolerable living conditions. Today 28.4% of Holyoke's residents live below the poverty line. It has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the state, resulting in a disproportionately young population, with almost half of the Latino population under the age of 18.¹ The city's violent crime rate is 129.27% higher than the national violent crime rate average in Massachusetts, and 70% of crime offenders lack high school diplomas.² In Holyoke, this statistic is greater due to its astonishingly low high-school graduation rate of only 49%. Over 30% of the total population lacks a high school diploma or GED. Furthermore, in the predominately Latino communities, less than 1% of individuals have earned a college degree or above.³ Collectively, these statistics represent the factors that contribute to the continuation of the cycle of poverty in these communities, and reoccurring incidents of violence.

A recent study shows that households headed by a person lacking a GED were 9.4 percent more likely to be poor or low-income than their peers with a high school diploma/GED.⁴ Accordingly, many organizations in Holyoke have pursued education-based approaches for poverty prevention, particularly through adult basic education (ABE) programs- Basic Literacy, ESOL and GED - that enroll over 380 students. However, in today's market, individuals need more than a GED to obtain a decent paying job. This means postsecondary education is now required to avoid living in poverty. Nationally, however, less than 35% of GED recipients enroll in post-secondary education.⁵ To address this, Holyoke's ABE system has formed an ABE to college pipeline initiative, which currently includes a College Awareness/Readiness curriculum taught in ABE classes, a bridge class for students who attain their GED, and a small Transition to College/Careers course for GED recipients committed to going to college. The part of the pipeline missing is a comprehensive college preparation for current GED students that adequately prepare them to enter the next levels. The current pipeline provides students with the information and inspiration to enroll in college, but not with the skills and mentorship they need to succeed.

In conclusion, in order to break the cycles of poverty that instigate violence within the Holyoke community, its members need to succeed in college. This requires intensive college guidance that begins when students are studying for their GED.

The Project:

My proposed project is to construct a new segment of the ABE to College pipeline for current GED students, through an 8-week-long summer intensive College Bound summer program that will focus on preparation for success in college. The program would serve a maximum of 15 students pursuing their GED in the Holyoke Community College Adult Learning Center (HCC/ALC) program. HCC/ALC teachers will help us identify the students they think will most benefit from the project to be our program participants. As an incentive for participation, all students will receive a \$200 stipend to cover transportation and childcare costs.

The program is comprised of three main tenets taken from research-based practices that have most successfully equipped students with the knowledge and ability to successfully pursue higher education. These three tenets are: 1) Inspiration and motivation for college, 2) Intensive mentorship and career guidance, 3) Concrete skill development.

¹ Holyoke Bound Planning Committee. City of Holyoke Demographic Information. Oct. 2011. 5-College Consortium

² "Holyoke Crime Statistics : Massachusetts (MA) - CityRating.com." Best Places To Live - CityRating.com. Web. 13 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.cityrating.com/crime-statistics/massachusetts/holyoke.html>>.

³ USA. Census Bureau. 2000 Census Data (by Census Tract) Holyoke, Massachusetts. 2000. Print.

⁴ Commonwealth Corporation. (2007, June). Poverty and the workforce. *Commonwealth Corporation Research and Evaluation Brief*, (4)10.

⁵ Jobs for the Future. (2004, November). *Breaking through: Helping low-skilled adults enter and succeed in college and careers*. Retrieved from <http://www.jff.org/publications/workforce/breaking-through-helping-low-skilled-adu/172>

For inspiration and motivation, we will use an existing College Awareness/Readiness curriculum. The curriculum first convinces students of the economic and personal reasons pursue higher education, followed by an exploration of community colleges' available resources and opportunities. The objective of the curriculum is to have ABE students concretely imagine themselves going to and completing post-secondary education. In addition to the curriculum, we will invite professors from the surrounding 5-colleges to give interactive lectures on research that is relevant to Holyoke, with the intention of instilling purpose in post-secondary learning and providing concrete examples of why post-secondary does relate to their lives. This will contribute to participants' exploration of major and certificate options that build on their current interests and talents, as well as financial planning and time management skill development; all that will orient students on successful college bound paths. Students will also go on three college tours to Holyoke Community College (HCC), UMass-Amherst, and Mount Holyoke College, to see and experience what college is like.

Recent studies have shown that most college awareness/readiness programs are extremely successful in inspiring students to go to college, but struggle to adequately prepare students to be successful once they begin post-secondary education. Studies show that intensive mentoring with students is a critical component in helping students navigate their education. Therefore, we will find 5-15 mentors for our 15 students. Mentors will be comprised of a mixed group of 5-College and HCC students, faculty & staff, community professionals. Mentors will be assigned based on students' career and academic interests. One gathering each week for the 8 weeks will be designated for structured reflection and career/academic advising with mentors. Mentor-student pairs will be placed into skill-development groups, led by three project managers. They will focus on writing and field-specific skills improvement, high-expectation goal setting, and resource navigation. Mentors will also be invited to our college visits, and provided with a stipend to pursue additional activities with students.

The final component of the summer program is a digital storytelling project, facilitated by the Latino Youth Media Institute in Springfield, MA. Digital storytelling is a new media innovation that allows public viewing of marginalized voices. It requires storytellers to actively digest and reflect on their learning process as they design their story. This component of the summer camp will occur the final two weeks of the program, serving as our concluding activity. During these two weeks, students will have to synthesize what they have learned throughout the program, and project where they intend to go once the program ends. Digital storytelling also concretely teaches students critical thinking, writing composition skills, and expression of individual agency – all skills important for college success. At the end of the two weeks, we will host a public viewing of the digital stories, symbolically held inside of one of Holyoke's re-purposed mills. It will represent Holyoke's potential for and hope in revitalizing itself through education, and bringing an end to poverty and violence.

Sustainability and Future Impact:

The proposed project will construct a missing link in the GED to college pipeline and will more concretely prepare students to enter higher levels of education. I have the support of the director of HCC/ALC, who promises to continue supporting these students academically after the program ends. Kristi Kaepfel, GED recipient and Holyoke resident, has agreed to be a project manager and to facilitate the continuation of the mentorship relationships after the summer program ends, meaning students will continue to receive academic and career advising as they transition into college. Additionally, the digital stories will be sent to WGBY-Public Television of Western Massachusetts, continuing the discussion about the individual and community benefits (and struggles) of going to college.

My qualifications:

For the last three years I have been working in various capacities in Holyoke's ABE community. I first tutored at the Transition to College and Careers program at HCC, where I became keenly aware of the particular struggles recent GED recipients encounter as they make the large transition from GED programs to college, how they often lacked college cultural knowledge, and struggled with basic literary expression and critical thinking skills. That same year I was asked to collaborate on the College Awareness/Readiness curriculum that has since been published and used throughout Western Massachusetts. I will structure the summer camp around this curriculum. The following year I went to Chile to study popular education and critical pedagogy, and am now pursuing a sociology honors thesis on civic education in the most recent Chilean student movement. I have combined my interests in civic education and ABE teaching in the past year by teaching a Civic Engagement elective course for students at the HCC/ALC program. In the class we learn about community and political issues, build critical thinking skills, and ultimately, develop individual action plans for community engagement. I have become increasingly involved in the Holyoke community over the past three years, and have built relationships with many community ABE educators and administrators who have been and will continue to be valuable advising and navigating resources for any project I pursue.