

Advanced Conflict: Applying Knowledge to Help the Community

Anyone who knows Jennifer Peeples knows that she loves her job. In our interview, she said, “I love my job! This is the best job in the world.” Her passion and confidence radiate as she does her best to make a difference in the world, one student at a time. She has been a professor here for 18 years. She has been very successful in her research for environmental communications and she recently just received an award for *Researcher of the Year*. This semester she has started teaching a new course called Advanced Conflict.

This conflict class is different from her other conflict classes because the students are given the great opportunity to apply their knowledge. A major part of this class is the service learning project. Communication studies majors come together, uniting their knowledge of resolving conflict to help others in the community. The students just finished this project which was an endeavor to help Resident Assistant’s in campus housing be better able to resolve conflict. They were given the opportunity to train 60 potential resident assistants and nine of the professional staff. The goal that was given to the students from the resident directors was, “provide training and support to RA’s in order to help resident’s handle their own conflicts in productive ways.”

Mali Soumpholphakdy, a current student in Professor Peeples’ class, told me her experience with the service learning project. She said that sometimes it is hard to just stick with teaching the basics, that they usually teach way more than they need to. The hard part has been keeping everything short and simple. She explained to me the process of the project. They started by each student creating a presentation and then they narrowed it down to the one that they would give to the RA’s. She stated, “We wanted to reframe the common mindset that conflict is always bad. Our desire for them was to realize that conflict can be a good and

beautiful thing that can bring about change.” The students then gave suggestions to the RA’s on better listening skills and how to ask open and honest questions. They also taught them some essentials when dealing with conflict. Such essentials include, separating the person from the problem and making sure that the person’s needs are addressed. To make sure their teaching was effective, they gave the RA’s opportunities to practice what they learned in a role play situation. Mali explained that through this process, they felt that they helped the RA’s understand that conflict isn’t always arguing or heated conversation but that it can be helpful and be resolved in a way that brings about change and unity.

Josh Johnson, a USU student who is currently working as a Resident Assistant, shared some positive feedback from the RA training. He said, “the training was super helpful because I always want to just fix the problem, but I learned that I just need to take a back seat and try to help the residents solve their problems for themselves.”

It can be said that these students have used their hard-earned knowledge in all of their communication studies and conflict courses to do good and educate others. This Advanced Conflict class is the perfect transition from learning in a classroom, to getting out in the real world and applying what they have learned.

The service learning project was a huge success and the RA’s and the Comm. Studies majors are better off because of it. Before the semester ends the students will be doing small individualized trainings with each RA helping them role play, following up from the training and answering any questions they might have. The Advanced Conflict class will then wrap up with creating a presentation for the resident directors that will be used in training new resident assistants in the fall. ###

By Sarah Taylor