Engaging Reality: Accompaniment and Community

“If you are coming to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you are coming to help me because you believe that your life and liberation are bound up with mine, then come and let us walk together.”
--Lilla Watson

The praxis seminar examines how we cross boundaries and create lasting relationships; it begs the questions: can we look critically at the realities and systems of our world and understand our roles within them? With all of human and societal complexity, then, in what or whom do we plant our hope? Based on academic background, personal interests and professional goals, as well as the unique contexts and needs of communities, students are paired with fellow classmates and assigned a praxis site in a local Filipino marginal community. Students learn from that community two full days a week for the entire semester. This learning environment cultivates an awareness of and sensitivity to the realities of those who are struggling to end social injustices while working to promote human dignity.

The primary source of learning / teaching in the course is in the context of a marginal community in the Philippines. Students enter the praxis communities as learners and not as volunteers. This experience does not serve as practice; rather, these experiences are honored as vital sources of knowledge and as valued ends in themselves. Therefore, students enter these communities as learners and are invited to immerse themselves in the “classroom” of the people of the Philippines.

Students’ praxis sites are intentionally linked to their other academic courses. In particular, the praxis seminar is designed to give students the tools to enter praxis sites in mutually beneficial ways, to analyze and critically think about social injustices experienced in the communities, and to process personal growth and foster commitment to an awareness of and response to the complex realities of the world.

Course Outline

1/17 Introductory Session: Praxis Visit (Sitio Payong)
1/18 Introductory Session: Praxis Visit (San Damian Center & HULMA, R2R)
1/19 Introductory Session: Praxis Visit (Tahanang Walang Hagdanan)
1/20 Introductory Session: Praxis Visit (Lingap Pangkabataan, Inc. & L’Arche Punla)
1/21 Introductory Session: Praxis Visit (Kapit Bisig)

1/21 Engaging Questions: Reflection on Orientation
Dean Brackley, S.J., “Meeting the Victims, Falling in Love”
“Two in a Million: Danny and Annie Perasa,” NPR / Storycorps (in class)

Suggested Reading:
Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., “Challenges in Jesuit Higher Education”
Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., June 1982 Commencement Address, Santa Clara University
Peter Hans-Kolvenbach, S.J., excerpt from “Justice in Higher Education”
1/26 **Approaches to Accompaniment: Re-imagining Global Interdependence**
Discussion on praxis and accompaniment as approaches
Sherry Turkle, “Stop Googling. Let’s Talk”

*Suggested Reading:*
Omid Safi, “The Disease of Being Busy,” *On Being*

2/2 **“A Well-Educated Solidarity”: Responding to Injustice, Expanding Narratives**
Reflection: 1st Days of Praxis
David Diggs, “We See From Where We Stand” *and*
Chimamanda Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story” (TED talk) *or*
Toni Morrison, “The Fisherwoman”

*Suggested Reading:*
Ivan Illich, “To Hell with Good Intentions”
John J. McLaughlin, “Unfinished Houses,” *America*
Rachel Naomi Remen, “In the Service of Life”
Pablo Neruda, “Childhood and Poetry,” *Neruda and Vallejo*

2/9 **The Sacredness of the Ordinary: 1st Praxis Weekend**
David Foster Wallace, “David Foster Wallace on Life and Work”
Mev Puleo, “Maria Da Silva Miguel,” *The Struggle is One: Voices and Visions of Liberation*

2/13 & 2/16 **Reflection: Praxis Weekend**
Praxis Meetings (small praxis groups)

2/23 **Steps in Social Analysis: Understanding Inequality in the Praxis Sites**
Steve Privett, S.J., “Like a Bear Robbed of Her Cubs”
UN Human Development Reports 2013 & 2015
Calatagan Orientation to Sitio Rodriguez Fishing Village Immersion

*Suggested Reading:*
John Neafsey, “Discernment and Social Analysis”

3/1-3/5 **An Ability to See: Cultivating Awareness in Calatagan**
Immersion in Barangay Uno, Sitio Rodriguez, Calatagan, Batangas
Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, pp. 281-308

3/9 **Accompaniment in Community: Integration & Support**
Greg Boyle, SJ: “Disgrace,” *Tattoos on the Heart*
Brene Brown, TED Talk, “The Power of Vulnerability”
*Film: Short-Term 12*

*Suggested Listening & Reading:*
3/16  Welcoming the Whole: Strength & Weakness Reframed  

3/23  Reading the Layers: Social Analysis  
Mary Oliver, “To Begin With, the Sweet Grass”  
Social Analysis Group Work  
Reflection

3/30*  Social Analysis Presentations  
In-class presentations during Praxis & Sociology class times – all students

4/6  Commitment to the Journey: Living in an Expansive Reality  
Annie Dillard, Holy the Firm

4/13  Vacation

4/20  Suffering, Discernment & Mercy  
Marilynne Robinson, Lila

4/27  Discernment & Vocation: Listening & Responding to Reality / 2nd Praxis Weekend  
Parker Palmer, Let Your Life Speak  
Guest Facilitator: Heidi Kallen, Co-Director, Casa Bayanihan

5/4  Moving Forward: A Fidelity to Hope  
Greg Boyle, SJ “Success,” Tattoos on the Heart  
Shaun Tan, “The Lost Thing” (short film in class)

  Suggested Reading:
Stephen Colbert, “On Making the Late Show His Own, GQ
Henri Nouwen, “Fragile and Hidden”
Andrew Solomon, “Notes on an Exorcism,” The Moth
Howard Zinn, “The Optimism of Uncertainty”

5/11  Final Praxis Presentations
Course Requirements

1. *Course Readings / Communal Reflection (15%):* Students are invited to reflect communally on selected readings as well as on their own experiences in the praxis sites. Students are graded on degree of participation and not the content of reflections.

2. *Journaling (15%):* 1-2 pages maximum. Students will write weekly journal entries over the course of the semester on a variety of topics based on their experience in communities. Students are graded by the effort given in addressing each section and not on the content of the reflections. Each journal entry will be out of 10 points considering completeness, timeliness, and thoughtfulness (putting in effort to think deeply about experiences in community, connections to life, etc.).

If journals and other assignments are one day late, students will receive a maximum of 7 pts; two or more days late, 5 pts; Incomplete, 0 pts. Please submit your journal entry onto the student computer every Tuesday by 6pm. Late entries must be printed and submitted directly to the professor.

Format: Page size: A4, 1” margins all sides, Times New Roman 12pt, Paragraphs: double-spaced, indent first line of paragraph 0.5”, no space between paragraphs. *Save as Journal#_LastName* (e.g. Journal2_Flores) in pdf format. You should plan to type your journals even if you keep a hand-written journal.

3. *Social Analysis (20%):* Social analysis can be defined as the effort to obtain a more complete picture of a social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships. Social analysis serves as a tool that permits us to grasp reality with which we are dealing. In partnership with the political science and sociology classes, students examine a situation in their praxis site with the goal of obtaining a more “complete picture” of the reality. Grades for the social analysis are based upon the thoughtful investigation of the situation in the praxis sites where the complexity of the situation is held in tension with an understanding of the frameworks of accompaniment, history, politics, gender, and economics.

4. *Final Praxis Project (20%):* The overarching goal of this project is to share students’ experiences of walking with the people in their praxis sites. Students will integrate course readings and reflections to create a project that attempts to capture a significant story, moment or lesson from their praxis community. Students will share their project with classmates. Grades are given based upon student’s degree of engagement with the assignment as well as the content of the final presentation.

5. Mid-Term and Final Evaluations (10%):
Students must complete, in collaboration with their praxis site coordinator, a mid-semester and final evaluation.

6. Praxis Binder (5%):
In collaboration with their praxis partners, students will add to and update their praxis community’s “Praxis Binder.” Praxis binders offer a way for current Casa students to communicate helpful advice and materials with future Casa students that will be placed in their praxis site. In the binder, students could include a number of things: letters with unsolicited advice or lessons learned, a breakdown of community organization, family trees, lesson plans used throughout the course of the semester, etc. Grades are based upon effort and content. Each student from the praxis site must contribute equal work.

7. *Attendance (15%):*
Students are expected to attend praxis sites on Mondays and Wednesdays regularly, as well as the seminar on Friday afternoon. Frequent late attendance to praxis seminar and/or absence from praxis sites (three
times or more) will affect students’ overall course grade. Co-director(s), Assistant Director, and CCs will hold meetings with students who are frequently absent to discuss the issue.

Grading

Following USF’s grading policy, final grades will be reported as follows: **A** – Outstanding; **B** – Superior; **C** – Satisfactory; **D** - Lowest Passing; **F** - Failing (course not counted toward degree requirement). The grades A, B, C, and D may be modified by plus (+) or minus.

Learning Outcomes

The seminar will use a variety of texts and speakers to facilitate deeper reflection and critical thought both about how students are growing individually and how they are cultivating an awareness of individual and social realities in praxis sites. Students will achieve the following learning outcomes, as evidenced by class discussions and reflections, journals, social analysis, the final praxis project and evaluation of the experience:

Students will:

- Possess the ability to enter another cultural context with a heightened degree of sensitivity and appreciation of the knowledge and wisdom of praxis community members.
- Integrate and apply the seminar’s readings and discussions to the realities and issues of their praxis sites
- Analyze and understand their own attitudes, assumptions and personal growth through contact with marginalized Filipinos
- Identify, analyze and better understand the social realities and injustices in their praxis sites
- Recognize the benefits of life-long responsible citizenship and civic engagement in personal and professional activities.
- Reflect on and evaluate how the praxis experience is mutually beneficial for both students and communities, identifying strengths of the experience, areas for growth, and concrete ways to grow in partnership

Academic Integrity

In keeping with USF’s Academic Honor code, students are expected to “demonstrate the core values of the University of San Francisco by upholding the standards of honesty and integrity, excellence in their academic work, and respect for others in their educational experiences.” Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated and will be dealt with according to USF’s Academic Honor Code. A complete discussion of the Honor Code may be found at [www.usfca.edu/catalog/policies/honor/](http://www.usfca.edu/catalog/policies/honor/)