**The Good Works Praxis Volunteer Experience, Spring 2017**

The Good Works Praxis volunteer experience is a community service structure that has been designed to fit the community engagement requirements of Service Learning courses at Ohio University. The structure of Praxis can accommodate around thirty students total. As space within the program is limited, it is important that course instructors provide their students with other options for fulfilling the service requirements of the Service Learning program. In addition, it’s our desire that students who choose to fulfill their Service Learning requirement, through the Praxis program, do so with a level of enthusiasm for the program.

A student that completes the Praxis structure will end the semester with at least twenty-four hours invested in the program. This time is split between two weekly events: a weekly meeting and a weekly service experience. The weekly meetings will begin on February 22nd and will last approximately one hour. The weekly service experiences called Transformation Groups will begin on the weekend of February 24th-26th and will last approximately three hours. Both the weekly meeting and the service experiences will last for a total duration of seven weeks. During that time, we will be asking students to attend at least four out of seven meetings and six out of seven Transformation Group experiences.

The Transformation Group component of Praxis will provide students with five different small group service opportunities to choose from: Friday Night Life, Agriculture, Neighbors Helping Neighbors (morning and afternoon) and Dinner at Timothy’s. The timing of each opportunity is detailed in the calendar below. These service contexts represent five different arenas in which Good Works regularly serves the Athens County community. Essentially, we are inviting Service Learning students into the work that Good Works is already doing on a weekly basis. Consequently, Good Works staff, interns and volunteers will be counting on the students that have committed to Praxis to be present, on time and to stay for the duration of each Transformation Group outing. For this reason, we are asking the instructors of each course to provide a degree of accountability to the commitment their students have made to the program. Instructors will be alerted if absenteeism becomes an issue or if a student is not living up to the commitment requirements of the Praxis program.

Good Works staff members are committing to provide leadership for both the weekly meetings and the weekly service experiences. Good Works staff will present content during the weekly meetings that will explore the topics of Beauty, History, Culture, Values and Needs of Appalachian Ohio, specifically Athens County. In addition, Good Works staff will lead a “debriefing” session at the conclusion of every service experience. This session is intended to add depth to the overall Praxis experience. Namely, we want students to move past the “project” mindset toward community service and into an increased focus on forming relational connections with the people that they are going to encounter. Good Works has, for the past seven years, been leading small groups of students into similar service experiences.

Good Works, Inc. has been serving the marginalized and vulnerable members of the Athens County Community since 1981. Please visit our website at [www.good-works.net](http://www.good-works.net) to learn more about our organization.

**Transformation Group Descriptions**

**Friday Night Life**

Friday Night Life is a weekly event that brings together adults and children from all over Athens County for a nutritious free community meal followed by a wide range of community building experiences. This Good Works initiative is in its 23rd year and regularly hosts 100 to 150 people. FNL is held at the Good Works Luhrig Rd property until October when we transition to the The Plains United Methodist Church in The Plains. FNL is attended by folks who have intersected with Good Works through a wide variety of streams. Some people attend because they’re in need of a nutritious meal and others need social nourishment. Many people have described FNL as having a “family reunion” kind of atmosphere. The primary role of student volunteers is to interact with the FNL community. It’s our desire that all FNL participants are able to find a niche in the community and to have a degree of ownership in making FNL happen each week.

**Meeting time: Fridays, 5 to 8pm**

**Neighbors Helping Neighbors**

Neighbors Helping Neighbors is a Good Works initiative that focuses on home maintenance. Good Works receives many requests, from our neighbors, for help with everything from simple lawn maintenance to extensive building projects. On an average year, Good Works serves around fifty families in this way. The NHN transformation group is an opportunity for student volunteers to connect with Athens County residents through friendship while filling a practical, home maintenance need. We will be offering two independent sessions of the NHN transformation group this semester.

**Meeting time: Saturdays, 9am to 12pm and 1 to 4pm**

**Dinner at Timothy’s**

The Good Works Timothy House is a home for people experiencing homelessness in our region. The house has capacity for fifteen people each night. Participants in the Dinner at Timothy’s transformation group will have the opportunity to prepare and enjoy a meal with the residents of the Timothy House. This is a very relational and an excellent opportunity for students to form relationship across socio-economic and cultural boundaries.

**Meeting time: Sundays, 5 to 8pm**

**Agriculture**

The agricultural transformation group, a component of Good Works Gardens, is an excellent opportunity for students to experience Athens County outside of the city of Athens. We’re currently working with fifteen “garden partners”, spread throughout the county. Our garden partners are people who have asked for Good Works assistance with the cultivation of home garden spaces. Many of the neighbors we serve are experiencing the effects of advanced age, disability, economic poverty or a combination of all these elements. Through the agricultural transformation group, student volunteers will have the opportunity to work alongside some of their Athens County neighbors in an effort to increase self-sufficiency and dignity in our community.

**Meeting time: Saturdays, 9:00am to 12:00pm**

**Meeting Content Description**

Meeting #1, February 22nd

Introduction to Good Works

The first meeting of the Praxis experience is intended to be an exploration of Good Works and an introduction to the Transformation Group experience. Students will be exposed to the history of our organization and the philosophy that drives what we do and how we do it. Students are encouraged to ask questions of the Good Works staff in order to gain a better understanding of our organization and the work we do in the Athens County community.

**Question of the week: What is relationally-based service?**

Meeting #2, March 15th

Topic: History of Athens County

Good Works staff will focus in on one or several aspects of the fascinating history of Athens County or Appalachian Ohio. Topics may include, but are not limited to, extractive industries in our region, the native peoples of Southeastern Ohio, an exploration of the term “Appalachia” and/or other historical topics relevant to our region. Students will learn about the historical events, economic, political, and social trends that have forged Athens County beginning in pre-colonial up to the present.

**Question of the week: What vestiges of Athens County history have you observed in and outside of your service experience?**

Meeting #3, March 22nd

Topic: Needs of Athens County

The topic of this meeting will revolve around an exploration of the needs of our community. Good Works staff will present content that examines a regional struggle with economic poverty, food insecurity, under-funded public education and/or homelessness. This conversation is also likely to include some elements that will encourage students to look beyond the situational poverty of Appalachia and into the many strengths and the abundant physical and cultural resources of Southeastern Ohio.

**Question of the week: How do the strengths and weaknesses of the Athens County community compare to that of our home communities? If you’re from Athens County, describe some of your communities’ greatest strengths.**

Meeting #4, March 29th

Topic: Culture

During the fourth meeting of the semester, Good Works staff will lead a conversation that will outline some of the characteristic traits of Appalachian culture. Our hope is that this conversation will afford non-Appalachian students an opportunity to gain an understanding and an appreciation of the culture of the Athens County community. We hope to facilitate a sensory experience of Appalachian culture such as storytelling, quilting or music. Furthermore, it is likely that this conversation will also include some discussion of commonly held stereotypes surrounding Appalachian culture and how those stereotypes effect how we view our Athens County neighbors.

**Question of the week: What differing cultural patterns have you observed during your Transformation Group experience?**

Meeting #5, April 5th

Topic: Beauty

This meeting will focus on the topic of the physical beauty of Athens County. The geography of our region is defined by dense forest, picturesque farms, sheer cliffs, creeks, rivers, lakes, ridges and hollows (pronounced: hollers). There is also an abundance of wildlife. The natural landscape of Athens County also bears the scars of its history with the extractive industry. This conversation

will examine how the landscape of this region has shaped the culture, livelihood and people of Athens County.

**Question of the week: Where do you see beauty in Athens County and how might others in the community find it there also?**

Meeting #6, April 12th

Topic: Values

Students will explore the roots of the value system of Appalachian peoples, reflect upon how these values differ from or are similar to their own, and discuss examples of how contrasting value systems are manifested in their Transformation Group contexts.

**Question of the week: What are some of the values that I perceive from my interaction with the community? How do these compare to the values of my community of origin?**

Meeting #7, April 19th

Topic: Closing

The final meeting of the semester will serve as an opportunity for each student to “unpack” their experience with Good Works. Good Works staff will ask students to talk about the ways in which their service was enlightening, difficult and/or transformative. Good Works staff will also open avenues for interested students to continue to be involved with Good Works initiatives.

**Question of the week: How has this Praxis experience affected your professional/personal worldview and/or ambitions?**



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| Praxis calendar of events: February 2017 |
| Mon |  | Tue |  | Wed |  | Thu |  | Fri |  | Sat |  | Sun |
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| 13 |  | 14 |  | 15 |  | 16 |  | 17 |  | 18 |  | 19 |
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| 20 |  | 21 |  | 22Introductory meeting5 to 6 pm |  | 23 |  | 24TransformationGroups week 1**FNL, 5 – 8pm** |  | 25**Ag,** **9 - 12pm****NHNA,** **9 - 12pm****NHNB,** **1 – 4pm** |  | 26**DAT’s,** **4 -7:30pm** |
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| Praxis calendar of events: March 2017 |
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| 13 |  | 14 |  | 15Meeting #2Topic: History |  | 16 |  | 17Transformation Groups week 2**FNL, 5 – 8pm**  |  | 18**Ag,** **9 - 12pm****NHNA,** **9 - 12pm****NHNB,** **1 – 4pm** |  | 19**DAT’s,** **4 -7:30pm** |
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| 20 |  | 21 |  | 22Meeting #3Topic:Needs |  | 23 |  | 24TransformationGroups week 3**FNL, 5 – 8pm** |  | 25**Ag,** **9 - 12pm****NHNA,** **9 - 12pm****NHNB,** **1 – 4pm** |  | 26**DAT’s,** **4 -7:30pm** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 27 |  | 28 |  | 29Meeting #4Topic:Culture |  | 30 |  | 31Transformation Groups week 4**FNL, 5 – 8pm**  |  |  |  |  |
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| Praxis calendar of events: April 2017 |
| Mon |  | Tue |  | Wed |  | Thu |  | Fri |  | Sat |  | Sun |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | Transformation Groups week 4 |  | 1**Ag,** **9 - 12pm****NHNA,** **9 - 12pm****NHNB,** **1 – 4pm** |  | 2**DAT’s,** **4 -7:30pm** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3 |  | 4 |  | 5Meeting #5Topic:Beauty |  | 6 |  | 7Transformation Groups week 5**FNL, 5 – 8pm**  |  | 8**Ag,** **9 - 12pm****NHNA,** **9 - 12pm****NHNB,** **1 – 4pm** |  | 9**DAT’s,** **4 -7:30pm** |
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| 10 |  | 11 |  | 12Meeting #6Topic:Values |  | 13 |  | 14Transformation Groups week 6**FNL, 5 – 8pm**  |  | 15**Ag,** **9 - 12pm****NHNA,** **9 - 12pm****NHNB,** **1 – 4pm** |  | 16**DAT’s,** **4 -7:30pm** |
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| 17 |  | 18 |  | 19Final Meeting |  | 20 |  | 21Transformation Groups week 7**FNL, 5 – 8pm**  |  | 22**Ag,** **9-12pm****NHNA,** **9- 12pm****NHNB,** **1 – 4pm****Cookout 5-7pm** |  | 23**DAT’s,** **4 -7:30pm** |
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Notes:

* The final meeting of the semester will take place on April 19th.
* The final transformation groups of the semester will take place on the weekend of April 21st-23rd.
* Good Works will be hosting a cookout for students, faculty and staff on April 22nd from 5-7pm at the Good Works Luhrig Rd. property.