2015

Connecting general education programming with regionally-engaged learning economies: The results of a community inquiry and dialogue

Brandon W. Kliewer
Kansas State University, brandon.kliewer@gmail.com

Daniel Cox
Danieljcox1990@gmail.com

Bryan Cooney
sebcoonrabbit16@yahoo.com

Briana Stiehl
bastiehl@eagle.fgcu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://encompass.eku.edu/prism

Connecting general education programming with regionally-engaged learning economies: The results of a community inquiry and dialogue

Brandon W. Kliewer
Kansas State University

Daniel Cox
Florida Gulf Coast University

Bryan Cooney
Florida Gulf Coast University

Eric Frankovitch
Florida Gulf Coast University

Brooke Shine
Naples, Florida

Briana Stiehl
Florida Gulf Coast University

There is a growing effort to more intentionally situate higher education as an anchor institution within a larger regional, social, political, and economic ecosystem. This paper describes the civic process and outcomes of a community inquiry that considered the relationship between general education programing at comprehensive universities and the trajectory of regional economies. The community inquiry leveraged intergroup dialogue techniques to provide a unique community perspective on potential ways general education can inform engaged learning economies. The result of this community inquiry and dialogue highlight three broad themes that could connect general education programs to engaged learning economies in other regions: campus-community partnerships, logistics of a general education program, and reconsidering the relationship between academic knowledge and soft skills. The results section describes, summarizes, and analyzes the proceedings from the perspective of community.

Keywords: Engaged learning economies, Civic leadership, Deliberative civic engagement

Southwest Florida is in a position to consider how its regional economy overlays with the General Education Program at Florida Gulf Coast University. Currently, the Bonita Springs Estero Economic Development Council (BSEEDC) is leading conversations around economic regionalism. According to the BSEEDC website, the Council is committed to "…building a prosperous, sustainable, and economically diverse community" (BSEEDC, 2014). The conception of economic regionalism that informed our community inquiry has its roots in local economic development, employment generation, and economic revitalization (Leigh & Blakely, 2013) but overlays with the larger project of community engagement and civic renewal (Levine, 2013).

As the region is reconsidering its economic plan, changes in the State University System of Florida has created the possibility for a more intentional collaboration between Florida Gulf Coast University and the BSEEDC. In 2012, the Florida state legislature mandated changes across the board to the General Education Program (GEP) at all state colleges and universities that would go into effect in the 2015-2016 academic year. House Bill 7135 requires students take at least one state core course in each of the following five subject areas in partial fulfillment of 36 required hours of General Education: Communication, Mathematics, Humanities, Social Science, and Natural Sciences. At Florida Gulf Coast University in the GEP, student learning will be assessed in relation to competencies,

including critical thinking, writing communication, quantitative reasoning, and civic identity (under a new assessment plan going into effect fall 2015). The General Education Program at Florida Gulf Coast University is determined by the faculty via representatives of the General Education Council and with oversight of the Director of General Education in the Office of Undergraduate Studies.

Our community inquiry considered how an engaged learning economy could be framed around the new General Education Program at Florida Gulf Coast University and general education programs at other regional universities. As anchor institutions (Hodges & Dubb, 2013), comprehensive universities play a significant role in regional economies. In the context of Southwest Florida the presence of Florida Gulf Coast University has many indirect social, political, and economic benefits. The purpose of this inquiry was to identify intentional opportunities and potential barriers to collaboration between the revised general education program and the regional economy. A particular emphasis was given to giving voice to community not normally included in the general education and economic planning meetings.

This document outlines the methods and results associated with our community inquiry. The first section considers the relevant academic literature in the area of community-engaged scholarship, regional engagement, and engaged learning economies. The second section outlines the methods of our community inquiry and civic dialogue. The penultimate section outlines the results of the civic dialogue. Our civic dialogue considered the intersection between engaged learning economies and general education programming. The final section offers a general discussion of larger implications raised by our community inquiry.

Literature Review

According to Furco and Miller (2009), engaged colleges and universities work "… synergistically to build and sustain an institutional culture in which community-engaged research, teaching, and public service are valued to the extent that they become fully infused within the academic fabric (p. 47). The method of engaged scholarship has been defined in relation to civic renewal (Levine, 2013) and redefining purposes and processes of democratic engagement (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2012). Community-engaged scholarship is tied to reimagining the civic and public purposes of higher education (Kozma, 2013). Colleges and universities express their civic and public mandate through a series of community engagement and outreach activities (Brannon & Dauksas, 2012).

Community engagement, also known as regional engagement, "…describes the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, and global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity (Saltmarsh & Driscoll, 2014). Engaged learning economies intersect campus-community partnerships from the perspective of civic engagement and economic development (Wittman & Crews, 2012). Edward Blakely (1994) defined local economic development as the "…process in which local government or community-based (neighborhood) organizations engage to stimulate or maintain business activity and/or employment" (p. xv-xvi). The goals of engaged learning economies are defined in relation to the project of economic growth for the public good. To achieve desired outcomes, engaged learning economies "…partner with communities to support strategic economic development by building on existing assets" (Wittman & Crews, 2012, p. 8). Engaged learning economies are only given meaning when informed by larger public

34

values, goods, and objectives. In 2012, Campus Compact released the white paper that highlighted the role civic learning and civic engagement has in the economy. Campus Compact is a national coalition of colleges and universities in the US that have made an explicit commitment to advance the civic and public purposes of higher education. The engaged learning economy connects civic learning and engagement to growing the economy.

Research has indicated that the employment and purchasing practices of colleges and universities create *multiplier effects* that help strengthen regional economies (Shaffer & Wright, 2004; Hahn, Connerty, & Peaslee, 2003). Campus-community partnerships and networking, extending from forms of community-engaged scholarship, have also been found to promote economic recovery (Zuickes, 2009). The potential overlay of community-engaged scholarship and redesigning a more sustainable and just economy seems promising and deserves more intentional consideration. Our community inquiry focused on the intersection of general education and regional economic development from a community perspective.

Most of the literature that connects civic engagement to engaged learning economies is developed from a policy and expert perspective. Our community inquiry intentionally created a space for community to consider the potential of general education programs to intersect dimensions of the economy. There has been a general call to design community-engaged scholarship structures that are inclusive of community voice in more meaningful ways (Stoecker & Tyron, 2009). Forms of community-engaged scholarship and community-capacity building have been bridged to civic renewal efforts and include a community perspective (Waters & Brigden, 2013). However, most of the literature in regional engagement compartmentalizes university and community spaces (Cruz & Giles, 2000), privileges community in ways that are not genuine and undermine larger commitments to reciprocal partnerships between campus and community (Bortolin, 2011), and emphasizes student learning over how community-engaged scholarship affects community (Stoecker & Tyron, 2009). Our community inquiry has been designed to intentionally include community voice and has genuinely tried to avoid the identified limitations.

Effective civic and public work is deliberative, collaborative, and focused on cultivating civic relationships. Levine (2013) suggests civic renewal is stalled by the suppression of participation by major institutions, prevailing ideologies, and existing civic culture. The current state of civic and public infrastructure makes it difficult for citizens to actively participate in defining the social, political, and economic trajectory of their community. The civic studies tradition attempts to leverage community-engaged scholarship to create the capacity for civic co-creation and movement towards community-identified ideals. The methods of this inquiry were developed to be inclusive of community voice, participation, and leadership development.

Methods of deliberative civic engagement were used in this project to view engaged learning economies through a civic studies lens. Deliberative civic engagement is defined by the methods used to consider public issues and determine levels of participation. First, deliberative refers to "…thoughtful and reasoned consideration of information, views, experiences, and ideas among a group of people" (Nabatchi, 2012 p. 8). The civic engagement component points to groups of people "…working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make difference (Nabatchi 2012, p. 7). The primary goal associated with

35

deliberative civic engagement is to influence officials in power (Leighinger, 2012 p. 19). The purpose of this manuscript is both regional and national. The forums were designed to invite community participation at the planning, execution, and analysis portions of the project. The lead conveners designed the deliberative forums as a space to not only cultivate meaningful conversations related to engaged learning economies, but also increase the leadership capacity of community. The lead conveners presumed that participation in the deliberative civic engagement forums had an educative dimension that would translate to increased capacity for leadership (Longo, 2013a; 2013b). The conveners relied on Ganz (2010) to consider ways deliberative civic engagement built public relationships and connected community leaders using narrative strategies. At the regional level, this document will be used to continue conversations around engaged learning economies in southwest Florida. Detailed summaries of the results were given to the general education council and the region's economic development commission. The reports will contribute, and have contributed to ongoing conversations occurring in each of the committees. At the national level, the results of this community inquiry highlight dimensions of regionally engaged learning economies as they intersect general education programs.

Method and Civic Dialogue Design

This document is the result of a collaborative community inquiry that used methods consistent with civic studies and deliberative civic engagement. The development of the community inquiry, execution of the civic dialogue, and analysis of the results were collaborative, reciprocal, and inclusive across the entire spectrum of the campus-community partnership. The indirect, and at times direct, outputs of the community inquiry process were tied to build community capacity to exercise. The focus and goal of our project was to intentionally connect various groups in our community, which normally do not interact, in order to contextualize engaged learning economies at the intersection of general education programs. At the outset of this project, the lead conveners were interested in considering how a liberal arts-based general education program can also advance a socially-conscious, environmentally sustainable, engaged learning economy in our region. The community inquiry was led by an Interdisciplinary Studies Senior Seminar in the civic engagement track of the Interdisciplinary Studies program.

The lead conveners decided to use an intergroup dialogue to consider the identified topic. Intergroup dialogues are "…facilitated group experiences…that provide people with a safe and structured opportunity to explore attitudes around contentious issues" (Natbachi, 2013 p. 8). The interdisciplinary studies students leveraged the community-engaged inquiry methods covered in the course to build public relationships and link a range of public narratives to the topic of an engaged learning economy.

The lead conveners followed the core principles of civic leadership (Ganz, 2010) to build public relationships and link various stakeholder groups in our region to a common public narrative. Students were divided into groups of two and tasked to connect with 12-key stakeholder groups. Stakeholder groups were defined as a "…person, group, or organization that has a "stake" in the outcome of a decision" (Stoecker & Tyron, 2009, p. 107). Student groups developed public relationships and expanded the community inquiry network by conducting a series of one-to-ones. One-to-ones are meetings which "… organizers recruit a host who will commit to invite members of his or her network…to meet the organizer, share experiences, and discuss the movement" (Ganz, 2010 p. 533). The lead

36

conveners organized small one-to-ones between 1 to 3 other community members. The advantage of this process of community organizing is that the lead conveners were able to free themselves of existing community infrastructure and identify individuals that were interested in participating in the civic dialogue. The assumption of this process was that the identified individuals might potentially exercise leadership to advance the development of engaged learning economies in the future. For purposes of this community inquiry, the following stakeholder groups were identified and included in the initial one-to-ones: local government, public schools, business and industry, conservation groups, university staff, administrators, faculty, and students, hotel, tourism, and entertainment, and general community members that did not identify or easily fit within a single stakeholder group. The stakeholders that participated in the initial interviews were emailed a thank you note and a document that contained the notes from the one-to-ones. The community members were encouraged to correct any misinterpretations and add any additional thoughts to the notes. The one-to-ones indicated that participants were primarily interested in exploring and considering the nature of engaged learning economies.

A general education program that embraces a liberal arts education does not necessarily have an obvious connection to an engaged learning economy. As a result, the one-to-ones helped frame the dialogue around areas of overlap between the general education program and the needs of the regional economy. The results of the one-to-ones helped lead conveners to produce a framing document and energize community interest in the deliberative civic engagement forum (see Apendix for additional information about the context of the civic dialogue). The civic dialogue framing document centered the dialogue questions on how civic and public work overlap with the skills and knowledge needed in a 21st century economy. It became clear from the one-to-ones that community members were interested in connecting civic and public work to the General Education Program at Florida Gulf Coast University. Community members saw the integration of civic and public work as not only an intrinsically valuable practice, but also as a pragmatic strategy to cultivate the soft skills necessary to support a regional economy. Once the framing document was created, students began to leverage the network of different relationships created by producing the framing document to recruit participants for the civic dialogue.

Using the network created by the one-to-ones, students recruited participants from the community to consider the relationship between the General Education Program at Florida Gulf Coast University and the regional economy. Fifty-three community members attended the civic dialogue. Participants were divided up into groups of 8-9 people. The faculty instructor of the interdisciplinary studies senior seminar, Director of the General Education Program, and the Chief Executive Officer of the BSDEEC briefly provided opening comments to explain the inquiry process and primed the context of the civic dialogue. Each question in the framing document was considered for approximately 20-30 minutes (see Appendix for the framing document). Each table had a facilitator and recorder. Facilitators used the Nominal Group Technique to maintain an inclusive and participatory dialogue (Taylor, Berry, & Block, 1958; Chapple & Muphy, 1996). The recorders took field notes in order to capture the civic dialogue. Field notes have the "…primary goal of description rather than analysis." (Emerson & Fretz, 1995 p. 105). However, the actual practice of field note taking prevents a clear separation between descriptions and analysis. Emerson & Fretz (1995) refer to this as "analysis-in-description" (p. 106). As a result, recorders were instructed to collect field notes that were "…selective, purposed, angled,

37

and voice…" (p. 106). At the end of the three rounds, participants had an opportunity to share their thoughts on the broader topic and reflect generally on the civic dialogue process. Nine participants gave statements during the final at-large reflection. The facilitators and recorders organized the results from the dialogue for analysis.

Following the civic dialogue event, groups of students prepared brief 10 to 15 minute presentations that used the field notes to identify common themes that emerged from the dialogue. The purpose of the presentation was to ensure assumptions and interpretations of the results were critically evaluated to ensure a premature consensus had not developed. The presentation process identified three common themes that emerged at each table during the civic dialogue. Students were organized into writing groups based on the results of the civic dialogue. The writing groups paralleled the themes identified through the civic dialogue. The following themes were identified: campus-community partnerships, logistics of the general education program, and connecting theory to practice with the intention of developing soft skills.

After the field notes from the civic dialogue were organized, students were divided evenly into thematic groups. Students wrote the introduction and conclusion sections of each thematic sub-section collectively. Each student was then responsible for expanding on one of the points within the thematic area. The students had 7-days to write the first draft of their section. The course instructor reviewed each draft and provided feedback and comments. Students then had two weeks to revise and resubmit their sections. Each student wrote composite elements under each section that captured points that were considered during the dialogue. The course instructor and lead student authors were responsible for editing and organizing the manuscript. Once the document was created it was sent to participants from the dialogue that expressed interest in providing feedback and reviewing a draft of the document. Participants had one month to review the manuscript and provide feedback. Subsequent feedback and contributions from the community were then incorporated into the text. The following section reports the main themes of the civic dialogue. The results of this dialogue highlight a community perspective of how an engaged learning economy could potentially intersect general education programming.

Results from Dialogue and Community Inquiry Campus-Community Partnerships

The civic dialogue brought together every cross section of the community to discuss how a general education program and a regional economy can grow in reciprocal and mutually beneficial ways. The participants of our civic dialogue recognize the relationship between the Regional Economic Development Plan and the General Education Program at Florida Gulf Coast University as having an overlapping goal of *cultivating a sense of place.*

Participants defined sense of place both in terms of identity and commitment. The results of the inquiry point to a general desire to design an engaged learning economy that helps students identify with the region. Student identity tied to the region was characterized in the field notes by participants through commitments connected to green business, environmental sustainability, the cultivation of niche markets, and insulating regional markets from the ebbs and flows of the global economy. The underlying assumption that was considered was how the General Education program could be connected to developing the identified elements within the existing regional economy. The second dimension included in understanding sense of place was developing a commitment to the region.

38

Participants acknowledged that economic conditions often create push/pull dynamics once students graduate. There were multiple calls to design engaged learning economies that helped students build a commitment to the region. The underlying assumption expressed during the dialogue was that if structures were in place, students and recent graduates would be more likely to remain committed to the region, regardless of how the global market was impacting the region.

It was clear that participants were calling for engaged learning economies that advance a *Live Here. Learn Here. Stay Here* approach. One of the identified techniques to create a sense of place was by developing meaningful campus-community partnerships. Participants identified five main goals that could be achieved through the development of more robust campus-community partnerships. The identified goals are as follows:

1. More intentional connections, relationships, and networks across community.
2. Move away from "counting direct service hours" as the highest form of civic and community engagement; instead, create more issue-based and/or project-based requirements that are defined by students and community.
3. Create Community Learning Labs – space in the community in which students, faculty, and community members meet to consider important issues and develop scholarly community-based projects.
4. Build a regional identity around a General Education Program and an engaged learning economy that advances environmental sustainability and niche markets appropriate for Florida Gulf Coast University and Southwest Florida.
5. Create formal opportunities for students to be embedded into community and formal opportunities for community members to be embedded into Florida Gulf Coast University.

The following paragraphs provide composite examples of possible campus-community partnerships that cultivate a sense of place and were discussed at the dialogue.

It is imperative for the success of students at regional universities to be provided with the space to make meaningful connections with individuals in the community. To be consistent with the "live here, learn here, stay here" approach, students must be introduced to organizations within the surrounding region. Gaining an emotional and physical connection to the region creates levels of attachment that encourage students to continue living in the region upon graduation. Participants vocally supported meaningful partnerships that encouraged students to stay in the region after graduation. For example, expanding internship opportunities and forms of community-engaged scholarship can help students connect their academic experience to the region. These experiences can help students connect to existing professional opportunities or help define and create jobs that do not yet exist. One of the goals of these types of experiences should be to tie students emotionally to the region. Students will be more likely to invest in their general education and region if the education process is connected to developing sense of place.[1]

Connecting students with community through intentional multidisciplinary projects can help develop a strong sense of place. For example, participants at the dialogue considered the development and execution of a community garden or farm that could provide a meaningful space for multidisciplinary study and place building. While the farm is small, it needs assistance from the community to help it grow. Students could leverage academic skills and knowledge to operate different dimensions of the farm. As the project matured,

[1] Section authored by Yilianna Hernandez, Environmental Studies, 2014 & Colette Thome, Psychology, 2014

the opportunity for interaction between students and community members would grow. These types of interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaborations have the potential to build the emotional connection that will keep talented students in the region.[2]

Participants at the dialogue discussed community engagement programs that would encourage students to re-visit community organizations throughout their undergraduate experience. Authentic partnerships would hopefully develop strong relationships with those stakeholders. Participants expressed an interest in exploring the possibility of having long-term community engagement experiences be the equivalent to lab credit. Long-term community engagement experiences would help students reflect on the relationship between their academic studies and civic and public work.

Participants noted that traditional-aged college students are usually in a period of transition while completing their undergraduate degrees. Many indicated that the disruptive potential of attending college should be designed to help students re-connect to the local region of their comprehensive university. Participants called for more student-centered academic service-learning teaching methods and community-engaged scholarship experiences. Most community engagement experiences in general education programs are defined and negotiated by faculty and university administrators. Participants expressed a general sentiment that the disruptive potential of the undergraduate experience could be effectively channeled if students were given the opportunity to design their own community-engaged scholarship experiences. For example, rather than having a direct service hours requirement in order to graduate, it would be in the best interests of both the community and the students to complete more meaningful community engagement projects and long-term service experiences tied to their academic interests, passions, and professional goals.[3]

Building on the idea of developing a regional identity centered on environmental sustainability, participants discussed the idea of developing community learning labs that could support environmental sustainability and civic engagement initiatives. Community learning labs would be used as a space for students, faculty, and community members to meet and collaborate on ideas, provide a space for students to pitch green business ideas, develop job skills for a green economy, and provide a space for students and community organizations to meet for community engagement projects. Participants expressed a clear interest in connecting the engaged learning economy to environmental sustainability and ecotourism in southwest Florida.[4] Participants considered the possibility of directly integrating courses in the General Education Program that support and advance the ecotourism industry in the region. This idea not only aligned with the mission of the university, but also aligned with economic initiatives in the region. The idea would be that the curriculum of some of the general education courses would include understandings of ecotourism in the region and students would complete forms of community-engaged scholarship that supported dimensions of the ecotourism industry. This type of relationship would help students network with professionals in the area and represent the university in a positive light in the eyes of people visiting the area.

Logistics of General Education Programs

This section of the paper focuses on addressing the logistics of executing a general education program at a regional comprehensive university. Stakeholders participating in

[2] Section authored by Brooke Shine, Physchology, 2014

[3] Section authored by Solomon Zarmbey, Community Partner & Student, 2014

[4] Section authored by Brooke Shine Psychology, 2014

40

the civic dialogue considered and discussed opportunities associated with redesigning course sequences in relation to skill development and to redesign the infrastructure that supports engaged learning economies. After the dialogue, it came to our attention that state policy does not allow public colleges and universities, for the most part, to sequence courses within the General Education Program. The state policy that prevents sequencing general education programs might be something stakeholders consider revising in the future. Stakeholders at the dialogue were very concerned that there was not a more intentional sequence in the general education program. Participants felt that students often complete general education programs without any intentionality. The field notes indicated that participants were interested in providing students with experiences that support future learning and professional development.

To develop structures of life-long learning in the context of southwest Florida and Florida Gulf Coast University participants urged a reconsideration of some policies and practices. Stakeholders at the civic dialogue focused their comments on incorporating more strategies for civic engagement projects and academic service-learning. The following section of this document considers the logistics of general education programing from a community perspective. The identified areas of consideration are as follows:

1. Guidance - Develop positive and close relationships between students, university faculty, and the community to provide effective guidance through multiple perspectives.
2. Tools for Success - Enhance classroom pedagogies to effectively engage students and prepare them for civic and professional roles beyond the college experience.
3. Opportunities for Practice - Foster student engaged scholarship, service, and volunteerism for the benefit of the student, university, and region.

Guidance

It became evident that stakeholders in our community felt strongly about incorporating more student interaction with Florida Gulf Coast University faculty, community professionals, and Florida Gulf Coast University graduates within the General Education Program. Participants considered a variety of ways to encourage students completing general education courses to interact with community. The most focused proposal discussed at the dialogue was a call for more interaction between students, faculty, and community partners to create community-engaged scholarship programs and academic service-learning opportunities. Students would be able to work directly with faculty to work towards solving a campus or community issue. Increasing interaction between students, faculty, and community will help build networks of people that share a common passion. Along with faculty interaction, participants thought it was important for classes in the general education program to have more intentional interactions with professionals in the community. Participants considered professional speakers and relationships as a potential way to more fully integrate a community perspective into the curriculum of the general education program. For instance, a group of participants thought that during the Visual Arts and Humanities classes, a local artist could speak to classes about art in the region. This teaches students more about the topics covered in class, develops an appreciation for the arts, and allows students the opportunity to make a personal connection with a community member. The connection between the theoretical concepts and practice of art in the region becomes real to students.

There was also general interest across all the dialogue tables to have students completing

41

general education courses to interact with recent graduates. Students in the general education program would be able to get a perspective about what to do when college is over from someone who is in a similar life situation. Connecting undergraduates with recent graduates could be incorporated into the general education program by recruiting alumni to speak to students in general education classes or serve as community mentors for community engagement projects. For example, participants considered the possibility of a biology graduate speaking to a general education biology class and leading an integrated community engagement project tied to the course. The graduate could explain what he/she did upon graduation and how their academic interests in biology connected to the professional world and the community engagement project. General education programs would benefit from more student interaction with faculty, community professionals, and recent graduates.[5]

Tools for Success

Many at the dialogue felt that students are often ill prepared to articulate skills, knowledge, and behaviors developed during the general education program to external stakeholders. Many at the dialogue felt that there is currently a disconnect among stakeholders outside of higher education about the relevance of general education courses for students. Many discussants felt that the general education program plays a key role in student development; however, regional universities and students do a poor job communicating and translating skills that were cultivated in the general education program to civic and professional spaces. Participants called for more courses and experiences that help students communicate their skills and knowledge to audiences outside of higher education. Participants felt that some student learning outcomes in the general education in the general education program were not demonstrable in applied settings.

For example, many participants were interested in the design of general education programs that improved dimensions of intercultural competence. However, many participants indicated that they felt student learning in general education programs was not directly tied to behavioral and attitudinal change in practice. Although participants recognized the financial and budgetary limitations, many thought it was important for students in the General Education Program to study abroad and the administration should consider including an international experience as a graduation requirement. A thematic version of the General Education Program could orbit around issues of environmental sustainability. Students in this theme could then use data collected from the region to learn probability and statistics. It does not have to be a full semester long program, but many discussants indicated that experiencing foreign countries in the context of a vacation, can be a transformative learning experience. There was also diffused interest in exploring potential ways to improve intercultural competencies through domestic academic programming. This idea was not fully developed but could serve as the focal point of future dialogues.[6]

In the interest of building an exceptional educational foundation for students, many stakeholders in attendance presented the idea of having general education courses be defined by theme instead of subject area. These thematic general education courses would be centered on various issues that are tied to the student's potential major or professional field. This thematic approach would also help students grow and become active members in the community. For instance, participants suggested that a general education requirement

[5] Section authored by Chelcie Almeyda, Biology, 2014
[6] Section authored by Ashlee Dunne, Biology, 2014

42

at Florida Gulf Coast University could be to have all students take a probability and statistics course that used real-world data collected from the region. This would help to get students interested and engaged with their coursework as they look to real world issues in their general education theme. Furthermore, this framework for thematic general education courses could be applied to a larger context to track social, political, and economic issues outside a student's major field of study.

In addition to the development of thematic general education courses, stakeholders felt it is very important that the general education program, not only at Florida Gulf Coast University but generally at comprehensive universities, help students "learn how to learn." The field notes indicated that essentially every dialogue table expressed that the current workforce is very competitive and students will need to draw from multiple adaptive skills to effectively participate within their regional community and economy. To develop these skills students will need to be able to learn and process new information quickly and effectively.[7]

Opportunities for Practice

Many participants felt it was important to consider the relationship between the general education program and a student's larger academic and professional interests. The content of the dialogue focused on how direct service and academic service-learning experiences are commonly practiced at regional universities. Many felt that there was not enough attention being given to connecting direct service, academic service-learning, and other forms of community-engaged scholarship to a student's interests and the overlapping needs of the economy. Participants indicated that they felt students are not generally cultivating a sense of civic agency and autonomy when working in the community.

Many of the participating stakeholders agreed that students should receive incentives from the university and community to complete civic and public work. In an ideal situation, students would be intrinsically motivated to complete civic and public work. Often, however, students are faced with considering the opportunity costs associated with the expense of tuition, course work requirements, transportation, full-time enrollment, and 40+ hours of wage work for part-time pay. The stakeholders proposed incentives that can help students develop interest in engaging in meaningful community work. Many of the proposed incentives were not directly monetary. Some of the incentives discussed included the following: scholarships, public recognition, recommendation letters, and recognition of skills and experiences on academic transcripts. The stakeholders felt that incentives and positive reinforcement from the university and community would give students the means to more deeply connect scholarly interest to civic and public work. Some suggest an incentive and reward system that would move community involvement from volunteerism to higher forms of civic leadership and professionalism.

Logistics of the General Education Program Revision in Review

The deliberative civic engagement forum has general implications for all regional and comprehensive universities. Stakeholders provide a community perspective on how to revise general education programs through the lens of engaged learning economies. Stakeholders at the dialogue ultimately wanted to consider opportunities that more intentionally guided students to civic and public work opportunities, equipped students with appropriate skills and knowledge for civic and professional lives, and created student-driven opportunities to

---

[7] Section authored by Kimberly Nall, Communication/Community Member, 2014

43

connect the general education to practical community issues. Improving the delivery of the general education program around these areas will hopefully connect students, community partners, and faculty along the theory to practice continuum.[8]

Bringing Theory to Practice: Soft Skills

Developing soft skills is an essential component of professional and public success. Participants defined soft skills as the ability to think critically, communicate in diverse groups, recognize and develop healthy personalities, and maintain professional relationships. As indicated by many participants at our dialogue, these are the skills that often determine success in civic spaces and competitive job markets. Stakeholders were confident that students are getting the technical skills needed to find employment from their education; however, the students that struggle to find stable employment seem to be missing basic soft skills. Often unimpressed by those who do not possess these skills, local community participants agreed that there must be a firm effort on integrating these skills into general education curriculum and experience. The following paragraphs detail three dimensions of soft skills that were identified and considered during the civic dialogue:

1. Development opportunities for soft skills
2. Communication & networking: Developing soft skills through civic work, academic service-learning, and internships
3. Engagement with and consideration of civic virtues[9]

Participants expressed a clear position that required courses in general education programs should integrate practices and teaching methods that cultivate a range of soft skills. Participants suggested that this integration can take place by requiring more students to lead community engagement experiences and encouraging students to connect course content to larger civic and public issues. Participants repeatedly talked about the potential of community-engaged scholarship and academic service-learning to create a space to cultivate and practice soft skills.[10]

Communication & Networking: Developing Soft Skills through Civic Work, Academic Service-Learning, and Internships

Community engagement and academic service-learning creates opportunities for students to build professional networks. Many dialogue participants stressed a concern that emerging technologies are disrupting the basic development of interpersonal skills (e.g. holding conversations, making eye contact, group problem solving). Participants frequently talked about how intentional community-engaged scholarship can potentially provide students an opportunity to develop these important interpersonal and soft skills. Dialogue participants discussed how civic and public work would require students to organize, design, and execute community-engaged projects. Participants expressed a general interest in finding innovative ways to integrate community-engaged work into a region's economy and general education programing.[11]

Engagement with and Consideration of Civic Virtues

Participants seemed to be particularly interested in exploring the relationship between public work and empathy. With respect to the dialogue, empathy was defined as cognitive

---

[8] Section authored by Spencer Klepper, Chemistry/Community member, 2014

[9] Section authored by Daniel Cox, Environmental Studies/Community Member, 2015

[10] Section authored by Daniel Cox, Environmental Studies/Community Member, 2015

[11] Section authored by Briana Stiehl, Environmental Studies/Community member, 2014

44

and affective participation in another's experience. Dialogue attendees agreed that developing young adult's capacity for civic and public engagement is necessary for a thriving economy. However, participants also seemed attuned to the fact that emerging engaged learning economies could be exploitative for students and community members. Discussants considered how civic-mindedness could anchor the moral basis of engaged learning economies. Participants generally agreed that concerns of ethics and fairness of engaged learning economies should be considered in future dialogues. Participants expressed clear interest in connecting general education programming to economic growth strategies.[12]

Closing Reflection

Community inquiries provide an intentional opportunity for groups of people to come together and consider issues that impact the lives of everyday people. If done properly, deliberative civic engagement can support citizen co-creation, individual agency, and increase levels of democratic participation. In a time of wicked social, political, economic, and environmental challenges, the capacity of communities for democratic self-determination becomes increasingly important. The results of this civic inquiry not only provide a model for other regional engagement efforts, but highlight community perspectives on the potential ways general education programs can anchor engaged learning economies.

Overall, the results of the dialogue provide a helpful resource for the regional engagement field to continue to explore dimensions of engaged learning economies. However, the results and substance of the dialogue also point to some areas of tension that can serve for further consideration. First, regional engagement practice needs to cultivate a more refined, theoretical and practical, understanding of the purpose of public universities. Secondly, the results of our community inquiry clearly indicate that comprehensive universities need to reconsider their role in cultivating a sense of place in the 21st century.

The results from the civic dialogue highlighted areas that deserve further consideration around engaged learning economies. Comments and general themes from the dialogue seem to indicate general confusion around the public purposes of a regional university. Campus-community/community-campus partnerships and regional engagement practitioners ought to spend more time directly highlighting, championing, and promoting the public purposes of general education at regional universities. Regional universities that consciously work towards realizing their mission have a commitment to place in a way that other colleges and universities do not. Connecting the liberal arts, humanities, and other general education curricula to public purposes will help stakeholders to see the importance of education in a time when the value of higher education is being reconsidered. It is appropriate for a democratic society to choose how public monies are spent. However, if public higher education is to remain relevant in the 21st century, there need to be more intentional efforts to highlight the power and success of general education programming to external stakeholders and audiences. Recognizing the public purposes of a regional comprehensive university can be realized with a focused attention on cultivating individual skills necessary for civic and professional success. Communicating to external stakeholders outside higher education can be done by reimagining the role higher education has in cultivating spaces for civic participation and action. It is easy to focus on the instrumental benefits of education

---

[12] Section authored by Section authored by Nicole Brewer, Biology, 2015

if there is no obvious way higher education supports larger public goods.

The participants of the civic dialogue also pointed to a general anxiety around how the intrinsic and instrumental outcomes of higher education are understood from the perspective of community. Participants often discussed the outcomes of a degree from a comprehensive university and general education program in instrumental terms (e.g. students will have certain experiences, access to certain types of jobs, certain levels of satisfaction, etc.) However, instrumental understandings of the general education programs risks missing the larger public significance of education. The education students receive at a university should prepare them for more than their first job. Comprehensive universities have an obligation to prepare students for public life. As more engaged learning economies emerge, it is crucial to constantly reconsider the organization of the curriculum and to balance between instrumental and intrinsic concerns (interest in learning, commitment to civic-mindedness, desire for knowledge and truth, moral responsibility, etc.)

Successful engaged learning economies will support co-creation, collaboration, and individual agency. Comprehensive universities are not technical schools, nor do they provide vocational training. This does not mean that there cannot be more intentional efforts to integrate learning outcomes of the general education program to the larger regional economy. Community-engaged scholarship, campus-community partnerships, and larger efforts of civic renewal should be leveraged to communicate the public purposes of comprehensive universities to stakeholder groups.

The position of institutions of higher education in society is evolving. Historically, comprehensive universities have had a unique position in anchoring a sense of regional place (Hodges & Dubb, 2013). However, technological innovation, public disinvestment, and changing social patterns are changing the relationship between regional comprehensive universities and a sense of place. Regional engagement can play an increased role in redefining a sense of place as comprehensive universities enter the 21st century.

Discussants at the dialogue identified tensions associated with comprehensive universities' historical commitment to local communities in a increasingly global context. The tensions between how regional engaged learning economies fit within a larger global economy were not always clear to participants. The tensions comprehensive universities feel between the local and global is becoming more pronounced as comprehensive universities continue to expand online and virtual curricular and co-curricular offerings. Technological innovation is changing the way citizens and stakeholders articulate the purposes of a comprehensive university. Locating a regional university in a globally connected world challenges fundamental assumptions of place-based education and regional community-engaged scholarship. The results of the dialogue point to the need to consider questions of scope and location of the regional university in the economic field. The dimensions of community-engaged scholarship, co-creation, participation, and partnership will be shaped by how the space of regional engagement is located in the community and region.

Dialogue participants longed for a strong emotional connection between recent graduates and the surrounding region. However, the results of the dialogue highlight a fundamental disconnect between a shared sense of place and how global capitalism challenges place. Cultivating a regional engagement practice that builds a sense of place often means individuals becoming rooted to a specific geographical location. This puts individuals that use their labor to produce an income at a distinct disadvantage in relation to global capitalism. Corporations move and relocate according to supply chains, labor markets,

46

and financial and security markets. The everyday citizen does not have the same flexibility and mobility to follow the movement of capital if they are rooted to a specific region. Future dialogues around engaged learning economies need to consider how a commitment to place can be reconciled with tensions produced by global capitalism. If sense of place is a value that regions want to realize, in practice, there needs to be a serious effort to consider the relationship between structural elements of global capitalism and engaged learning economies.

References

Blakely, E. J. (1994). *Planning Local Economic Development: Theory and Practice* (2nd Ed). New York, NY: Sage Publications.

Bortolin, K. (2011). Serving ourselves: How the discourse on community engagement privileges the university of the community. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *18*(1), 44-58.

Brannon, D., & Dauksas, L. (2012). The academic and social benefits for preservice teachers working with children and families of promise. *PRISM: A Journal of Regional Engagement*, *1*(2).

Chapple, M., & Murphy, R. (1996). The nominal group technique: Extending the evaluation of students' teaching and learning experiences. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher education*, *2*(21), 147-160.

Cruz, N., & Giles, D. (2000). Where's the community is service-learning research? (special issue) *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 7, 28-34.

Furco, A., & Miller, W. (2009). *Issues in benchmarking and assessing institutional engagement*. Indianapolis, IN: Jon Wiley & Sons.

Ganz, M. (2010). Leading change: Leadership, organization, and social movements. In N. Nohira and R. Khurana (Eds.), *Handbook on leadership theory and practice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

Hodges, R., & Dubb, S. (2013). *The road half traveled: university engagement at a crossroads*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

Jacoby, B. & Mutascio, P. (2010). *Looking in, reaching out: A reflection guide for service-learning professionals*. Boston, MA: Campus Compact.

Kozma, C. (2013). A crucible moment and the current state of engagement: A conversation with Caryn McTighe Musil. *PRISM: A Journal of Regional Engagement*, *2*(1).

Leigh, N., & Blakely, E. J. (2013). *Planning local economic development: Theory and Practice* (5th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Leighninger, M. (2012) Mapping Deliberative Civic Engagement: Pictures From a (R) evolution. In T. Nabatchi, J. Gastil, M. Leighninger, & G. M. Weiksner (Eds.), *Democracy in Motion: Evaluating the Practice and Impact of Deliberative Civic Engagement* (pp. 19-39). USA: Oxford University Press

Levine, P. (2013). *We are the ones we have been waiting for: The promise of civic renewal*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Longo, N. V. (2013a). Deliberative pedagogy in the community: Connecting Deliberation dialogue, community engagement, and democratic education. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, *9*(2).

Longo, N. V. (2013b). Deliberative pedagogy & the community: Making the Connection. *Higher Education Exchange*, 49-60.

47

Saltmarsh, J., & Driscoll, A. (2014). *Classification Descriptions*. Retrieved from http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php

Saltmarsh, J., & Hartley, M. (Eds.). (2012*). To serve a larger purpose: Engagement for democracy And the transformation of higher education*. Philadelphia, PA:Temple University Press.

Stoecker, R., & Tryon, E. (2009). *Unheard voices: Community organizations and service learning.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. 1-18

Taylor, D., Berry, P., Block, C. (1958). Does group participation when using Brainstorming facilitate or inhibit creative thinking? *Administrative Sciences Quarterly*, *3*(1), 23-47.

Waters, S., & Brigden, J. (2013). Assessing the community partner in academic Service learning: A strategy for capacity-building. *PRISM: A Journal of Regional Engagement*, *2*(2).

Wittman, A., & Crews, T. (2012). *Engaged learning economies: Aligning civic engagement and economic development in community-campus partnerships.* Boston: Campus Compact.

Appendix

Civic Dialogue: Considering the General Education Program & The Bonita Springs Estero Economic Development Council

Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) is currently in the process of revising the General Education Program. These changes have created a unique opportunity to consider how both the General Education Program and the larger economic development initiatives can intersect in the region. The following section provides a brief description of both the Bonita Springs Estero Economic Development Council and the FGCU General Education activities.

Bonita Springs Estero Economic Development Council

VISION: To build a place to live and work that is economically diverse with a year-round economy that also enhances the environment and reflects the character of its inhabitants.

WE ARE PRO-BUSINESS! The Bonita Springs Estero Economic Development Council (BSEEDC) is committed to building a prosperous, sustainable, and economically diverse community. Our role is to serve as community consultants, advocates, and facilitators. We exist to help local companies succeed and grow, to help relocating companies get their business up and running as quickly as possible, and to attract new businesses to our region for sustainable job growth.

http://www.bonitaedc.com/about-us.html

FGCU's General Education Program (GEP)

The revisions to FGCU's General Education Program are motivated by legislatively mandated changes across the state of Florida (HB 7135). This rule requires students to take at least one state core course in each of the following five subject areas: Communication, Mathematics, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences, in partial fulfillment of 36 required hours in General Education. Student learning will be assessed in relation to learning competencies including Critical Thinking, Written Communication, and Quantitative Reasoning, and Civic Identity. The General Education Program curriculum is

48

determined by the faculty via representatives on the General Education Council, and with the oversight of the Director of General Education, in the Office of Undergraduate Studies. FGCU's GEP's current mission reads as follows:

> The General Education Program supports the university mission and guiding principles by promoting academic excellence, preparing students for their majors, and cultivating habits of lifelong learning. General education coursework encompasses the subject areas of communication, mathematics, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Students develop a wide range of content knowledge and disciplinary perspectives, along with important academic competencies.

The revised mission (effective fall 2015) maintains the emphasis on a breadth of knowledge across disciplines, and highlights additional capacities, skills, and practices. It reads as follows:

> Rooted in the tradition of liberal arts education, FGCU's General Education Program provides students with opportunities to cultivate the intellectual curiosity, knowledge, and skills necessary for academic success, engaged citizenship, and lifelong learning.

As such, FGCU's GEP offers knowledge in multiple disciplines, emphasizes **intellectual and practical skills** (critical thinking, effective communication, and quantitative reasoning) to develop students' academic, career, and life skills, and **through a new competency, Civic Identity, (to be implemented fall 2015) the** GEP challenges students to engage with diverse and interconnected social and natural worlds in ethical, responsible, and creative ways.

Through courses offered in the 5 core subject areas FGCU incorporates high-impact educational practices including Learning Communities, Service-Learning, Community-Based Learning, Diversity and Global Learning, Undergraduate Research, and Collaborative Assignments and Projects.

Visit the General Education Program site: http://www.fgcu.edu/General_Education/index.html. For more information on the revision process visit here: http://www.fgcu.edu/General_Education/GEDrevision.html

Context of Civic Dialogue

The goal of this dialogue is to discover potential areas of collaboration that will strengthen both the General Education Program at FGCU and the Bonita Springs Estero Economic Development Council. We have been, and will be, working towards this goal by building partnerships across the private- and public-sectors that are reciprocal, mutually beneficial, and reflect an exchange of knowledge and resources.

Students enrolled in an Interdisciplinary Studies course have been coordinating the community-engaged research project tied to this larger discussion. Students were divided into 12-groups representing different elements of our communities. The following stakeholder groups were included in the initial interviews: local government, public schools, business and industry, conservation groups, university, staff, administration, faculty & students, tourism & entertainment, and general community members that did not identify or easily fit within a single stakeholder affiliation. Twenty-eight respondents, from across the different stakeholder groups, were interviewed.

The results of the interviews produced a common theme. Our community is interested in institutions of higher education that cultivate the skills, habits, and spaces that advance a

49

socially-conscious and growing regional economy. Community members not only wanted a general education program that prepares students to be hardworking and equipped with the skills and knowledge for the regional economy, but also wanted a holistic education that prepared citizens to revitalize civic life and participatory democracy in our region. The interviews seem to indicate a general interest in leveraging the skills and spaces associated with the practice of democracy to advance a growing economy. Respondents want to grow the regional economy, but do so in a way that recognizes the sensitive ecosystems and current conservation efforts in Southwest Florida. Revitalizing civic life and the practice of democratic participation will ensure that our community can balance environmental concerns with economic goals. Our community generally understands the relationship between the Bonita Springs Estero Economic Development Council and the General Education Program at FGCU as having an overlapping goal of ***cultivating a sense of place***. Stakeholders seem to desire a regional economy and regional university that encourages community members to **---"Live Here. Learn Here. Stay Here."**

Ground Rules

Before we begin the civic dialogue it is important to establish some basic ground rules.

The one overall rule is to *listen* and *speak* with respect. That means:

-Listen to understand. (before you speak to be understood)

-Wait your turn to speak.

-Speak up when you have something to say.

-Speak as clearly and efficiently as you can.

-Speak personally. (do not speak for someone else, be responsible for what you say)

-Confront respectfully. (you can be as hard on ideas as you need to be, but do so in a civil manner)

THE GROUP WILL PRODUCE A BETTER PRODUCT IF YOU TAKE RISKS.

-Be creative. Look for new ideas

-Don't be afraid to challenge the status quo or authority.

1. Are these ground rules clear?
2. Do any of these ground rules need to be modified?
3. Do you wish to make any additions? Deletions?
4. Does the group mind if I enforce the identified ground rules?

The following three questions represent a composite of the general areas of concern and perceived potential areas of overlap that were identified by respondents.

1. Stakeholders expressed a general interest in educating students in ways that not only produce educated citizens, but also professionals equipped with the soft skills of critical thinking, group communication, and problem solving necessary for our regional economy. Respondents indicated that students should be encouraged to take a wide range of classes, which is consistent with a traditional liberal arts education. From the respondents' perspective, the General Education Program should include courses in the arts, sciences, and humanities. However, many respondents were interested in exploring ways a liberal education could be integrated with forms of civic and public work that produce not only

50

civic skills, but the soft skills necessary for the regional economy. Respondents were interested in more courses that include academic service-learning components, internships, undergraduate research, civic learning, civic and political activity, and applied experiences that connected academic material to real-world issues (e.g. climate change, conservation, sustainable economic development, arts and culture as a path to employment, financial & fiscal sustainability, etc.) problems. These are all forms of education and scholarship that intersect public and civic work.

How can our region more effectively integrate civic and public work into the general education program, to not only equip students and community members with critical thinking, problem solving approaches, and communication skills to support a growing regional economy, but also to strengthen the practice of democracy in our region?

2.Civic and public work have not only been connected to reinvigorating the habits and spaces of democracy, but also the professional skills needed to support our regional economy. Respondents indicated that they desired a general education program and a regional economy that not only advances positive social, political, and economic innovation, but also recognizes the types of conservation that are needed to protect the environmental sustainability of Southwest Florida. The respondents were calling for a general education and regional economy that is citizen-guided, collaborative, and participatory. There was an interest in a general education program that cultivated an understanding of purposes and processes associated with the practice of democracy. The idea was that the regional economic structured and designed to encourage active participation from all segments of our community. Throughout our interviews the respondents identified specific purposes and processes, tied to the practice of democracy, which they felt should be cultivated and enshrined in both the General Education Program and Bonita Springs Estero Economic Development Council.

What purposes and processes would you add and remove from this list? Why? How can the general education program not only cultivate the identified purposes and processes of democracy, but enshrine them in our regional economy under the guidance of the Bonita Springs Estero Economic Development Council?

3. Reflection.
a) After considering the first two questions associated with this dialogue, are there any issues, topics, or questions related to the intersection between the General Education program and the Bonita Springs Estero Economic Development Council that you feel we should define and consider during the final portion of our time together?
b) What can and should be done next? What are the next steps?

Table 1

Deliberative Civic Engagement Framing Document and Protocol

Purposes associated with the practice of democracy	Examples of Purposes	Processes associated with the practice of democracy	Examples of Processes
Inclusion & Increased citizen participation	Valuing diversity, building community across difference	Critical thinking	Evaluating assumptions, social, political, and economic critique, anticipating problems and issues before they come to fruition, etc
Perceived legitimacy of laws, policies, and societal outcomes	Commitment to greater good, understanding of how individual relates to larger societal structure	Community problem solving	Evidence-based decision making, inclusive and participatory forums, networking, coalition building etc
Increased cross-sector collaborations & networks	Understanding of private and public good	Group-communication & communication networks across sectors	Discuss sensitive and complex community issues, civility, active-listening, etc.
Increased written & verbal communication	Public speaking, letter to the editor, issue awareness/advocacy	Understanding of systems, organizations, and institutions	Community power mapping (formal and informal), understanding of local government, familiarity with business landscape
Global awareness	Understanding of multiculturalism	Understanding of political process	Active participation in governing process
Civic Identity	Conception of self that includes civic and public work	Quantitative reasoning	Data management software, google analytics, interpretative abilities etc
Civic learning	Specific skills needed to conceptualize self as someone who can participate in civic and public work	Approaches to social, political, and economic innovation	Creative processes, forms of collaboration
Cultivation of empathy & understanding of individual vs. collective obligation	Essential elements of community and the practice of democracy; understanding of individual rights and corresponding obligations	Designing effective feedback, assessment and evaluation structures	Understanding of and active participating in public scholarship, basic understanding of social science process, basic understanding of research design.

About the Authors

•**Brandon W. Kliewer, Ph.D**., is currently an assistant professor of civic leadership in the Staley School of Leadership Studies at Kansas State University and an associate scholar with Points of Light. Brandon holds a Ph.D. from The University of Georgia in political science and a Master's degree in political science from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He can be reached at bkliewer@ksu.edu.

•**Daniel Cox** graduated from FGCU in 2014 with a degree in Environmental Studies.

52

With a passion for public horticulture, Daniel aspires to use the tools of civic engagement to connect people with plants through public gardens.

•**Bryan Cooney** graduated from Florida Gulf Coast University in the summer of 2014 with a degree in Sociology. He currently resides in Vero Beach, Florida, but is looking to return to the Southwest Florida region for a career in youth education and counseling.

•**Eric Frankovitch** graduated from Florida Gulf Coast University in 2014 with a degree in Environmental Studies and a minor in Biology. He is now working at an all organic aquaponics farm in Fort Myers, Florida where he demonstrates sustainable methods of agriculture to the community.

•**Brooke Shine** Shine is an Elementary school teacher in Naples, FL who aspires to pursue an advanced degree in School Psychology. Brooke attended FGCU as an undergraduate student.

•**Briana Stiehl** graduated from FGCU with a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies. She grew up in Naples, Florida and upon graduation teaches children and adults of both Collier and Lee County about Florida's environment, the endangered Florida panther, and sustainable farming.

53