

3-13-2018

Welcoming Immigrants to New Hampshire

Nick Pulliam
The Clock Online

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.plymouth.edu/plymouthclusters>

Recommended Citation

Pulliam, Nick, "Welcoming Immigrants to New Hampshire" (2018). *Clusters*. 445.
<https://digitalcommons.plymouth.edu/plymouthclusters/445>

This Text is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Plymouth State. It has been accepted for inclusion in Clusters by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Plymouth State. For more information, please contact ajpearman@plymouth.edu, chwxson@plymouth.edu.

Welcoming Immigrants to New Hampshire

Nick Pulliam

For the Clock

ntpulliam@plymouth.edu

There is nothing better than hands on learning and for a while now, PSU has been pushing for just that with the Cluster Initiative. One new course that falls under this initiative is Welcoming Immigrants to New Hampshire.

It is a project-based course which provides students the opportunity to work alongside immigrant and refugee communities in Concord. It is the brainchild of Dr. Laura Tilghman and Dr. Whitney Howarth. Tilghman has a background in environmental science and anthropology, with a specific focus in migration studies. Howarth's background is in World History and studying the roots of current world conflicts. Both professors have traveled to different parts of the world and both have worked with refugee communities in their private lives. Their mutual interest is what inspired them to make this course.

With this new course, they are hoping to provide students with the opportunity to help two prominent refugee communities. The first being the Bhutanese Community of New Hampshire. To provide some history, this post-settlement agency was founded to help the influx of refugees from the country of Bhutan, which neighbors the country Nepal. For the past few decades the ruling government in Bhutan has been persecuting primarily southern citizens of the nation who have an ethnic Nepalese background. This started by labeling them as illegal immigrants, which simply is not true because many of these people have generations of history in the country. After that they forcibly evicted people from their homes, leaving them with no option but to move to refugee camps in Nepal. By the end of this movement there were over 100,000 Bhutanese citizens living in refugee camps in Nepal. Several countries agreed to take them in and around 2,000 were sent to New Hampshire. The Bhutanese Community of New Hampshire hopes to help these refugees integrate into their new community.

The second community students work with is the New American Africans. This group has a similar goal, they want to help support African immigrants and refugees arriving and living in New Hampshire. Many people this agency supports are war refugees. Their site says that they "create opportunities for immigrants and refugees in New Hampshire to be empowered to take care of ourselves and our families, to be productive members of society, and reach our fullest potential to belong and contribute to the New Hampshire community". Both groups are simply looking to be a part of and support their local communities so that they can thrive in their new environments.

Leaving home to go to a new country is no easy task and many of the people in these communities face similar hardships. A settlement agency called Ascentria works to help arriving refugees, but they can only support them for ninety days. Once the three months are up, refugees are left to fend for themselves, they even need to pay back the plane ticket they used to get to the United States. So, they find themselves in a new country where most do not know the language or any of the cultural expectations and norms. They also have very limited career and education prospects. These people would end up on their own, if it was not for agencies like the two that the class is working with. Both groups try to provide services to boost the opportunities for members of their communities. Some of these services are after school programs for kids, teaching English, dance lessons, computer lessons, and programs for elderly members for the community.

With the sheer number of services, they provide, it can be challenging to evaluate how they are doing. That is where the PSU students come in. They are not necessarily there to volunteer, but instead to evaluate how these two agencies are doing and to provide constructive feedback on where they are doing well and where there is some room to improve. This is something the agencies are not

quite used to, because usually when they have outside help, it is just people trying to volunteer in more conventional ways. Howarth says that “We’re interested in asking students to think about how the programs are set up, how do they express their mission?” Students will analyze how other refugee service agencies around the country are operating and then provide feedback to the two agencies.

The first half of the class has students conducting background research into these two agencies. But after Spring Break, Tilghman expects that the class will be more hands on for the students and hopes that students will find a particular area of interest that they can work in. That can range from sex-education to nutrition programs. It is up to the students to decide what they want to do.

A project-based class like this is ambitious and since this is the first time it has been tried, there are some challenges that the group must face. The greatest one is scheduling, since this is a two-credit course it is usually placed on top of already packed schedules for the students and the professors. That is why many of the course meetings are online. Another interesting challenge student will be facing is the cultural gap between them and the people they will be working with. To the refugees arriving in New Hampshire, it is like a whole new world and there is usually a language barrier that can make communication more difficult. Students will need to work through that to reach their goals. Despite the challenges ahead, none of them are too difficult for the class to take on.

Right now, the class is made up of primarily of handpicked Anthropology and Social Studies majors and that is mainly because this is the first year of the class. But in the future Tilghman hopes to have students from other majors who can provide a unique perspective when it comes to helping these communities. In many ways, this first year is a test run that will provide a foundation for future classes down the line.

Even though the class is closed by this time in the semester. The opportunity to help refugee communities in New Hampshire has not just disappeared. There are four refugee cities in New Hampshire: Laconia, Concord, Manchester, and Nashua. Each of those cities have agencies that are always looking for volunteers, especially student volunteers. After all, students are the next generation of voters and leaders, so working with all these different communities at a younger age could help to break down some of the negative stigmas that are unfortunately associated with them in modern America.

The opportunity to have a class like this is because of the cluster initiative and student’s desires to help local communities. Hopefully this class can be the first of many to give students a new perspective on the world around them and an opportunity to leave a lasting impact.

