

## **GPP Practice Experiences: Critical Questions, Challenges, and Opportunities**

The Practice Experience (PE) is the signature element of the Global Poverty and Practice Minor, providing an opportunity for students to connect scholarly understandings of poverty and inequality with action to alleviate them. The PE can take place domestically or internationally, with a minimum expected duration of 240 hours over the course of at least six weeks. Students are encouraged to find their own placements in a particular sector of poverty action. The expectation is that different students will work at different scales, doing different kinds of work; as such, the PE might be housed in a wide range of organizations, including non-governmental organizations, government agencies, social movements, community projects, and development initiatives.

While students have some flexibility to choose their site, scale, and form of poverty action, each choice raises distinct social, political, and logistical challenges and opportunities for the student. This document—organized around 11 common types of PEs—highlights some questions to engage with when considering these PEs. Students may find that the work they set out to do fits into more than one of these 11 categories. For example, a student’s PE may be located within a community center which offers educational programming and has a collaborative relationship with a local government office. For this reason, *we encourage our students to carefully read through this entire document to determine which questions and issues they might usefully and seriously engage as they prepare, undertake, and reflect on their PE.*

### **I. Supporting service delivery organizations such as medical services (free clinics, urgent care clinics, overseas medical initiatives), legal services (advice, assistance with paperwork), other community services (food banks, Goodwill), etc.**

The vast majority of aid organizations focus primarily on the delivery of some specific service to low- income or otherwise marginalized populations. As such, it is crucial to reflect on how a particular service delivery organization relates to the history of state welfare for that particular “service” in the country where it operates.

*Questions to engage with in this kind of PE:*

- Does the organization’s approach to service delivery simply seek to meet the needs of a few more people or to (also) foster people’s capacities to transform (social/political) structures which create inequality?
- If the organization is a donor-funded non-profit, is it letting the state off the hook for services the state ought to be better providing?
- What are the views prevalent in society about the role of the state in providing these services? What are the organization’s views on the role of the state? Does the organization interact with state welfare provisions and, if so, how?
- What skills do you have that enable you to meaningfully contribute to this project? How are

you trained and qualified to carry out the tasks the organization may assign to you? This is particularly important to ask in the case of medical service delivery organizations that today constitute a growing industry.

- How can the organization's service provision be better rooted in and oriented toward the concerns and viewpoints of the people they seek to serve?
- How does this organization approach questions of respect, privacy, and dignity surrounding service provision in their sector?

## II. Educational Organizations or Projects

Implementing universal primary education in every country is the second Millennium Development Goal, and in the United States there is even a growing movement for "college for all." Education is often touted as a crucial route out of poverty, and yet this link between educational attainment and poverty alleviation is frequently simply assumed without specifying exactly what kind of education can reduce poverty, how it can achieve this goal, and for whom it can do so. Many fundamental questions are often taken for granted, but deserve our critical attention, for example: What is the purpose of education, and does everyone need the exact same education? What "counts" as education – only those things learned in accredited institutions? Why should educational credentials received be correlated with one's standard of living? What kinds of skills are most relevant to learn for the goal of wide-spread poverty alleviation?

*Questions to engage with in this kind of PE:*

- What is the purpose of education, according to the organization/project?
- Who is served by this purpose, and how?
- Does the organization's approach to education simply seek to outfit a few more (underrepresented) people with the skills and credentials necessary to "succeed" within existing structures or to (also) foster students' capacities to transform structures which create inequality?
- How, exactly, does the kind of education provided by the organization contribute to alleviating poverty, and for whom? (Think also about the scale of potential change – is this intervention only likely to impact a few individuals or to have a broader effect?)
- If the organization emphasizes education for social justice, how is "social justice" defined, and how is this reflected in the curricula and pedagogies of the organization?
- How does the organization reflect on how their services do or do not hold governments accountable for providing a high quality public education for all? How does it define what constitutes a "high quality public education"?
- How is the kind of education provided by the organization relevant to the students and their families/communities?
- How does the organization take the connection between education and poverty alleviation for granted, or does it have an analysis of how education can both reinforce and/or transform poverty and inequality?

### III. Public Health Programs focused on issues such as oral health, reproductive health, hand sanitation

Public health organizations, with their focus on “education, not just medication,” are a popular PE choice for students planning a future in a medical career who are also committed to poverty alleviation. However, there are many issues to be aware of when choosing this kind of PE, in particular if you will be doing this work across power-laden lines of difference. Matters of the body are deeply personal and it can be quite degrading to imply that a person or community does not know how to properly care for their own or their family members’ bodies. Furthermore, while the educational and preventative care aspects of public health may appear to be treating the “roots” and not just the “symptoms” of problems, it is important not to assume that the problem is due to lack of knowledge versus lack of resources. Does your organization only focus on the “micro-parasites” or does it also address the “macro-parasites” which have resulted in the public health issues it is addressing?

*Questions to engage with in this kind of PE:*

- Who determined the public health priorities your organization addresses, and what was the process for prioritizing these particular issues?
- How does the organization approach questions of respect, privacy and dignity in relation to its work?
- Who do you think should be responsible for providing these health services? (NGOs, government, private corporations, schools, community members, international volunteers, international aid)?
- Is this primarily a “band-aid” providing organization or does it also envision its work fitting into a broader strategy of addressing poverty?
- What skills do you have that enable you to meaningfully contribute to this project? Are you trained and qualified to carry out the tasks the organization may assign to you?

### IV. Helping to build community infrastructure, such as houses, gardens, schools, or latrines

Physical infrastructure is often used as visible evidence of poverty, including poor quality housing, lack of water access, inadequate sanitation facilities, or limited school structures. While stark, physical manifestations of poverty are easily identified and often memorable, they exist as symptoms of underlying structures. While addressing these symptoms can provide relatively quick, tangible results (which may appeal to funders, financial investors, or volunteers), the long-term benefits are not always clear. Efforts to improve the physical manifestations of problems do not always consider the relationship between infrastructure and root causes of poverty. As a volunteer helping to construct infrastructure in poor communities, students should consider not only the structures that have created these symptoms, but also how they have come to this work, and what skills they are bringing that do not already exist within the communities themselves.

*Questions to engage with in this kind of PE:*

- Who had input on the decision to build this infrastructure? Who was involved in the planning process? How it will be used, for whom?
- From your perspective, who should be responsible for building this (NGOs, government,

- private corporations, community members)?
- What is the vision for how this building project will, in the long-term, impact the broader social issues at stake?
- What kind of accountability does the organizing project have to the community or communities within which it works?
- What skills do you have that enable you to meaningfully contribute to this project? How are you trained and qualified to carry out the tasks the organization may assign to you?
- Will working on this project (and with this organization) allow you to meaningfully engage with broader issues of poverty and inequality?

## V. Participating in community organizing and other social movement-oriented initiatives

Community organizing takes many forms and can be utilized in many different kinds of struggles for equity, justice, and sustainability. The defining feature of community organizing is a process whereby a collective of individuals who recognize shared interests come together to build social power toward achieving particular goals of social change. If carried out with some duration and public visibility, these initiatives might be understood as a social movement. Community organizing is often used as a synonym for “grassroots organizing” because the assumption is that the organizing collective - “the community” - is not a formal institution but rather the product of efforts emerging from people impacted by some form of injustice or shared social problem. In addition to questions we should raise about what counts as and constitutes “community,” the definition of *community organizing* also becomes a little blurred when one recognizes that, in our era, many grassroots struggles evolve into more professionalized (e.g. NGO, private sector) initiatives. Conversely, institutions such as unions and professional, issue specific organizations sometimes develop community organizing initiatives as one, complementary aspect of their efforts to remedy and ameliorate injustices. In whatever form - be it an autonomous community group, a faith-based initiative, or some variety of institutionally affiliated organizing effort - some important questions should be considered.

*Questions to engage with in this kind of PE:*

- What are the historical origins of this particular effort/movement?
- Under what conditions and through what processes have the goals (and broader politics) of this organizing effort been defined?
- How do the goals of this effort/movement fit within broader strategies of addressing poverty and inequality?
- What is the relationship of this effort/movement to the state, private sector, and other non-profit organizations working on similar issues?
- What kind of accountability does the organizing project have to the community or communities within which it works?
- What is the organizational structure of this effort/movement, and how can you meaningfully fit into it? Is your role specifically defined, and what kind of accountability is there for your work within the organizing effort?

## **VI. Supporting issue-specific organizations, such as environmental interest groups, human rights organizations, or gender equality projects**

Issue-specific organizations provide services and/or advocate for change revolving around a narrow set of issues. This focus can provide students with an in-depth understanding of these issues during the practice experience. However, working with these types of organizations can pose certain challenges as well. These organizations may have varying levels of commitment to addressing issues of poverty and inequality. For example, although the negative impacts of environmental issues such as pollution, energy extraction, and waste disposal disproportionately affect low-income communities, not all environmental interest groups consider these communities to be central to their work. Additionally, issue-specific organizations often stake claim to a certain level of expertise on the issues they focus on, which should raise certain questions from students.

*Questions to engage with in this kind of PE:*

- How does this organization understand and articulate the relationship between its work and issues of poverty and inequality?
- What approach(es) to social change does this organization take, and how does this strategy or strategies fit with the kinds of skills, experience, and knowledge you are seeking to develop?
- What kind of accountability does the organizing project have to the community or communities within which it works?
- By framing the problem in this issue specific manner, what other approaches or understandings might be neglected or left out
- In your particular role with the organization, what opportunities will there be to meaningfully confront and engage with the complexities of addressing poverty and inequality?

## **VII. Interning with a for-profit corporate enterprise or a corporate-affiliated foundation**

In the last decade, the private for-profit sector has become actively involved in poverty action. Students interested in participating in such work should pay particular attention to the type of institution they are considering and type of work they would engage in. This category includes a) for-profit companies for whom the poor are a “bottom of the pyramid” market; b) social businesses that have adopted a “double bottom line” of profits and social returns; c) corporate social responsibility arms of corporations; d) corporate-financed foundations that are philanthropic entities but tied to the brand of the corporation; and e) models of ethical consumerism that market, distribute, or sell products that are meant to have an impact on poverty. Worker-owned co-ops or the cooperative movement more generally has a longer history and yet these institutions might also be considered here.

*Questions to engage with in this kind of PE:*

- How does the work being done by this for-profit enterprise differ from work being done by non-profits or government agencies focused on the same sector? Why is it different?
- Which of the types of institutions listed above are you working with, and what are the strengths and limitations of this institution in addressing issues of poverty?
- For-profit entities make profit; indeed, they have a legal obligation to do so. While the “bottom

of the pyramid” philosophy argues that poverty can be eradicated through profits, other institutions in this field insist on “blended value,” i.e. a double bottom line that limits profits in order to reap social returns. How are these goals reconciled (or not) with goals of poverty alleviation.

- If you are working with a corporate foundation, the corporate social responsibility arm of a corporation, or an ethical consumerism strategy, how is this work compatible with what the corporation does in its main, profit-making enterprise.

## **VIII. Interning with a government agency or office/working on policy**

An internship with a government agency (ranging from the federal-level USAID to the county-level Alameda County Department of Health, and everything in between) or with think-tanks doing policy work is yet another way to fulfill the GPP practice experience requirement. Yet, government and policy work is potentially both powerful (because wide and deep in scope) and top-down (because bureaucratic).

*Questions to engage with in this kind of PE:*

- What is the historical role of this government entity in addressing issues of poverty and inequality? How has this shifted over time, as the social consensus on the role of the government in your particular sector shifts?
- What is the relationship between this agency/office and the private sector or non-profit organizations working on similar issues? What is the relationship between this agency/office and the communities it is intended to represent/serve?
- What are the ways in which your agency/office relates its work to the people most affected by the policies it legislates or executes? How can people most affected be more involved in such policy work?
- What is the capacity of the agency/office to utilize your skills?
- What sort of work will you be involved in, and will this work enable you to meaningfully engage with the complexities of addressing poverty and inequality?

## **IX. Academic research or creative research projects, such as the making of films**

The GPP minor encourages students to think of themselves as public scholars and to consider how their expertise and scholarship can have significant impact on poverty knowledge and poverty action. However, the GPP Minor does not allow independent research to count as a PE, as we do not prepare students to fulfill the complex protocols of responsible and rigorous research. Additionally, UC Berkeley requires all research involving human subjects to undergo review. With this in mind, we encourage students interested in such an experience to join a research team/creative research team, preferably led by a faculty member or graduate student—at UC Berkeley or at another university—who has already received human subjects approval and has met protocols of research. Note that these questions and issues also apply to research or creative work projects you may be enlisted to do with service or policy organizations.

*Questions to engage with in this kind of PE:*

- How will this research advance poverty knowledge and poverty action?
- Who is undertaking this research and with what purposes and audiences in mind?
- How will this research be documented and disseminated?
- Is the research meaningful for those who are being researched or who are most impacted by the issue that is being researched?
- Research, like practice, is fraught with relationships of inequality. Ask yourself: what is the relationship between the researchers and those being researched?
- Academic and creative research typically require long-term engagements with a community, issue, and social group. Does this project have such an approach?
- How does the research represent the poor and poverty? What are the potential consequences of such forms of representation?

## **X. Placement organizations**

In recent decades, many organizations (both non-profit and for profit) have been started with the aim of placing young people in community service experiences. The politics, intention, and accountability of these placement organizations vary considerably. Some organizations explicitly advertise “volun-tourism” while others express a deeply collaborative partnership with the local, community organizations within which they place students. All of these organizations charge a fee for their service—in some cases many thousands of dollars for short-term experiences. While these placement organizations may provide a level of structure and support that are valued by you and your family, some will certainly not meet your educational goals in GPP nor reflect the ethical and educational commitments of our program.

*Questions to engage with in this kind of PE:*

- What is history and nature of the relationship between this placement organization and the communities, projects, and organizations within which it places interns?
- Is the placement agency necessary for you to establish a practice with the organizations or projects you seek to work within? In other words, can you directly communicate with the organization you seek to work with?
- The placement organization raises money through its fees. How is this money used by the organization, and how do you feel about this allocation? (It is perfectly reasonable for you to ask this budget question of any placement organization.)
- Does the placement organization provide a curriculum or other programming that positively contributes to the overall experience of the practice experience?
- Who determines the kind of work carried out within this kind of practice experience? To who is your work accountable and by whom is it supervised?
- How does this organization understand and represent poverty/inequality, and how does it express its commitment to poverty action?

## **XI. Founding and launching a new organization**

The founding and launching of a new organization is an exceedingly rare PE option. To persuade us that this undertaking should qualify, a student would need to make a strong case for why this organization is necessary and useful. The student would also need to detail the plans for funding and launching, and describe how the time frame of these plans relates to the time frame for completing the GPP Minor.

Submission of such a proposal does not guarantee approval.

*Questions to engage with in this kind of PE:*

- Why is this organization necessary and useful in this location and at this time, and how are its projects related to poverty action?
- How do the new organization's goals and approach fit with existing and comparable initiatives (both public and private)?
- How does the time frame of founding and launching this organization relate to your time frame for completing the GPP Minor?
- In the absence of a supervisor, to whom will you be accountable for your work?
- A sole focus on fundraising is not sufficient; it already assumes all the critical questioning about a specific intervention that "The Ethics, Methods and Pragmatics of Global Practice" and your GPP Capstone Course discuss. What projects and activities will you do beyond fundraising?