

Join the class

If you're interested in learning more about homelessness in the United States, a good place to start is the reading list from Prof. Chris Fee's first-year seminar.

- *Begging for Change: The Dollars and Sense of Making Nonprofits Responsive, Efficient, and Rewarding for All*, by Robert Egger. An exposé of waste and ineffectiveness in the nonprofit sector.
- *Beyond the Shelter Wall: Homeless Families Speak Out*, by Ralph da Costa Nunez with Naomi Sugie. Profiles of five different women living in transitional shelters which recount the stories and personal struggles of homeless families.
- *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness*, by Peter Rossi. Documents the striking contrasts between the homeless of the 1950s and 1960s and the contemporary homeless population, which is younger and contains more women, children, and blacks.
- *Flat Broke With Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform*, by Sharon Hays. Focuses on single mothers in two towns who have at times relied on welfare for support.
- *Grand Central Winter: Stories from the Street*, by Lee Stringer. A memoir that chronicles the unraveling of an seemingly secure existence as a marketing executive to an odyssey of survival on the streets of New York City.
- *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck. Depiction of the

lives of ordinary people striving to preserve their humanity in the face of social and economic desperation.

- *Ironweed*, by William Kennedy. A schizophrenic drifter spends Halloween in his hometown after returning there for the first time in decades.
- *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, by Barbara Ehrenreich. An investigation into the impact of the 1996 welfare reform on the "working poor" in the United States.
- *Not All of Us Are Saints: A Doctor's Journey With the Poor*, by David Hilfiker. A story of how faith and dedication made a difference when Hilfiker left a rural practice in Minnesota and began to practice poverty medicine in a ravaged ghetto near the White House.
- *Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America*, by Jonathan Kozol. An unforgettable record that documents the desperate voices of men, women, and children caught up in the nightmarish situation of being homeless.
- *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women*, by Elliot Liebow. A portrayal of women living in shelters near Washington, D.C., and how they struggle to retain their dignity in the face of rejection by society.
- *Who Qualifies for Rights: Homelessness, Mental Illness, and Civil Commitment*, by Judith Lynn Failer. An examination of the logic and language of rights of people with severe mental illness and the theory behind civil commitment.

shelter. Still, those onions need to be chopped, and there are only so many people working in the kitchen. And the women, they want some human interaction with some nice people who just accept them as a bunch of nice people. The students are helping to pull their weight while at the same time the

wheels are turning in their heads about how they might be able to apply the DCCCK model to the food that is wasted at Gettysburg College and the hungry people who live in Adams County, for example." (See "Campus Kitchens project" on page 21.)

For Fee, the students need more than just an emotional response to homelessness if they are going to understand it. "I worry that if you just have an emotional or sentimental response without an intellectual understanding of the problem, people get tired of hearing about it," he said. "You saw that with Katrina relief and the tsunami disaster. You see an outpouring of generosity after disasters, but then people go back to their normal lives.

"It's essential to have that academic background. First of all, because we are a college and that is what we should be doing; but secondly because then you really have to think about homelessness. We have to learn about these things in order to have a sense of what

the issues are. Otherwise, we're just ladling out soup or talking to people in the street. That wouldn't be bad. In fact, it would be good and fine. But it's not enough. There is not going to be any change that way."

Fixing the holes

A.J. Nappo from Westtown, N.Y. wholeheartedly agrees with Fee's assessment. "This course was academically challenging in many ways," he said. "We had tough writing assignments that pushed us to become better writers. But I found this course to be especially enriching because I constantly found myself thinking and putting different aspects of the course together. In my service placements, I was thinking about how it applied to the reading or vice versa. How did my service experiences play into what we are talking about in class? I had never really had an experience like this where all the different factors were woven together."

All 14 students in the class agreed that the course with its combination of academics and service had made them

"Working in the D.C. Central Kitchen was an eye-opening experience. I have never seen so much food in my entire life. It disturbs me to consider how much food would have gone to waste over the weekend had it not been for Robert Egger, for DCCCK, and for its employees. I was really impressed with the entire operation. It was one thing to read about it in *Begging for Change*, but it was another to actually see the kitchen in action." — A.J. Nappo '10, from his class blog

more aware of an important social issue in this country. Several even felt inspired to continue to fight for change, though as Arsenie said, "we know that the road ahead is a long one."

"From reading the books to interacting with the homeless in Gettysburg and Washington, D.C., I've learned the homeless are not a 'them,'" Arsenie said. "They are Americans and human beings. I no longer look at the homeless as some demographic that is separate from everyone. Everything we did in this course has had a compounding effect on me. Homelessness is a problem for which we are still searching for a

definite solution. It's important that we start looking for those permanent solutions instead of adding band-aids to a growing wound."

Fee echoes that sentiment. "I think that a course like this is only the tiniest step in the direction of fixing the holes in the boat, but it's more than just bailing water. It's saying, 'Okay, while you're bailing out water, you need to think about why you're bailing.' You also realize that you need to bail that water because if everybody stops bailing, the boat is going to sink. And we certainly don't want that to happen, because we're all in the same boat." ■

Campus Kitchens project

No one is more excited about the Campus Kitchens project than Louisa Polos '08 of Katonah, N.Y. Polos was a student in Prof. Chris Fee's first-year seminar on homelessness two years ago, and has now served as a student assistant to the course for the last two years. She's also become involved with the Center for Public Service.

"Last summer I attended a program on homelessness in Washington, D.C.," Polos said. "I worked closely with Robert Egger, founder of D.C. Central Kitchen (DCCCK), and I learned a lot. When I heard about their Campus Kitchens project, I thought it would be a perfect thing to start at Gettysburg."

The Campus Kitchens Project follows the effort developed at DCCCK in

Washington, D.C., where food is donated by restaurants, caterers, and hotels to provide more than 4,000 meals a day to the homeless. Here in Gettysburg, Polos said, "perfectly good food that is going to be thrown away could be recycled to feed people in the local community. Local restaurants and hotels can also donate to the effort, and students staff their campus kitchens during slower periods to prepare, cook, and distribute the food to the local community."

Ten colleges and universities around the country currently participate in this program, including Wake Forest, Minnesota State, and Washington & Lee. Polos hopes to bring the same program to Gettysburg — doing, as Fee saw it, "a bit of boat repair while simultaneously bailing more than her share."

"Today Abbie was back at El Centro and I was glad to see her since it had been a few weeks now. After working with José the previous week I had realized how nice she is to work with. She grabbed her snack and we sat down and talked like we usually do before homework." — Allison Brown '10, from her class blog



Abigail Hernandez-Gomez, in second grade in Gettysburg, reviews her homework with Allison Brown, who volunteered at El Centro.



Service learning in the classroom

Prof. Chris Fee's first-year seminar on homelessness isn't the only class that combines service learning with classroom learning.

Prof. Paula Olinger in the Spanish department, for example, requires students in a variety of her courses to spend at least an hour a week working with students at El Centro — an organization that helps migrant children with homework lessons. The interaction with the mostly Hispanic population at the center furthers the students' understanding of the language, while also helping the students with their learning.

And Prof. Jennifer Hansen in the philosophy department has students in her course on gender and identity spend more than 30 hours working with her and local community partners on a research project to solve a pressing community problem or affect social change. At the end of the semester students keep a web-based log, or blog, to record their progress, present a final paper, and make a presentation to the community partners on their solutions.