

# SERVICE-LEARNING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND ACTIVISM IN HAWAI'I

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Engaged Scholarship Consortium 2019  
Denver, CO: October 9, 2019

# Civic Engagement

- “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes” (Erlich, 2000).
- Students encouraged to see themselves as systemic change agents.
- Strengthen community and improve environmental indicators by instilling an ethic of engagement.



Loko 'Ea Fishpond 2018

# Civic Engagement through Service-Learning

- Service-learning in environmentally themed classes can have a positive impact on students' views of themselves as agents of change.
- Develop social capital using service-learning as a tool to engage students and develop community building and responsible environmental behavior skills.
- Service-learning can be a site of empowerment for our student population
  - See challenges and participate in developing solutions within course content in a safe space.



Kuhiawaho Lo'i 2017



# Community Driven Projects and Partnerships



Students with MA'O work day leaders 2016

- Potentially problematic power hierarchy embedded in relationships between academia and community.
- Faculty must reflect on their own positionality
- Projects must remain community-driven through dynamic reciprocity
- Research agendas and teaching practices must have value for our communities



# Service-learning and cultural practices in Hawai'i

- Hawai'i context - *'āina*-based education
- “talking story”
- Develop relationship with *'āina* and with each other.
- Students chant *oli* to ask for permission to enter and indicate respect for spaces they are visiting.



Students chanting with other community groups at He'eia Fishpond 2016

# Environmentally Responsible Behavior



Ka'ala Farms 2019

- Service-learning helps students overcome commuter student barriers.
- Rooted in community.
- Leads to self-efficacy and motivation to participate beyond the confines of class.
- Enable students to find creative ways to solve problems and apply skills.
- Develop capacity for activism and environmentally responsible behavior.
- Goal of classes is to create environmental citizens with focus on systems-thinking.



# Methods

- Analysis of student comments on open-ended course evaluation questions
- 16 classes over past 8 years
- 506 relevant comments
- Environmental Politics, Politics of Food, Politics of Water
- Nvivo 12 software used to code comments into themes



MA'O Farms 2019



# Course formats

- Environmental Politics
  - *Full semester, in person and online*
- Politics of Food
  - *Part of term (6 weeks), in person and hybrid*
- Politics of Water
  - *Part of term (6 weeks, hybrid only)*
- Student enrollment range
  - *12-30 students*
- All include required service-learning component



He'eia Fishpond  
mangrove removal 2019

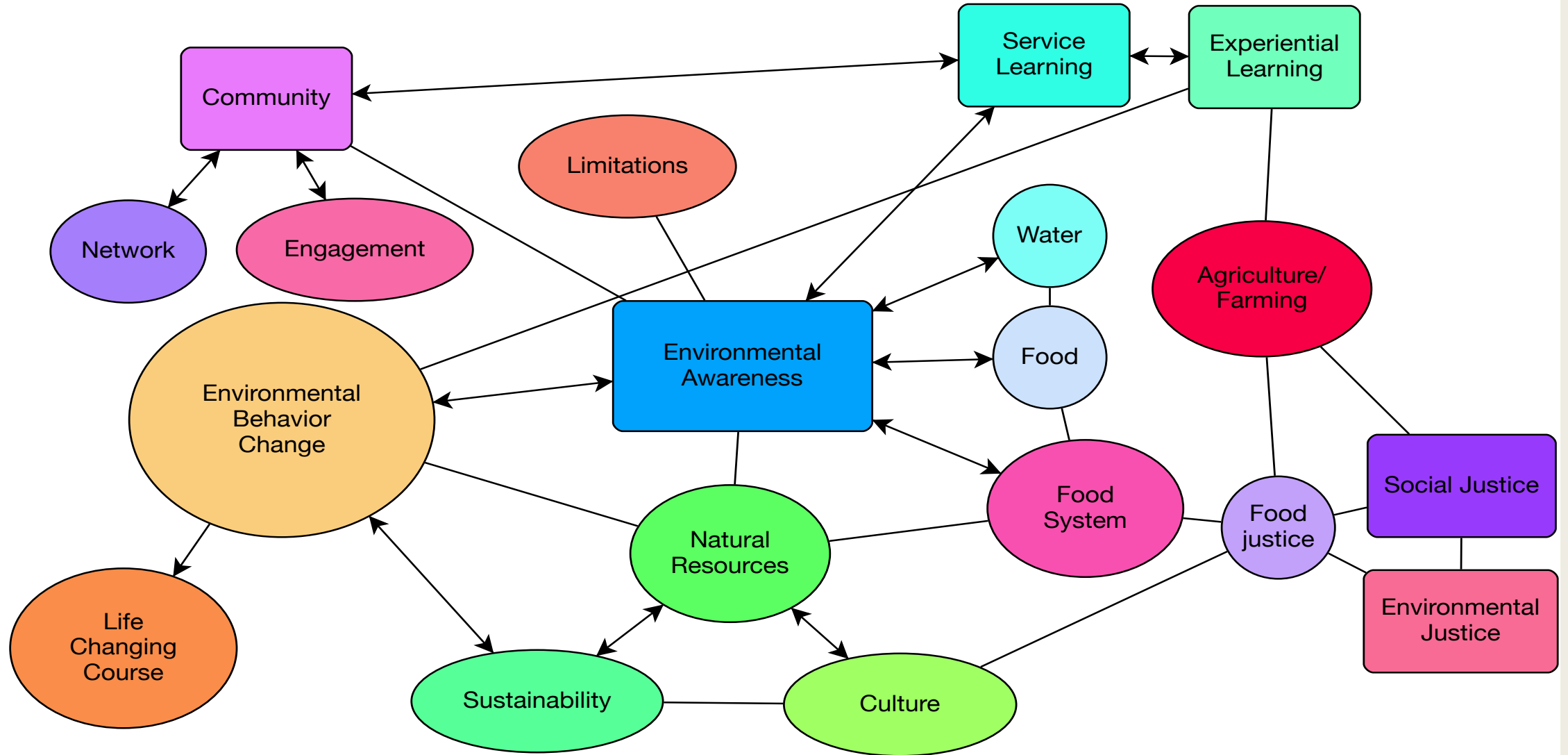


# Student Voices

- “It is truly a life changing course. I was able to not only learn about the politics behind food, but I was able to reconfigure my diet, lifestyle, and being mindful of what food industries I support and what food I purchase in the stores.”
- “This course forced me to evaluate my daily life. The foods I eat, the places I shop, the companies I support. I have made huge changes to my personal life as it has truly opened my eyes.”
- “This was an excellent course. The hands-on experience turned lectures into life lessons that we will not forget. This course encourages healthy living, encourages becoming involved in local politics and learning how to support your community and learning sustainable living.”
- “Truly life-changing experience, balanced with knowledge and hands-on activity.”



# Environmental Awareness Concept Map



# Conclusions

- Environmental awareness learned through service-learning influences positive environmental behavior changes in students
- Service-learning does not necessarily engender civic engagement
- Students could be self-selected
- Students view possibilities of individual behavior change, not necessarily systemic.
- No students mentioned inconvenience or pessimism as barriers to environmental behavior change.
- No longitudinal perspective available.



Ka'ala Farms Cultural Learning Center 2018