ANTI-POVERTY MOVEMENTS AND THE CREATION OF NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAMS

By

Kristin Elizabeth Kovacs

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Committee Membership
Dr. Jennifer Eichstedt, Committee Chair
Dr. Meredith Williams, Committee Member
Dr. Meredith Williams, Graduate Coordinator

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ABSTRACT

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Anti-Poverty Movements of the 1960s framed and delivered a message on economic and educational inequalities that shaped national service initiatives from 1964 to the present, and resulting in programs such as Straight Up AmeriCorps. In this thesis and project work, I use social movement theory and the related sociology of knowledge to analyze and explain both the social production of AmeriCorps and my own work with the Straight Up AmeriCorps program. During 2009 and into early 2010, I chose to work with this AmeriCorps program to fulfill the applied sociological experience requirement for my Master’s in Sociology.

During my practice placement with Straight Up AmeriCorps, I collaborated with program staff on the development of grant proposal. I was asked by program staff to document a compelling need for the new focus of the program and to develop a program evaluation plan that included performance measures and tools for measurement.

Straight Up AmeriCorps was originally created and developed in 1994 to prevent at risk and low-income youth from dropping out of school. Along with a change in the local community’s most pressing need, Straight Up AmeriCorps’ traditional focus on academic mentoring and tutoring is giving way in the coming to year to that of career-
path mentoring, building youth job experience, and developing skills related to academic and career success. In this way, programs such as Straight Up AmeriCorps are situated at the locus of knowledge-power as they translate and mediate between the State, anti-poverty movement organizers, and local need.
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INTRODUCTION

Change is inevitable, necessary, and guided by a variety of social forces. As a student of sociology, I have always been interested specifically in exploring social movements, how they develop, how they gain momentum, and the impact they have on social structures, the collective consciousness, and social policies. Coming from the perspective of an activist, I also wanted to learn how to encourage social change in positive ways. As such, it’s no surprise I chose to focus my attention in graduate school on social movements and social change.

In my studies, I pursued both an applied Sociology focus and a teaching focus. As part of these two difference foci, I was able to complete a placement project as well as a teaching assistant position. For that reason, this paper is a combined thesis/project, incorporating theory as well as the work I completed through my applied sociology placement project with Straight Up AmeriCorps. All of it is framed within a discussion about social change and the role of knowledge production/dissemination.

There are many factors that affect social change; however, I chose to examine the role of knowledge and knowledge production in social movements because of its crucial role in informing and motivating individuals into social action. Computers, cell phones, and the internet make sharing ideas and information easier and easier, but influencing social change, motivating individuals into action, and effecting social institutions to make positive progress remains a challenge. My goal in this paper is not just to understand the process of how movement generate social change, but to show options for individuals on...
how to potentially make their work in the world more far-reaching and effective.

I begin by exploring the history of social movement theory. I start by examining theories that focus on individual grievances, then move on to the resource mobilization theories, theories focused on the political opportunity structure, and then those that look at the role of various identities in social movement involvement. Lastly, I move to an assessment of radical social movements theories. I outline the main points and shortfalls of each theory in terms of the role they attribute to knowledge production and dissemination, thus outlining the perspective I will argue through my case-study exploration. I draw heavily from radical social movements and theories about them because it draws our attention to the fact that creating and disseminating knowledge is, and should be, a high priority for social movement organizations.

After a theoretical exploration, I outline my methods for this paper and move on to highlight two different case studies. I look at the development of AmeriCorps programs in general terms, and then turn my focus to a specific example, the Straight Up AmeriCorps (SUA) program. I chose these as case studies because of their connection to my placement work with SUA and because AmeriCorps is the result of social movements, politically motivated action, and the resulting creation of federally allocated funding designed to help empower economically, politically, and socially disenfranchised communities.

This paper is designed to highlight the role of knowledge production and dissemination in the movements that lead up to the creation of AmeriCorps and individual programs such as SUA. Theoretical insights are given validity through
concrete examples, showing how these knowledge practices influenced change in the past, laying the ground work for how to potentially utilize knowledge practices in the future to effect positive social change.

In the discussion and conclusion, I seek to clarify that the role of knowledge production and dissemination is a crucial factor in social change. I do not want to replace former theories, as each provides valuable insight. Instead, I hope to enrich the discussion by refocusing on the knowledge-practices of movements to give activists another tool for their repertoire of social action methods. The take away point is that positive social change and movement success is reliant on the effective use of knowledge-practices to disseminate information and motivate individuals/groups into action.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Many theories exist about social movements and numerous attempts have been made to understand how and why they come into being and either thrive or fail. Some of these theories address the role of knowledge and knowledge production and its level of importance. Given my focus on the role of knowledge and knowledge production, I will begin with a discussion of Foucault’s power/knowledge couplet and set forth a definition for the term knowledge-practices. From there, I have organized my consideration of social movement these theories according to whether, and to what degree, they speak to the role of knowledge and knowledge production.

Social Movement theories range from focuses on individual grievances, to resource mobilization, the political opportunity structure, and the role of various identities; most of these theories see the goal of social movements to be reform of the societies in which they operate. I also consider theories of radical social movements since these movements must operate within the system to mobilize knowledge, resources, etc. for movement success, yet the goal of their end outcome is dramatically different in that they seek total system change. With such a distinctive goal, these theories will offer additional insights because their unique goals and tactics help to point out the power of knowledge and role of knowledge production within social movements in a different way than the more reform-oriented movements and theories.

Introducing Foucault

To begin, a discussion of Michel Foucault’s power/knowledge couplet will help to
shed light on why knowledge practices are important. It is helpful to first look at his view on power both from an institutional and individual perspective. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), he stated “Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up” (202). Institutions appear to deindividualize power; however, Foucault saw power as a function not just of institutions, but of institutional norms and how individuals exist and are organized within the institution.

Next, the concept of knowledge becomes relevant to the discussion. In *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, Foucault wrote “knowledge is for me that which must function as a protection of individual existence and as a comprehension of the exterior world. I think that’s it. Knowledge as a means of surviving by understanding” (7). Foucault believed knowledge and power where tied to one another. Together knowledge and power produce discourse, and discourse can create new sets of power relations. In *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault delves into the relation between the two and begins exploring their effects on one another. He states:

“What I mean is this: in a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of discourses” (93).

Through discourse, which is created by the intersection of knowledge and power, individuals create institutions. If the underlying discourse that created those institutions is changed due to new knowledge or new power relations, then the institutions must also
change. This view therefore imbues individuals with the capacity to change social institutions by changing discourse through knowledge-practices.

Thinking for a second on the positive effects of power and its role in the production is knowledge is vital for applying Foucault’s theories to those of social change and social movements. For “there is no power without resistance. No discourse of truth goes unchallenged” (Brown, 31). The key for our understanding of how power generates resistance, and hence social change, lies in looking how knowledge production can change discourse (and thereby the very understanding/framing of issues), how it affects and is affected by power, and how to use that information to inform movements for social change.

Defining Knowledge-Practices

The concept of knowledge-practices is also vital to the analysis that follows. As such, the first question about knowledge-practices that must be asked is what exactly is meant by the word, and why is it important. The term ‘knowledge’ itself can mean a variety of different items, ranging from ideologies and expertise about the social world to more general experiences and stories that also have social significance (Casas-Cortez et al. 2008:27). Adding to the word and making it ‘knowledge-practices’ changes the meaning to focus on the discovery and dissemination of various forms of knowledge. As stated by Casas-Cortez et al. (2008), this ranges from traditional:

“...research practices and critiques that engage, augment, and sometimes challenge the knowledge of scientists or policy experts, to micro-political and cultural interventions that have more to do with ‘know-how’ or the ‘cognitive praxis that informs all social activity’ and which vie with the most basic social institutions
that teach us how to be in the world” (Casas-Cortez et al., 42).

What it all means is that knowledge-practices are the ways in which we produce and disseminate knowledge at all levels. Knowledge is not something that is only produced by the “experts”, but rather something that can be produced by anyone as a challenge to the status quo.

With a basic understanding of both knowledge-practices and Foucault’s power/knowledge couplet under our belts, it’s time to turn to an analysis of the existing literature on social movements. Throughout the discussion of theories of social movements that follows, I will also be addressing the role of knowledge-practices, knowledge production in social movements, and how it relates to movement power and individual/community empowerment.

Early Theories/Classical Theories

Social movement theory began in the 1950s and 1960s with a focus on social conditions that cause strain and lead to psychologically based grievances. A variety of theories, including mass society theory, collective behavior/action theory, and status inconsistency theory, among others, all fall within this early theories category. Each theory follows the same causal model, stating that structural strain leads to a disruptive psychological state, which then leads to a social movement of individuals acting upon their own psychological needs (McAdam, 7). Each specific classical theory varies in its specific focus; however, they all dismiss the idea that individuals are deliberate social actors capable of producing knowledge to empower themselves and their communities, as
well as acting rationally and with purpose within the movements in which they take part.

Classical theorists viewed social movements with a number of assumptions that caused them to miss the important role of knowledge production in movements. First, these theorists saw movements as spontaneous forms of expression existing outside the normal institutions of society (Tarrow 14). Not seeing these movements as part of the regular social structure, classical movement theorists didn’t connect movements to politics or political change (Tarrow 14, McAdam). These theories are similar in that they have the same sequence of events that “moves from the specification of some underlying structural weakness in society to a discussion of the disruptive psychological effect that this structural “strain” has on society. This sequence is held to be complete when the attendant psychological disturbance reaches the aggregate threshold required to produce a social movement” (McAdam 7). The individual’s motivation for social action was viewed as a knee-jerk reaction to abate psychological stress and discordance, thus disavowing individuals of their ability to think critically and rationally about the world around them. As such, movement actors were repeatedly seen as incapable of utilizing or producing knowledge to help inform their actions and goals of social changes and community empowerment.

Moving on to the discussion of some of the specifics of classical theories, I will first examine mass society theory since it does, at least in part, address issues of community. Mass society theory identifies social isolation as the specific structural strain that leads to individual feeling of anxiety and alienation. This psychological state was then seen as causing groups of people, all believed to be acting separately upon the same
individual feelings of anxiety and alienation, to engage in extreme actions and social movements (McAdam 7). As stated by McAdam in his work, “movements offer the atomized individual the sense of community one lacks in his/her everyday life (Arendt, 1951:316-317, Kornhauser, 1959: 107-13, Selznick 1970: 263-266)” (McAdam, 10). Although this theory addresses the sense of community present in social movements, it is focused on appeasing individual alienation rather than on individuals actively attempting to build and empower the community in which they live.

Another classical theory called status inconsistency theory manages to also bypass issues of knowledge production and community empowerment. Status inconsistency theory focuses on severe and widespread inconsistency between statuses such as ones education level, income or occupation as the source of social strain that leads to cognitive dissonance and causes individuals to become involved in social movements (Geschwender, 1971). Although McAdam (1982) shows how this theory argues that involvement in a social movement helps mitigate feelings of dissonance and has a positive psychological effect on its participants, it fails to address how individuals become aware of the fact that there is inconsistency in status or the logistics of forming a social movement based on “widespread status inconsistencies.” Gathering enough individuals affected by status inconsistency to act in unison would imply that people have to first develop knowledge of this inconsistency, and secondly, that they share this knowledge with others. However, status inconsistency theory does not take up these issues and therefore the issue of knowledge production and sharing is lost. Similarly, the notion of individuals working together to empower the community is brushed aside by
this theory’s consistent focus on alleviating individual, psychological stress as the reason behind social action.

The last example of classical movement theory that I will address here is collective behavior theory as posited by individuals such as Neil Smelser (1962), Kurt Lang and Gladys Lang (1961), and Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian (1957). The basic tenet of this theory is cyclical: social change causes structural strains, and these strains create the necessary conditions for a movement to emerge thus resulting in more social change. This idea is not entirely off base; however its focus on the psychological effects of change on individuals ignores how it affects communities on a larger scale. This theory argues that social change disrupts the normative order and leads to normative ambiguity (Smelser, 1962; 11), thus creating the necessary psychological stressor that then leads to involvement in social movements. What is particularly interesting about this theory is that it “emphasizes the disruptive and disturbing quality which new ideas, technologies, procedure, group migration, and instructions can have for people” (Gusfield, 1970, 9) while I am arguing the exact opposite: that new information and new technologies for sharing information actually allow individuals to work together to empower themselves and their communities through social action. That is to say, although things like migration are disruptive, the disruption itself can create new discourses that can threaten the “old way of doing things” and foster social change, whether the change is for better or for worse (i.e. immigration reform or the rise of Fascism, just to name two possibilities). Instead, as evidenced in Smelser’s discussion of “generalized beliefs” and how new beliefs develop in social movements that differ from
those which normally guide other types of behavior, this realm of theory sees social
movements as a way for individuals to cope with normative ambiguity rather than to
facilitate social change for the sake of bettering their communities.

I am not the first to critique these classical theories, as they have been widely
critiqued for their focus on individual discontent and psychological stressors while
dismissing the important roles of individual autonomy and deliberate action. Although
Tarrow argues the most successful of the classical theories “linked collective behavior to
a functional view of society in which societal dysfunctions produced different forms of
collective behavior” (Tarrow 14), it is also argued that this model generally portrayed
movements as irrational and situated them as operating outside and separate from the
existing structures of society (Tarrow 1998, McAdam 1982). Larger social, political and
cultural contexts are not taken into account (McAdam 1982) and from this point of view,
movements are stripped of their power, significance, and their ability to effect social
change beyond individual psychology. Lastly, and because of the critiques outlined
above, these theories never address issues of knowledge production and community
empowerment within social movements.

Resource Mobilization - 1970s

The next wave of social movement theories allowed more room to address
knowledge and knowledge production as theorists attempted to fill the void left by the
failure of classical theory to adequately explain why mobilization occurs. Posited by both
John McCarthy and Mayer Zald in the 1970s, resource mobilization theory examined the
role that various resources played in mobilization (Tarrow 1998). Theorists outlined a number of important resources such as money, legitimacy, having support, and knowledge as having an effect on the mobilization potential of a social movement, thus affording knowledge a bigger role than classical theories ever did in terms of movement mobilization. Resource mobilization theories were, however, still limited in their continued reliance upon the idea that grievances fuel the fire of a social movement. The key difference in terms of my argument is that resource mobilization theories relied heavily on the amount and use of available resources as the means of individuals to create an actual movement. For this reason, movements were no longer seen as irrational and outside the realm of normative structures, but instead as a tactical response to the social order (McAdam 1982) that utilize various resources, such as knowledge, in mobilization.

Despite the resource mobilization theory’s attempt to better explain the existence of social movements and how they actually come to mobilize members of society, there are still holes in the theoretical assumptions and the role that knowledge is allowed to take. This theory continues with the assumption of individual grievances as motivating individuals to act, however it also assumes that grievances are ever-present in modern and pluralistic societies and that actors are not psychologically stressed but rational actors. This shift acknowledges that social movement participants are capable of utilizing and producing knowledge for the sake of mobilizing change, a step up from the allowances of classical theory. However, since this theory is still focused on grievances as the source of unrest, this overshadows the use of knowledge by movement participants for the sake of community empowerment. In the end, at least resource mobilization
theory recognizes knowledge as a resource for mobilization because of its ability to empower individuals to act.

Another critique is that the resource mobilization perspective only measures movements’ success in terms of their ability to meet concrete goals or win concessions from those in power. Barbara Epstein (1991) argued that this leaves little room for acknowledging transformations of consciousness or community building. The power of knowledge to effect social change and empower communities is neither something “concrete” to be measured, nor does it result from winning concessions. Moreover, because this is how the resource mobilization theory measures success, the theory also assumes that bureaucratization of the movement is both positive and a desired outcome when that is not necessarily true. In fact Piven and Cloward (1977) argue the opposite and show that bureaucratization is actually the downfall of movements because it strips movements of any power to effect change.

In moving past the limitations of the resource mobilization perspective, we actually see some social movements achieve success because of their “lack” of resources, not despite it (Fitzgerald et al. 2000:575; Epstein 1991). Even though resource mobilization theory fails to adequately address the roles that grassroots organizations with few resources play in mobilization (Tarrow 1998, McAdam 1982), we see that with deficiency of resources, smaller grassroots social movements must rely heavily on the resource of knowledge and developing knowledge-practices that are effective for creating change. This shows that the resource mobilization theory, although capable of allowing acknowledgement of knowledge as resource, may have unintentionally down played the
importance of this specific resource and limited the roles it afforded knowledge-practices in grassroots organizations.

Turning to the Political

The next phase of social movement theory emerged in the late 1970s and focused on political opportunity structures. Outlined by Charles Tilly in 1978, this structural model focuses on how collective action relates to the state and the political structures of society. It attempts to remedy the gap left by the resource mobilization perspectives’ inability to explain movement success or failure by thinking through what is politically “possible” for a movement to accomplish. As with RM perspectives, this theory also downplays individual and group psychological motivations for engaging in SM’s. In addition to downplaying psychological motivations, the Political Opportunity Structure models also downplay emergent knowledge production amongst movement participants in their theorizing.

Sidney Tarrow (1998) advances a vein of politically focused movement theory in his work on contentious politics. He sees the process of social change as heavily reliant on expanding and constricting political opportunities, with these political opportunities being affected by shifts in “cycles of contention.” Cycles of contention help to explain that political opportunities for change are greater when the levels of overall social tensions in a society are higher, and action is constrained when these levels are low. However, in the end Tarrow argues that “whatever the source of contentious claims, it is political opportunities and constraints that translate them into action” (141). Knowledge
is important to his theory in that movements must be able to see and recognize both openings in the political structure and the widening of cycles of contention in order to act strategically at a time when their mobilization is more likely to succeed in effecting change. However, knowledge is only acknowledged as important in this limited sense.

Another pertinent theory that is focused on politics is Doug McAdam’s political process theory (1982). McAdam saw social movement dynamics as constantly changing and dependent upon the interaction between movements and the larger sociopolitical environment. He argues that theories of social movements exist within larger frameworks and, as such, they assume different types of institutional power: classical theories exist within a pluralist model; resource mobilization exists within elitist understandings of the American political system; and political process theory exists within a form of institutionalized power that draws upon both elitist and Marxist interpretations. Political opportunity theorists thus point to an expanded definition of power that takes into consideration how both internal and external sources of power feed into the dynamics of a movement. McAdam identifies three major factors that can lead to the development of a social movement including; the level of organization within the aggrieved group (or their “readiness”), the groups collective assessment of possible success (or their “insurgent consciousness”), and how these groups align themselves politically with the overarching political environment they seek to change (or the “structure of political opportunities”). The term “insurgent consciousness” is tied to movement participants’ knowledge about when external factors are favorable for success, and he explicitly ties the concept to movement success. McAdam argues knowledge is key to making an organization ready
for action and informs movements on how to best align one’s self in the political
environment for success. Although he doesn’t use the term knowledge-practices, he is
acknowledges the role of knowledge in social movements in a covert way: as an
important, but not vital, tool for recognizing opportunities of change. What he missed is
looking at how movement participants create an “insurgent consciousness” through active
and deliberate means of knowledge discovery and dissemination.

This model of movement theory has other critiques and flaws. As Tarrow points
out, most of theories have not been systematically studied in their applicability to
countries outside of the “liberal democracies of the west”. As such, movement success is
typically narrowly-defined and limited to change within the existing sociopolitical
context. Piven and Cloward (1977), in their work on welfare politics and social protest,
actually show that working within political channels can lead to the incorporation of the
movement into the government, a process that decreases the power of movements to
effect greater change. Therefore, the political process model cannot accurately capture
success of movements, specifically radical social movements, which operate outside of
this existing context and seek system change (Fitzgerald et al. 2000:576).

Overall, theories of social movements that focus on the political open up a new
vein of conversation regarding movement potential and success, however the view in-
and-of-itself is still relatively limited in its contribution to the role of knowledge within
social movements and the ability of knowledge to empower people to act. Some theorists
allude to the importance of knowledge about levels of contention and openings in the
structure of political opportunities, but knowledge itself is not the focus of the theory.
After all is said and done, what good is a political opportunity if you are not in the know that it exists?

New Social Movement Theory

Known collectively as new social movement (NSM) theory, this new generation of theories developed in the early 1990s and turned its focus to cultural factors that affect social movements and collective action. NSM theories tend to focus largely on the role of identities and culture within the current economic system, situating the rising number of fragmented movements within a post-industrial, late-capitalist economy (Epstein 1991:228). Although these theories are fragmented and diverse, much like the movements they attempt to explain, there are common themes throughout NSM theories worth exploring here. A new focus on culture and identities leads to new insights as to the role of knowledge and knowledge production in social movements.

The overall themes of NSM theory shed light on another way of looking at knowledge and knowledge production in social movements. These themes, outlined in an article written by Steven M. Buechler (1995), begin by drawing on the work of Cohen and Melucci to show how theorists consistently argue that symbolic action must accompany instrumental action that happens in the sociopolitical sphere. This shows that NSM theories are moving away from the focus on political action and are instead consistently pointing to cultural change rather than just political change. Other consistent themes Buechler finds include: concepts of autonomy and self-determination, as in the work of Jurgen Habermas and Dieter Rucht: and the role of postmaterialist values, as
seen in the work of Inglehart, Dalton, Kuechler, and Burklin. NSM theory also draws heavily on theories of social constructionism by examining how the group itself socially constructs grievances, ideology and even knowledge; as well the role of collective identities and the informal, temporary social networks that draw people together in collective action. NSM theory’s focus on culture and identity are not in-and-of themselves focused on the role of knowledge in social movements. Instead, they focus on identity construction and identification with movements. Through this process, NSM theories point to culture and identity as new topics for the analysis of the role of knowledge and knowledge production using a social constructionist lens.

Symbolic interactionism (a big part of NSM theory) understands that society and social structures, including social movements, are both created and maintained through the day-to-day interactions of its members. In this perspective society is seen as constantly changing and “social order” is understood as negotiated between groups and its members. Symbolic interactionism argues that individuals negotiate the meaning of everything with other members of society. This means that concepts such as knowledge, and the determination of what knowledge is important, is socially constructed [see George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer (1969), Everett C. Hughes (1958), Howard S. Becker (1964), and Ralph H. Turner (1962, 68, 78)]. Additionally, our understandings of social movements and other social structures are similarly socially constructed and maintained through the same interactive process. By rooting itself in social constructionism, New Social Movement Theory reminds us of the importance of interaction and shared knowledge.
Another important contribution of NSM theory involves work on identities and how individuals come to participate in movements. Although this aspect of NSM theory tends to focus on identities, it draws out important information about movement mobilization and creates knowledge that can then be used by social change movements and leaders to better mobilize and effect change. By drawing on identity theory, social identity theory, and self-categorization theory, insight is provided as to how collective identities are developed.

According to NSM theory there are a number of factors that affect identity construction and identification with social movements, an understanding of which can impact a movement’s knowledge of best-mobilization practices. Although a full discussion of these factors is beyond the reach of this paper, a brief examination and citations for further exploration will be provided here. Identity development is a complicated and fragile process, but the roots of identity construction can be traced to interests that are based in part on structure and culture determinations (see Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994; Johnston, Larana, and Gusfield 1994; Klandermans 1994; Melucci 1989; Stoecker 1995). Social identities are also tied to individual identities, with individuals thinking of themselves in terms of groups and organizations (Boezeman and Ellemers 2008). Each individual who chooses to identify with a social movement organization must imbue that social identity with meaning through identification with the prototype of the ideal movement participant (Hogg, 2006, Huddy 2001), a high valence of group membership (Simon 2004), alignment of core values (Barth 1981, Huddy 2001, Fox 1996), and lacking identification with the characteristics of common out-groups (Barth
An individual’s identity/ies are constantly shifting as well (Brewer and Weber 1994, Simon 1994, and Turner et al. 1987), so it is important to understand how individuals’ internal dynamics of identity and their salience hierarchies allow role, social, and person identities to simultaneously operate and shift in importance at any given time or situation. As changes occur in one’s commitment to, and salience of, any given identity, the door opens for changes in behavior and potential movement involvement (see Stets and Burke 2000, Stryker 1994). Lastly, individuals need to overcome barriers to participation in social action (Klandermans 1993) including perceived high costs and low benefits, an unknown probability of movement success.

Although NSM theory is one of the newest veins of social movement theory, there are a number of important critiques to keep in mind, both in terms of the theory in general and for its implications for knowledge production and the role of knowledge in social movements. Its focus on symbolic interactionism and social constructionism provides great insights to how people create meaning in their lives and social action; however it ignores the opportunities and constraints available in terms of resource mobilization and the political opportunity structures as outlined by earlier theories. In terms of knowledge production and practices, it takes an understanding of the strengths and weakness of each vein of SM theory to begin to develop a comprehensive understanding of the importance of the production of knowledge and its dissemination for social action.

NSM theory also tends to overemphasize identity at the expense of understanding the complexity of some movements. They are inclined to avoid discussing class-based identities and exhibit a bias towards the more easily defined movements with narrow

Another important critique outlined by Barbara Epstein (1991) that has particular relevance for my work, is that NSM theory tends to be intellectually complex, making it a theory about movements rather than for movements. Because NSM theory and knowledge presented by theorists can be utilized by movements to produce knowledge in such a way as to increase mobilization and, in the long run, to better effect social change, the information needs to be presented in a way that is useable by social change activists and movement organizers in order to better mobilize others for social action.

Radical Social Movements

The last set of social movement theory that I bring into the discussion is work done on radical social movements. Although not always recognized as a distinct set of social movement theory, I argue that indeed it is. Radical social movements must operate to mobilize knowledge and resources with the end goal being revolution rather than reform. RSMOs are typically analyzed alongside more moderate movements, a process that obscures our understanding of them, their goals, and their successes. This is problematic and looses the importance of the work done to facilitate change through knowledge production and distribution. As argued by Fitzgerald and Rodgers (2000), radical movements need their own theoretical literature if we are to fully understand them. Analyzing radical movements and organizations points out the power of knowledge and role of knowledge production within social movements in ways that analyzing the more reform-oriented movements and theories does not.
A large part of what RSMOs do is engage in various types of knowledge-practices. Their attempts to facilitate social change lies in creating alternative knowledges that counter the hegemonic knowledges produced by the neoliberal state, and they work hard in the subsequent dissemination of these new knowledges since they are vital to the social change process for RSMOs. As such, these organizations focus heavily on the methods and means of communication they have with the community. This process is, in part, out of necessity since most RSMOs find it difficult to deal with the mainstream media (Fitzgerald et al. 2000:584). Mainstream media can distort RSMOs messages, ignore their concerns all together, or be completely dismayed with the lack of structure that makes “talking to the person in charge” a difficult task as decisions are often made collectively rather than through a hierarchical model. The lack of mainstream media attention has forced RSMOs to develop their own forms and methods of communication in order to diffuse knowledges, and many organizations use newsletters, pamphlets, street speaking, theater, the internet and even music as means to facilitate communication (Fitzgerald et al. 2000:585).

Social movements gain power in opposition to hegemonic knowledges by creating and diffusing alternative knowledges. These movements understand that knowledge takes many forms and the organizations involved utilize the plethora of knowledges that are available in order to facilitate change. RSMOs develop critiques of the current political state and offer alternative perspectives through the creation of counter-hegemonic knowledges (Casas-Cortez et al. 2008:28). Moreover, these knowledge-practices can lead to new ideas and understandings about democracy and lead individuals into social action.
This is why “knowledge practices are a crucial component of the creative and daily practice of social movements” (Casas-Cortez et al. 2008:19).

The generation of new knowledges allows movements to act towards social (and political) change by working strategically to allow for a space in which social action can rethink democracy (Casas-Cortez et al. 2008:20) and implement it in a real life scenario.

“There is a marked, yet subtle difference between the analytical conclusion that movements produce different ideas or narratives about democracy to a conclusion that recognizes these as theoretical and practical creations and/or applications of a theory or knowledge of democracy” (Casas-Cortez et al. 2008:42).

As such, RSMOs actually structure themselves in a way that upholds their beliefs about radical democracy: nonhierarchical organizational structure, consensus-based decision making, and emancipatory and anti-capitalist ideologies.

Additionally, special attention must be paid to the knowledge of everyday people in the efforts of social movement to promote social justice and empower individuals within that system. Paulo Freire argued in his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed (2000) that true change can only come from those who are the oppressed in society. He wrote that “critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action, must be carried on with the oppressed at whatever the stage of their struggle for liberation” (Freire 2000:65). Those who are the oppressed within a particular system of domination have the knowledge and skills to find the methods of change that will work best for themselves and those around them. Furthermore, clearly echoing the work of Paulo Freire, Casas-Cortez, Osterweil, and Powell state “’people’s knowledge’ is based on grounded experience that can differently enhance particular processes of social emancipation”
(Casas-Cortez et al. 2008:48). It is the citizens who have the power to protest the system they live in and the knowledge of how they want to re-create the world around them. This is precisely why many social movements look to knowledge creation and knowledge-practices; it is as a means to empower those around them.

Radical movements draw our attention to the fact that creating and disseminating knowledge is, and should be, a high priority for social movement organizations. Knowledge-practices take up a significant amount of social movements’ time and activities (Casas-Cortez et al. 2008:28), and we see that this is important for creating alternative knowledges to counter hegemonic ones, for creating the space to allow the people to determine the course of action that is best for their community, and to actually lead those community members into action.

Lastly, and of particular interest to this topic, is the tie back to the relationship between knowledge and power. In drawing once again upon the work of Michel Foucault, let us go back to the fact that knowledge and power are viewed as having a mutually constitutive relationship in which each is heavily invested in one another, so much so that the two concepts are inseparable from one another. He states that “power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Discipline and Punish, 27).

What this mean is that we must look to who is producing knowledge, their intentions, and the effects of the knowledge generation on society. Add this to the preceding social movement theory discussion, and we can now move onto to looking at a case study of
two social change programs and their roles in knowledge creation/dissemination for the purposes of social change.
METHODS

Methods and Processes for Case Studies

Throughout my graduate coursework, I was involved with a number of applied research projects. I worked with Dr. Judith Little and other graduate students to complete a qualitative analysis looking at the feasibility of a relocation shelter for domestic abuse clients; I also spent some time working Democracy Unlimited of Humboldt County (or DUHC) to begin a placement project which, unfortunately, never fully came into being; and lastly I found a placement with Straight Up AmeriCorps as a result of my employment with the program as their Program Evaluation and Monitoring Specialist.

The case studies for this paper were selected based on my own AmeriCorps experience and placement project work with Straight Up AmeriCorps. For that reason, I have chosen both AmeriCorps, as a general case, and Straight Up AmeriCorps, as a specific case, as my two case studies.

My qualitative analysis of these two case studies blends ethnographic research and action research (Berg, 2004). I will analyze the culture of AmeriCorps and Straight Up AmeriCorps and look at the ways in which each program utilizes knowledge-practices to further social change. Additionally, part of my analysis that follows is from my own experience as a participant and can be seen along the same lines as that of a participant observer. I use my own experiences and observations as an AmeriCorps member, generally, and as a Straight Up Member, specially, to aid/inform my analysis. I also utilize historical data to inform my discussion.
Methods and Processes for Placement Work

I completed my placement work with Straight Up AmeriCorps (SUA). My placement site report is attached to this thesis in the appendix. The project can be broken down into three separate subsections, each containing its own methods and processes as outlined below. At the time of my placement, I was working with SUA as their Program Evaluation and Monitoring Specialist and was contracted to work on various parts of the grant application to fulfill the requirements of my graduate placement work.

Strategic Planning

The first section of my placement work dealt with strategic planning and program design. Every three years SUA needed to apply for a re-authorization grant from AmeriCorps to secure funding. The program had been experimenting with different types of work due to some American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding it received for the 2009-2010 year and was looking into changing its program design and focus for the upcoming grant. As such, the strategic planning process began in the late summer/early fall of 2009 with the goal of working through the details of changes that could be implemented once the request for proposals (RFP) for AmeriCorps funding was released.

A collective determination was made to let the community decide what it needed most from the program, thus following the action research/asset-based community development methodology. This decision was made in part because it follows sound research practices, but also because it helps to fulfill a requirement of the AmeriCorps grant to show that SUA involves and empowers the community being served in the
planning process. In the end, a series of strategic planning meetings were scheduled to solicit input from the community.

The series of strategic planning meetings with the program stakeholders and other members of the community helped narrow down the future focus of the program from the five focus areas outlined by AmeriCorps. Two planning meetings were held starting in early October of 2009. We got a variety of interested individuals with diverse viewpoints to give the program feedback on what its future direction should be. In other words, we were gathering information from the community about what was both needed in Humboldt County and what was feasible in terms of program design and funding needs.

**Data Collection**

Data collection was also conducted in the initial planning stages. I completed research on county statistics to locate potential gaps in service. I also gathered information through focused meetings with other SUA staff and outside organizations. This process allowed SUA to start looking at new potential partners such as the local Workforce Investment Board and the Humboldt County Office of Education. Lastly, I developed, distributed, and analyzed the results of a Partner Survey. The survey was distributed in early November to all current SUA partner sites in order to gauge their interest and financial ability to host AmeriCorps members in the future, and to determine what services they would be interested in seeing AmeriCorps members provide.

What emerged out of the program’s strategic planning process and the various stages of data collection was a new focus on workforce development, and an entirely new means with which to work with Humboldt County’s disadvantaged youth.
Grant Writing Methods and Process

In the grant-writing phase of this project, I started by researching secondary sources such as the datasets on Census.gov (the American Community Survey for 2005-2007 and 2006-2008, Census data), and local school statistics from the Humboldt County Office of Education and California Department of Education (including STAR test results, CAHSEE data, graduation rates, rates of completion of high school for disadvantaged youth), as well as other local reports related to the topic. I researched scholarly articles to better understand the social, psychological, and developmental factors that affect youth and their rates of school completion and successful or unsuccessful career paths. The data discussed above was used in large part to write the community needs section of the program’s grant application.

The data gathered through this research, along with the community-based data and statistics and strategic planning, helped inform SUA’s development of new performance measurements, which are discussed in greater detail in the appendix of this paper.

Methods for Developing Forms

After the grant proposal was submitted to AmeriCorps for consideration, I began working on the development of the forms that members would be using to track their hours and activities with the youth they worked with. I used my knowledge and training in quantitative methods, coupled with my research highlighting the important benchmarks for youth career development, in the creation of the form content and design. I also researched types of questionnaire and tracking databases already in existence and
pulled information, questions, and overall goals that could be applied to Straight Up’s program design. Additional information on the specific forms and surveys created can also be found in the appendix.
CASE STUDY ONE – AMERICORPS, THE BIGGER PICTURE

AmeriCorps came into being in 1993 and is often described to those who have not heard of it as the domestic Peace Corps. It is a federal program that is designed to engage people in intensive national and community service.

Legislative and Social History

AmeriCorps legislation has its roots in a history of governmental response to poverty. In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt started the Civilian Conservation Corps, in part as response to poverty and unemployment epidemic caused by the Great Depression. Then in 1960, President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps with a focus on social and economic development in third world countries. VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) and the Job Corps were also created a few years later by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 as part of Lyndon B. Johnson’s *War on Poverty* (The Corporation for National and Community Service, “AmeriCorps VISTA”). Next came various youth conservation corps for youth and young adults at the federal, state, and local levels in the 1970s and 80s.

Then in 1993, President Clinton signed in to law the National and Community Service Trust Act, creating AmeriCorps and its governing body, the Corporation for National Service (today called the Corporation for National and Community Service, or CNCS). CNCS became an umbrella organization for multiple federal community service programs, adding Learn and Serve (originally founded in 1990) and Senior Corps (founded in 1993 through the merger of Foster Grandparents, RSVP, and Senior
Companions programs that originally began in 1973).

The most recent legislation regarding AmeriCorps was passed in 2009. The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act reauthorized AmeriCorps funding and sought to expand its total size from 75,000 members to 250,000 members per year by 2017.

Types of AmeriCorps Programs

The CNCS AmeriCorps umbrella includes three separate types of programs, including the 1960s’ VISTA program, State and National Programs, and the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC).

VISTA

The AmeriCorps VISTA program was designed with the specific goal of fighting poverty. Early VISTA volunteers created well-known and lasting anti-poverty program such as Head Start and Upward Bound (The Corporation for National and Community Service, “AmeriCorps VISTA”). As stated by the Corporation for National and Community Service, today these members continue to “live and serve in some of our nation’s poorest urban and rural areas. With passion, commitment, and hard work, they create or expand programs designed to bring individuals and communities out of poverty” (“What VISTA Members Do”). The VISTA program focuses on indirect community building in low income communities. Volunteers work with non-profits organizations and public agencies with the end goal of improving organizational capacity and sustainability. Volunteers often create programs that will address poverty such as literacy campaigns, improving health services, and fostering economic development. The Corporation for
National and Community service states that each year over 6,000 VISTAs serve low-income communities while serving at over 1,200 different projects throughout the country (“What VISTA Members Do”).

State and National Programs

The AmeriCorps State and National program is the largest of CNCS’s AmeriCorps programs. It is designed to provide grants to various not-for-profit organizations so that those organizations can then recruit volunteers to provide direct services to meet “critical community needs”. Grants are awarded and managed through various State Commissions (California’s State Commission is CaliforniaVolunteers, or CV) and each grantee must meet community need(s) in one of CNCS’s main focus areas, including: education, economic opportunity, health and wellness, veterans, and the environment. Organizations are awarded grants in three-year authorization cycles and must re-apply each three-year cycle with a “decreased cost per member service year (MSY),” or how much it costs to enroll one full time member, or its equivalent, for one service term. For example, a 1.5 million dollar per year program that receives $750,000 from CNCS for 50 members costs CNCS $15,000 per member service year. The requirement to decrease this cost to CNCS is designed to show that the program has increased community support and alternative funding avenues, in theory making the program more sustainable over time so that it can continue in the absence of CNCS funding, if need be. Volunteers for these programs are recruited and trained by individual grantees and address community need through direct, hands-on service opportunities such as tutoring at-risk youth or building homes for low-income individuals. Each year,
according to a State of Illinois publication, about 65,000 State and National AmeriCorps members serve their communities through hundreds of not-for-profit organizations.

**AmeriCorps National and Civilian Conservation Corps (NCCC)**

The AmeriCorps National and Civilian Conservation Corps (NCCC) program is a team-based, residential program for 18-24 year olds and is modeled after the 1930s’ Civilian Conservation Corps and the United States Military. As outlined by the Corporation for National and Community Service, teams of eight to twelve are deployed throughout their region to strengthen communities by working on various service projects with sponsor organizations (non-profits or local, state, tribal, federal agencies). Sponsor organizations must request NCCC assistance by applying to their region’s NCCC campus. Through their term, NCCC members complete four different six- to eight-week projects in various service focus areas such as disaster response, infrastructure improvement, environmental stewardship and conservation, energy conservation, and urban and rural development. Each year, about 1,100 NCCC members serve communities throughout one of five regional areas in the United States (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008).

**Service Term Requirements**

Individuals selected by an AmeriCorps program to serve sign up for a term of service and commit to serving a certain minimum number of hours, anywhere from a full-term of 1700 hours to a quarter-term of 425 hours. They typically receive a living stipend during their term and earn a Segal Education Award upon the successful completion of the term, with a value equivalent to the Pell Grant for a full-time term (currently $5,550).
Members are also provided health insurance, child care benefits, and student loan forbearance/deferment.

**Standardized Messaging and Member Recruitment**

Each type of AmeriCorps program has the same three main focuses: to help the community, to develop members, and to recruit additional volunteers. The standard language of “serving for a year of National Service” draws individuals from around the country interested in the same broad goal, provides a centralized application system for recruitment, and allows for national recruitment by locally based programs. The message is broad enough to recruit members into the National Service Movement at high rates, but specific enough that it largely recruits individuals with the same socially conscious attitude and social change goals. This messaging is key to movement growth and development and has lead to a steady yearly enrollment of about 75,000 individuals.

The standardized online application offered through AmeriCorps.gov allows everyone interested in being a part of the mission to complete the application and join the pool of like minded individuals. Once in the door, with a generic application submitted into the system, applicants then submit the same application to specific AmeriCorps programs that have service focuses which are uniquely suited to their own personal social and/or environmental change goals. This system brilliantly illustrates an effective implementation of knowledge –practices that procure movement members with the same broad social change goals and then sorts/places them into the programs that are a good fit to their specific interests. This ensures continued devotion and involvement with the once
broad AmeriCorps mission, now refined to the individuals own social and/or environmental change goals.

This process is also very successful in linking smaller programs throughout the United States with a national recruitment database, thus allowing for enrollment of large number of highly qualified or motivated individuals, even in smaller towns or more rural areas with smaller populations to draw from.

AmeriCorps State and National Program Design

State and National Programs, which are the largest and most diverse type of AmeriCorps programs, have a unique characteristic that ties into the discussion about knowledge-practices and community-based social movements: the community’s involvement in determining the program design.

This subset of AmeriCorps programs are developed by specific communities and/or organizations with projects that can be partially funded and supported in their own area. Organizations that apply for AmeriCorps funding must show that they have done research within their communities to determine that the need(s) they are proposing to address (say a high drop rate, bad local water quality, or homelessness) is a serious problem for that locality. This is an extensive knowledge-gathering process that forces organizations or agencies interested in hosting AmeriCorps programs to hold community meetings, conduct research, and seek out like-minded partners to develop a program specific to the needs of the community in which it was developed. These organizations must also bring the promise of a diverse, and sometimes substantial, local funding match.
into their grant application. For that reason, grantee organizations partner with other organizations that are willing and able to provide funding and/or provide a “placement” for service opportunities, such as in schools, at non-profit restoration programs, or in homeless shelters.

This process makes programs stronger. Not all applications to host AmeriCorps members are accepted, only those that substantially illustrate the local need, based on research, and solid program design are selected for funding. Therefore, the programs that end up hosting members are vetted by AmeriCorps to ensure compliance with the national service program mission, to provide meaningful service opportunities, and strengthen each individual participant’s investment in the underlying AmeriCorps mission; all leading to a stronger base of support for the AmeriCorps mission and movement for national service.

Core Program Characteristics

Because of the great diversity amongst programs, it is important to identify the core ideology and common characteristics that all AmeriCorps Programs share: such as endeavoring to leave a lasting community impact, developing and fostering civic engagement, remaining apolitical, taking a reform-approach. All of these characteristics will be explored in greater detail below.

Lasting Impacts

A key AmeriCorps ideological goal is to leave a lasting impact within the communities served. VISTAs attempt to do this mainly through capacity building. They
establish new programs and find ways to make the programs they work with more efficient and sustainable beyond their term of service. Other AmeriCorps members make a lasting impact on their communities through measurable, direct service. Rather than by creating programs to help their community, they serve within existing programs by doing tasks such as tutoring youth in math and reading, mentoring at-risk youth, or restoring watersheds. This direct service leaves a lasting impact on those individuals affected by the program.

The lasting impact focus extends to the longevity of the programs themselves. State and National programs are required to apply for less federal funding every three years and to make up the difference by finding local/alternative funding sources. This encourages local community ownership and investment in the program. The long-term goal is for the program to be able to continue in the event that AmeriCorps funding is no longer received or available. The focus on longevity and lasting impacts forces programs to mobilize a base of support of their own, and conveniently, a base that supports AmeriCorps by proxy, should Congress threaten to cut funding.

Civic Engagement

Another component of AmeriCorps ideology is developing and fostering civic engagement in its members. AmeriCorps is structured so that each individual, regardless of the specific program in which they are involved, will ideally come out of their term of service more civically engaged than when they began the program. This civic engagement begins first and foremost by learning the motto of “getting things done” and taking the AmeriCorps pledge, usually during the first few days of orientation:
“I will get things done for America - to make our people safer, smarter, and healthier. I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities. Faced with apathy, I will take action. Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground. Faced with adversity, I will persevere. I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond. I am an AmeriCorps member, and I will get things done” (AmeriCorps.gov).

Secondly, throughout their term of service, AmeriCorps members learn how to foster social change through the standardized AmeriCorps training curriculum. This specific training is required by all national service programs as a part of their overall training curriculum and focuses on developing skills that last beyond a term to continue having a positive community impact post-service. Lastly, all members must participate in National Service Days. There are a handful of these days each year in which all AmeriCorps members, regardless of location, must participate. These days are usually large events that bring the community together to work on community service projects such as building a playground in a low-income neighborhood, painting a youth center, or collecting canned goods for food pantries. All of these tactics combine to expose members to a variety of avenues to become and/or stay civically engaged. It also aids in developing relationships between members and community groups, organizations, and projects.

The focus to “get thing done” and the training, experience, and community connections AmeriCorps provides tends to have a lasting impact on the outlook of AmeriCorps members after their term. A 2008 CNCS report found, through an eight-year longitudinal study, that AmeriCorps generates alumni who are more engaged in their community.
“In fact, sixty percent of AmeriCorps State and National alumni work in a nonprofit or governmental organization, continuing to solve their communities’ most pressing needs. […] Nonprofit employers also look to alumni as a valuable source for employees, hiring many alumni who first served in their programs as AmeriCorps members. And AmeriCorps is a clear entrée to public service for minority alumni and alumni from disadvantaged circumstances, as both groups are significantly more likely to choose public service careers than their non-AmeriCorps peers” (3).

This study also found that alumni are engaged in their communities in a way that makes them “agents of positive change.” Of course, given the consistent focus on civic engagement, this is not surprising. That is not to say that AmeriCorps necessarily creates this in its participants, as those who opt to join AmeriCorps are already invested in making a change in their local communities prior to receiving training from AmeriCorps. However, in the absence of data to support or negate any population group self-selection, what is clear is that AmeriCorps provides a great networking opportunity for those who want a foot-in-the-door and forges connections between community groups, the public sector, and those who want to find careers there.

Apolitical Service

Another commonality amongst AmeriCorps programs is that all members, while serving in their local communities, must be apolitical due their status a federally funded program. There are strict guidelines that outline prohibited activities, such as: attempting to influence legislation; organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes; assisting, promoting, or deterring union organization; engaging in partisan political activities; engaging in religious instruction; conducting voter registration drives; or providing abortion services or referrals. Staying out of politics helps ensure that the public does not see AmeriCorps as misusing tax dollars. However, regardless of the
reasoning behind the ban on political activities, it is an interesting juxtaposition to the fact that AmeriCorps members are being trained on how to effect social change in poor and underserved communities. These members, purely by being a part of AmeriCorps, are inherently having a political impact through their actions, because empowering disadvantaged communities to improve their circumstances is, in and of itself, a political act.

Reform-Oriented

AmeriCorps programs are also inherently reform-oriented in their approach to community empowerment and social change. Members work within the current social structure to create change, largely by creating programs and working directly with individuals to improve access to services and opportunities through some type of community education program (i.e. tutoring, career counseling, etc). Through their size alone, tens of thousands of AmeriCorps members are creating positive social change, building capacity, and challenging the status quo for low income and disadvantaged communities.

A Needs-Based Approach to Change

AmeriCorps programs and members are meant to engage in service and projects that the community itself has determined to be needed. State and National Programs are funded based on community organizations grant proposals that must show that the proposed program is a legitimate and valid community need. VISTA members also serve with agencies or non-profits that must apply to be placement sites, and they are selected based on their documentation of need and ability to provide a meaningful service
opportunity. Lastly, NCCC members are sent to project sites with the greatest need as determined through an application for assistance. All these characteristics align AmeriCorps programs with the needs-based community development approach, leaving the burden of proof on the program applying for members. Programs compile local resources, reports, experts, and/or hold community forums to determine the most pressing problems facing the community and to provide the justification for their program’s existence. This knowledge gathering exercise ensures programs are well informed about their communities needs and generates discussion among program partners for how to effectively address the issue.

The drawback is that these needs must fall within one of CNCS’s priority areas in order to be considered, so community needs can only be determined based on the limited scope of AmeriCorps funding possibilities. As such, the federal government is able to outline what is sees as the greatest need and then expects individual programs to conform to their outlined criteria, thereby imposing their ideas upon the needs-based community development process and overshadowing local decision making processes.

**Tracking, Reporting, and Generating Knowledge**

At the federal level, AmeriCorps must continuously show that it is having an impact in order to justify continued funding. As a result, each individual AmeriCorps programs must generate a large amount of data to measure impact and effectiveness over the course of one AmeriCorps term (up to 12 months). This can be difficult for some programs to quantify and exemplify, such as those engaging in academic mentoring or environmental restoration. However, to continue receiving funding and show that
programs are having the impact CNCS wants/needs them to have, this is a must. Organizations that are unable to quantify their impact do not receive follow up funding, thereby opening up the pot of money to other programs that show a promise of greater impact. As such, AmeriCorps keeps its status as a program that makes a difference, and that helps make the case to Congress to continue allocating funding each year to the program.

The oversight of AmeriCorps funding by Congress, and of individual programs by CNCS and its State Commissions, may take knowledge production and information gathering a bit too far. The continuous development of new policies and procedures to improve AmeriCorps program and ensure the adequate use of federal money creates an unnecessary burden on programs to produce information. New policies, increased oversight, and tighter monitoring lead to increased bureaucratization and micromanaging, causing staff and members to spend more time collecting data to show improvement rather than having them engage in activities that actually improve the community.

AmeriCorps Conclusion

In the end, programs under the AmeriCorps umbrella are able to deploy resources throughout United States to fund various types of programs that are managed locally to coordinate and implement community development programs specific to their community’s need. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is able to use a relatively small amount of money allocated by Congress to create real and
widespread change in local communities because of the requirements that most of its programs (State and National programs – which comprise the majority of AmeriCorps money) must utilize substantial matching funds. Each individual program is generally well researched, supported within its local community, and brings together socially conscious individuals to develop and foster their interest in social change. AmeriCorps, in return, provides networking opportunities and a unifying identity under which to create that change. As a movement, it has engaged in knowledge-practices that foster its continued existence and impact in low income and disadvantaged communities.

Now that I have explored a national service program at its largest level, that of federally funded AmeriCorps service, I move to examine its implementation in the field. In the next chapter, I examine a specific AmeriCorps program in order to better understand the knowledge-practices that occur at the local level of national service.
CASE STUDY TWO – STRAIGHT UP AMERICORPS

Straight Up AmeriCorps (SUA) was created in Humboldt County in 1994 when the first round of AmeriCorps funding applications for State and National Programs was implemented. The SUA program was developed, in part, by Redwood Community Action Agency (RCAA).

SUA’s host agency, RCAA, was a great match for the proposed program. Community action agencies themselves are non-profit private or public organizations that were also created by federal legislation designated to address and fight poverty in local communities, just like AmeriCorps funding. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, passed as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty, is responsible for laying the groundwork for establishment of Community Action Agencies throughout the country. RCAA, specifically, was founded in 1982 and is one of twenty-one community action agencies in California.

Program Design

Over the years, the SUA program enrolled AmeriCorps members each year (approximately 40 per year recently) and placed these members with different partner agencies, mainly K-12 schools with after-school programs, throughout Humboldt County. I served as an AmeriCorps member with this program in 2007 at a time when the program was designed to be an academic mentoring and tutoring program with a secondary focus on health and wellness for low-income and at risk-youth. The overall structure and goal of SUA, as I had experienced it, had not changed much since its
The program’s inception in 1994:

**The Primary Focus, Academic Tutoring and Mentoring**

The overall strategy of the program involved increasing the academic knowledge of students while also building confidence through the goal setting process. The students who qualified for the program had to be performing at or below average level in school and be enrolled in an after school program. SUA’s members, myself included, worked with specific students throughout the school day, both in the classroom and after-school. Time was spent in one-on-one and small-group meetings to provide targeted tutoring. Students were also encouraged to develop SMART goals with their AmeriCorps member. Members were there to provide guidance, help students work through setbacks and celebrate successes, and to help their students develop the skills they need in order to reach their goals and improve their academic standing.

SUA members were also meant to serve the role of being a stable adult in the lives of these students and to be someone who cared greatly about their academic progress and development. The program operated under the assumption that many of the students being tutored and mentored were lacking solid role models in their home lives. By working with students intensely over the year, providing tutoring and mentoring, the goal was to have a lasting impact on that student’s life for years to come.

**A Secondary Focus, Health and Wellness**

The program’s secondary focus on health and wellness required members to work with students on making healthy choices regarding topics such as nutrition and exercise. These activities were largely accomplished by creating lessons for the after-school
program and by leading activities during school breaks, such as lunch and recess. The overall goal of this secondary focus was to improve students’ abilities to make those healthy choices and increase their physical fitness and activity level.

Moving in New Directions

During Straight Up’s fifteenth year, when I started working with the program as staff in 2009, the program received funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and began expanding its services, adding assistance in different capacities. The program began incorporating a variety of alternative, tertiary targets. As a result, SUA expanded from its standard school-based academic mentoring program and began placing its members with different community-based organizations designed to improve the self-sufficiency of those in poverty in a variety of new ways. Members were placed with organizations such as the Consumer Credit Counseling Service to provide youth with financial planning skills, RCAA’s Youth Service Bureau to work with at-risk or homeless youth to help get them back on their feet, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program to provide help with taxes for low income families, and RCAA’s Energy Services Division to weatherize the homes of low-income families with the goal of reducing their energy costs.

Expanding and Re-focusing Straight Up’s Mission

As SUA began expanding services provided under ARRA, it was also time for the program to re-apply for another three-year State and National AmeriCorps grant. This process required the program to take a look at the overall focus and direction of the
Straight Up AmeriCorps Program to determine future funding feasibility and community need. The ARRA expansion also created a great deal of diversity in the program and opened doors to possible programmatic changes. As such, the program began investigating different primary targets areas for service to seeing if re-framing and re-focusing the program was necessary for the new grant cycle.

SUA faced a number of difficulties with the upcoming grant application. First, it would be fighting to be competitive amongst a plethora of academic mentoring programs in California. The program, if funded, would also be required to find greater community-based match (increased non-federal funding) than in past years because of the AmeriCorps grant requirements reducing the AmeriCorps grant dollars to programs as they age. And while finding greater local funding would be a must, SUA also had to consider the fact that local school budgets were getting tighter as the economy sank into recession. Therefore adding the cost onto existing community partners would not be financially feasible for many in the program’s existing network. For all these reasons, SUA staff realized they needed to reassess community need and assets in order to continue serving the youth of Humboldt County.

Gathering Information and Talking with Community Stakeholders

The first step in the process of reassessing the program focus involved gathering data and seeking community input. SUA staff decided to hold two meetings to solicit input from current and potential stakeholders about the programs direction. I assisted with coordination, note-taking, and facilitating small group discussion at these events. The first meeting reviewed the different AmeriCorps focus areas and discussed the
importance of each to the different community partners present. The second meeting honed in on the top community partner contenders and brainstormed future program design and focus options. These steps were in line with the community-based needs assessment of the greater AmeriCorps ideology and moved the program successfully in the first steps of knowledge production and information gathering.

During the process of soliciting input from potential stakeholders, SUA staff also made connections with the Humboldt County Office of Education and the nascent Decade of Difference initiative being developed, locally, by the Headwaters Fund. Through a number of one-on-one meetings, this lead also proved to have some funding that might be able to help fund the next round of SUA and supplement the AmeriCorps funding. The Headwater’s Decade of Difference funding was focused on preparing today’s students for jobs in the future high-need career fields in Humboldt County (called targets of opportunity), and, as it turned out, one major component of that plan involved targeted tutoring in language arts and math for elementary school students performing below average on standardized tests.

Through meeting with community partners, soliciting their input, assessing community capacity, and developing a partnership with HCOE and the Decade of Difference initiative, the Straight Up AmeriCorps Program solidified that it would continue in the field of tutoring/mentoring, albeit with a slight re-focusing. Instead of a focusing on tutoring and mentoring with a secondary focus on health and wellness, the program would soon focus on career path mentoring.

This new focus had a couple of advantages. First, it maintained the large tutoring
component for the same student population with which the program historically worked. Second, this new focus would allow program staff to continue implementing all the training materials and curriculum it had developed over its 15 years of existence, maintain community partnerships, and continue serving the youth of Humboldt County. The new curriculum for career path mentoring was already being developed by HCOE and would be made available for SUA members to utilize in the classroom and afterschool with the youth they were to mentor. The steps taken to research, redefine, and forge new connections were an exercise to strengthen the program and ensure its resources would be used to the fullest.

The New Design

The new focus on career path mentoring and its related focus on early math and language arts interventions would need to show its impacts in a number of ways. First, the program would track improvements in test scores over the course of the year on standardized math and language arts tests. A pre-test would be administered at the beginning of the year, with a mid-year and end-of-year assessment also being completed to show overall progress in just 10.5 months. The career path development/mentoring component would be measured by the student’s progress through a system called the Kuder Career Navigator (software purchased by the Humboldt County Office of Education). This is an age-specific program designed to help students move through a series of concrete steps to get them thinking critically about what careers they want to explore in the future by helping them figure out their interests.

The long-term goal for the program was twofold; to improve at-risk youth’s
chances for future success in school, and to expand their opportunities for future career success. By aligning with the Decade of Difference initiative, targeted career path mentoring could do just that. It would develop students with both the training and interest in careers projected to have the largest vacancies/need in the future for Humboldt County. As a trade off, the Straight Up AmeriCorps program would be able to put feet on the ground for the Decade of Difference cause. SUA members would be trained to empower disadvantaged youth to make informed decisions about their future; to give them the necessary tools and educational foundation for success by improving math and language arts skills and to make positive impacts on the lives of others.

Placement Work with SUA

The rest of my placement with Straight Up AmeriCorps had three major components. The first was to work with the program to develop components of its next grant application to AmeriCorps. The second part of my placement involved developing well-researched performance measurements by which the program could track and demonstrate its impact on students. The last part was to develop the tracking tools themselves to guide AmeriCorps Members and students through the process, and also collect accurate and complete data. Each part is further outlined in the appendix. However, for the purposes of discussion of this thesis, each step of my placement work can also be seen as tying into specific knowledge-practices.

I researched and developed sections of the grant, including the compelling need, measurable outputs and outcomes, performance measures, the evaluation plan, and the
accomplishment and impact summary sections. The research required informing the programmatic design and implementation was key to making a good argument for funding. Well-researched program designs that use strategies that show results are more likely to receive funding because they can demonstrate that their design/techniques have been successful elsewhere.

I was also responsible for the creation of performance measurement goals and the tools/forms that would be used to accurately capture the data needed by the program for reporting purposes. The first performance measure outlined in the grant proposal set out to provide math and language arts interventions to K-4th grade students. The second major performance measure that I researched and recommend was related to career path mentoring. Each of these performance measurements contained specific goals, such as: the number of students that would receive mentoring/tutoring, the percentage that students needed to improve, and a goal for the number of students who will reach that goal.

These performance goals and reporting forms were designed to collect information from AmeriCorps members about their service activities and quantify their impact. The data would be collected at least three times per year, allowing SUA to report its successes to funders. Accurate and timely data collection would also allow individual members to gauge their own success with students and allow the program to gauge the overall success of its members. With updated data, SUA could adjust the program to provide additional training if it was falling short on goals. This process allows the program to readjust during the year to maximize its impact and ability to bring about
social change, thus showing the power of effective knowledge-practices and feedback on progress.

SUA Conclusion

SUA is an example of how federal dollars, available through AmeriCorps in this case, can be used to implement important local initiatives. SUA chose to focus on education-based initiatives tied to locally-generated knowledge about the future of Humboldt County’s career opportunities. Potential funding was turned into a plan of action for creating positive change within Humboldt County for its most at-risk youth, and AmeriCorps members were part of the plan as the avenue for this knowledge disbursement.

Unfortunately, in this case, federal funding was not awarded to the Straight Up AmeriCorps program due to competition with other highly competitive grant proposals, eventually causing the SUA program to be completely dissolved.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Situating both case studies within the context of Social Movement Theory can provide interesting and poignant insights. How these programs were formed and how they have impacted and fostered social change is unique, yet applicable to theoretical processes, and can clarify social movement theory through tangible examples. Moreover, drawing attention to the knowledge-practices of these movements can point to the important role of knowledge production and dissemination in the success of social movements.

Social/Political Context

To begin, we must situate these movements with the larger social, political and cultural context, something taken for granted by the early classical theories of social movements. AmeriCorps came into being in 1993, and followed in the footsteps of decades of social action leading to federal legislation. For the purposes of this paper, we can begin by looking at President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal. This legislation was the first large-scale domestic program aimed at reducing poverty and social/financial reform. Born out of the social woes of the Great Depression, FDR dealt with the social problems of his time by setting up unemployment relief and creating jobs through program such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC (a significant precursor to AmeriCorps legislation). The New Deal, although not explicitly tied to a social movement, is tied to the social conditions of the time and paved the way for future social action by setting a precedent for government’s role in responding to and dealing with
social problems.

Then the 1960s came along, and with it President Lyndon B Johnson’s War on Poverty. This time, inequitable social conditions and the large-scale social movements of the 1960s forced the government to respond to the people’s movements. Born out of this process was the creation of even more social programs, such as the VISTA program (another significant precursor to AmeriCorps).

Without the context set forth by the New Deal and War on Poverty, AmeriCorps itself would likely have never come into being. The political precedent of legislative response to social upheaval and movements’ demand for change paved the way for AmeriCorps legislation of 1993. But this only paints part of the picture.

Resources

Of course AmeriCorps and Straight Up could not have come into begin without certain resources as well. Tying into the Resource Mobilization Theory, we begin with AmeriCorps’ existence being tied to the resources of federal funding. Straight Up AmeriCorps is also tied to that funding, but it also leverages those federal dollars with local school district funds and funding from Redwood Community Action Agency. SUA was able to utilize RCAA, a pre-existing local community action agency and non-profit for its resources and structure. This provided the SUA program with guidance, support, and stability. This was certainly an invaluable resource to the nascent program. SUA was also able to utilize the help and availability of local teachers and after-school program coordinators in developing and implementing the program.
Culture, Identity, and Symbolic Interaction

No discussion of AmeriCorps/Straight Up being movements that are also the result of movements can be complete without looking at what New Social Movement Theory has to contribute to the discussion. The concepts of identity, culture, and symbolic interaction can lend a hand to understanding these movements and start drawing attention the knowledge-practices employed.

Although NSM theories look at political action as important, it also draws attention to the importance of cultural change. It is the first of social movement theories to allow us to look at how groups socially construct their own grievances, ideology and knowledge; and how collective identities and social networks draw people together for the purposes of social action and change. These are key qualities of AmeriCorps and when looking at AmeriCorps as a movement in and of itself, we see very distinct and strong identity formation among members, a shared ideology, and vast network of connections.

The analysis that follows looks more at the dynamics within movements, rather than the reason for their creation. In the specific case of AmeriCorps, the political background and legislative action are very helpful in understanding the movement up to the creation of the program. Yet it is these additional components of culture and identity and the networks they create that help to illuminate the factors that lead to strong movement identity, stability, and strength over time.

AmeriCorps Identity

AmeriCorps members develop a strong sense of identity within the program,
thereby creating a strong movement for change. This sense of identity is achieved by the AmeriCorps in a number of ways. AmeriCorps members become invested in the AmeriCorps program through its initial and going training program and easy identification with the AmeriCorps uniform. The training program helps spread a similar message to all AmeriCorps members throughout the county, which in turn leads to a cohesive group message, common amongst a spread-out population. The AmeriCorps uniform also allows members to easily recognize members of their own group. The uniform is a symbol of group membership and immediately signals to insiders that the person wearing the uniform is one of their own, like-minded, and devoted to the same AmeriCorps agenda. This immediately fosters a connection based on the shared identity and is something that I, as an AmeriCorps alumna, have personally experienced a number of times.

AmeriCorps continues to foster this shared identity and mission after individuals complete their term of service. The program maintains an alumni program that all members are encouraged to sign up for upon the completion of their term of service. This alumni network helps keep in touch with thousands of individuals for the dispersal of information, as well as for mobilization when the program is threatened through budget cuts or the like. This network is designed to quickly mobilize the base for support and can do so by simply sending an email to its members, informing them of issues and mobilizing them into action to help fight for a cause. This is also done sparingly enough, so as not to overwhelm members with requests or information, thereby avoiding asking too much of individuals.
AmeriCorps members also experience meaningful service opportunities during their term, which leads to positive associations and a strong identity with the program. Alumni thereby have a compelling reason/desire to keep the program going which serves as another factor that motivates individuals into action, especially when provided information (knowledge) that the program is being threatened by some cause or another.

The Missing Link: Knowledge-Practices

Of course, all of this only paints part of the picture. What good are political opportunities if they are not exploited by social movements? How helpful are resources, if the movement doesn’t know how make the most of them? And of what use is group cohesion, identity, and networks if we do not talk about the ways those are used to disseminate important information and to motivate the group and guide their collective actions? The key is looking at the ways new information allows individuals to work together to empower themselves and their communities through social action, and looking at how that new information is generated, disseminated, and put into action.

One reason that AmeriCorps is able to generate movement amongst its supporters is the Alumni network it created. As noted above, the alumni network allows for the quick dissemination of important information to those invested in the program’s future. The key to this discussion though is looking at the network as tool for knowledge dissemination and, therefore, utilizing the alumni network as part of its knowledge-practices. The alumni network is the tool used to disperse calls to action, to inform alumni of the threat to the program, and to implore them to act to save the program. By
informing invested parties of the threat, usually to reduce or eliminate funding, alumni
spring into action to put in calls or write letters to their elected officials.

AmeriCorps also attempts to change the dialogue on issues and improve
social/environmental conditions through other knowledge-practices. Even though
AmeriCorps is federally funded and cannot technically be focused on social change, it
consistently challenges the status quo by fighting poverty, homelessness, and
environmental degradation. It churns out tens of thousands of individuals each year who
have been through the AmeriCorps training that, in large part, looks at the history of
poverty and social change and trains AmeriCorps members on how to continue this fight
in their service terms and beyond. As such, the training program is a knowledge-practice
of AmeriCorps. This dialogue is created and disseminated out those members with the
goal of empowering them to continue the fight for social justice.

The knowledge-practices set forth in the AmeriCorps training program can be
seen in its application with Straight Up Members and their training to empower
disempowered individuals through tutoring and goal setting. This knowledge practice is
one of the programs biggest tools used to effect social change and is the result of the
development and dissemination its training program. Knowledge basically flows from
program management, to its members, to the students being tutored, all with the end goal
of fighting poverty and empowering at-risk youth to make positive changes. For example,
let us look at the training on making SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable,
realistic, and timely). The information about goal setting and tools to do so successfully
had to travel through the network, from program administration to members to students.
Without this network to disseminate goal setting strategies and techniques, the program would not have been able to positively impact the lives of the students involved. Moreover, without the knowledge, techniques, and training in SMART goals, the members would not have been able to be as effective in their missions. The combination of the information and its dispersal is what makes this an effective knowledge-practice of the Straight Up AmeriCorps program.

Applying Foucault

As discussed in earlier chapters, Foucault’s focus on knowledge and power is important for understanding social movement success. I argue that the creation and dissemination of knowledge by AmeriCorps and Straight Up is a prime example of power being used for positive purposes, to produce counter-hegemonic knowledges and dialogues under the guise of social reform. Knowledge-practices, such as the training in SMART goals, illuminate the knowledge and power dynamics in a given situation, work to change the discourse, and potentially create new power relations by empowering the disempowered. In this instance, the at-risk youth are by far the most powerless and SUA members are training them in developing new skills. This knowledge of SMART goal making was passed onto members by program management, who received training and resources from AmeriCorps itself. You can follow the flow of power and knowledge down the chain from AmeriCorps to individual SUA mentees. The goal of this transfer of knowledge is to change the discourse. To get these student to take an interest in doing better for him or herself, and to fight back against the socio-cultural factors that are
working against them in the first place. This provides us with a fabulous example of knowledge and power being used for positive social change, rather than oppression and maintaining the status quo.

Conclusion

Each historical phase and development of social movement theory provides a different context and highlights a variety of factors that affect social movements, their power and significance, and how they can actually produce social change. My discussion of knowledge-practices is meant to clarify the role of knowledge production and dissemination within these theories and highlight that it they are crucial factors to take into consideration. The key is not to replace former theories of social movements, but rather to enrich the discussion by refocusing on the knowledge-practices of movements. Solid knowledge-practices help lead to movement success when situated in conjunction with the right resources, political opportunities, and cultural and social factors. Moreover, focusing on the knowledge-practices of movements allows us also to look at the existing power relations by analyzing the flow of knowledge and how that flow is also seeking to change discourse and power relations at their source. Positive social change, whether it is reformative or revolutionary, cannot come to fruition without the effective use of knowledge-practices to disseminate information and motivate individuals/groups into action.
REFERENCES


Introduction

I first started working with the Straight Up AmeriCorps Program in 2007 as an AmeriCorps volunteer. I served in a part-time capacity at a local elementary school doing largely academic mentoring and tutoring with disadvantaged youth who were falling behind in school. Being a part of the Straight Up experience that year had a profound impact on me, and I was more than excited to be able to return to work with the program again in 2009, this time as staff. When I began my employment as the Evaluation and Monitoring Specialist, the program was just about to begin the planning process for applying for another round of federal AmeriCorps funding.

Starting in the summer of 2009, Straight Up AmeriCorps (SUA) undertook the project of applying for another AmeriCorps grant with the goal of securing three more years of AmeriCorps funding. I worked with the program to provide research on the topic of youth development and career path mentoring, to write portions of the grant documenting compelling community need and outlining the proposed performance measures, to develop data sheets for the program to be able to track its progress, and to develop methods that would allow for timely and accurate reporting of data from individuals working with youth in the field. This report documents the process of my work for the agency as well as the outcomes of that work.
Description of the AmeriCorps Project

I was contracted by the Straight Up AmeriCorps Program to research and write portions of the 2010-2013 recompete grant\(^1\) to apply for three additional years of federal AmeriCorps funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service. This included participation in the strategic planning process, implementation of a preliminary partner surveys, and researching and developing of sections of the grant, including: the compelling need, measurable outputs and outcomes, performance measures, the evaluation plan, and the accomplishment and impact summary sections. In addition to drafting these sections of the grant, I was responsible for the creation of performance measurement tools that would accurately capture the data needed by the program for reporting purposes, and the development of tracking databases that would allow the program to store and analyze the information.

Methods

**Strategic Planning Process**

The strategic planning process had been outlined by the program directors and involved a series of community meetings, the promotion of these meetings throughout the Humboldt County service providers, and development of a partner survey to gauge the future interests of current partners.

I, as well as others involved in the strategic planning process, began by promoting

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\(^1\) AmeriCorps funding is awarded in three-year cycles. Programs that receive AmeriCorps funding must complete a new grant after every 3\(^{rd}\) year and recompete for federal funding against all new applicants and existing programs.
the first general Straight Up AmeriCorps planning meeting where we hoped to get a variety of interested individuals with diverse viewpoints to give the program feedback on its future direction. We promoted our own planning meetings to other service providers in Humboldt County (I attended the local NET meeting) and also invited current project partners and the Humboldt County Office of Education.

At the first general planning meeting, held October 9th, 2009, various community partners or potential partners were asked to brainstorm about how the Straight Up Program might be able to address any one of the five service areas outlined by the Corporation for National and Community Service. These five service areas were education, clean energy/environment, veterans, healthy futures, and opportunity. We structured the meeting to have a table for each service area topic and outlined key questions to discuss at each table. Staff facilitated the discussion and took notes at each table: I was responsible for the education service area. About 30 people attended the meeting in all. After the meeting, I processed all the notes that had been taken.

I also developed the Partner Survey and distributed it to the programs current placement sites in early November to gauge their interest in having AmeriCorps members address the different service areas at their schools, as well as their financial ability to have AmeriCorps members at their sites again the following year\(^2\). I created the survey through Survey Monkey, a free online survey creation website, and distributed the link to the survey via email to all the of the placement sites on November 12, 2009. Of the 25

\(^2\) Straight Up Placement Sites provide a match to the program in order to have AmeriCorps Members volunteer at their sites. This financial match contributes to member stipends and the overall program operating expenses.
partner sites, 14 returned a survey. I printed each response and entered the available data from each survey into an excel spreadsheet that tallied the results.

**Researching and Writing the Grant**

Once the strategic planning process was complete and program staff was able to determine a specific focus on career path mentoring and workforce development, I was able to delve deeper into the research and start writing my sections of the grant. The grant writing component of my work required extensive research to determine if the proposed program focus on career path mentoring for at-risk youth was warranted by the “gaps”\(^3\) in county statistics and supported by scholarly findings. My grant-based research was centered around: one, the current state of educational attainment in Humboldt county; two, finding effective strategies based on existing research by which AmeriCorps members could provide interventions to youth at risk of dropping out of school; and three, the “targets of opportunity”\(^4\) for Humboldt County as outlined in reports from the local Workforce Investment Board to determine how future AmeriCorps members would be able to guide youth towards careers in the most promising areas for local economic and workforce development.

To find the data that I needed to write up the draft of the “community need” section of the grant, I spent my time researching secondary sources. This included the datasets on Census.gov for the 2008 American Community Surveys one year estimates

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\(^3\) AmeriCorps grant requirements detail that proposals must address and identify a community’s “gap in service,” an area where service via the proposed program will be meeting an otherwise unmet need.

\(^4\) The industries that have demonstrated staying power over the past 15 years and are responsible for 53% of all private sector wages.
and the 2000 Census data. I also assessed local school statistics from the Humboldt County Office of Education and California Department of Education, including: STAR test results, California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) data, graduation rates, and rates of completion of high school for disadvantaged youth. I also researched local reports related to these topics and scholarly articles to better understand the social, psychological, developmental, factors that affect youth and their career paths, their rates of school completion, and whether or not they have a successful future in the workforce. I then used this data to aid in the development of performance measures and to document the need and justification of the proposed work AmeriCorps volunteers would be doing through the Straight Up AmeriCorps Program.

**Reporting and Documentation Tools**

After the grant was submitted to AmeriCorps, I began work on the development of forms members would be using to track their hours and activities with the youth with whom they would be working. I began on this aspect of the program immediately because AmeriCorps funding awards are typically announced in late May or early June (even though the proposals are submitted in early December), and AmeriCorps members begin service in August. I used my knowledge and training in Quantitative and Qualitative methods to develop useful forms and coupled that knowledge with my research findings to outline important benchmarks for youth career development. I also researched questionnaires and tracking databases that already existed from which I could incorporate useful information, questions, and overall goals.
Goals Meet and Work Accomplished

The data that was gathered through my research, along with the input we received from community meetings and partner feedback informed the development of Straight Up’s grant proposal. Program staff, myself included, designed a new program structure and detailed new performance measurements in the grant proposal to convince our funders that the work of future Straight Up AmeriCorps members would have a positive impact in the lives of the youth they served. The outcomes of my research can be seen in the grant narrative, under the Rationale and Approach section and the Measurable Outputs and Outcomes section, as well as in the Performance Measure Worksheets.

The AmeriCorps Grant Proposal

As the individual in charge of developing the Rationale and Approach section of the grant, I spent my time researching state and county statistics, as well as consulting existing research and literature pertinent to the new program focus. This section of grant is where I detailed the compelling community need as a means to justify why the Straight Up Program should it receive AmeriCorps funding. It was also the section of the grant that detailed how the proposed program would fill a community’s documented “gap in service.” My findings are outlined below.

Humboldt County is in need of a workforce that has, at a minimum, a high school education. The Humboldt County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) has projected that Humboldt County’s employment future will have “targets of opportunity” where 90% of the jobs in these fields will require at least a high school diploma of its employees. These targets of opportunity are best defined as:
“The region's most promising areas for economic and workforce development. They include specific industry sectors drawn from both the region's export-oriented base clusters and support sectors focusing on the highest growth sectors in terms of jobs, wages, and firms since 1990. Each target of opportunity includes elements that are export-oriented, population-driven, and offer career potential for local residents” (Prosperity Network, http://www.northcoastprosperity.com/local-economy/targets)

However, when you compare the need of these economic sectors that require 90% high school completion to the 76% high school completion rate in Eureka City Schools (according to the US Department of Education’s 2007-2008 data), it becomes clear that today’s youth will not have the basic high school education that future job opportunities will require. This mismatch of need for an educated workforce with the education level of the population continues when you look at those with a college education. The young adults of Humboldt County hold bachelor degrees at the rate of 23.2% (for 25 to 34 year olds); however, they are replacing the baby-boomer population who hold bachelor degrees at a rate of 28.5%, according to the American Community Survey one-year estimates from 2008. With only 37% of jobs in the targets of opportunity being in the lower wage/education levels earning less than $25,000 a year (Workforce Investment Board of Humboldt County, 2007), it is vital for the local economy to have sufficient numbers of today’s youth who will be able to replace an educated, aging workforce.

The Straight Up AmeriCorps Program planned to address this issue by targeting disadvantaged youth who were performing below their grade level in school with targeted career path mentoring for students in fifth grade and up, and focused tutoring in language arts and math for students in kindergarten to fourth grade who scored below proficient on a Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessment or a similar assessment tool.
This is where Phase Two of the research and writing that I conducted for SUA came into play. I researched existing literature to determine best practices for Straight Up to follow in its two approaches to working with disadvantaged youth to improve career preparedness.

The two distinct, yet related, performance measures for the upcoming grant cycle included targeted kindergarten to fourth grade tutoring in math and language arts, as well as career path mentoring for kindergarten to twelfth graders, but with a more specific focus in grades five to twelve. By making sure that the methods Straight Up proposed for interventions to improve career readiness were well-founded and based on best practices, the program would be more likely to both receive funding and succeed in its goals to empower youth to have brighter career futures.

Performance Measure One: “Get Me Back on Track”

The first performance measure that was outlined in the grant proposal was called “Get me Back on Track”. In this performance measure we outlined that members would provide math and language arts interventions to 220 kindergarten to fourth grade students by meeting with students one-on-one for at least one hour per week. Members would work with the classroom teacher and use the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessment tool, or something similar, to identify which students were in need of academic interventions. Once these students were identified, members would use the curriculum of their host site and the assistance of Resource Teachers at the Humboldt County Office of Education (HCOE) to provide the targeted interventions and monitor students’ progress.
My research aided in the development of this performance measure and provided the justification for the approach. In studies of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), Andrew C. Zau and Julian R. Betts (2008) found that “virtually no students pass both parts of the CAHSEE and subsequently drop out” (14). They also found that elementary students’ low test scores in reading and math were some of the best predictors of future failure or success on the CAHSEE. Implications for Humboldt County were stark, as county averages on STAR tests in 2009 indicate that as many as 6% more fourth graders score below proficient in math and language arts compared to students across the state. The numbers for local, economically disadvantaged youth are even bleaker: with 52% of economically disadvantaged youth scoring below proficient in fourth grade English-language arts, and 50% scoring below proficient in fourth grade math as compared to 29% and 30% for non-economically disadvantaged youth, respectfully.

What the data and research showed was a need to focus on helping students with lower scores in math and reading as means to improve opportunities for success in their future with the local job market. As stated by Hans Johnson in a 2009 PPIC report that evidences the importance of early interventions, “interventions in early grades seem to be more effective than later interventions” (Educating California: Choices for the future, 12). By working with kindergarten to fourth grade youth who score below proficient on localized assessment tools with targeted interventions to improve student’s proficiency in these areas, SUA would be working towards a goal of having 60% of the kindergarten to fourth grade students that work with AmeriCorps members experience gains of 5% or greater on standardized assessment tests.
Performance Measure Two: “Career Path Mentoring”

The second major performance measure that I researched and recommend was related to career path mentoring. This performance measurement was designed around research findings as follows.

To begin, a study by Mortimer, Vuolo, Staff, Wakefield and Xie (2008) published in the journal *Work and Occupations* found a positive, and statistically significant, relationship between self-esteem and the rate of career acquisition, along with other predictor variables of student’s academic performance and school involvement during ninth grade. Based on this research finding, the program decided that Straight Up Members would be providing career path mentoring aimed to improve students’ attitudes towards their future careers and education, help youth explore possible career paths, and promote school and community involvement.

Another important aspect in career development and acquisition for youth begins with early socialization into the workforce. Research by Jeremy Staff and Jeylan T. Mortimer (2007) that was based on the Youth Development Study\(^5\) showed that steady, moderate intensity employment while in high school improved school performance, prevented drop out, limited time spent watching television, and provided students the skills needed to complete college and move more quickly into careers after graduation. Students with low educational promise, based on attitudinal assessment, school performance, and family background, which have near continuous employment throughout their high school careers also had an increased likelihood of both

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\(^5\) An ongoing, longitudinal study of 1,010 teenagers that started in 1988.
postsecondary school attendance and bachelor degree completion by as much as five
times the rate of those who only worked sporadically. As such, SUA proposed for it
members to work with at-risk students to provide one-to-one and small groups career
path mentoring that would lead to early socialization into the workforce.

Developing Reporting and Tracking Tools

SUA submitted its grant proposal to AmeriCorps in December 2009. The next
step in the process was for me to create tracking tools that would breakdown abstract
concepts of career preparedness and exploration into concrete achievable steps. This was
an anticipatory project, as funding announcements would not be made until June 2010
and the program hoped to start in early August.

Tracking Tool for Career Path Mentoring. A great resource that became available
to the program through the planning process and new partnership with the Humboldt
County Office of Education (HCOE) was the Kuder Career Navigator. The county had
recently purchased this software for all sixth to twelfth grade students to aid students in
their career preparation and hoped to utilize Straight Up AmeriCorps members to assist in
implementing the program. The Kuder Career Navigator was age-specific and designed
to help students choose a career and education path by using scientifically validated
career assessments. When I was granted access to the website for research, I saw that the
various tools and exercises outlined on the website were the same research supported
steps that I read about while conducting my own research for the grant. The Kuder
system outlined concrete steps that students could take to help them reach the goal of
learning more about their interests. However, because each level was unique to students’
grade level and developmental goals, this required me to develop a separate tracking tool for each grade level so that AmeriCorps members could accurately track and report their students’ progress. In the end, I developed eight distinct tracking forms, one for each grade from fifth to twelfth grade. I also translated all my forms into online versions in order to facilitate quicker and easier data reporting on behalf of SUA members.

**Tracking Tool for K-4th Grade Math and Language Arts Improvements.** The second tracking tool I developed was designed to track student’s progress in math and language arts. This was called the *Ongoing Assessment Tool – K to 4th Grade* and would be used by teachers to establish a baseline proficiency level and score on a localized assessment tool. It would also be used to refer students for services with SUA members. Students who received services from SUA members would also have a midterm and final assessment conducted by the members/teachers to show overall program progress towards meeting the goals outlined in the AmeriCorps performance measures.

Developing this tracking tool required accommodating the ongoing student assessments that were already being conducted by teachers and administrators. By streamlining the progress to avoid unnecessary data duplication and extra work, SUA would receive data quickly and accurately by asking teachers to report on what they already knew. This would also lead to greater buy-in from teachers and administrators who may have historically lagged on completing the necessary SUA paperwork. This tracking tool was relatively consistent in terms of aesthetics to the fifth to twelfth grade tracking sheets for the sake of overall program cohesiveness, and the form itself clarified exactly how it was to be used in conjunction with existing on-going student assessments.
Youth Attitudinal Survey Tracking Tool. The last component of this step of the project was to use my research to craft a questionnaire that would gauge student attitudes and beliefs that were important indicators of career preparedness and success. I also researched similar, successful and reliable surveys for additional input. As a result, the *Youth Attitudinal Survey* became a 14-question survey designed to get the most pertinent information regarding each student’s career preparedness. It was also designed to be administered as a pre-, mid-, and post-service survey. The survey consisted of a series of statements that were placed on a five-point scale (with the exception of the last) ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The statements in the survey were as follows:

- Graduating from high school is important to me.
- I think about what I want my future career to be.
- I would describe my personal relationships as supportive.
- I try hard in school to do my best work.
- I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
- I feel encouraged to pursue a future that will make me happy.
- I have received useful information about how to explore future career opportunities from the AmeriCorps Member I’ve been working with.
- I think it’s useful to think about a future career.
- I have the knowledge I need in order to make informed choices about my future.
- I believe that people in my community can get good paying jobs if they stay in school.
- I don’t know where to begin my exploration of future career options.
- I feel that my education is meaningful.
- I believe that education, solid goals, and an eventual good job will provide me with a solid future that no one can repossess or steal.
- Lastly, in my opinion, since working with AmeriCorps, my overall career preparedness at this point in time has: Stayed the same, Somewhat Improved, Greatly Improved, Significantly Improved

This survey was later condensed into just four-questions that would be a part of SUA members’ ongoing monthly assessments. This decision was made based on past program experiences regarding data collection responses and reporting deadlines. In
deciding which questions to include, I went back through the list and grouped questions based on what type of information they attempting to solicit. I then narrowed down the most important indicators as based on the research and chose one question that best fit each category. This is the case for the first three questions. The last question is designed to elicit the youth’s own perception of improvements in career preparedness. See below:

- I have the knowledge I need in order to make informed choices about my future.
- I feel encouraged to pursue a future that will make me happy.
- I feel that my education is meaningful.
- In my opinion, since working with AmeriCorps my overall career preparedness has improved.

Challenges

One challenge I faced through this process was the need to begin writing sections of the grant prior to having solidified program objectives and goals. In past years, the strategic planning process did not lead to such a significant change in program objectives. The same timeline that may have worked in past years was a bit too short for dealing with the amount of changes that needed to be made to the grant narrative and performance measures.

Another challenge I encountered was getting access to the localized assessment tools used by future partner sites since the exact partners were not yet determined (and likely would not be until funding was announced in June 2010). I needed to learn about the type of assessments used, their scoring ranges, and how they correspond to the categories of Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic, and Far Below Basic in order to create a matrix that would easily outline how teacher’s local assessments related to
AmeriCorps requirements. If I had been able to create this, SUA’s reporting forms would have been easier for teachers and school administrators to use and understand.

Recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations for the Straight Up Program that I provided at the end of my placement.

1. Make the Youth Attitudinal Survey a pre- and post-test only, using the longer 14-question survey. This survey was originally designed to be administered as a pre- and post-assessment; however a mid-year assessment was required by funders. Replacing the 14-question survey with just four questions may have better fit the needs of the programs reporting goals, but from a data reliability and statistical standpoint, it is my recommendation is that the Youth Attitudinal Survey returns to its longer and more comprehensive version.

2. Develop a relationship with teachers and school administrators in addition to the after-school coordinators. With the increasing focus on targeted academic work for kindergarten to fourth graders, a stronger working relationship with teachers would be beneficial to the program in terms of getting reliable data in a timely fashion. If teachers can better understand why they are being asked to report on student progress, SUA will end up with more complete and accurate data.

3. Address small errors in data collection early and often! This will save staff time and ensure more accurate data throughout the year. Members need to be sufficiently trained during their initial program orientation on how to
appropriately utilize SUA forms. They also need to receive feedback from SUA staff throughout their term.

4. When evaluating the Youth Attitudinal Survey results, do not report using the most common response. Historically, SUA used the mode (most common response) in reporting on progress-to-date when calculating an average score is more statistically sound. For example, in the past, if a student selected “Disagrees” the most during the pre-service survey and then “Agrees” the most on a post-service survey, they would have improved by 40%, assuming a five-point scale). When calculating the average, it takes into account all responses and finds the middle ground. By comparing the two averages over time, the program will be able to paint a more accurate picture of program success.

5. Provide training for SUA members on how to work with teachers and school administrators on paperwork. This would be beneficial in getting teachers to pay more attention to paperwork, be timelier, and improve accuracy in their reporting. Simple ideas like giving the teacher a token of appreciation (something as simple as a cupcake or thank you note) along with the stack of paperwork could go a long way in making teachers feel appreciated for the extra work they put into completing paperwork for SUA Members.

6. After the first month of service and before the first month’s paperwork is due, have a brief training that revisits the reporting tools and how to use them. This training was always covered in-depth during the orientation before members had a chance to do any work in the field. By the time the first round of reporting
paperwork was due, they may have forgotten important instructions. Additional training will also provide staff with yet another opportunity to stress the importance of data collection and reporting for the program.

7. Create a matrix for the kindergarten to fourth grade referral form that relates various localized assessment tools to the scales that SUA will be using for reporting. This is critical for making clear connections between local assessment tools and AmeriCorps requirements. If paperwork is clear and easy for teachers to complete, then SUA staff will receive more assessments in a timely fashion, with more reliable and accurate data.

Conclusion

It was a great pleasure working with the Straight Up AmeriCorps program on the development of a new program objective, performance measures, and tracking instruments. SUA developed strong, new partnerships through its strategic planning process that will aid in its success should AmeriCorps funds be awarded. Having a working relationship with the Humboldt County Office of Education (HCOE) and access to HCOE staff who offered to provide trainings, resources, and data is an incredible resource to the program. Additional potential funding through the Decade of Difference Initiative was also incredibly valuable as SUA faced funding match shortages.

At the close of my placement work with SUA, I felt that the new program design was well thought out and had the potential to make a large impact in the local community. Through solid research, we were able to formulate very specific objectives
and generate new tracking forms that would also make data collection, analysis, and reporting clearer for members, staff, and hopefully, our funders.

Status of the Project

Straight Up AmeriCorps learned in June 2010 that it did not receive its AmeriCorps funding and unfortunately, the program was dissolved.