

Expanding the classroom walls with a purpose: Fieldtrips as Active and Applied Pedagogies at Higher Education Institutions

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Dr. Vanessa A. Slinger-Friedman is a Professor of Geography at Kennesaw State University. Her work has included a study of Vetiver grass technology for soil erosion control, the use of agroforestry for Amazonian urban resettlement in Acre, Brazil, and ecotourism on Dominica, W.I., for economic development and nature preservation. Her other research interests include innovative pedagogy to teach about sustainability and geography. This pedagogy related work has been recognized by the University System of Georgia 2016 Regents' Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award, and a 2018 Higher Education Distinguished Teaching Award from the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE).

While field trips are cited by University students as being some of the most impactful experiences, research shows that field trips are declining due to lack of funding and scheduling issues, among others (Barton, 2017). I have found that if done well, field trips can enhance a student's knowledge, learning, and meaning through direct experience, resulting in a deeper understanding of the material taught in the classroom. The ultimate goal is for the fieldtrips to stimulate interest and motivation in a subject while enabling students to connect classroom learning with applications in the real-world to address complex issues.

Field trips are purpose-driven and organized visits taken by students under instructor coordination (Shakil et al., 2011). If field trips are going to be more than opportunities to get outside of the traditional classroom, they need to be structured and connected to curriculum to have successful outcomes (Coughlin, 2010; Kennedy, 2014). As such, my field trips are designed around educational objectives and contain three stages: pre-trip planning, trip and participation, and post-trip evaluation and reflection.

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Organization stage	Activities
Pre-trip planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate site selection and coordination of logistics for visit • Providing course content, including theory, related to the field trip • Background research on the site to be visited • Exploring any assumptions about site and connections to course content with students
Trip & participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students demonstrating active engagement at the site, e.g., paying attention, asking questions, taking notes and photos (if allowed).
Post-trip evaluation & reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description and highlights from the field trip • Reflection: Key insights and learning related to the course content

Utilizing one's own campus as a living learning laboratory can eliminate the cost and scheduling concerns associated with field trips. For example, in my classes focusing on sustainability-related concepts, I have organized campus tours with the Sustainability Ambassadors student group, visits to the KSU Commons Dining facility, and trips to the KSU Field Station (formerly Hickory Grove Farm). These campus locations provide opport

"I believe a hands-on learning experience is beneficial to people in general. The actual trip to the neighborhood or facility gives a sense of place and scale. Seeing the community, business, or operation and meeting the people who live or work there humanizes what we see in class or in a book."

"I loved learning hands-on about sustainability in my community."

"I believe it encourages student engagements to translate classroom teachings into practice."

"It helped me connect class material to the real world."

"Fieldtrips give a different view of the topic at hand. It's always nice to be able to have different perspectives on an issue and possible solutions. I think fieldtrips aid in giving those different perspectives."

In order to merge curriculum and practice, students should come away from classes with the ability to apply concepts and knowledge learned to their practical lives and to the current problems of the world, including those connected to sustainability. The above survey comments show how field trips can inspire this to happen. The following student statements from field trip reflections clearly summarize how incorporating this pedagogy into my classes is accomplishing my stated goals: "After this field trip, I am a lot more excited to be a part of sustainability here at KSU. I learned about the many different organizations that I can join and discovered that I have the opportunity to create my own. I now feel confident about making a difference here at my university.... I have been inspired to make a difference here on my campus" and "this field trip ... inspired me personally and professionally to participate in efforts such as the ones showcased during this fieldtrip."

Barton, K. (2017). Exploring the benefits of field trips in a food geography course. *Journal of Geography*, 116(6), 237-249. doi:10.1080/00221341.2017.1296481

Coughlin, P. K. (2010). Making field trips count: Collaborating for meaningful experiences. *The Social Studies*, 101(5), 200-210. doi:10.1080/00377990903498431

Kennedy, M. (2014). The benefit of field trips. Retrieved March 12, 2021, from <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/gurc/2014/2014/6/>

Shakil, A., Faizi, W., & Hafeez, S. (2011, March 26). The need and importance of field trips at higher level