

***Introduction to the Special Issue***

**Human Rights Education, Service-Learning,  
and Civic Engagement**

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Since the advent of the public sociology initiative in 2004 and the founding of the Section on Human Rights of the American Sociological Association (ASA) in 2008, sociologists have increasingly embraced the human rights framework in their research, teaching, and service. In the same time period, universities have increasingly prioritized service-learning and civic engagement as components of undergraduate education and training. Accordingly, this special issue of *Societies Without Borders: Human Rights and the Social Sciences (SWB)* explores the relationship between the sociology of human rights - understood as the use of sociological theories, methods, and knowledge to identify human rights abuses and promote social change - and the growing emphasis on service-learning and civic engagement in universities. In publishing this special issue, the editors hope to inaugurate an open-ended dialogue on ways of giving substance to the service-learning and civic engagement initiatives that have emerged at institutions of higher education.

The idea for a special issue on “Human Rights Pedagogy, Service-Learning, and Civic Engagement” was first discussed at the 2010 Annual Conference of the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology (AACS) - an entity that has many affinities with the Human Rights Section of the ASA. Past-President of AACS Steven Picou, whose reflections on building professional association capital in the service of human rights appear in this issue, invited the scholarly NGO Sociologists Without Borders (SSF) to hold a special session at the AACS conference. In the aftermath of the SSF session, the editors of *SWB* distributed a call for papers devoted to the following questions: How do sociologists teach human rights to students? How do service-learning projects contribute to students’ understanding of human rights issues? How do sociologists contribute to the debate on

civic engagement? It goes without saying that the resulting submissions went considerably beyond these questions.

Many of the articles in this special issue refer to Human Rights Education (HRE) - an approach that has been formalized by the United Nations Organization and numerous NGOs. For more information on Human Rights Education, please visit the following website: <http://www.humanrightseducation.info/>.

In the spirit of dialogue, we welcome responses from readers.

- The Editors