SERVE Mid-Term Reflection

26 April 2013

Through Seattle Tilth, I serve as the Garden Steward Intern of Bradner Gardens Park, located in the Mt. Baker neighborhood of southeast Seattle. I appreciate the multi-faceted ways in which Seattle Tilth inspires and educates others to care for their own physical and emotional well-being, the health of their community, and to care for the Earth. The organization encourages Seattleites of all ages to get involved in urban gardening and farming. They achieve this goal by providing a Children’s Garden program, where school classes come and visit the farm to learn about ecosystems, where food comes from, and to deepen their connection with the earth through hands on learning. They also hold a program for troubled youth where they train teenagers in farming and marketing techniques to provide them with a tangible skill to use post-high school. Seattle Tilth reaches out to adults by offering adult education classes, plant sales, and work parties. Through each of these programs, Seattle Tilth covers a wide span of demographics and is able to further spread their mission.

I have had the privilege of working with the adult demographic of Seattle Tilth. My previous volunteer work has primarily been with children thus far, through tutoring programs, sports teams, and the Boys & Girls Club. I have appreciated working with people older than me, for the knowledge and wisdom they have to offer has been eye opening and humbling. Every Monday, Seattle Tilth holds a work party from 3 to 6 pm. During these times, we perform a number of various tasks, including weeding, soil prepping, planting, composting, and harvesting. Through these parties we engage in teamwork and sharing knowledge in order to achieve a common goal. Personally, I have little experience with
gardening and farming, so each day seems to bring new knowledge and skills. This has been humbling, as I am encouraged to ask questions and admit what I do not know. I have found that peoples' openness in asking and answering questions has helped foster our work party team. I also think there is a strong power in working with your hands together to produce something as fundamentally vital and basic as food.

Outside of the work parties, I have taken on the project of coordinating Seattle Tilth Bradner garden with a local food bank. My supervisor, the garden coordinator, and I decided that our garden should be experienced and appreciated by two groups of people: those who put time in effort into growing the food, as well as those who are in desperate need for fresh food. With this, we concluded that we would designate a section of the garden for the food bank, and the rest would be open for work party members to harvest and enjoy. Currently, I am in the process of coordinating with St. Mary’s Food Bank. With in the next week, I need to figure out what crops are most needed and desired by the customers of St. Mary’s and to design a garden plan for where and when to sow what seeds. Once harvest time arrives, I will need to coordinate the pick up and drop off times with the food bank, in an attempt to get our produce to St. Mary’s in the freshest manner possible. I am looking forward to this aspect of my internship and hope to encourage the Seattle Tilth volunteers to also serve at St. Mary’s so that we may connect with others who are sharing in the harvest. I think fostering these community relationships will also inspire further care in wanting to provide good food to our friends.

The third part of my internship is focused on education. Our garden is full of interesting structures and crops, such as the windmill irrigation system, straw mulch, fava bean cover crop, eggplant, and sorrel. We want to help those visiting our garden get a
holistic understanding of how we run our garden and why. In order to do so, we place signs through out the beds, labeling and describing each dimension of the working whole. My task in this project is to take inventory and organize our current signs, to create new ones, and to implement the displays through out this years growing season.

Through my internship thus far, I have learned that I am a very task oriented individual. I like direction in exactly what needs to be done. I have also learned that I need feedback from my supervisor in order to feel adequate in fulfilling my position. My supervisor is a very laid back individual. She is rather vague in her instruction and indirect in defining what she expects of me. In order to meet her in this relaxed state, but also to meet my own feedback needs, I have resorted to becoming very inquisitive. As she describes what eventually needs to happen in the garden, I come up with a plan of action, run it by her and ask for suggestions. She seems to respond well to this, and as I ask questions, she explains more in detail, which further allows me to grasp her vision and expectations. With in this context, I have enjoyed the freedom to problem solve on my own. I have grown accustomed to our communication style and we have a deep respect for each other. I realize that respect and appreciate is fundamental in establishing a functioning work relationship. I also appreciate the less stressful environment of Seattle Tilth and my supervisor. I think it is a good balance for me right now, as I reach my stress quota enough through school. After college though, and as I enter the work force, I do not think I would mind working in a more structured and organized culture.

I am thankful for this opportunity to explore my passion for local food systems. I have already learned a great deal about Seattle communities and various skills of urban gardening. I look forward to furthering my involvement with in Seattle Tilth.