

Valparaiso University Community Research and Service Center:
Tracking Bias Motivated Incidents in Northwest Indiana

- The Community Research and Service Center (CRSC) provides research and service to government and not-for-profit organizations in Northwest Indiana and involves undergraduate students in integral ways in these projects.
- The CRSC develops partnerships with community organizations. Since 1995 it has completed over 75 projects for over 50 organizations and involved over 400 in students these projects.
- Students in the CRSC track bias motivated incidents in NW Indiana which include “behavior which constitutes an expression of hostility against the person or property of another because of the victim’s race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity/national origin.”
- This is an ongoing, applied research and advocacy project that relates to diversity and inequality, involves partnerships with the local community, and has had substantial and sustainable impact.
- Students track incidents in local newspapers and code them as to type (cross burning, swastika painting, etc.), location, severity, perpetrator, target, and victim. 265 incidents have been identified between January, 1990 and December, 2008.
- Tables and graphs are created and put on a web page that includes an interactive map that indicates location, type, and severity of the incident and provides automatic linkage to detailed newspaper accounts of each incident. See www.valpo.edu/organization/copc/bias.
- The project has impacted race relations in the region and public policy and resulted in a Mayoral proclamation recognizing the problem and vowing to take continual, corrective action.
- Helped fuel a variety of other activities including conferences and a “No Hate Summit.”
- Regularly presented at events throughout the region, featured in numerous newspapers articles, and has become an indicator of the status of race relations in the region.
- Lessons learned and reasons for success:
 - Dangerous issues to get involved with -- very easy to get “burned.”
 - University’s legitimacy plus previous partnerships were critical to success.
 - The community invited us to participate to help solve a problem – not research for publication.
 - The data generated were very good, valid, and convincing.
 - Resources were available to accomplish and continue the project.
 - Incentive structures for faculty are critical.