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Including Service-Learning in Your Class: How We Did It

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Too often students' experience in higher education is to passively absorb information. It is then students' responsibility to apply this material to areas of their lives (e.g., families, careers or communities) at some later point in time. However, faculty can use a teaching method that simultaneously links information taught in the classroom with the skills and insights that students learn when they volunteer in their communities.

Service-learning improves education by enriching the curriculum and by encouraging students and instructors to put coursework into context. Consequently, academic work and service are completed together so that students study issues and become participants in addressing those issues in a particular community setting (Speck, 2001). The overarching goal of service-learning is to foster the development of citizenship by integrating theory and practice so that students can begin lifelong involvement in social issues and public life.

Various elements have been identified as being essential for service-learning. First, students should be providing meaningful service in a setting or community that is related to the content of the course. Second, students should be involved in an extensive reflection process about their experiences in the community. Reflection allows students to connect what they observe and experience at the site placements with their academic studies in the classroom. Third, service-learning needs to include mutuality, in that both students and the community should benefit from the experience.

The success of service-learning as a powerful strategy is well-documented. More than 150 investigations regarding its effectiveness have been conducted in the past decade alone. Students who engage in service-learning perform better academically. They have higher graduation rates and are more satisfied with their college experience. They become more engaged citizens and demonstrate greater cultural and racial understanding. They develop socially, emotionally and morally because of this work (cf. Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Sax & Astin, 1997).

Moreover, service-learning is an exceptionally versatile technique. For instance, Heffernan (2001) presented a compendium of service components for many disciplines. Architecture students can participate in design projects to enhance the residences of people with physical disabilities; computer science undergraduates can train personnel at community organizations about how to use different software programs; and language students can investigate the use and structure of African American Vernacular English and apply this knowledge to teach reading skills to African American elementary school children. In the remainder of this article, we explain how we implemented service-learning in psychology, history, education and biology courses.

REACHING OUT TO CHILDREN THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING

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I teach undergraduate courses in child psychology and service-learning is an integral component of my students' learning experience. Students in my classes put their knowledge into practice by working directly with at-risk children. They have cared for families living in domestic violence shelters, they have cradled hospitalized infants, tutored inner-city teenagers and supported children who grieve the loss of a parent. In fact, my students have contributed over 11,000 hours of service in total to underprivileged children since I started to teach. These opportunities widen students' understanding of others and help them to become more compassionate. Through class discussions and written assignments, students see how topics from the course allow them to better understand children at their sites and they appreciate how their interactions with children clarify the more abstract class concepts. In this section, I explain the steps that I use to include service-learning into my teaching as a template for others.

First, I ensure that community service is consistent with my goals for students' learning for the particular class. Most child psychology courses help students understand the social, emotional and cognitive functioning of children in terms of both normal and abnormal development. Students learn about relevant theory, research and applications as the course progresses.

Using this as a starting point, service-learning allows me to expand my goals for students' learning. In particular, this technique widens my goals so my students can learn how to interact with children in empathic and developmentally appropriate ways. Moreover, field work provides students with the opportunity to apply theoretical and research knowledge in their observations and interactions with children at their sites.

Second, I decide on the number of hours of field work required for the particular class. In my own experience, this number varies widely (i.e., from eight to 72 hours),

depending on the content, level and number of credit hours for the class. Most often, I require students to complete 12 to 22 hours of community service distributed across several weeks of the semester (i.e., two to three hours per week for about two months). I always reduce other course requirements accordingly given the scope of the field commitment.

Third, I help students find appropriate sites for their service-learning work. Some faculty members who use service-learning establish a relationship with one site at which all students volunteer. This has the advantage of ensuring a comparable and well-defined volunteer experience for students, but can create problems in terms of successful coordination with students' schedules or easy site access for a geographically dispersed student body. Instead, I allow my students to find their own community placements that they submit for approval. In particular, the site work must (a) allow direct interaction with children in meaningful ways that connect with the content of the class; (b) occur in an organized setting, such as a school or agency, rather than by informal arrangement (e.g., babysitting); and (c) provide an on-site supervisor who can provide assistance and feedback. I ensure that the volunteer work is mutually beneficial for the student and the site as well.

Students in my classes find placements through their own exploration, a directory of sites that I have compiled, or through Internet resources. Regardless of the type of community service, there are Internet sites that facilitate volunteering which are invaluable for service-learning. These include http://www.volunteermatch.org, http://chicagovolunteer.net and http://www.idealist.org. Students can learn about many ongoing service opportunities after they enter their zip code, maximum commuting distance and interest area into these websites. In my classes, students designate children and youth as the appropriate search term; however, volunteer opportunities also address topics such as health, immigration, media, women's issues, race, computers and technology, hunger and many others.

Fourth, I make frequent connections between the course material and students' placements. I accomplish this by selecting reading and lecture content that is especially relevant for students' site work and by asking students to share their service experiences to inform discussion. Although some undergraduates have some trepidation before starting their service learning work, they all become aware of the benefits. One student summarized:

> As for my field placement experience itself, it has been a roller coaster of emotion that has left me 10 times stronger and wiser than I was before. I thought that I knew what compassion for another human being was. I am now able to give it to others in the most meaningful way imaginable.

> I cannot explain how it feels to stare a battered woman in the face and try to tell her that everything will be all right when she is hurting inside and out. When the man that she loves who is the father of her children has stripped her of her dignity and self esteem. I cannot explain how it felt to have beautiful little children standing in front of me with sad eyes and broken hearts because they are scared and sad and they miss their dads. All that I can say is that I spent a lot of time thinking, praying, crying and growing and I will never again be the same and I am so grateful for that. I feel that I have done things to help the people at the shelter, but the life lessons that they taught me are worth their weight in gold.

Often, service-learning allows students to make connections to social issues. As another student commented:

> I think that, although no one would say their life is perfect, it can be easy to forget just how many families struggle with extreme poverty, abuse and/or neglect when we aren't directly confronted with it every day. To continue to be in denial of the fact that there is still racism or destitution in this country is just naive. Obviously, these factors also play a big part in what kinds of adults these children will grow up to be. I have become even more empathetic and open-minded to everyone I encounter, because you never know what a person may have to struggle with at home or behind closed doors.

Finally, I provide students with writing assignments that ask them to describe their interactions and activities at the site, document connections between their volunteer work and the course material and readings, comment on what they learned and catalog their emotional reactions. One of my students observed:

> Completing the journals was crucial to examining and absorbing important events during our volunteering. Instead of just showing up, leaving for the day and repeating it the next week until it's all a blur, we were forced to think about what we encountered, what we learned from those interactions, how that might shape our future choices.

Admittedly, including service-learning in a course can be challenging and time-consuming. However, my students — and many others — often describe these experiences as meaningful, rewarding and even life-changing.

IMPLEMENTING SERVICE-LEARNING INTO WORLD HISTORY: HOW DO YOU DO THAT?

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This question usually comes up when I discuss service-learning course implementation with faculty and I explain how I implemented this pedagogy in my world history courses: How do you do service-learning in history? As any course that embeds service-learning pedagogy, I began with the course goals and objectives. As Heffernan (2001) clearly states in the *Fundamentals of service-learning course construction*:

> Goals are learning outcomes — broad statements identifying the general educational outcomes you want students to display upon completion of the course . . . Objectives are the concrete measures by which goals will be realized and are usually expressed as relationships between specific concepts. (p. 12)

Essentially, I reviewed my goals for my world history course and reviewed my course objectives that achieve these learning outcomes. The question then becomes: How can the service-learning pedagogy enhance and reinforce the learning objectives in order to produce a greater impact on the learning outcomes? This was my starting point for integrating service-learning into my course.

Since some of the learning outcomes for my World History Since 1500 course are to develop an understanding of global patterns, themes and historical forces that affected societies in all parts of the world since 1500 and to connect such historical forces to the present, I wanted to engage students in a historical force that has influenced the world to the present. One of the main historical forces emphasized in this course is industrialization, as well as its impact on people through the evolution of a new social class, the working class. In order to make history come alive and emphasize the relevance of such historical forces to the present, I implemented service-learning into my course by engaging students in 20 hours of service work in homeless shelters to interact with "the working poor" homeless population in direct service.

After making contact with a community partner organization and establishing a relationship with this organization that manages about 20 different shelter sites, I implemented reflection assignments in my course. In the Service-Learning Cycle, a service-learning model suggested by O'Toole and O'Toole (2001), service-learning reflection is categorized into pre-service reflection, reflection during service and post-service reflection. I implemented a pre-service reflection assignment, three reflections during service (all of which were 1 to 3 typewritten pages in length) and a post-service reflection and research paper (8 to 10 pages in length). This replaced the larger research paper I previously required in this course. The final research and reflection paper allowed students to synthesize their community experiences and to connect it to the discussion on historical forces in modern history.

During the most recent semester, the evaluations from the students in my service-learning world history course not only addressed the course learning outcomes, such as connecting past to present and addressing historical forces through modern history, but also focused on the institutional, mission-related learning outcomes of social justice and engaging in the community. For example, students' comments on the service-learning experiences included the following:

- "It helped with the course and how past events connect to the present."

- "[I] had an opportunity to draw links globally and historically … [Service-learning] stays true to the mission of the University."

- "[I benefited by] changing my way of thinking."

- "This made it meaningful to the mission of the institution."

- "Meeting the [homeless] guests at the shelter challenged my perception of the homeless … It fits well with RU's goals as a University."

- "[I benefited from] the hands-on community service … it made me more socially just."

The ambiguity that often comes with extending the learning of students into the real world through service-learning experiences coupled with structured reflection assignments is offset by increased learning outcomes, more involved students in the classroom and students who become engaged not only in the subject matter, but also in the community, bringing the mission to life.

SERVICE LEARNING AND THE GO-GIRL PROJECT

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Background of the GO-GIRL Project

The GO-GIRL Project (Gaining Options: Girls Investigate Real Life) began during the Spring 2006 semester at Roosevelt University. The purpose of the GO-GIRL program is to build 7th grade girls' mathematical confidence, skills and conceptual understanding by integrating mathematics and social science in a technology-rich environment. Undergraduate and graduate education, psychology and mathematics majors who serve as mentors to the girls support the program. GO-GIRL, which was created by Pamela Reid (the current Provost and Executive Vice President of Roosevelt University) and her colleagues at the University of Michigan, is part of a two-year dissemination grant funded by the National Scientific Foundation (NSF). Roosevelt University was selected to adapt and implement GO-GIRL, along with four other universities: Wayne State University, Howard University, Illinois Wesleyan and University of Pennsylvania.

Learning about Early Adolescent Girls

The Roosevelt students who served as mentors in the GO-GIRL Project were all enrolled in the course Adolescent Girls in Theory and Practice (EDUC 352/452, cross-listed as PSYC 381/481) during the Spring 2007 semester and then concurrently with the project after the fifth week. The goals of the course included the following:

- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the basic terms and concepts of adolescent development and psychology in girls through writings, readings and class discussion.

- Compare and contrast elements of some of the main theories of adolescent development, including intellectual, cognitive, social and emotional development of adolescents, particularly in girls and how they may help to explain various aspects of adolescent behavior and learning. Students will apply this knowledge in their consideration of how adolescent development influences the act of teaching and learning.

- Build a conceptual understanding of the needs of pre- to early adolescent girls, demands in school, confounds of poverty and ethnicity, and issues surrounding achievement through gender-based research.

- Design, implement and evaluate curricula in a collaborative, small-group, single-sex setting.

- Practice the role of "teacher as facilitator" and "teacher as mentor."

- Come to an understanding of gender-based research focusing on social, cognitive and academic issues of girls from diverse settings.

The course required the student-mentors to maintain a weekly reflective journal. The student-mentors also designed a career project to teach to the girls; they developed a case study about one of the girls in their group; and finally, they completed the program evaluation. There were also weekly readings and discussions on gender-based research. Most significantly, however, were the student-mentors integrating theory with practical application by taking the theories of adolescent development and methods from the seminar and applying them in the GO-GIRL setting.

The Roles of the Roosevelt University Student-Mentors

One of the main concepts behind GO-GIRL is the establishment of mentoring relationships among the 7th grade girls and their assigned mentors. In three different teams, five to seven girls worked with two mentors to design and complete a GO-GIRL social science research project using "real life" data collected from their peers. With the help of their mentors, the girls:

- Chose a research topic (The topic for this year's project was body image.)

- Designed a survey, posted it on the Internet and collected data

- Analyzed the data

- Formulated and tested hypotheses

- Presented findings to parents and guests

The mentors faithfully worked with the girls for ten Saturdays, 8:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. In addition to checking in their assigned girls and greeting parents each Saturday morning and checking their girls out to their parents at the end each session, the mentors had the following responsibilities:

- Facilitated the completion of the GO-GIRL lessons within their teams

- Led lessons to the entire group

- Supervised the girls on their team for the duration of the GO-GIRL day

- Supported each of the girls in their group, both academically and socially, during the course of the program

What the Mentors Gained from the GO-GIRL Experience

In a program like GO-GIRL, it is typical for mentors and girls to develop meaningful relationships that extend far beyond the program. The mentors also viewed this program as giving them the opportunity to show their real leadership in working in one-on-one relationships and teaching in a real-life situation to small and large groups. One education major (Spring 2006) commented that the GO-GIRL Program better prepared him to work with adolescents than any of the other teacher preparation courses he had taken, including student teaching. The following are just a few responses from the student-mentors' reflective journals:

- "As a teacher, I will use this relationship with the girls to learn from them particular issues that they might be dealing with as middle school girls."

- "How will the girls see me, especially with my being from Africa? Will they accept me as their mentor?"

- "This is my most hands-on experience to date and I was surprised with myself and how I was able to relate to the girls. In the week working up to our first meeting, I was very nervous about how well I'd be able to connect with them."

Conclusion

A program like the GO-GIRL Project is a "two-way street" for the 7th grade girls and Roosevelt's student-mentors. A primary goal for the girls is to increase their confidence in their mathematical ability by exposing them to math in a variety of contexts, such as research methods, data literacy, statistical tools, technological skills (i.e., use of graphing calculator and Internet research and data literacy software with laptop computers) and career exploration of mathematics and science-related fields. Because many of the girls came from diverse settings, they came to understand that they were all basically the same: they shared the same interests and concerns of most adolescent girls. They also commented that they enjoyed having a mentor for the one-on-one attention with an adult female and felt very comfortable working in an all-female environment.

Roosevelt University student-mentors, who were all female, reported that they benefited greatly from the opportunity to mentor, encourage and support young adolescent girls in learning mathematics. They felt they contributed to helping several of the girls gain more self-confidence and teaching them how to get along with others. They got to know their girls well over the ten weeks by spending both formal class time with the girls and having informal interactions with them in the morning, at lunch and on field trips. As one student-mentor commented: "I feel that I am going to be able to take a lot out of this experience and I feel that the girls will only help me to become a better educator."

Service-Learning in Science as a Way of Knowing

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In the Department of Biological, Chemical and Physical Sciences, many of our students go on to major-related careers in health sciences, research or science education. Thus, our approach to service-learning has been largely discipline-based. We aim to include themes of social awareness and community engagement into a traditional content-driven science curriculum. Our efforts are coordinated through participation in a nationwide initiative called Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities, or SENCER. We work from the existing curriculum to meet the SENCER Ideals and university goals of improving student learning, interest and retention in major-based courses.

The course on which I have focused my attention is Biology 150, Science as a Way of Knowing. Biology 150 is a popular general education option for education and liberal arts majors and it is also the first in a required course sequence for biology majors. While very successful, the course now faces the challenges of maintaining consistency across multiple sections and content and skill retention for students who proceed into science majors. In Spring 2007, I taught a section of Biology 150 at the Chicago Campus and incorporated several new service-learning activities into the existing course framework. These modifications included inquiry-based discussions on the boundaries of science, pharmaceutical marketing and prescription, popular science reporting and other "science and society" topics. Students used these discussions to explore contemporary science issues from multiple perspectives, both inside and outside the scientific professions.

The class also took part in a semester-long "Civic Engagement Project." This project required each student to pose a scientific question that could be answered through community interaction (such as conducting a scientific poll or developing educational materials) or through research into a public health or environmental science issue. The projects ranged from a survey of attitudes on anti-smoking laws to a 4th grade curriculum module on childhood obesity to a quantitative analysis of CTA Brown Line train travel times. As shown in student reports and in responses to course evaluations, students appreciated the chance to pose their own hypotheses and use a scientific approach to issues that affected their lives and their communities. After the course, 81% of the class said that they were at least "somewhat interested" in reading about science and its relation to civic issues and 90% said they were at least "somewhat confident" in their ability to apply scientific information to social concerns.

These are promising preliminary results that will be enhanced by further revisions to the course and will be used to create a course portfolio for use by all instructors. Future versions of Biology 150 will include a greater emphasis on the civic engagement component, especially in sections for non-majors. Class sections for majors will integrate the principles of disciplinary service-learning and the goals of the SENCER initiative into the existing content areas. My long-term goal is that students will be better able to see the relevance of their experience in Biology 150 and will choose to continue their development as broadly trained and socially aware scientists.

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Bringing Experiential Learning Into the Classroom

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"Tell me, and I will forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand." — Confucius

Confucius reminds us in this quote about the importance of having experiences and how they can be opportunities for learning. The early 20th century American psychologist and education reformer John Dewey made a call in 1938 for educators to appreciate the role direct experiences can have in individuals' learning and growth (Dewey, 1938). Dewey advocated for teaching to become more experiential and less didactic. In doing this, he was advocating that we teach to all types of learners not just the majority of learners. It is estimated that about 65% of the population can be classified as visual learners, 30% as auditory learners and 5% as kinesthetic learners (Conrad, n.d.). Since the majority of learners are visual learners, those tend to be the students to whom educators teach. As educators, we often consider the needs of the visual and auditory learners we have in a classroom when we design our lectures. The use of overhead projectors, PowerPoint presentations or writing notes on a chalkboard while we verbally present lecture material are all ideal ways to deliver material to visual and auditory learners. However, what do we do for those students who are kinesthetic learners? This