

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE INTERGENERATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING
EXPERIENCE: COMPONENTS OF THE UGIVE PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT. The benefits of service-learning as a pedagogical strategy are becoming well known (Strage, 2004). Essential components of successful service-learning are being identified as well. Yet, there are still few comprehensive models of service-learning available. This article attempts to fill this gap by providing an overview of the UGIVE program (undergraduate interdisciplinary volunteerism experience) developed for a university-level undergraduate gerontology course. The five essential components of the UGIVE program are: (a) Community Partnerships; (b) Training and Preparation; (c) Reflection; (d) Recognition; and (e) Evaluation. In addition to explaining each of these components and providing detail about the training manual developed for this program, challenges of incorporating a program such as the UGIVE program are described.

In a constantly changing world, it is important that we equip future generations with the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to be successful in a dynamic environment. One of the ways this can be accomplished is through expanding educational efforts to include new pedagogical strategies, such as service-learning. Service-learning has been defined as:

...a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and which actively engages students in reflection in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995, p. 112)

Service-learning is an approach that combines in-class material with volunteer-like service within the community, allowing students to learn the course information and apply it to real-life situations. Service-learning is different from volunteering in that academic material is

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integrated and applied to community goals and needs (Romack, 2004). Therefore, the purpose of service-learning is for students to collaborate with members of the community to address an identified need, resulting in both the students and community benefiting from their work together (McCarthy & Tucker, 1999).

While the concept of service-learning has been widely used in teaching for decades, this method of instruction hasn't always been known as "service-learning," and, historically, had little acknowledgement for its value. It wasn't until the 1990s that outcome studies were published recognizing the influence that service-learning had on student education (e.g., Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Although there is increasing empirical support for service-learning, we believe that a gap exists in the current service-learning literature. Instructors need assistance in developing high quality service-learning programs that will foster positive outcomes from service-learning. Consequently, our purpose for this paper is threefold: (a) to provide an overview of service-learning and history of the UGIVE (undergraduate interdisciplinary volunteerism experience) program; (b) to provide examples of specific training materials designed for an intergenerational service-learning program; and, (c) to address the essential components of a successful service-learning program, including challenges associated with the inclusion of service-learning. Although the materials are specific to intergenerational service-learning, they can easily be adapted for use with other types of service-learning programs.

Overview of Service-learning

The benefits of service-learning are vast at both student and community levels (Hamon & Way, 2001). Students are engaged and become active agents in their learning experience (Astin & Sax, 1998; Roodin, 2002), by integrating and applying knowledge about individuals and

groups of people into real world practices. The interaction within the class as well as between the students and the community demands a respect of human potential and the art of effective collaboration. The art of collaboration includes a heightened complexity when considering the diversity that exists from college-aged students to later-life adults.

By focusing on the continuum of the life span, the integration of service and course content can increase students' understanding of the strengths and challenges of the aging population (Blieszner & Artale, 2001; Bringle & Kremer, 1993; McCrea, Nichols, & Newman, 1999). Students also may realize the biases that have previously compromised their views of the aging process. Many students begin to gain competency in assessing later life through a new venue and are able to acknowledge a more holistic perspective of the life cycle and components that can influence people's lives. Perhaps the most important benefit for the students is an evolving appreciation of self and the value of diversity as they grow in their awareness of differences in age, race, gender, spirituality, and relational change throughout the life span (Tschirhart, 2002).

A secondary gain for students is the potential for future personal or professional opportunities (Blieszner & Artale, 2001; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Fenzel & Leary, 1997). Not only does the service experience encourage students to learn about a variety of occupational prospects, but also allows them to consider how a change in personal or familial health may influence their role at home or in their community (e.g., one student described a grandparent's diagnosis of Alzheimer's that had later influenced the student's role in the family, transitioning from role of grandchild to role of caregiver). The service-learning teaching method provides students with greater insight for the realities, strengths, and challenges of aging and aging

environments prior to finding employment or being faced with life altering familial circumstances (Valerius & Hamilton, 2001).

Service-learning courses benefit the community as students help reach under-served citizens who may be restricted by physical, psychological, or social limitations (Green, 1998). Students may assist older adults who struggle with mobility by delivering prepared meals or assisting those who are illiterate or have experienced vision loss by reading books or magazines, or perhaps most influential, by extending a positive social interaction by listening to a story from the past. Sadly, all of these activities may otherwise be limited without the aid of students engaged in service-learning courses. Community partners have acknowledged the unique contributions of student learners and have supported the belief that these additional activities would not be possible without the support from schools and universities.

Given these benefits of service-learning, more and more instructors are implementing this teaching method into their courses (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001). However, there are limited resources or guides available to assist in the development of service-learning program, which may lead instructors to reinvent the wheel or abandon thoughts of how service-learning can be incorporated into their classes. Other instructors may incorporate volunteering into their course not recognizing that this is different from service-learning and it may not yield the same results. Therefore, it is important for instructors to first acknowledge the type of course that is appropriate for their students given the class size, community need, and desired outcome from the experience. Based on this assessment, instructors will choose either service-centered learning or content-centered learning. Service-centered courses assist students in reflecting on and learning from service in which they are already engaged (e.g., some faculty associate this type of learning with internship experiences), whereas content-centered courses are those in which the

content of a class is better understood and course objectives are more effectively reached by the inclusion of a service project (Steffes, 2004). The UGIVE intergenerational program described in this paper is an example of a content-centered course.

The UGIVE Program

When designing a service-centered or content-centered course, there are several key factors that must be included in order to maximize the potential benefits for students. First of all, students must have a sense of self-efficacy; they must feel as though they are qualified to perform a service and to work as part of a team. Self-efficacy can be achieved through class discussions and instructor reassurance (McCarthy & Tucker, 1999). Additionally, the course level, maturity level and level of preparedness of the students, and the degree to which the community partners believe that service-learning is important and beneficial should be considered (Lagana, 2003).

The introductory gerontology course for which the UGIVE program was designed is a sophomore-level course that is cross-listed with the departments of Social Work, Gerontology, and Child Development and Family Relations. The service-learning component was first implemented in the fall of 2002 and was initially funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, Learn & Serve Higher Education through a grant to The Association for Gerontology in Higher Education in partnership with Generations Together. The service-learning component required all students (typically 50-60 students) enrolled in the course to engage in 12 hours of service-learning with older adults in the community.

One of the most important aspects of any service-learning course is a set of clear educational objectives. The learning objectives for our intergenerational course were that students will: (a) interact directly with older adults in meaningful activities, (b) integrate course

material with service-learning experiences, (c) dispel personal myths and stereotypes about older populations, (d) increase their knowledge about older adults and the aging process (assessed through a pre-test/post-test), (e) develop critical thinking and problem solving skills related to aging issues, and, (f) provide a needed service to the agency or organization.

Defined objectives allow those involved to monitor the progress made and to determine if the service-learning experience was satisfying the needs of both the students and the population with which they were working. Additionally, objectives provide an outline for educators and supervisors to regularly evaluate the students' work and to recognize their achievements (Loschert, 2001). In this case, a content-centered course, which was labeled the UGIVE program, was created in order to enhance course objectives that were originally established for a traditional learning context. Based on existing research on service-learning, we identified five essential components of a service-learning course that would make the UGIVE program successful: (a) Community Partnerships; (b) Training and Preparation; (c) Reflection; (d) Recognition; and, (e) Evaluation. The following section will describe each of these components.

Community Partnerships

In developing a service-learning program, a key aspect is the interaction between the students and the community partners with whom they are working. The service-learning experience is an opportunity to develop better relationships between a campus and the community (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Therefore, agencies should be chosen that will provide students with positive experiences (Elam, Musick, Sauer, & Skelton, 2002) and have a shared long-term investment in a campus-community relationship.

To assess community partners' interest in a service-learning partnership, a Needs Assessment for Community Partners was administered (readers may contact the authors to obtain

a copy of the needs assessment form). The assessment included questions such as how many students would you like to have at your site, in what kinds of activities would the students be engaged, are there specific hours that students must be available (e.g., only in the morning or not on weekends), and who will serve as the site supervisor for the student(s). Conducting a needs assessment allowed the community partners to (a) understand service-learning, (b) brainstorm the types of projects that could be completed, (c) consider the optimal times or days for service learners to be involved, and, (d) contemplate any questions or concerns prior to the start of service-learning. Conversely, the needs assessment allowed us to learn which sites had interest in providing experiences for the students, how many students each site could handle in one semester, and the nature of the activities in order to ensure that the activities were appropriate for student involvement. While many colleges and universities now have a service-learning center on campus, we believe that it is beneficial for the instructors themselves to conduct a needs assessment or to work closely with their service-learning center. This allows faculty to determine what is most appropriate for their students and it can be a tool to build strong community partnerships.

The relationship between community partner and students must be seen as a partnership in which all groups have equal status. In addition to collaboration, Goff (2004) identified reciprocity as an important component of effective service-learning. Reciprocity is achieved when both parties benefit from the service-learning partnership. Students must be aware of the fact that they are benefiting from the partnership as much as the community. This will prevent them from viewing service-learning as charity work and from seeing themselves as providing a service to the less fortunate (King, 2004). It may be beneficial to develop a service-learning agreement with the community partners. Developing such an agreement allows all those

involved to find a balance between the course objectives and the expected outcomes of service, and to clarify the commitment between both parties (Romack, 2004).

There are several important components of effective collaboration with community partners. First, there must be a clear purpose for the partnership and a compatible relationship in which those involved have similar values, goals, and objectives (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Second, there must be effective communication between all participants (e.g., a student must call the community partner if he is ill or contact the instructor/community partner if she is concerned about a safety issue such as elder abuse). Last, the nature of the interactions (e.g., reading, story telling or other direct interactions opposed to those that may not include an interface between individuals, such as filing or housekeeping) between students and the people with whom they are working must be recognized as one of the most crucial elements of service-learning. Not only must interactions be pleasant, but communication must be clear, consistent, and ongoing (Hamon & Way, 2001). There should be ample interactions between the students, instructors, participants, and site supervisors throughout the service-learning experience.

Training and Preparation

After establishing relationships with community partners, it can be advantageous to develop a formal instructional guide for students involved in service-learning. A written guide not only defines course goals and objectives, it can be used to list required activities, policies on attendance and participation, and criteria for grading and course credit (Elam et al., 2002).

In order to meet our personal needs for developing an intergenerational service-learning course and in hopes of assisting others who are interested in incorporating service into their classes, we created a manual for distribution to students, faculty, and community partners involved with the introduction to gerontology course. The contents of our service-learning

manual include the goals and objectives, policies on attendance and participation, the service-learning agreement between the students and the site, as well as criteria for in class projects related to the service-learning, such as reflection.

The gerontology students received the manual with one hour of training during one of the first classes of the semester while new faculty persons/graduate assistants and community partners received the manual via a personal meeting with the primary faculty person at the service-learning site. We have found that personal contact with community partners prior to the start of the service-learning hours enhances the experience for the students and the site and also allows the community partners to feel more comfortable about contacting the faculty person about concerns or questions in the future. A full-length version of the service learning manual is available by request to the authors. However, a description and justification for each subsection is detailed below to highlight the types of information to be shared with students, faculty, and community partners. Each section included in the manual can be changed to suit the site, class size, or need of the instructor.

Defining Service-learning (Subsection 1 of the manual). It is important for students to understand the concept of service-learning and then to see how their institution promotes service-learning. Within the academic system, it is beneficial for the institution to have a universal definition of service-learning so that students see the relevance of their experience beyond the classroom. The objectives for the class can be highlighted, in order to allow students to process how service-learning will be integrated with course content throughout the semester.

Service-learning Requirements (Subsection 2 of the manual). Within the UGIVE program, students provided service for 12 hours throughout the semester. Some faculty may choose to require more and some may require less; however, with up to 65 students we didn't

want to overwhelm the service-learning sites and wanted to ensure a balanced course by emphasizing course content and service-learning experiences. It is also important to give students some specific guidelines about how their hours will be conducted. Without these guidelines, students may wait until the last minute to complete their hours or neglect to contact sites when they are unable to participate due to illness or other conflicts.

Classroom Assignment Requirements (Subsection 3 of the manual). This section defines the importance and expectations for the reflection exercises. It is imperative to have some structure for the reflection process, especially with written forms of reflection. This structure ensures that students integrate what they have learned in the course with what they have learned at their sites and minimizes random thoughts or effortless contributions. We selected to have the students submit their written reflection (referred to as service-learning journals) electronically through Blackboard, a popular course management system, which is used at many universities. Through an informed consent form completed at the beginning of the semester, we were granted permission to use the journals as qualitative research.

Disability Support Services (Subsection 4 of the manual). We have accommodated students with a variety of disabilities including visual impairment and hearing impairment. Disability support services or a similar service can be a tremendous help in assuring that all students are able to participate fully in the service-learning experience. One of the greatest challenges for students with disabilities as well as many other students was lack of transportation. Fortunately this hasn't been a frequent issue; however, special arrangements have been made for some students and all students have been accommodated. Students without transportation can be paired up with students who do and we included some sites that were either within walking distance from campus or that had city bus transportation available.

Dos & Don'ts of Service-learning and Tips on Aging (Subsections 5 & 6 of the manual).

Service-learning is a new experience for the majority of our students and we included a list of what should and shouldn't be done (Subsection 5) throughout a service-learning experience in the manual. This section provides students with guidelines as to how act professionally and how to address issues or concerns at their site. Interestingly, many students have not engaged in conversations or activities with an aging person outside of the relationship with their grandparents, so a tips on aging section (Subsection 6) was also added to the manual to help guide the students through this experience.

Volunteer Act of 1997, Insurance Forms, and Confidentiality (Subsections 7, 8, and 9 of the manual). While we have gone through the effort to describe that service-learning is not the same as volunteering, we believe that the students as well as community partners needed to see the Volunteer Act of 1997 in order to protect students from fear of liability for their time spent at the service-learning site. While these students would be protected under the Act, our institution asks each of the students to complete an insurance document (Subsection 8 of the manual) that is signed and turned into the faculty during the one-hour training. Students are also asked to sign a confidentiality document (Subsection 9) to ensure that personal information is not shared during class or reflection exercises. Students are informed to only break confidentiality when they suspect that harm is being done to a person or if a person has described suicidal ideation.

Consent, Waiver, and Release Form (Subsection 10 of the manual). Some students choose to go above and beyond in their service-learning experiences by creating photo albums or scrapbooks on service-learning for the university or for the service-learning site. Depending on the type of reflection activities used, students might also like to use photographs as part of a

reflection activity (e.g., a poster presentation). A consent form is signed by anyone who is willing to have their picture taken by a student for personal or academic purposes.

Documentation of Hours and List of Placements (Subsections 11 and 12 of the manual).

Prior to initiating the UGIVE Program, we were able to meet with the staff of the university's service-learning organization and they were able to assist with the documentation of student hours (Subsection 11), student enrollment in liability insurance, and provision of a list of placements that they had found to be supportive of service-learning (Subsection 12). With this information, we were able to tailor our training manual to match the university policies in regard to service-learning.

Service-learning Agreement and Evaluation (Subsections 13 and 14 of the manual). At the beginning of the semester, following the completion of the needs assessment the service-learning site typically receives a list of the student names who have selected their site for their service-learning experience. This list of names (Subsection 13) is attached to the service-learning manual and the site administrator/community partner is entitled to make changes to that list as needed. As previously mentioned, a site visit or follow up call is made to each community partner throughout the semester and at the end of the semester, the community partners are asked to complete an evaluation on each student (Subsection 14).

Reflection

One of the most important aspects of service-learning is reflection. Indeed, reflection is considered the essential link between service and learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Simply adding service-learning to the curriculum does not guarantee that students will reflect on their experiences or make the connection between the classroom information and their service (Eyler, 2002). Reflection activities provide students an opportunity to contemplate the learning that

occurred from their service experiences (Collier & Driscoll, 1999). This often is accomplished through the use of written journals, in which students can document their experiences in class and on site, reflect on the lessons that they have learned as a result of their service, and discuss sensitive or confidential topics. Other types of reflection are more interactive in nature, such as small group discussions and classroom presentations. These forms of reflection are useful in that they expand ideas through interaction, capture emotions more so than written assignments (Collier & Driscoll), and help students to process their experiences and to go beyond just describing their work to analyzing it as well (Hamon & Way 2001). As a result, students are better able to make connections between classroom material and their service experience and apply this knowledge outside the classroom.

In our course, we expected students to participate in two forms of reflection: class discussion and reflection journals. Class discussion provided an opportunity for students to share what they had been doing at their sites and to reflect on how these experiences coincided with concepts or theories from class. While maintaining confidentiality, students shared strengths or concerns they had encountered in their work throughout the semester. Reflection journal submissions were turned in about every three weeks and followed an outline of (a) description: a description of the experiences they had encountered with older adults at their site, (b) analysis: an assessment of how course content related to their service experience. This section typically included a specific reference to a concept or theory discussed in class, and (c) application: commentary on how service-learning experiences and relevant course content can be applied to their personal and/or professional life.

Recognition

The accomplishments of service-learning participants must be recognized and feedback is required to ensure the success of future service-learning endeavors. All participants as well as the institutional administration should conduct evaluations and high-quality service-learning should be rewarded (Bringle, Hatcher, & Games, 1997). In addition, support for service-learning can be maintained through committees and advisory boards comprised of students, faculty, administrators, and community partners (Loschert, 2001). The more people that are dedicated to developing and implementing service-learning programs and recognizing the accomplishments of those involved, the more successful it will be.

The UGIVE Program has always had a strong commitment to recognition. At the end of each semester, every student was invited to a service-learning appreciation day that included refreshments. The students were able to invite an older adult and their site supervisor. All students who finished their service-learning hours received an official certificate of completion. In addition, three awards were given each semester. The first award is for student learner of the semester. The site administrators/community partners nominate the students for this award. The second award is for older adult of the semester and the third is for the community partner of the semester. The students were asked to make the nomination for the latter two awards. We also recognized a person each semester that provided exceptional support to service-learning. Examples include the director of the service-learning program on campus, a vice chancellor for research that provided funding for service-learning and a community partner who accommodated 10 students each semester for her site.

Evaluation

There are numerous stakeholders in developing a successful service-learning program, including faculty, students, community agencies, and the service partners/recipients (Bringle et

al., 1997). All of these stakeholders must be prepared to engage in the endeavor and have clear expectations of the service-learning experience and the evaluation process. This can be accomplished through the appropriate training and assessment of progress.

Evaluation of the service-learning experience can be conducted in many ways, such as reflection, surveys of the community partners, student examinations, and site visits/follow up with the service-learning sites. First, we encouraged students to evaluate their understanding of the course content as well as their service-learning experience through verbal and written reflection. We also asked all contact persons/site administrators at the service-learning site to complete an evaluation on each student prior to the end of the semester. After the faculty reviewed these evaluations, a summary of concerns or strengths was then shared with the student. Student evaluation was also conducted through objective exams, as questions were added to each test to promote reflection on the service-learning process. Finally, a site visit and/or phone calls were made throughout the semester to service-learning sites to ensure that there weren't any concerns that needed to be addressed. These forms of evaluation have promoted a healthy experience for the students as well as the community partners. In fact, as many as 98% of students in a given semester reported that they would continue to visit their site after the end of the semester. We attribute this success to our rigorous training materials including the evaluation process.

In addition to the more traditional pedagogical evaluation methods described above, we have assessed the effectiveness of service learning as a teaching strategy through a pre-test, post-test research study. Results of this research study are beyond the scope of this paper.

Challenges

Although there are many benefits to service-learning, there are some challenges that many faculty, students, and community agencies face when attempting to implement a UGIVE service-learning program. Often faculty are reluctant to take on the additional responsibility due to the time and coordination demands, lack of support from the administration, the extra work involved in preparing/training students, and inexperience with non-traditional teaching methods (McCarthy & Tucker, 1999). Many professors are discouraged from implementing service-learning programs because institutions do not support service with the same credibility and respect as their duties of teaching and research (Bringle et al., 1997). Coordinating schedules and committing time are often obstacles for faculty, students, and the agencies. Also, many agencies agree to work as a service-learning partner and then do not follow through with their commitment. Finally, with the increasing popularity of service-learning, agencies might be overwhelmed with the number of students wanting to do service hours and students themselves might be overwhelmed with service requirements in multiple courses. Thus, when making a decision about whether or not to incorporate service-learning into a course, it's important to weigh the benefits and the challenges and each instructor should make a decision that's appropriate for their situation.

Conclusion

The UGIVE program can easily be adapted to other types of courses and other types of service learning experiences. Yet, the five components of the program (a) Community Partnerships; (b) Training and Preparation; (c) Reflection; (d) Recognition; and (e) Evaluation are essential to any service-learning program. While implementing a successful service-learning experience can be time consuming and challenging, with careful planning using the provided

resources, service-learning can provide tremendous benefits for students, faculty, and community partners.

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