



Engaging fashion majors in the community: Outcomes of a service learning project

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Service learning (SL) is a form of experiential learning that uses community service to enhance program learning outcomes through mutually beneficial activities and student reflection opportunities (Anderson, Royster, Bailey & Reed, 2011). Experiential learning in an SL context provides an opportunity for learners to use acquired discipline knowledge and critical analysis as they participate in a real life activity to derive new learning and insights. Service learning activities also enhance academic curricula and build valuable community-college relationships (Bohn & Schmidt, 2008). This abstract describes university learner outcomes of a successful SL program that connects university and community high school students via a mutual interest in fashion.

“Project MODA” is an SL project that pairs university fashion majors with at-risk high school students in the university community. Project goals include introducing high school students interested in fashion careers to college life and expectations. Prospective participants are recommended by their high school teachers and counselors based on fashion-related career goals and academic and social characteristics. College mentors are selected through an application process and volunteer their time as an extra-curricular activity. The project is in its third year and is funded by 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which is part of the No Child Left Behind Act. Mentors and high school participants (10 to 12 per year) meet weekly in the university apparel lab during the fall and spring semesters. Mentors develop and deliver curriculum, which includes design, pattern making and construction skills. Each high school student designs and constructs a garment under the guidance of a mentor, then models the completed garment in the university’s spring fashion show.

Outcomes for learners in SL activities include academic advancement, personal development and civic engagement (Ash, Clayton, & Atkinson, 2005). Knowledge is enhanced when learners apply classroom learning in the SL activity, enabling increased mastery of a subject. SL activities enable learners to gain new insights about personal strengths and weaknesses, sense of identity, assumptions, beliefs, and convictions. SL participants may also gain insight into approaches to enact community change by reflecting on the efficacy of the SL activity in meeting community objectives (Lattanzi, Black, Campbell, Dole & Palombaro, 2011). To identify outcomes of university student participation in Project MODA, mentors (n=12) in the 2012-13 SL project were asked to complete a reflective writing exercise. Each participant wrote

Page 1 of 2

about their contribution to the project, how they applied knowledge and skills learned in their major, how the experience influenced personal skills, and identified new skill development. They were also asked to describe the most meaningful aspect of working on the project. Content analysis guided by the experiential/service learning literature revealed multiple outcomes. Learners' reflections on their knowledge and skill enhancement included increased teamwork, interpersonal communication, problem solving, creativity and leadership skills. Also mentioned was the opportunity to reinforce classroom learning by teaching the content to others. Personal development outcomes included ability to work in a diverse environment, patience, and reinforcement of self-worth and self-efficacy as a result of community service. There were relatively fewer comments regarding community engagement outcomes. Students expressed satisfaction that their efforts made a difference in others' lives, but did not articulate how their efforts contributed to broader community improvement objectives or campus-community relations.

Results suggest that this service activity has met many of the expected outcomes of service learning for university participants. An area for improvement in future projects is to build awareness of community engagement objectives and outcomes among university participants. Connecting mentors with community high school educators at the beginning and end of the project to gain a better understanding of overall educational objectives and impact is one way to increase university student participants' view of their role in the development of youth in the community.

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