

Teaching Students to Become Responsible Citizens

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While in school, it is a wonderful time to begin to teach upcoming professionals about giving back to the communities they live or work within. These young adults can inspire the next generation of students to do the same. Participating in service learning allows students to see the impact of their hard efforts on the communities they serve. Witnessing the specific needs or purposes that need to be addressed by the community should inspire the students to get involved in order to make a difference. Teaching should focus on enabling students to enter the workplace, including opportunities for personal development.

Keywords: service learning, mentoring program, community service projects, personal development

INTRODUCTION

The University of Findlay was founded in 1882, and is located in Findlay, Ohio. The university is located in a micropolitan community within an hour or two in commuting distance from Toledo, Columbus, Dayton, and Detroit. The university has approximately 3,300 students with 33 percent in graduate programs ranging from master's to doctorate programs. The remaining 67 percent are undergraduate students majoring in business, education, health professions, equestrian, and humanities among others. As members of this community, The University of Findlay prides itself in providing an educational environment for all learners of diverse backgrounds. The university aims to assist learners to enter the workplace while providing opportunities for personal development. These opportunities can include ways to serve a diverse community with empathy and an open mind willing to learn. A forward-looking goal is integrating service learning within the course content or curriculum.

For college students, doing service learning can enhance their resume and help them to stand out among the competing applicants for job positions. The benefits of service learning can be such a rewarding experience. Encouraging students to get involved can set them up for a lifetime giving back. The University of Findlay accounting students organize funds raisers in order to raise funds to host events that benefit the surrounding community. There are always opportunities for students to get involved on campus or externally. For those who do not, perhaps they are uncertain where to begin. The manuscript will highlight and describe some learning service activities as they relate to diversity awareness and describe how service learning activities are integrated into courses. Looking at a few projects of what has worked favorably to get accounting students active outside of the classroom is the objective.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Certain terms and concepts are not necessarily inherent in all fields of studies, and so to serve as a guide, we conducted a review of related literature to describe service learning and diversity. Service learning is “a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity in such a way that meets identified community needs, and reflect on the service activity in such a way to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996, as cited in Gujarathi and McQuade, 2002). The careful and purposeful link between academic or course content and service differentiates service learning from volunteering. Jay (2008) describes “service learning typically last only one semester in duration and usually only a few hours per week outside of the class” (as cited in Desmond, Stahl, and Graham, 2011).

Dewey is the best-known early educator and he felt that for education to have relevance, it should be linked to the community (Cress, et al., 2010). According to Dewey (1916), the education an individual receives should include activities that permit students to look ahead and predict the type of activities that a community might need. In order to accomplish the foresightedness, Dewey (1916) suggests (1) observing the conditions to see where service can be included; (2) determine the sequence needed; and (3) make a choice that is the best for the community. When designing a service learning project, Dewey (1916) suggests to “stop, look, listen” (p. 152). Legislative reforms highlighted the importance of including having students involved in service learning projects within the curriculum. According to the United States Department of Education (U.S.D.E.), the National and Community Service Act of 1990, National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, the Learn and Serve America program are a few examples (Skinner and Chapman, 1999).

The U.S.D.E. conducted its initial survey surrounding the importance of incorporating service learning into the classroom (Skinner and Chapman, 1999). The survey revealed that thirty-two percent of all public schools included some type of service learning as part of the curriculum. From the schools that had service learning, the survey revealed that (1) to help students become more active members of the community; (2) to increase student knowledge and understanding of the community; and (3) to meet real community needs and/or foster relationships between the school and surrounding community as being top outcomes of performing service learning projects (Skinner and Chapman, 1999). The community is important and is only considered one side of a service learning project. The flip side of a service learning project is the academic side. How well are the course objectives being met? The U.S.D.E. survey revealed increasing students’ critical thinking and problem-solving skills and improvement in core academic courses as being important too (Skinner and Chapman, 1999).

Colleges and universities too have service learning implemented within the curriculum. Campus Compact was created by Brown, Georgetown, and Stanford Universities in order to encourage service learning into higher education (Celio et al., 2011). Research has found that college students participating in service learning tend to have higher GPAs, higher retention rates, and tend to graduate (Cress et al., 2010). Furthermore, research revealed that college students tend to have improved academic content knowledge, critical thinking skills, written and verbal skills, and leadership skills (Cress et al., 2010). When college students were paired with high school students on service learning projects, or through tutoring or mentoring programs, or other programs, the high school students were more likely to graduate high school and enroll into college (Cress et al., 2010).

Research further defines diversity as “individual differences (e.g. personality, learning styles, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g. race/ethnicity; class; gender; sexual orientation; country of origin; ability; and cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations)” (Milem et al., 2005, as cited in Lee and Priester, 2015). A well-planned service learning is an experiential learning and the hope is “to promote student reflection and awareness of political, social, and economic intolerance in order to foster a deeper respect and appreciation for diversity” (Holland, 2006, as cited in Desmond et al., 2011). A well-planned service learning project promotes student reflection and awareness of political, social, and economic intolerance in order to foster a deeper respect and appreciation for diversity.

STRATEGIC AND COURSE GOALS

The University of Findlay developed its eight strategic goals back in 2012. These goals were designed to continually move the university forward in its quest to provide an outstanding educational experience for the students of The University of Findlay. These eight strategic goals are reviewed and evaluated each year by administration, faculty, and staff, and allows for the university to plan for the upcoming year. The eight strategic goals for the university are:

1. *Equip students for meaningful lives and productive careers*
2. Improve academic programs continuously through rigorous assessment
3. Grow targeted enrollment
4. *Enable exceptional student learning*
5. Develop the whole person through personalized attention
6. Embrace professional, cultural, and intellectual diversity
7. Provide experiential learning in every program
8. Build best-in-class strategic resources

The service learning activities being conducted by the accounting and business students contributes to the strategic goals 1 and 4 for the university.

For example, in the Accounting Club, students are given the opportunity to meet with accounting professionals. Additionally, students become exposed to professional trends, employment opportunities, and educational growth within the accounting discipline. The credit bearing course objectives for the Accounting Club include developing a more thorough and broadened education and knowledge of the accounting field; build a professional network through work on community projects and by interacting with professional speakers and advisors; and learn and apply strategies that will directly assist in acquiring a job in the accounting profession. The service learning projects that will be described have permitted the accounting students to achieve the Accounting Club course objectives and contribute to the university's strategic goals.

FUND RAISING

In order to complete some of the community events, such as:

- Hosting Christmas on Campus
- Adopting a special needs classroom for equipment
- Sponsoring student scholarships
- Sponsoring children's mentoring program cultural events and college scholarships
- Purchasing book bags and school supplies for the Homeless Shelter and Hope House
- Sponsoring Hancock Saves literacy program,

the student accounting organization will host two annual fund raisers in order to help cover the monetary cost of the various community events. A third fund raiser is also hosted that is geared towards donations from the faculty and staff of the university.

To begin the process, the Student Government Association requires that all student organizations to complete a fund-raising permit. The permit provides a brief description of the fund raiser along with the its purpose. Once the fund-raising permit is approved, the student accounting organization may begin with its fund-raising activities. In order to cover the monetary needs for the community events, the student accounting organization will sell Fall and Spring final exam gift packs to the parents of enrolled campus students. The final exam gift packs contain a licensed university gift, such as stadium blanket, along with a variety of snacks to make the final exam cram sessions less stressful. Most parents will provide some words of encouragement to include with the gift for their children as they enter final exam week. As stated, a third fund raiser is centered around donations from the faculty and staff of the university. It is this third fund raiser where the gifts of Santa's toys for the children will be received.

Christmas on Campus

For the Christmas on Campus project, the students work with the local Findlay elementary schools and the Homeless Shelter in order to provide a holiday for the disadvantaged. For many of the children, this event represents the only Christmas these children will receive. As a result, this project is a high priority for inclusion each year from the fund raiser proceeds. The accounting students bring about 80-100 children of local families to campus in order to meet with Santa, play games and other fun activities, and each child receives a Christmas gift from Santa from that Childs' Christmas wish list. The accounting students organize the event, plan the activities, and etc. In addition, each attending family receives a Christmas treat, such as a turkey or ham. The accounting leadership team reaches out to other student organizations on campus for assistance. There are many university student organizations that get involved in this wonderful event. Such as:

- IMA Accounting Club
- IMA Accounting Honor Society
- DMD Business Honor Society
- Habitat for Humanity
- Xi Theta Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta
- 2 Chemistry based Clubs
- Kappa Epsilon
- City Missions
- Mortar Board National Honor Society

Other Donations

Any extra monetary proceeds from the fund raisers have been used to support the other projects the accounting students pursue. Such as purchasing unique equipment for special education classrooms, sponsoring student scholarships, sponsoring children's mentoring program cultural events and college scholarships, purchasing book bags and school supplies for the Homeless Shelter and Hope House, and sponsoring Hancock Saves literacy program.

SERVICE LEARNING

Faculty members who are contemplating on integrating service learning into their courses are recommended to contact the Service and Community Engagement Department of their institution for finding potential service projects. Some service learning can be discipline specific, such as sharing accounting or finance skills with non-profit organizations, setting up an accounting system or budget for a non-profit organization or hosting a local workshop. According to University of Wisconsin (2021), some other suggestions for service learning can include:

- Serve on a board for a Not-for-Profit organization
- Work on a Habitat for Humanity project constructing housing for families with low incomes
- Organize/assist with voter registration
- Work with a neighborhood association
- Work with a public interest organization
- Work with a political campaign
- Assist with community events and projects such as museum activities, cultural awareness programs, fairs and festivals, Adopt-a-Highway, neighborhood clean-up/beautification days
- Serve as a mentor for a young person through Big Brothers Big Sisters, Scouting, 4-H or other youth organizations
- Help Senior Citizens with a variety of activities that enhance their quality of life
- Conduct a conservation project at a park, lakeshore or nature center
- Tutor elementary or secondary students in a variety of subjects, work with Literacy Volunteers of America, or serve as a "Reading Partner" to encourage youngsters to develop good reading habits

From the suggested service learning list, The University of Findlay accounting students have been involved in many of the suggestions and beyond, including:

- Serving as student ambassadors on campus
- Volunteering for backyard mission trip
- Building house walls for Habitat for Humanity
- Participating in Ohio Benefit Bank
- Teaching financial responsibility as part of a retraining program offered by the City Mission
- Developing the accounting system for Oiler Enterprise
- Involvement in a mentoring program
- Teaching financial literacy to elementary students
- Offering various workshops for the local Senior Citizens

Offering Workshops for the Senior Citizens

Students in the Managerial Accounting capstone course complete a community service project as part of their course requirements. The course is intended to provide professional development by helping individuals advance their careers in accounting, finance or business management. The capstone project allows the graduating accounting students to apply their skills while giving back to the community. With the assistance of the Campus Compact, Service and Community Engagement Department, a connection with the Hancock County Agency on Aging was possible. The connection has permitted the accounting capstone class to host several workshops over the years. The accounting students decide upon a project based upon suggestions from the Senior Citizens. Over the many years, a range of topics include Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Power Point, personal budgets, social media, email, pictures, and etc.

The accounting students in the capstone course were able to teach/refine the Microsoft Excel skills of the Senior Citizens while at the same time teaching the group how to prepare a personal budget using Microsoft Excel. This is just one example of a marvelous project that combined many skills. The accounting students planned, coordinated and organized the event. The event really allowed the students to take ownership and develop their leadership skills. The accounting students that are involved in this capstone course, are also involved in many of the other projects conducted throughout the academic year. There is a reflection piece after the completed project. The students seem to genuinely enjoy the project.

Mentoring Program

A mentoring program can connect people who have a specific skill or knowledge with individuals who is looking to acquire those skills or knowledge. Companies can benefit from such an arrangement because those organizations are helping to educate an upcoming workforce with the knowledge sought by the profession. As a result, a more prepared applicant will be applying for positions within these organizations. Matching current students and alumni has blossomed into internship opportunities and job offers.

A successful alumnus mentoring program has been implemented within the accounting program at The University of Findlay. Faculty members teaching accounting saw a need for students to grow their education in a way that only people in the accounting profession could help. It was an immediate success. The mentoring program that was designed allows juniors and seniors to be mentored by an accounting alumnus, while freshman and sophomores are mentored by the upper-class accounting students. The pairing of the alumni to the student is the most challenging task for the program. Students were amazed by the help that their mentors could offer and the mentors were impressed to meet accounting students that were interested in learning and willing to step out of the box. Students realize the mentoring program is an investment in their personal and professional growth and have seen positive outcomes.

A mentoring program can be difficult to begin, but the rewards really benefit the participants. There is no single mentoring plan that works for everyone, and the program can be modified to meet the needs and objectives of the participants. This program is employer-oriented, and at the end of each year, students will report on their experiences. Students explore a range of accounting career fields, set goals for themselves, develop invaluable contacts and resources. Students find themselves job shadowing, completing

internships, and receiving full time positions. After graduation, the mentored students come back to the university and serve as professional alumni mentors to our undergraduate students.

DANA SCHOLARS PROGRAM

The Dana Scholars program was established in 1995 through the generosity of the Dana Corporation. Executives-in-Residence share their leadership skills to a select group of business students. The program allows for education and business to bond through a credit bearing business capstone course. A key to this program is a visit to other companies for an up-close observation of operations and personnel management. Students share their team building and leadership skills by mentoring fellow learners in the class. A sample of companies represented by the Executives-in-Residence include:

- Marathon Petroleum Corporation
- Blanchard Valley Health System
- Fifth Third Bank
- Cooper Tire and Rubber Company
- G.S.W. Manufacturing
- Continental Cablevision
- Garner Trucking
- Columbia Gas
- Pro-Tec Coating Company
- F.D.I. / Pukka

CONCLUSION

Research has demonstrated that service learning has been an effective teaching pedagogical strategy. The practice of incorporating service learning into the curriculum has enabled the university to set the student up for a meaningful life of giving back to the community after graduation in which they reside or work. Furthermore, service learning can allow exceptional course outcomes by permitting students to develop a deeper understanding of academic content knowledge, critical thinking skills, written and verbal skills, and leadership skills. The manuscript highlighted and described some learning service activities as it relates to diversity awareness and described how service learning activities are integrated into various courses, such as the Accounting Club, Managerial Accounting Capstone, and Dana Scholars Capstone courses. Curriculum-based service learning projects should have clearly stated learning objectives and address a community need over a period of time, such as one semester. Reflections, classroom discussions, presentations, and writings can help the student learn from the community-based projects (Skinner and Chapman, 1999; Kraft, 1996).

Research findings suggest that there is a positive association between service learning and academic success. From the research, strengthening the relationship among the school, student, and the community was deemed to be important, including improving academic performance. The objective of this manuscript was to discuss a few service learning projects that has worked favorably in accounting and business courses to get students' active outside of the classroom. The authors hope these service learning experiences further their students' view of diversity as it relates to gender, sexual orientation, race, religion and socio-economic standing, among others. The authors hope to inspire others to do the same and perhaps form a more collaborative effort between and among programs and offices. Teaching should focus on enabling students to enter the workplace, including opportunities for personal development. The authors are hopeful to further equip their students for meaningful lives and to provide them with experiential learning that addresses diversity. Whether students are fund raising in order to complete worthy projects, or educating senior citizens, or mentoring colleagues, these all meet the basic criteria for service learning. The projects can vary in length and time commitment. Students continue their learning process by giving back to the community.

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