

service-learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Undergraduate



Experiences & Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

Service-learning is the core of our University's mission and Psychology. We were committed to continuing service-learning initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic. Building community is a key component to service. According to psychologists (Beilock, April 2020), building community is also key to weathering the pandemic.

This study evaluated students learning outcomes and attitudes toward service projects during the COVID-19 pandemic. We hypothesized students would view service-learning positively and demonstrate desired learning outcomes despite adaptations required due to COVID-19.

Introduction

Service-learning is a large component of students comprehending CUW's mission statement: Concordia University Wisconsin is a Lutheran Higher Education community committed to helping students develop in mind, body and spirit for service to Christ in the church and in the world. The CUW psychology department engages students in service-learning by making service projects a required part of their final course grades.

The fall 2020 study assessed students' learning outcomes and attitudes toward service-learning projects during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The introduction of service-learning to students during their first years in college is very beneficial for their overall college experience. This encompasses both their academic and social experiences. According to (Bringle, Hatcher, & Muthiah, 2010), service-learning:

- Was mediated by quality of educational experience
- Peer and faculty collaboration, personal and career relevance, as well as active learning were components of a high-quality experience
- Lead to higher intention to and actual enrollment in the following academic year

We hypothesized students would view service-learning positively and demonstrate desired learning outcomes despite adaptations required due to COVID-19.

Methods

The Fall 2020 study employed a cross-sectional, survey research design to investigate students' experiences. Fall 2020 students enrolled in psychology courses completed a 35 item self-report survey at the end of the semester via Qualtrics.

Student learning outcomes were assessed using the University's 5-point scale (Significantly Exceeds Expectations to Significantly Below Expectations) to measure Program Learning Outcome #3 – Ethical and Social Responsibility in a Diverse World and Global Learning Outcome #2 – Service and Global Citizenship.

Results

Results from 169 survey responses supported the hypothesis that students would view service-learning positively and demonstrate desired learning outcomes despite adaptations required due to COVID-19.

For example, 83% of students found their educational experience was enhanced by serving others during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, 93% of students found value in conducting a service-learning project despite not being able to directly interact with those they served.

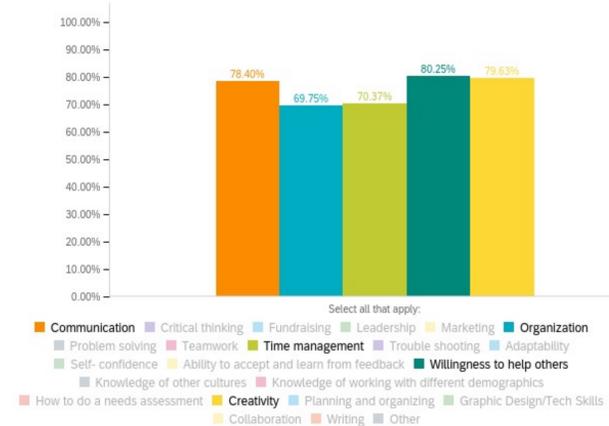
Program assessment of student learning supported the hypothesis that students would demonstrate desired learning outcomes. For instance, in upper-division courses for psychology majors and minors, out of the 41 students 41% of students significantly exceeded expectations, 34% exceeded expectations, 17% met expectations, and <7% fell below expectations.

In addition to these upper-division courses, 86% of the 16 surveyed students in a lower-division course agreed their educational experience was enhanced by serving others during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Perception of Gained Skills

According to (Kolb, Longest, & Jensen, 2013), service may benefit students by allowing them to work on their writing skills and fostered better planning and revision skills. With the perception of gained skills presented, students stated their assigned service project allowed them to gain skills of communication and organization.

Students were also surveyed about what skills they perceived to have gained while participating in their assigned service-learning project. The top 5 skills gained were communication, organization, time management, willingness to help others and creativity.



In addition to these gained skills, 82% of all surveyed students agreed that they improved their critical thinking skills through their service-learning projects.

By practicing these skills in their undergraduate courses, these students have had experience developing essential organizational skills that will benefit them in upper-division undergraduate classes, graduate school and/or work.

Contact Information

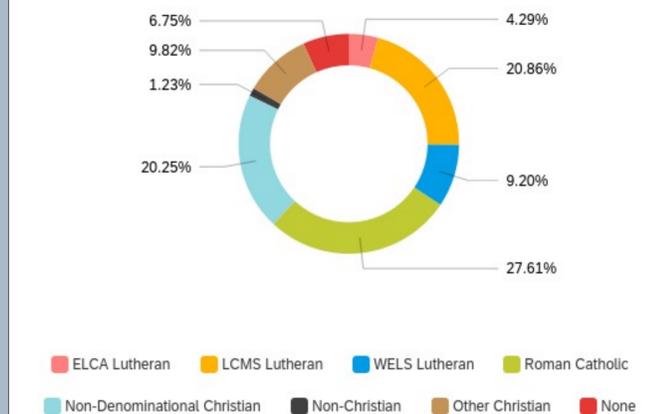
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For Christians, service allows us not just to learn about ourselves as individuals, but also to be reminded of our place within the community and our identity as Christ-Followers (Feenstra, 2011).

Student's Religious Affiliations



80% of all 169 surveyed students agreed their faith played a role in their participation in their service project.

Additionally, 86% of surveyed students for the fall 2020 semester agreed the faith components of their service project were important.

Students were also asked if they believed participation in a service-learning project enhanced their educational experience overall. 87% of all surveyed students for the fall 2020 semester agreed their service project enhanced their overall learning experience.

According Padgett, Keup & Pascarella (2013):

- Service enhances students' life-long learning orientations
- Projects that are academically challenging have greater benefits for life-long learning
- Service fosters meaningful learning objectives that encourage students' need for cognition, in particular integration of ideas, information, academic experiences, and co-curricular activities

The current findings indicate that integrating service-learning in undergraduate curricula is valuable, even in instances when the fullest experience is not possible.