High Impact Practices in Core Foundation Courses

Evaluation Report

Fall 2016

> Due to their positive associations with student learning and retention, certain undergraduate opportunities are designated "high-impact." High-Impact Practices (HIPs) share several traits: They demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback. As a result, participation in these practices can be life-changing (Kuh, 2008). NSSE founding director George Kuh recommends that institutions should aspire for all students to participate in at least two HIPs over the course of their undergraduate experience—one during the first year and one in the context of their major (**NSSE, 2007**).

Executive Summary

During the fall 2016 semester, 31 faculty members teaching Foundations core courses intentionally embedded High Impacted Practices (HIP) in their sections across both NY campuses. 26 of those faculty members signed up with both the experiential education and interdisciplinary studies offices. HIPs were delivered in 30 known sections – 19 Foundations of Inquiry and 11 Foundations of Scientific Process. 18 of these faculty members sent final reports of their experiences, along with samples of student work. All sections offered community based learning, and 16 sections offered service-learning specifically. Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (Learn and Serve America National Service Learning Clearinghouse). Service-learning can offer *direct service* to community members, *indirect service* to organizations providing direct service, or *advocacy* to address the root cause of social issues. Six faculty members offered advocacy assignments which connected course content with political issues discussed during the presidential election, and guided students to write elected representatives about issues of concern. Five faculty members promoted direct service, which partnered students with local non-profits to work with directly with community members in need. One faculty member guided students in an indirect service project that helped a non-profit partner improve services. Four faculty member guided their students to perform a combination of all three types of service-learning.

Classes engaging in direct and indirect service partnered with organizations like the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, Digital Grandparents, Fountain House, Many Babies, PS 354, The Institute for Career Development, AHRC, the Vocational Independence Program, The Hoboken Shelter, and University Settlement. Advocacy work was done in partnership with NYC Votes, a division in the NYC Campaign Finance Board, and NYIT, which had a series of voter registration and education events from September – November. "In these programs, field-based "experiential learning" with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life" (https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips).

Faculty and students evaluated their experience with HIPs (below), and a full compilation of faculty reports and samples of student work is available in the Interdisciplinary Studies office. The key takeaways from this pilot are: students and faculty find service-learning an effective teaching and learning approach; students become more connected to their peers, the faculty and the community; students developed skill sets they may not have developed in a traditional lecture class; and that service-learning is more work for those involved, but it makes the learning experience more rewarding and "real". As NYIT seeks to grow HIPs across the curriculum for all students, at all levels and in all majors, faculty must be supported through adequate training and students should be made aware of what HIP courses exist at the time of registration.

Student HIP Synopsis

37 Students from 5 courses completed the online service-learning evaluation (4 FCIQ / 1 FCSC) working with 8 community partners (The Hoboken Shelter, PS 354, University Settlement, St. Lucy's Soup Kitchen, Guild of St. Margaret, All Souls Church, NYIT, St. Philomena's Church). The FCSC class that responded was the only section to offer direct service; the other sections engaged in advocacy service-learning where they tied learning to the presidential election and wrote representatives on topics of concern.

Overall, service-learning had a positive impact on students': practical application of course theory; awareness of the needs and the problems in society and the factors that create them; ability to think about things in new ways; and on their experience at NYIT. More than 80% of students indicated as such in the evaluation. Class discussions, reflections, class readings, and conversations with community members had the most impact in making connections between course content and service. The top three skills students said they developed through service-learning were organization/planning, verbal communication, and critical thinking/problem solving. This feedback shows that service-learning as a HIP can help transform student learning, connect students to NYIT and the local community thereby helping with retention, and develop more civically engaged global citizens. This aligns well with NYIT's learning and achievement goals and the 2030 Strategic Plan http://www.nyit.edu/about/nyit_at_a_glance.

While only one student expressed disappointment with service-learning, the positive responses would likely be strengthened in the future with more faculty training and institutional support for HIP's. Again, Experiential Education and IS offices supported service-learning in core courses, but a reduction in EE staff made widespread and individual support to participating faculty, students and community partners across two campus locations difficult.

Assessment Data

% = Agree / Strongly Agree

81% This project allowed me to apply course content / theory to an experience outside the classroom.

76% I was able to apply experiences from the project site to the course content and class discussions.

73% Due to this project, I better understand the material presented in this course.

89% This Service-Learning challenged me to think about things in new ways.

71% As a way of learning, how did Service-learning compare with other traditional methods of learning (lectures, term papers, exams, reading, research, etc.)?

Most helpful in making the connection between the course materials and the experience with the community partner agency?
1. Class Discussions
2. Reflection
3. Tie: Class readings / Conversations with the community

60% (40% Neutral) Because of this experience I feel a greater sense of responsibility to my community.

81% Through this experience I attained a greater awareness of the needs and the problems in society and the factors that create them.

86% Service-Learning experiences can make a positive contribution to my NYIT experience.

60% Experiential Education staff were involved in my Service-Learning project.

49% (40% Neutral) Experiential Education staff provided support throughout the semester.

58% My placement(s) provided me with appropriate supervisory assistance.

Top three skills developed:
1. Organization/planning
2. Verbal communication
3. Critical thinking / problem solving

69% I would recommend this or these placement site(s) to future Service-Learning students.

Comments, questions and concerns about the student Service-Learning experience

- It felt really nice to give back in any way I can
- I loved engaging in this new method of learning.
- I loved working with the kids at P.S. 354 they are smart great kids who made me see a lot about today's kids that I didn't know about.
- This service learning project had really allowed me to see that there are schools that don't have all the learning curriculum needed and I hope my assistance helped them.
- The service learning had a tenuous connection to the class work.
- Nice
- I believe it was very useful to further understand how exactly the elections work to have more young adults aware of what's going on.
- Overall the service learning experience was a good one. I learned a lot from the events and from the views and experiences of others. I also sharpened my critical thinking skills.
- I disliked it strongly
- The whole service learning was nice until you got to the journals. The journals required you to write 4-5 pages about you visits to the events. The events were really short and repetitive so I really don't know how you can write so much on something so small. I honestly think the journals should be removed.

Faculty HIP Synopsis
Faculty were notified that FCIQ and FCSC courses would include service-learning at the summer core training session about 6 weeks before the semester began. HIP's were explained at this session and faculty were offered ongoing support from the International and Experiential Education and the IS offices. They were provided pre-arranged S-L projects associated with the presidential elections designed to enhance student understanding of the issues addressed by candidates during the elections and how those issues relate to content delivered in the courses. After weeks of class discussions where students drew connections between course content and their majors to political platforms, students were asked to develop their own platforms and share them in writing to their elected officials. This type of service-learning is called Advocacy Service-Learning. Other courses had options to partner with area non-profits to support public work initiatives like tutoring senior citizens in tech literacy, proposing new program models for organizations, and consulting with small non-profit startups on how best to market their efforts. These types of service are called Direct and Indirect Service-Learning.

Overall, the inclusion of service-learning as a HIP was effective for students, faculty and community partners. It enhanced faculty's ability to communicate core competencies of the subject matter taught, was beneficial to the community, and added to our students' social and emotional growth. Service-learning made faculty feel more personally fulfilled and helped them deepen relationships with students and community members.

Most faculty chose to include service-learning in their courses because it was required and they wanted to enhance student learning and encourage civic responsibility. While several faculty noted that it required more time of them as teachers, it was worth the effort and most would use it as a teaching strategy in the future.

As we grow HIP's in NYIT courses, the following are needed:
1. More planning time with more support from Experiential Education and possibly CTL is needed. *"When adding service learning to courses, faculty teaching those courses should be given more notice than just prior to the semester beginning. Planning a project that fits the needs of the class as well as the instructor's schedule, syllabus, and abilities could be very time consuming, especially if the project involves advance communication with a site to visit."*

2. 80% of responding faculty are adjuncts and one noted the need for additional compensation given the increased effort service-learning tied to community partners required. One faculty member noted, *"I was glad to have the chance to include a service project, and several students told me it was their favorite part of the course, but it would be hard to replicate the process without additional support or compensation -- it took dozens of hours for me to identify a project site and manage the service project."*

3. Students must be notified at the time of course selection that community service is required. A faculty member indicated that, *"I really found the inclusion of a service learning component to be very helpful. While my course's specific focus was on civic engagement, I thought it helped the students to see firsthand and understand the importance of being knowledgeable and open-minded to ensure that they are active members of the community with a voice that needs to be heard. My only recommendation for this learning/teaching component is that it be advertised to students ahead of their enrollment in the course. I think that some of my students would have preferred some of the service activities in some of*

the other sections and vice versa. I believe that if students are able to have a choice it can make a difference in the enthusiasm and desire to participate."

4. Students who performed well in class, performed well in the service-learning projects. Those who struggled in class, struggled with service-learning. Most students who did not do well academically missed many classes or did not submit assignments. It is worth exploring how HIP's can reach those who are not generally performing well academically.

5. Not all faculty will embrace using service-learning as a pedagogical approach. It does require a commitment to teaching differently. One faculty member stated, "*I think service-learning can definitely be a good thing----for certain professors. Personally, I preferred the older syllabus I used, which (I think, at least for my purposes) went more deeply into the subject of the course: Critical Inquiry. If service-learning is required in the future, I will, of course, go along with it. But I would hope NYIT would make it optional, so that faculty who really feel it adds to their plans for a given course can enthusiastically embrace it, and faculty who prefer to teach another way can retain the academic freedom to do so.*"

Another faculty member said, "*I value service learning and think it should be an essential part of college education. But, in this specific instance to unify all the FCSC sections, we all required students to write a letter to a political figure. Most students were not engaged. It was just another assignment. When I asked about it, many said they were not interested in politics, or did not wish to engage in this sort of activity, etc. Only a couple of students in the class of 30 felt they learned and grew. What appealed to the students, and what was lacking in this assignment, was having a choice in the activity. Doing something outside of the classroom, like a field trip with a required written assignment was met with a lot of enthusiasm, especially if they had options about where they could go to allow them to follow their own interests.*"

These comments illustrate the need for more training in HIP's and experiential education. At the start of the fall semester, the Experiential Education staff was reduced to one person providing guidance to faculty on both campuses. With increased support from both the Experiential Education office and the CTL, faculty can explore ways in which HIP's can be developed in alignment with their expertise, teaching preferences and available time commitment.

10 faculty completed evaluations
8 Adjuncts / 2 FT faculty – Average 11 years in higher education

<u>% = Agreed/Strongly Agreed</u>
80% Service-learning enhanced my ability to communicate the core competencies of the subject matter I teach.

80% The service helped my students see the relevance of the course subject matter.

70% The service aspect of this course helped my students see how the subject matter they learned can be applied to everyday life.

60% The service my students completed was beneficial to the college.

90% The service my students completed was beneficial to the community.

80% The service my students completed added to their social and emotional growth.

60% Disagreed / 40% Neutral The service my students completed interfered with their other academic responsibilities.

80% Using service-learning required more of my time as a teacher.

70% Service-learning was worth my effort.

70% I will use service-learning as a teaching strategy with future courses.

70% Service-learning helps fulfill NYIT's mission to: Provide career-oriented professional education; Give all qualified students access to opportunity; Support applications-oriented research that benefits the larger world

50% Agree / 50% Neutral There should be more courses offering service-learning at NYIT.

50% Agree / 30% Neutral I am satisfied with the assistance I received with the mechanics of service-learning (identifying placement sites, follow-up with students, etc.).

What were your reasons for deciding to teach a course using service-learning as a teaching method? (Please check all that apply)
Top Three:
1. Required – 60%
2. To enhance student learning – 50%
3. To encourage civic responsibility – 40%

Teaching a course that incorporates service-learning has affected the following (please check all that apply):
Top Three:
1. My own personal sense of fulfillment – 70%
2. My relationship with my students – 60%
3. My relationship with community partners – 50%

References

Kuh, G. D. (2008). High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

National Survey of Student Engagement (2007). Experiences that matter: Enhancing student learning and success—Annual Report 2007. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.