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An Evaluation of DLSU Students' Service-Learning Experience with Partner Communities

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Abstract: Service-Learning, as a teaching and learning pedagogy, is a curricular form of social engagement where student link active service with learning outcomes, and at the same time, enhances the students' civic education. The De La Salle University incorporates service-learning principles in its vision and mission as well as in its strategic plans where all undergraduate and graduate academic programs are required to have Service-Learning.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the Service-Learning experience of students in selected courses by describing the connection between learning and service objectives of the course and explain how the students' service experience enhance their social awareness and at the same time contribute in addressing community needs.

A mixed method approach using post service-learning evaluation survey was employed. The surveys were conducted among the 268 undergraduate and graduate students who took pre-selected courses with Service-Learning during the last two terms of Academic Year 2018-2019.

Results of study revealed the students' positive perception of their Service-Learning experience. Students saw a clear link between service activities with the course content and objectives. That through service-learning, the students gain better understanding of social realities and are able to develop and implement project or activities to address community issues and needs. Students felt relevant and happy because they have contributed something to the community. And, that service-learning sparked their interest to do volunteer work in the future.

Keywords: Service-Learning; Student's Service-Learning Evaluation



1. INTRODUCTION

Most higher education institutions have focused its curriculum and programs in producing graduates who possess civic-minded attributes. Bringle and Hatcher (2007) believe that a civic-minded graduate is a person who has completed a course of study (e.g., bachelor's degree), has the capacity and desire to work with others to achieve public goods and have a commitment to act upon a sense of responsibility as a member of that community.

One experiential form of educational approaches that is effective in inspiring civic-mindedness among the students is the use of service-learning as a teaching and learning tool. Service-Learning is defined as a

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

As stipulated in the De La Salle University (DLSU) Strategic Plan of AY 2010-2011 until AY 2018-2022, all colleges are required to integrate Service-Learning in all its undergraduate and graduate academic degree programs. In response to this mandate and in support to the university vision-mission, the Center for Social Concern and Action (COSCA) formed the Service-Learning Program (SLP). COSCA, being the social development arm of DLSU, is deeply engaged in Lasallian social formation and engagement. It is tasked to coordinate with various departments to help faculty and students implement their service-learning activities.

All social engagement activities in the university, including Service-Learning, are guided by

the Lasallian Reflection Framework (LRF): a continuous process of seeing-experiencing (Masid-Danas), analyzing-reflecting (Suri-Nilay), and acting-committing (Taya-Kilos) in order to manifest Lasallian core values of faith, zeal for service, and communion in mission. Inspired by this, service-learning activities engaged students to better understand community situation, analyze its root problem, and contribute in addressing community needs through meaningful service and learning activities.

Through the course of its implementation, COSCA-SLP has helped in the identification of community partners for the class; conduct of classroom orientation to prepare the students for their service activity; facilitate faculty and community partners' capacity building, reflection sessions, research, monitoring and evaluation activities. The students' course requirement, knowledge and skills are matched with that of the needs of community partners. With this, students were able to contribute in addressing these needs through various projects related to education, environment, health, organizational development, livelihood, and among other initiatives.

However, in spite of the university mandate, feedbacks from several faculty members revealed that some of them are still reluctant to invest the extra time that teaching service-learning courses entails. There is also a dearth of information that will describe how the students who took service-learning has made a difference to the communities where they have rendered service to and how these experiences have affected their perception about the poor and marginalized sectors of our society.

This research intends to evaluate the Service-Learning experience of students in selected courses by describing the connection between learning and service objectives of the course and how the students' service experience enhance their social awareness and at the same time contribute in addressing community needs. Specifically, this study aims to: 1) Describe and evaluate students' Service-Learning experiences in ECONDEV (Development Economics), CSRGOVE (Corporate Social



Responsibility and Governance), PROGDEVT (Program Development) and BUS560M (Business Leadership, Ethics and CSR) courses in terms of learning and service objectives. 2) Analyze if Service-Learning has been effective in increasing social awareness and in addressing community needs. 3) Explain the students' feelings and perceptions of their experience with the poor and marginalized sectors.

This study will contribute to understanding the educational value of course-based service among DLSU faculty and administrators. As a result of this research, faculty may not only gain a broader understanding of how learning takes place, how it positively affected the students, but also be more likely to support service-learning if they see evidence documenting its educational value. The empirical evidence of this study will support service-learning usefulness and value among the students.

2. METHODOLOGY

A mixed method approach in data collection and analysis were employed through the administration of the survey questionnaire to the students involved in service-learning program. Using a Likert Scale, the respondents were asked to rate each statement describing if they strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Results of the survey were tabulated and interpreted.

The four courses with Service-Learning component that were offered during the time of study are comprised of five (5) sections of CSRGOVE, one (1) section of ECONDEV, one (1) section of PROGDEVT and two (2) sections of BUS560M. Copies of course syllabi and selected students' reflection papers were read to supplement the survey.

A total of 268 undergraduate and graduate students were surveyed. This is approximately 10% of the total students who took COSCA facilitated service-learning activities within the terms covered. Of 268 students, 147 are in their third year level, 67

in their fourth year level, two on their fifth level and 52 are graduate students.

3. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY AND DISCUSSION

This section describes the students' rating in each of the statement as well as their corresponding comments.

Statement 1. I felt that we participated in the Service-Learning activities not only because it is a requirement but also because we saw the relevance of serving others.

Majority of the respondents (57%) strongly agree and 43% agree that service-learning activities done in the course were related to the theories discussed in class. Their reasons for agreeing are exemplified in the following written comments, one CSRGOVE student states, "we were able to apply CSRGOVE concepts which helped the kind parents in the community; we also have a deeper understanding of the society". An ECONDEV student said, "it allows the students to apply knowledge learned in class to actual activity". A PROGDEVT student confirms that, "the program allowed us to interact with the community which strengthened my understanding of the course". A graduate student expresses that "the integration of theories, frameworks, and the Lasallian core values into the service-learning gives balance to MBA program".

As these excerpts illustrate, the students were able to relate classroom discussions with service activities they did with their partner community. Students felt the connection of their service experience with the academic course material which provided not only academic enhancement but also practical experience.

Statement 2. With the Service-Learning component, I was able to understand the course lectures and see how the course can be used to address community issues and needs.



Another outcome of the service-learning experience is the students' understanding that it is a venue to serve the less privileged sector of the Philippine society. About 70% of the respondents strongly believe that they felt that they participated in the service-learning activities not only because it is a requirement but also because they saw the relevance of serving others. Reasons for agreeing are exemplified in the following quotes, "(We) the students were encouraged looking for ways to help the community" a CSRGOVE student said. Another CSRGOVE student describes the experience by saying, "we were able to immerse and remind ourselves our purpose on serving others". A BUS560M student shares, "it can bring out the best in us and think (of ways) that is valuable to us and to other people".

This result proves that directly applying the course material to the service experience was instrumental and a good venue to serve people in need. Active participation in communities is valued as a source of professional and personal development.

Statement 3. With the Service-Learning component, I was able to understand the course lectures and see how the course can be used to address community issues and needs.

About 71% of the respondents strongly agree that service-learning helped them understand the course lectures and see how the course can be used to address community issues and needs. Reasons for agreeing are shown in the following comments, that through service-learning "the program was able to educate the students about social issues and propose programs to solve it" a CSRGOVE student who implemented livelihood projects for mothers in the community shares. Another CSRGOVE student expresses, "It (Service-Learning) pushed us students to think of projects appropriate and perfect for the community". A PROGDEVT student assigned in a non-governmental organization that caters to urban poor families describe her experience, "having students give insights on the community, provides a new perspective in helping them".

This illustrates that the students' skills and knowledge learned in class are instrumental in creating projects that will contribute in resolving community issues by responding to community needs.

Statement 4. I was able to learn and understand the real situation/social realities in the community through my Service-Learning activity

About 77% of the total respondents strongly agree that they were able to learn and understand the real situation/social realities in the community through their service-learning activity. Reasons for agreeing are illustrated in the following comments, a CSRGOVE student recognizes that "(Service-Learning) was very eye opening; you'll learn and realize a lot". Other CSRGOVE students share this, "it widens my perspective and idea about the community", and another student realizes that, "it opens the eyes of students to the reality outside school".

Immersing the students in the community through the seeing and experiencing process give meaning to the classroom lectures as they are exposed to situations in the community. Through interactions they become aware of the poverty situation, its root causes and ending it with realization that as a student they can do something to contribute to the upliftment of these marginalized groups.

Statement 5. The Service-Learning activity positively changed my perception /impression about the disadvantaged people.

About 78% of the total respondents strongly agree that the service-learning activity positively changed their perception/impression about the disadvantaged people. A graduate student who had service-learning activity with the persons deprived of liberty (inmates) in the Bureau of Corrections suggest that service learning can help not only to break down students' stereotypes and prejudices but also to realize that merely gathering further information before making judgments can be



important. The student shares "it (Service-Learning) opened us into a different perspective regarding people who are deprived of liberty", another commented that "it gave us a paradigm shift about the New Bilibid Prison (NBP)".

Statement 6. I felt appreciated by my contribution in the community and it made me feel relevant and happy

About 79% of the total respondents strongly agree that they felt appreciated by their contribution in the community and it made them feel relevant and happy. Reasons for agreeing are the following quotes from the CSRGOVE students who had service-learning activities in the urban poor communities of Manila, "(We) the students were able to socialize, learn new things, and help people in need. More importantly, the students were able to share knowledge and happiness to others". Another student shares, "A sense of fulfillment and satisfaction to help marginalized people in the Philippines".

This indicates that students have shown increases in positive feelings and mental health. According to an article in Current Health 1 magazine, "[i]n a recent survey by Prudential Insurance Company, the number-one reason that young people named for volunteering was that it made them feel good." (University of Michigan).

Statement 7. I felt satisfied to share my knowledge and skills to other people who are in need.

About 80% of the respondents felt satisfied to share their knowledge and skills to other people who are in need. Reasons for agreeing are described in the quotes from CSRGOVE students, "it created a venue for students to share their knowledge and resources to the community outside DLSU", "being able to interact with other people and to educate each other" and, "we were able to reach out to the less fortunate and put the skills learned to good use...", and "there was an interaction between the partner organizations and the students which benefitted both parties."

Sharing knowledge and skills is very important in students' personal and professional growth. It can foster vision in others and strengthen interpersonal relationships with people. When students share knowledge with others, they not only educate others but more importantly it helps deepen their own knowledge and instills what they already know. Sharing knowledge with those less fortunate is a great service. It gives an opportunity to think about others and not just oneself.

Statement 8. The Service-Learning sparked my interest and desire to do volunteer work in the future

About 76% of the respondents strongly agree that service-learning sparked their interest and desire to do volunteer work in the future which means that there is a likelihood that they will do volunteer work after graduation. A graduate student suggested that the experience in servicing the persons deprived of liberty should be sustained, "Service Learning in NBP should be continued since it is an important part of learning". A CSRGOVE student likewise believes that "it helps in the invitation of volunteerism in order for us to be better engaged in society".

Volunteerism can lead to increased care for others and a desire to cooperate and get involved in positive ways, even among those who had previously exhibited antisocial tendencies (Smith 1999 cited in University of Michigan). Another major benefit of volunteering is the feeling of social connectedness that appears to be waning in our increasingly segmented society. Many students have reported an increased sense of social responsibility, and a subsequent desire to "give back" to the communities from which they have come (University of Michigan).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Service-Learning as a teaching and learning pedagogy engages academic programs to active service to the community. It creates a variety of experiential learning opportunities for students such in the case of those who joined ECONDEV, PROGDEVT, CSRGOVE and BUS560M. Based on



the students' experience the course objectives of service-learning activities focus on the importance of service with the community and lessons of civic-mindedness. It is a course base service experience that produces meaningful service and outcomes related to the course material as attested by the students involved in this study. Students were able to use their learning in class and see its relevance, application and connections through the projects they did for and with the community.

Using the Lasallian Reflection Framework as guide in doing service-learning by immersing oneself in the situation of the community where poverty, sickness, abuse, deprivation and neglect happens is an eye opening experience for the students. Students became more aware of the social situation and were able to see and experience in real life these poor and marginalized sectors. Through analysis and reflection students were able to understand the root causes of the problem and how these are being addressed or disregarded by people in authority. Students' interaction with the community positively changed their impression towards them and made them realized that students like them should contribute towards uplifting the lives of the poor. Sharing their knowledge and skills through the implementation of need-based projects made them feel valued and relevant. They even signified their interest in continuing on what they have started by expressing their intention to volunteer in the future. With this as evidence, service-learning experience has promoted civic-mindedness among students and even beyond the school setting.

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