

Student Evaluation of Fully Online Service-Learning on SDGs during the Covid19 Pandemic

Plata, Sterling and Moredo, Peter Jayson

De La Salle University
sterling.plata@dlsu.edu.ph

Abstract:

The COVID19 pandemic intensified the call to make education more relevant to the students by creating opportunities to improve themselves and society. Some universities adopted Service-Learning aligned with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to help students hone their life skills and develop values through civic engagement. During the pandemic, universities shifted to eService-Learning (E-SL) or online Service-Learning. This has been the case and response of the De La Salle University (DLSU) – Manila. Prior studies on E-SL have described the process of shifting to this new delivery system and have compared the types of E-SL. However, research on student evaluation of E-SL seems limited and is mostly conducted in western countries. This paper describes the shift from traditional Service-Learning to E-SL. It also reports the results of the student evaluation of a full online Service-Learning experience during the Covid19 pandemic. An online evaluation form composed of four parts was sent to students through Google Form. The results showed that the students acknowledged the role of E-SL in the process of understanding SDGs, learning collaboration and teamwork, and understanding civic responsibility.

Key Words: online Service-Learning; student evaluation; SDGs; Purposive Communication; e Service-Learning, E-SL.

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID19 pandemic intensified the call to make education more relevant to students by creating opportunities to improve themselves and society. Some universities have adopted e-service learning aligned with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to help students hone their life skills, develop values, and apply the skills learned in their academic programs. E-service learning (E-SL), according to Waldner et al. (2012), “occurs when the instructional component, the service component, or both are conducted online.” The authors also emphasize the advantage of this approach to engagement that is not limited by geographical location. In their review of studies on E-SL, Waldner et al. (2012) found four types:

Type 1. Service is onsite while teaching is full online.
Type 2. Teaching is on onsite while service is full online.
Type 3. Service and learning may be both partially online and onsite.

Type 4. Extreme E-SL is where both teaching and service are fully online.

Prior studies on E-SL have described the types of E-SL (Waldner et al., 2010; Waldner et al., 2012) and documented the process of shifting to this new delivery system (Strait & Sauer, 2004; Harris, 2017; Marcus et al., 2019). However, research on student evaluation of E-SL seems limited (Figgucio, 2020) and is mostly situated in other countries. This research attempts to fill this gap by reporting the student evaluation of the E-SL in Purposive Communication, a General Education course for all university students in the Philippines.

Context: Extreme E-SL in De La Salle University (DLSU)

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was already a proliferation of online learning and distance education in the Philippines. Some universities were offering

hybrid courses, but service learning remained face-to-face. However, with the announcement made by the World Health Organization (WHO) that COVID-19 was a pandemic, Philippine Higher Educational Institutions were forced to recalibrate their syllabus for online learning. De La Salle University (DLSU) planned the shift to E-SL immediately after the announcement as its response to the restrictions on movement brought about by the pandemic. The shift to E-SL is also part of the university's efforts to continue to fulfill its mission.

The Shift to Online Course Delivery of Purposive Communication

The context of this report is Purposive Communication. It is a General Education three-unit course required of all university students in the Philippines. The course description before the pandemic is shown below:

This course, PURPOSIVE COMMUNICATION, hones the ability of students to ethically, effectively, and professionally communicate, through the strategic use of various communicative forms, with different multicultural audiences and for different purposes in various modes. This course specifically develops the students' ability to use their communication skills and to use technology for civic participation in support of UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The course is anchored to an interdisciplinary approach and outcomes-based education (OBE). In addition, the process-approach and the genre-based approach to purposive communication will be used to teach this course.

The process of shifting to full online is enumerated below:

1. The syllabus was revised based on online policies of DLSU. First, "online" was added to the course description. Second, the learning outcomes were also reduced from five to four because of the university policy of independent study for weeks 9 and 13. The learning plan was also revised to inform the students about synchronous and asynchronous learning using Canvas.
2. The course was moved to Canvas, the learning management system of DLSU. This process


included creating modules, assignments, grading systems, and collaborative systems for group work. Students were grouped into SDGs through the People tool of Canvas. The SDG number assigned to each group was the theme for all their outputs in the course.

3. The Library Orientation was changed to an online Information Literacy session for week 2. This was handled by the DLSU Libraries. There were two synchronous sessions, and modules were uploaded in Canvas for asynchronous modality.
4. Service learning shifted to full online. It is worth noting that the Center for Social Action (COSCA) of DLSU was the partner of Purposive Communication in its service learning.

Extreme E-SL in Purposive Communication

The process of extreme E-SL based on the best practices of Waldner et al. (2012) is outlined below:

- A. Design
 - a. The Service-Learning component of Purposive Communication included a face-to-face meeting with partner organizations called the Advocacy Forum. The shift to E-SL meant conducting the Advocacy Forum through a Zoom meeting. In this meeting, partner organizations were given 15 minutes to talk about their advocacies and their campaign needs. Students were grouped into three members before the Forum. Each group would choose which NGO to help after listening to all the talks of all partner representatives. An advocacy planner was included in the syllabus, so that students were prepared during the Advocacy Forum.
 - b. The reflection prompt was also revised to match the full online design of E-SL.
 - c. The design also considered the core components of service learning (Center for Community Engagement, Learning, and Leadership, 2020).
 - i. Reciprocity. This means that students and partner organizations are in a win-win situation. Purposive

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- Communication, through the help of COSCA, established guidelines for acceptable service projects both for students and NGOs.
- ii. Serving a community-defined need. The online Advocacy Forum was the mechanism to ensure that specific needs were presented by NGO representatives.
 - iii. Working toward the public good. NGOs were chosen based on the extent of their service to the public.
 - iv. Integrated learning. Purposive Communication E-SL was designed to grade three major requirements: advocacy plan, advocacy campaign material, reflection, and advocacy letter.
 - v. Asset-based. COSCA trained partner organizations to include in their presentation how they were localizing the SDGs and their strengths. They were also trained to mention existing and new projects that students might be able to promote. The partner organizations also shared a virtual tour of the community they were serving to provide better appreciation and understanding among students of the current situation and actual condition of the community they were serving.
 - vi. Reflective. COSCA created a reflection sheet based on the Lasallian Reflection Framework or LRF. It is the university-wide lens used to reflect on all social engagement endeavors including service-learning. Research shows that it is necessary for students to critically reflect on any

service-learning activity (Calvert, 2015; Guthrie & Mckracken, 2014). Reflection allows students to deeply analyze their own transformation in terms of beliefs, perceptions, and values.

Below is the GEPCOMM eService-Learning Reflection Prompt:

SEE-EXPERIENCE (*Masid-Danas*)

- What was your initial impression or expectation before proceeding to the Online Advocacy Forum?
- What issues did you observe in the Advocacy Forum/ presentations of the center/organization/community during the Advocacy Forum?
- What did you feel about the situation of your selected center/organization/community as shared in the Advocacy Forum?

ANALYSIS-REFLECTION (*Suri-Nilay*)

a) **Academic Enhancement**

- What specific elements/principles of GEPCOMM were related to the advocacy plan I prepared?
- How was I able to apply my skill, perspective, or concept related to GEPCOMM?
- How did this experience reinforce my prior understanding of GEPCOMM?

b) **Personal Growth**

- How did this experience make me feel (positively and/or negatively)?
- In what ways did I experience difficulties (e.g., interacting with others, accomplishing tasks), and what personal characteristics contributed to the difficulties (e.g., skills, abilities, perspectives, attitudes, tendencies, knowledge)? In what ways did I succeed or do well in this situation (e.g., interacting with others, accomplishing tasks, handling difficulties) and what personal

characteristics helped me to be successful (e.g., skills, abilities, perspectives, attitudes, tendencies, knowledge)?

- How did this situation challenge or reinforce my values, beliefs, convictions (e.g., my sense of right and wrong, my priorities, my judgments)?
- c) **Lasallian Values** (Faith, Service, Communion in Mission)
- What specific elements of the Lasallian values were related to this experience?
 - How was I able to apply a value, perspective, or concept related to the Lasallian values?
 - How did this experience challenge or reinforce my prior understanding of these values?

COMMITMENT-ACTION (*Taya-Kilos*)

- a) **Academic Enhancement**
- How was my service-learning activity (Advocacy Plan/ Project/Activity) with the partner organization related to the GEPCOMM course I am taking?
 - Was I able to apply the theories I learned in GEPCOMM to the Advocacy Plan/ Project/Activity I did for the partner organization? How?
 - Did the service-learning project (Advocacy Plan/ Project/Activity) address community needs? Why? How?
- b) **Personal Growth**
- What did I learn most from this experience (Advocacy Forum)?
 - After this experience, what did I learn about myself?
 - What additional skills did I develop from my service-learning activity?
- c) **Lasallian Values**
- Is the project I did with the community sustainable? Can this be replicated by the community on their own?
 - What did I learn about the Lasallian values? How was I able to apply them?
 - What will I do in light of these values?

B. Technology

- a. Partner organizations were trained how to use Zoom.
- b. They were also trained how to improve their presentations, so they would be able to meet the time limit while they described their organization and their advocacy campaign needs. They were also reminded to include in their presentation the SDGs that they supported. In this way, students would be able to choose the organization that resonated with them.
- c. The Lasallian Core Curriculum Office provided a modest connectivity support for partner organizations that presented during the Advocacy Forum.

C. Communication

- a. The students were required to communicate their advocacy plan to their partner organization for feedback and approval.
- b. The students were also asked to audit the social media pages of the organization they chose, so that they would know what campaign assets were already there.
- c. The students were reminded that they were not supposed to raise funds for the organization they chose. They should focus on advocacy communication materials such as infographics, AVP, or PowerPoint Presentations.

This paper aims to examine the efficacy of E-SL by asking students to evaluate the design, communication, and technology used in their online service learning. It also aims to uncover students' perception of the benefits of the E-SL and the challenges they have encountered.

2. METHODOLOGY

Participants. There were 253 students who responded to the invitation to complete the online Service-Learning evaluation form sent through GoogleForm. Almost 70% of the respondents were first year students.

Data Collection. An E-SL evaluation form was composed

of four parts. The first part was composed of nine questions with three items each for technology, design, and communication to uncover students' assessment of these areas. Options were on a Likert scale. The second part asked students to choose the three most important lessons they gained from the E-SL. There were nine options, and students were asked to choose three. The next part asked students to choose the top two challenges they faced during the E-SL. The last part asked students to suggest ways to improve E-SL.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Technology. More than half (58.1%) of the participants strongly agreed that they were able to complete the service-learning project and to collaborate with the partner organizations smoothly through technology. It is worth noting that there were four technology tools used to communicate with partner organizations. First, Zoom was used for the Advocacy Forum. Second, COSCA created a Google Folder for student submissions of advocacy materials. Third, the students communicated with partner organizations through emails in case they needed to clarify some issues. Lastly, all modules to prepare students for service learning were uploaded in Canvas. Assessment and grading were also done in Canvas.

Design. Almost 70% of the participants strongly agreed that they were able to understand the situation of the partner community even without visiting them. In addition, 70% of the participants strongly agreed that the design of the E-SL helped them to analyze and reflect on the causes of the problems of the community while 60% of the respondents were satisfied with their E-SL experience. These results suggest the importance of a pedagogical design that ensures reciprocity as well as targeted service based on the actual needs of the partner organizations (Center for Community Engagement, Learning, and Leadership, 2020).

Communication. More than 80% of the students agreed that there was a smooth communication between them and partner organizations while 92% strongly agreed that they were able to communicate well with their teachers. Finally, 87% of the participants agreed that they were able to communicate smoothly with COSCA. This showed the effectiveness and efficiency of the different communication platforms used in the implementation of eSL.

Moreover, the respondents chose the top three lessons they learned from E-SL: understanding social issues, collaboration and teamwork, and civic responsibility. They also shared their appreciation for the opportunity to help the partner organizations through eSL experience. Students also reported that they felt good to be able to contribute in their own little ways in attaining the SDGs.

However, they also reported some problems. More than half of the participants reported connectivity and technical issues as challenges in E-SL. This result had a domino effect because a great number of respondents shared other challenges they encountered in doing E-SL: 1) efficiency of working with their group mates; 2) timely response from the partner organizations during inquiries; and 3) limited engagement with their selected partner organizations. These results suggest that the respondents found E-SL valuable despite the challenge of internet connectivity in their area. Finally, the respondents also suggested ways to improve E-SL. First, they suggested more options for partner organizations, so all the 17 SDGs would be addressed. Second, they also suggested more ways to interact with partners. Lastly, some suggested more interactive seminars and virtual tours. These results open doors for improvement to make E-SL more responsive to the challenges of students and partner organizations.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted to evaluate the extreme E-SL in Purposive Communication through a student survey. The results showed that the students acknowledged the benefits of a full online service learning. In addition, the technology, design, and communication mechanisms of the E-SL outweighed the challenge of an unstable internet in the country. Future research may focus on a different design where more partner organizations representing the 17 SDGs would be invited as partners as suggested by some students.

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