



People, Plants, and Puppies: Developing Service Learning Opportunities Across the Curriculum

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Project Background

➤ Agribusiness/Agricultural Engineering Technology

- Students participated in a week long travel study experience in Guatemala. Focused on service projects for impoverished people.

➤ Agriculture Education

- Students worked at an urban farm located in a nearby metropolitan of over 500,000 population. Focused on building/improving community gardening facilities.

➤ Veterinary Science

- Students participate in veterinary spa days and mock clinics which provided opportunities to help local shelters as well as university staff and faculty.
- Students are required to complete a minimum of 40 hours career experience. Many of these hours are completed acting as a volunteer within various animal-related businesses or organizations.

Existing Literature on Service Learning in Higher Education Course Work

- Service Learning...
 - Utilized to allow students to practice academics concepts, knowledge, or skills in a way that benefits or improves societal issues
 - Simultaneously enhances academic knowledge, builds the individual's citizenship skills, and improves community issue(s) (Sherrod, 2005; Yates & Younis, 1999; Youniss & Yates, 1997)

- Service Learning in Agriculture Courses...
 - Often utilized in agriculture courses at the secondary and post-secondary levels in a variety of contexts (Ricketts & Ricketts, 2016; Woodward & Rudd, 2016)

- Service Learning Enhanced...
 - Reflection on the project is key to increasing personal growth and personal self-efficacy (Bird, Bowling, & Ball, 2018; Sanders, Oss, and McGeary, 2016)

Research Methodology

- Qualitative Research Method
 - Exploratory multi-case study methodology
 - Data gathered from student interviews, faculty perceptions, course evaluations, observations, and journals
 - Analysis using the constant comparative method for common themes

- Essential Research Question:
 - “What are the lived experiences of students at a small regional university’s agriculture program who participate in agriculture course service learning projects?”

- Subjects:
 - Agriculture Business and Agricultural Engineering collaboration: Students studying any major on campus are encouraged to participate in the Service Learning trip to Guatemala
 - Agriculture Education: Students participate in a voluntary service learning experience in an urban setting
 - Veterinary Science: Students participate in internships and events on campus

Findings: Agriculture Business and Agriculture Engineering

- Service Learning Trip to Guatemala for 6 years running
- Collaboration between Ag Business and Ag Engineering faculty



- “The activities and events that I experienced and participated in during this travel-study were absolutely amazing and so eye opening. They helped me to see a whole new perspective on life. I was hands on with the community and it was very eye opening and I am grateful for this opportunity and experience.”-Student quote from trip evaluation

Findings: Agriculture Business and Agriculture Engineering



- “ I liked the service part of this trip. Being able to do charity work to help those in the community. It was something I needed to experience and I was grateful too.”-Student quote from trip evaluation

Findings: Agriculture Business and Agriculture Engineering

- Faculty Findings
 - Trip cost has ranged from \$1600-\$2000
 - Recruitment has been more difficult as costs have risen
 - Another major recruitment barrier has been parental concern about students traveling to Latin American countries
 - Additional pre-trip planning and information sessions have been required to overcome some of these barriers
 - Trip opportunity has been an effective recruiting tool as students are looking for ways to make a difference in the world.



Findings: Agriculture Education

- Service Learning experience at nearby urban farm in major metropolitan area
- First year was voluntary; will become requirement of teaching methods course
- “This was truly an eye opening experience. Until I came to [urban farm name], I never knew how little some people have...especially when it comes to food... .”-Student quote from interview



Findings: Agriculture Education

- “It’s amazing to see what impact [people] can have on communities using agriculture and education about producing food... .”-Student quote from observation



- Faculty Findings

- Cost of immersive urban experience: ~\$300 for supplies
- Students had positive experience, in large part due to an engaging and entertaining host!
- Students shared their experiences by word of mouth and via social media, which helped grow popularity of the experience for future students.

Findings: Veterinary Science

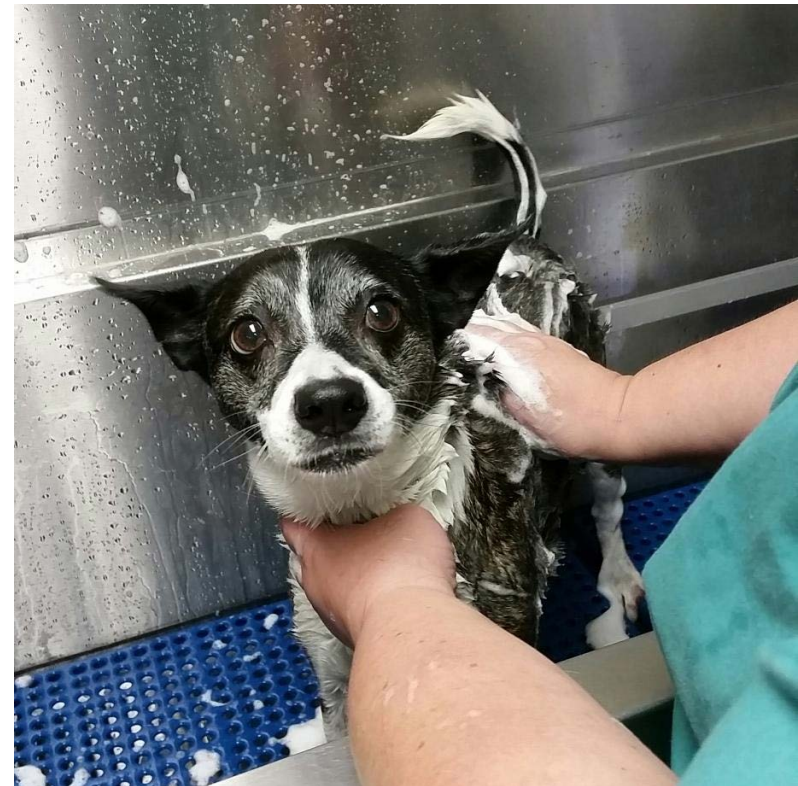
- “The program has helped us make animals more adoptable while allowing us to save a lot of money, which can be used to further assist and care for more animals.” – Quote from local shelter president



Findings: Veterinary Science

■ Faculty Findings

- Difficulty in scheduling large blocks of time suitable for these types of projects
- Students ask specifically for these types of learning experiences even if they occur on weekends or during breaks
- Students enjoy the opportunity to develop their professional communication skills while interacting with clients
- Donations from events help to offset costs



Findings: Common Themes

- Sense of purpose and making an impact
- Challenges of applying theoretical learning in the real world
- Enhanced global awareness

Conclusions and Implications

➤ Agriculture Business

- Students learn about global trade issues and implications for international business as well as global poverty issues.
- International development issues can be shown through these types of experiences.
- Faculty focus on the need to globalize our agribusiness students and how a trip like this can connect to AGEC 335 International Ag Trade and AGRI International Food and Fiber

➤ Agriculture Engineering

- Students understand challenges associated with providing infrastructure for basic needs in developing countries (such as housing and clean water)
- Eye opening to students how engineering codes vary from country to country.
- AGET students can be better prepared for the industry when they understand global issues firsthand.

Conclusions and Implications

➤ Agriculture Education

- Provided an “eye opening” multicultural experience by exposing students to communities and situations they had never experienced first hand
- Public school based agriculture education teachers must be prepared to work with a variety of learners. The urban farm experience can bring students “face to face” with the reality of poverty. More importantly, it can show how agriculture education can be used to combat poverty

➤ Veterinary Science

- Students are able to develop a wide range of skills such as client communication and time management while working in a real-world environment
- Knowledge learned in the classroom is able to be reinforced while students build confidence performing various animal health procedures and diagnostic tests
- These types of projects may help students become more familiar with aspects of their career path that they may not have considered before allowing them to make better decisions when entering the workforce

Recommendations

- Experiential learning activities require buy in from faculty and students.
- Start planning early if you plan to utilize global trips and expect the unexpected.
- Find good NGO partners for local and global experiences.
- Experiences can be used to reinforce classroom teaching. The “real world” is a powerful teacher!

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Questions?
