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Civic Engagement and Service Learning Partnerships

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Civic Engagement and Service Learning Partnerships

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The practice and the need it addresses

Service Learning and Civic Engagement

Service learning is designed to promote volunteerism and civic awareness. **Community engagement in higher education** specifically involves university members partnering with local community organizations to address a need. Students engage with community partners through service learning and other activities (Moore & Mendez, 2014). Service learning is a practice that connects new knowledge and social responsibility through active learning (Benson & Younkin, 1996).

Our community partner was Silver State Service Dogs, founded and directed by the first and last authors for the benefit of UNLV students. Our students were members of our undergraduate Abnormal Psychology courses (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002). We partnered with the RSO UNLV Society for Service Dogs, which was enormously helpful in procuring space and resources for class projects.

The social issue being addressed is suicidality and trauma recovery among veterans, first responders and private citizens.

Students were required to contribute 10 hours of community service and relate our subject matter to their service (Stark, 2016)

For example, PTSD is a common disorder for which individual sufferers request service dogs, and was a focus of a lecture and research by the students.

In the first half of the course, students **compiled bibliographies** from the literature regarding service dog effectiveness and service dog laws. They then synthesized the information into **group annotated bibliographies and group presentations**. An end-of-semester **letter of reflection** was required of all students (Gillis & Ryder, 2016).

Our service project was a student-run Fall Festival for Service Dog Awareness held on the grounds of UNLV.

Evidence this practice benefits UNLV Students

Student Reflections

“My favorite part of this experience was actually hosting the event with my fellow classes and engaging with other students. We were able to get a lot of donations for the Silver State Service Dogs, and it was fun to do so. We had games, giveaways, and baked goods. Aside from the fundraiser, my knowledge on service dogs and their purpose has greatly expanded. I’ve learned more about the regulations and restrictions as well as their uses.”

“Being able to participate in the Fall Festival that Dr. Diane Villa set up for us to present and talk about SSSD as well as the larger picture of service dogs was extremely rewarding to me.”

“Researching the topic helped me understand more about what service dogs are and what they are meant to be trained for. At the beginning of the semester, I was completely oblivious to what service dogs were meant to be trained for and how much they benefit their owners and improve their lives”

“The civic engagement project with Silver State Service Dogs allowed me to explore so much more. Just to briefly touch the surface of the knowledge I gained from this project, I learned about the human-animal bond as well as the effects of service dogs on all walks of life including people with learning disabilities, depression, and even veterans with PTSD. Not only are those just interesting topics in general, but they pair with the overall course of abnormal psychology too. Learning about how service animals can help with those aspects of abnormal psychology allowed me to apply my psychology knowledge to real-life scenarios.”

“My experience in civic engagement taught me a lot more about responsibility and patience. I learned how important it is to be able to communicate effectively with the communities around us”

“The Service Learning Program was very beneficial as a learning experience and as a social experience. I also had to step out of my comfort zone and use social media and reach out to others”



COLA
Student
Showcase

Resources and where to find them

To plan the Fall Festival we met with:

The Office of Student and Community Engagement who sponsored the pilot program and ran ongoing workshops

The Service Learning Department representatives

Rian Satterwhite: rian.satterwhite@unlv.edu
<https://www.unlv.edu/service/servicelearning>
<https://www.unlv.edu/service/unlvvolunteers>

Psychology Subject librarian to develop assignments and workshops –Samantha Godbey
samantha.godbey@unlv.edu

Student Union and Event Services– To reserve a area for the festival -

<https://www.unlv.edu/eventservices>

Because we were partnered with a RSO we were able to use the SORCE room - Student Organization Resource Center (SORCE) –
<https://www.unlv.edu/sia/student-orgs/sorce>

The Fall Festival had two themes

1) **Disseminating the newly gathered information** at the festival (students stood behind banners announcing their topics and “Ask Me” to encourage dialog among attendees).

2) **Fundraising to support service dog clients.**

The ten hours of service were attained through planning and attending the festival. Students were on one of 3 teams per section (2 sections of 35 students each)

- 1) Fundraising
- 2) Media
- 3) Activities for the festival (games)

The Festival was held on the commons during class time at UNLV and lasted for 4 hours. This was contingent upon available space.

Thank You to The UNLV Office of Student and Community Engagement for their support in this project.

How other UNLV teachers might adopt this practice

Benefits

Students’ interactions with their peers is a high impact practice; for both social and academic settings (Moore & Mendez, 2014).

Interacting with others was often cited in reflection papers as a benefit of the course.

Opportunities for dialogue in diverse groups are particularly valuable to promote student learning (Diaz & Perrault, 2010).

Our students were exposed to those with both visible and invisible disabilities and acted collectively as advocates for the cause.

Service-learning, could be a motivating force, driving research and participation (Gillis & Mentzell Ryder, 2016)

Student reflections indicated increased importance of applying knowledge to a cause.

UNLV teachers may adapt this paradigm in their courses, finding a community partner that fits their subject matter or focus and assigning projects that support civic engagement and service learning.



Example of student work