

# Service- Learning: A Forced or Encouraged Habit?

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# Overview

- Student Engagement and Student Voice
- NSU Students and Community Involvement
- NSU Student Recommendations to Enhance Service Learning Program

# Why Students Take Service-Learning Courses?

Possible Reason	Percent Responding		
	Major Reason	Minor Reason	Not a Reason
Interested in subject matter	64	22	13
Wanted to participate in service	40	28	32
Required as part of a major/minor	41	14	45
To enhance resume/application	40	28	45
The Professor	21	24	55
Offered at a convenient time	17	33	50

Source: Astin et al., 2000

# What Really Matters in College?

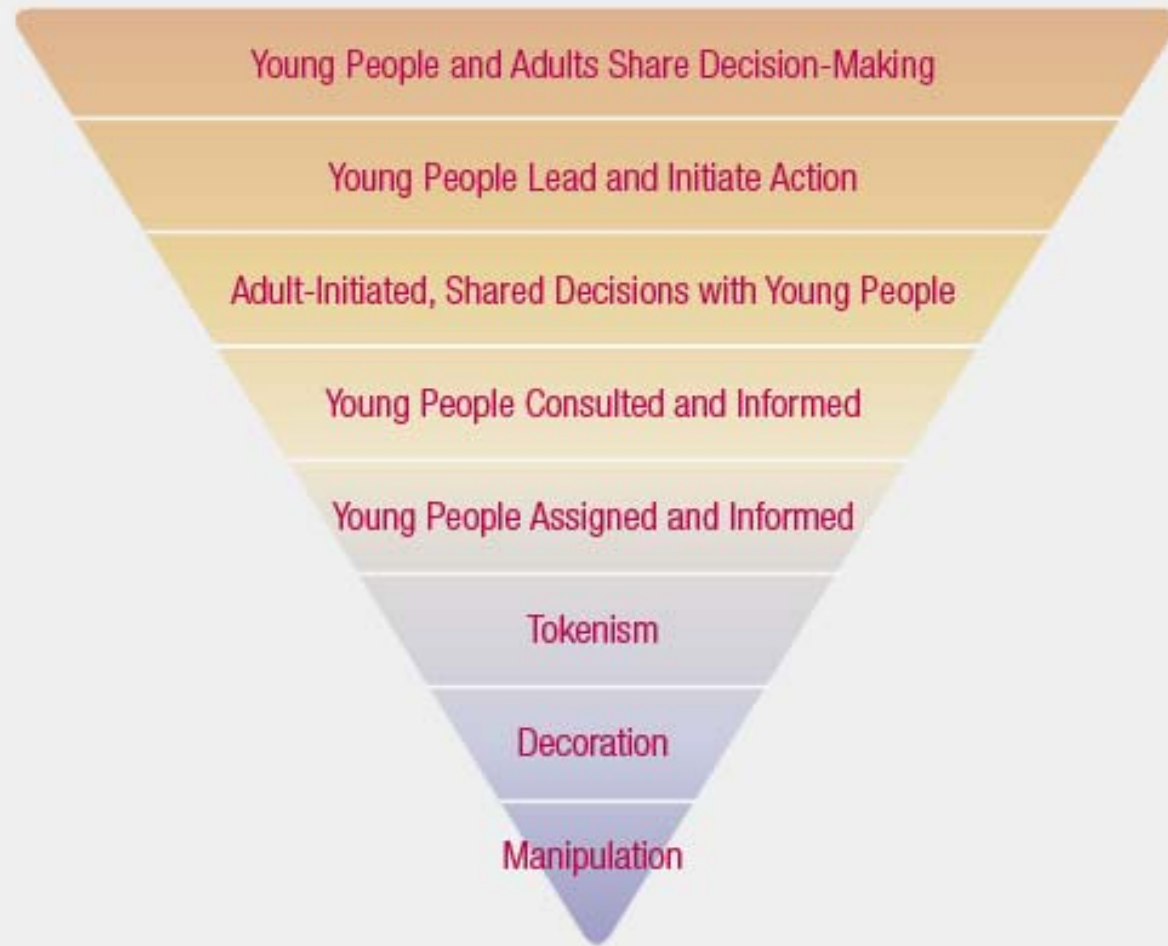
- Impact of college is largely determined by individual effort
- Students are not passive recipients of institutional efforts to “educate” or “change” them
- Important to focus on ways in which an institution can shape its academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings to encourage student engagement

(NSSE 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)

# Levels of Student Engagement

Highly Engaged

Non-Engagement



Adapted from Hart (1997)

# Listening to the Student Voice

Until students feel that what they think and say has institutional validity, it is impossible for them to view themselves as capable of providing meaningful service

(cf., Baxter Magolda, 1991)

# Student Voice and Service-Learning

“Unfortunately, although student voice is a required element of true service-learning, it is often not included in all courses where teachers claim they are practicing service-learning” (Morgan & Streb, 2001, p. 159).

# Student-Centered Service-Learning Program

- A student-centered SL program takes “an R. Buckminster Fuller’s view of students: human beings are born geniuses and designed for success. If they fail to display their genius or fail to succeed, it is because their design function is being thwarted” (Barr&Tagg, 1995, p. 23)
- Low levels of student participation in SL caused by the institution’s inability to listen to the students and facilitate their design function for engagement in service-learning activities.

# Engaging Students in Designing Service Learning Activities

- Indirect
  - Feedback loops
  - *Mandatory vs Optional Service Learning Essay*
- Direct
  - Participation in planning and implementation
  - *Service Learning Honors Fellows*

# Norfolk State University (NSU)

- Founded in 1935
- Located in the downtown Norfolk, Virginia, USA
- Virginia's largest public Historically Black University (HBCU)
- One of the largest HBCUs in the nation
- Approximately 6,000 culturally diverse students
- As a university of opportunity, NSU offers a wide variety of programs for students seeking access to an affordable high-quality education

# NSU Service-Learning Program

- Established in 2003
- Goals
  - Establish a university-wide service-learning program and ensure a centralized process for planning, administering and assessing service-learning initiatives
  - Strengthen students' critical thinking and leadership skills as well as engage students in civic activities
  - Enhance faculty professional skills through on-campus workshops, guest speakers, teleconferences and travel to professional meetings
  - Increase academic/community partnerships by identifying and addressing community needs

# NSU Students and Community Service Involvement: Incoming Students

- According to the 2004 Beginning College Student Survey (BCSS), almost half (47%) of the incoming freshmen volunteered or did community service very often or often during the last year of high school.
- According to the 2004 BCSS, two-fifths (39%) of incoming freshmen expect to participate in a school-sponsored community service project during the first school year.

# NSU Students and Community Service Involvement: Freshmen

- According to the 2005 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), 41% (38%) of NSU freshmen participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course during the first year at NSU.
- According to the 2005 NSSE, 45% (38%) of NSU freshmen plan to do community service or volunteer work before they graduate from NSU.

# NSU Students and Community Service Involvement: Seniors

- 52% (50%) of the NSU seniors participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- 59% (64%) of the NSU seniors did community service or volunteer work
- 47% of NSU graduating students are involved in structured volunteer work, community service, and/or civic activities while at NSU
- 71% of graduating students agree that there were opportunities to participate in internships and community service as part of regular courses.

Percents in parentheses are  
national averages

# NSU Students and Work & Family Commitments

- 34% (23%) of NSU first year students and two-thirds 64% (49%) of NSU seniors work for pay off campus 11 or more hours per week
- 41% (19%) of NSU seniors spend 11 or more hours per week caring for dependents.

# Methodology

- Data

- Exit Examination of Writing Competency essays
- 76 essays responding to a prompt:

*Should service-learning be a mandatory component of at least some of the general education classes that students are required to take?*

- Method

- Content analysis (GAO, 1996; Miles&Huberman, 1994)

# Emergenced Themes

- Service-learning as a component of the course should be *voluntary*
- Service-learning is an enriching experience and should be a *mandatory* component of the college curriculum
- Commitment to service needs to and can be *taught*, and
- **Steps needed to be taken to implement a successful service-learning program at NSU.**

# Student Recommendations to Enhance Service-Learning Program at NSU

1. Educate Faculty and Students about Service-Learning.
2. Actively Promote and Encourage Service-Learning, but do Not Force it on Students.
3. Involve Students in Service-Learning Planning.
4. Before Incorporating Service-Learning in General Education, Introduce it in Elective Major Courses, Especially in “Social” Fields.
5. Be Flexible and Pay Attention to Individual Differences among Students.

# Educate Faculty and Students about Service-Learning

- *“We must first ask ourselves – Do the students know what service-learning is? Why should they take the course? What are the benefits? and How could it possibly help them in some particular way?”*
- *“If service-learning were to be incorporated as a requirement for a course, these might be some of the questions asked: Am I going to get credit for it? What exactly does this requirement entail that we do? How will this requirement be organized? Who are we working with? How will it be graded?”*

# Actively Promote and Encourage Service-Learning, but do not Force it on Students

- *“A commitment to serving your own community is something that can’t be taught, it has to be shown. Service-learning should be presented to an individual and not forced upon them.”*
- *“The goal of administrators should be to focus on promoting service-learning. With ample information and encouragement, more students will participate and enjoy the experience.”*
- *“How do we get them [those who are not interested in service] involved? Be persistent, grab their attention.”*

# Involve Students in Service-Learning Planning

- *“I believe that the students should have a voice in whether or not service-learning should become a mandatory component of their already diverse curriculum. Should they agree with the aforementioned proposal, then students should organize and plan these projects. Let them do projects that will be beneficial and enjoyable. If they do not agree with the proposal, then please do not force them to participate.”*
- *“Engaging in the community as a student is an excellent idea only if the student knows that it is what he or she wants to do.”*

# Introduce Service-Learning in Elective Major Courses and in “Social” Fields

- *“The course should not be designed as a general requirement that all students take, but be specifically designed to fit our major as closely as possible.”*
- *“A better way to handle this situation is to make service-learning an elective or extra curricular activity. In this manner, the students involved in the projects are students willing to do the work.”*
- *“I believe that mandatory community services in the academic fields should pertain only to those areas involved in serving the community directly.”*

# Be Flexible and Pay Attention to Individual Differences among Students

- *“The majority of students’ outside time is consumed with either work or family. A great number of students are working two jobs or one job with long hours allowing them free time only in the later hours of the night. These factors need to be taken into consideration when introducing new criterion [service-learning] into classes.”*
- *“A class of students should not be looked at as a unit; they should be looked at as individuals who all have different goals in life and set standards for themselves.”*

# Student Recommendations to Enhance Service-Learning Program: *Implementation Strategies*

1. Educate Faculty and Students about Service-Learning.
2. Actively Promote and Encourage Service-Learning, but do not Force It on Students.
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4. Before Incorporating Service-Learning in General Education, Introduce it in Elective Major Courses, Especially in “Social” Fields.
5. Be Flexible and Pay Attention to Individual Differences among Students.

# Service-Learning Fellows

- *Student Leaders in Service*
- Honors students
- Service-Learning Strategic Planning Committee
- Presentations/testimonies
- Reflection/de-briefing sessions with Service-Learning Coordinator

# NSU Service-Learning Fellows: Examples of Self-Designed Activities

- Tidewater AIDS Program
- NAACP Health Fair

# NSU Service-Learning Fellows



Engaging Faculty and  
Community Partners



Designing Programs



# Service-Learning Challenge: Developing Intentional Learners

- “*The students give their time rather than the institution taking it*” [from an NSU student essay, emphases added].
- Integrative thinkers who have developed “self-awareness about the reason for study, the learning process itself, and how education is used” (AAC&U, 2004)

# Promising Suggestions: Informed Consent

“The procedural requirement for ongoing conversation that allows for students to participate in decisions about adjustments in learning activities as needed during the course of a semester” (Connelly, 2000)

# Promising Suggestions: Connecting Service-Learning and Spirituality

- “The exploration of one’s deeper sense of purpose and the subsequent action taken to pursue this purpose” (Koth, 2003)
- *“[T]he most rewarding element gained from service-learning is the knowledge of self, in order to determine life’s focus .... Completing service early in the education process may allow the student an opportunity to decide what is most important”* [from an NSU student essay, emphases added].

# Conclusion

- *“I believe that the students should have a voice in whether or not service-learning should become a mandatory component of their already diverse curriculum. Should they agree with the aforementioned proposal, then students should organize and plan these projects. Let them do projects that will be beneficial and enjoyable. If they do not agree with the proposal, then please do not force them to participate”* [from an NSU student essay].
- *“The students give their time rather than the institution taking it”* [from an NSU student essay, emphases added].

# Contact Information

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