The 4th Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Service-Learning
“Service-Learning as a Bridge from Local to Global: Connected World, Connected Future”

University Campus as Service Site - Addressing Campus Needs through Service-Learning
Elaine TANG, Teaching Fellow, Office of Service-Learning
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Introduction: Service-Learning as Community Engagement

• Promote university students’ civic / community engagement (Vickers, Harris & McCarthy, 2004; Astin et al., 2006)
• Common service sites: partnering service agencies and communities they serve (e.g. elderly homes and social enterprises)
What is meant by community?

- Zlotkowski (1999): primarily consists of (1) off-campus populations under-served by our market economy and (2) organizations whose primary purpose is the common good.
- MacQueen et al. (2001): 5 core elements of a community: locus (a place with people), sharing (people with shared interests/perspectives), action (existence of joint activities), ties (existence of relationship), diversity (existence of differences).
University is a community!

- A physical location
- People with shared interests (pursuing academic qualifications), actions and activities (curricular and extra-curricular), and diversity exists
Can university campuses be service sites?

• Yes but often neglected
• A university campus is a community with its unique needs, e.g.
  – food waste (e.g. UC Berkeley, 2012; The City University of Hong Kong, 2012)
  – food insecurity (e.g. The Florida State University, 2013)
SLP101 Community Engagement through Service-Learning

• Introductory S-L course offered by OSL, LU, HK
• Course contents:
  – basic experiential learning, S-L, engagement theories
  – discussion related to social welfare & services, and a selection of social issues
  – critical analysis & reflection
  – design, implement and evaluate a S-L project that addresses a specific need on the LU campus
    • Energy Saving (lights and computers) & Food Waste in canteen
Research focus

• Explore the impact of different service site arrangements (on campus vs off campus) on students’ perceived learning and service experience
Methods

• Qualitative content analysis of
  – students’ group project proposals (N=2)
  – final project reports (N=2)
  – a mid-term reflective meeting
  – an end-of-term focus group

In terms of 1) learning outcomes; 2) service experience
Intended Learning Outcomes (7 Domains)

1. Communication Skills: having sensitivity and confidence to communicate with others, and understanding the values of group discussion
2. Organization Skills: being able to organize events and others, and feeling competent and empowered to lead others when necessary
3. Problem-Solving Skills: being able to identify, frame, and resolve problems.
4. Subject-Related Knowledge: being able to identify and apply knowledge related to one’s academic subject to authentic situations, and seeing the usefulness of that subject
5. Research Skills: being able to frame and conduct information gathering, and understand the importance of this process to knowledge acquisition
6. Social Competence: having an increased understanding of others and oneself, and being able to connect with others who are different
7. Civic Orientation: feeling empathy for others, having personal responsibility for social situations, and planning for future civic action
## Findings and discussion

### 1) Learning outcomes

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Communication Skills

“We first drafted an email to Catering Group A and sought advice from our course instructor, Elaine. Then we sent our email together with a supporting document that listed out the possible advantages of introducing the measures we proposed to A. However, we didn’t get reply from the authority concerned. Thus, we sought help from the representative of the Catering Committee, Miss X from Unit B. With her help, we successfully made an appointment with the manage of Catering Group A and held the meeting.” (Final Report A)

“Because we communicated with a lot of people throughout the project, explaining what we wanted to do. Other than that we needed communication among group members, so I think, because in most of the courses I’d taken I just sat there and listened, and in the end we had a presentation and that’s it. (Winnie)
“Because I am not a talkative person. In our group there were members who facilitated the discussion and suggested ways to solve problems. That was how I learned to solve problems – we brainstormed a lot of solutions. I had more chances to express my opinions.” (Ryan)

“In the process, this time we thought of different ways to carry out our project and different parties were involved, and we were faced with a lot of problems which we hadn’t anticipated, like we talked to Catering Company A and Unit B, in which there were a lot of constraints. We learned how to follow the procedures and at the same time achieve what we wanted to.” (Chloe)
“Before taking this course I didn’t really care about what’s going on in society. After this course I think I am more aware.” (Winnie)

“In S-L we visited Organization A in Area A and Organization B, an environmental protection organization, as well as Organization C, we got to understand a lot more about services they provided low-income families and individuals and more importantly, the support they provide the ethnic minorities, and Organization B helped low-income families and the elderly through selling second-hand items... because in S-L, theoretically, we learned from a global perspective to our local community, and visits to these organizations were helpful. (Ryan)
2) Service experience

**Advantages**

1. Saves travelling time
2. Raises awareness of issues on campus
3. Students, who are the change agents, are the beneficiaries at the same time
4. A familiar environment: effective in terms of catching others’ attention
“because if not for this S-L project we wouldn’t have noticed, I mean wouldn’t have discovered so many problems among us. I mean through this S-L, even if we weren’t able to solve the problems at least they were problems for more discussion. Even now that the project is over we’re still thinking whether they’re other solutions to the problems, maybe not solving them completely but at least to a certain extent. I’d consider this an advantage.” (Ryan)

“Actually when I was first told to address a campus need I didn’t know what I was to do, but as the project goes on I started to realise that a lot of things on campus need improving, or, you know, things that could be improved.” (Winnie)

“I’d also recommend doing this on campus, because in the end we were the beneficiaries, most of the time anyway.” (Winnie)

“Most of the students, they were people who we knew, so there’s an affinity among us. And so like we were doing a project on food waste, they paid more attention. I mean they would participate in our activities, like we were passing out leaflets and put up table stands and they did notice.” (Winnie)
Problems & Difficulties

1) Administrative obstacles
“because most of our plans involved the university, or say the canteen, cooperation from different units, but a lot of the times the approval procedures, or the waiting, cooperation, all require waiting and approval, and our project period was just 2 to 3 months long. It’s really hard to carry it out smoothly so for both of our groups there was very little cooperation with other units.” (Chloe)

“Besides, the application procedures were complicated and time-consuming. There were many departments and authorities needed to consider our application, so it’s impossible to apply within such a short period of time for the running of a stall.” (Final Report A)
“but I think we both have responsibility. Like if we knew approval from administrative units was required we should have filed the application earlier. For example, putting up posters in classrooms, setting up booths outside some buildings, we could have applied earlier to allow more time for staff in those administrative units to process.” (Ryan)
Comparison with off-campus S-L projects

• Both have their advantages and limitations

“Actually doing services outside of campus has its own advantages. Because we were faced with more problems we also learn more at the same time.” (Ryan)

“Looking back I actually have a lot of regrets and realised there were a lot of problems, you know the promotion and some of our measures could have been done better, if we were given a second chance but it would have been even more difficult if this were done off campus with a group member who’s an exchange student who didn’t know the environment. It’s impossible. I mean a food waste project like this. So I think it’s better to carry this out on campus.” (Chloe)

“They are different... I don’t think they are comparable. After all they are different in nature. I benefited from both. Well there’s a similarity between the two actually – we were faced with a problem and we tried to solve it.” (Ryan)
Possible service on-campus projects suggested by students

• Food waste
• Mosquito problem
• Energy saving (air-conditioning)
Conclusion

This exploratory study suggests that

• Students perceive own improvement in various skills & competences (intended learning outcomes) in an on-campus S-L project

• University campuses can be suitable service sites, with their own advantages and also limitations. Course instructors could communicate with units the project may concern *before* the start of the course (although the experience actually forms part of students’ learning)
Thank you!