



Service Learning at California State University Monterey Bay

Developing Students' Social Responsibility and Commitment to Multicultural Civic Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Developing young people's commitment to public and community service has been a core goal of California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) –the university created in 1995 on the site of the former Fort Ord. CSUMB's academic program is guided by the campus' Vision Statement that establishes “coordinated community service” as a vehicle to enable students to develop the “critical thinking abilities to be productive citizens, and the social responsibility and skills to be community builders” (CSUMB Vision Statement). Unlike many higher education institutions that seek to promote an ethic of service through extra-curricular student programs and work-study efforts, CSUMB has made its commitment to community service an educational goal, placing service learning squarely at the heart of its academic program.

At CSUMB, it is not only the self-selected few who participate in community service programs. Through service learning, all CSUMB students take courses that give them the opportunity to engage in community service activities as a component of their academic curriculum. These service learning courses connect students with meaningful opportunities to contribute to their community, but also provide students the learning structures necessary to grow as capable and concerned citizens and community members. **Each academic year, 50% of CSUMB students are enrolled in service learning courses**, contributing thousands of hours to local schools, agencies and non-profit organizations in the Monterey Bay region. Equally as important as these hours of service, CSUMB students come to know intimately the rewards of active community involvement, and become more confident and committed to their role as community builders in our diverse, multicultural world.

THE PROGRAM: Integrating *SERVICE* as a Core Component of Academic Development

CSUMB's service learning program is distinctive because it is a graduation requirement for all students. But it is further distinguished by the fact that it has integrated the concept of “service and social justice” as a core component of academic study. Building on CSUMB's outcomes-based educational approach and its commitment to issues of diversity and multiculturalism, CSUMB's service learning program has made the development of “self-reflective, culturally aware and socially responsible graduates” a core educational goal.

CSUMB has integrated service learning in both its lower-division general education program, and as a learning outcome in each undergraduate major. As a result, CSUMB students take two service learning courses: (1) a lower division course that introduces them to concepts of service and multicultural community participation; and (2), a course in their major that addresses social issues more specific to their field and career aspirations. By embedding outcomes related to service and multicultural civic engagement in both the general education program and the graduation requirements of each major, every CSUMB student has the opportunity to engage with community projects of import and relevance, while examining issues of justice, compassion, diversity and social responsibility.

Furthermore, at CSUMB civic education and multicultural education are inextricably linked. For students to be well-prepared for our increasingly multicultural and global society, students must develop the skills to work collaboratively across the differences that have traditionally separated diverse segments of society. CSUMB's service learning courses therefore pursue learning outcomes related to these four aspects of service: diversity, justice, compassion and social responsibility (See attached, *CSUMB Service Learning Prism*). As a result, all CSUMB students develop the skills to be multicultural community builders, capable of building the multicultural commons that is crucial to the creation of a more just and equitable society.

The General Education Component: Community Participation

All students at CSU Monterey Bay must take a service learning course to fulfill their general education requirement in "Community Participation" –one of thirteen general education learning requirements. Most students take the course *Service Learning 200: Introduction to Service in Multicultural Communities*, whose goal is to "foster the development of self-reflective, culturally aware and responsive community participants through reciprocal service and learning" (Alexander, et al., 1998). In this course, all students are required to work a minimum of 30 hours at a community service site, while attending regular class sessions where they discuss readings and share insights from their community service experiences. The course enables students to examine their privileged and marginalized social group identities in order to sensitively and effectively participate in communities in ways that do not perpetuate racism, sexism, classism and other forms of systemic oppression. As a required sophomore-level course, this experience provides a valuable foundation for students' future community service involvement.

The Major-Based Component

All CSUMB undergraduate degree programs have incorporated service learning to develop their students' civic engagement skills. These service learning courses give CSUMB students the opportunity to expose their developing knowledge and skills to the complex reality of relevant social issues. Through this process, all CSUMB students critically examine what it means to be "of service to society," examining issues of compassion, diversity, justice and social responsibility through the lens of their degree program. Beyond meeting their graduation requirement, the major-based service learning courses provide students with valuable career-related experience, and expose them to civic and social issues that they will be wrestling with as future professionals in their chosen fields. Many students also use their service learning experience as the basis of their senior capstone project, working collaboratively with community agencies to address pressing community concerns.

Student Leadership in Service Learning

Student leaders provide valuable support to maintain the high quality of CSU Monterey Bay's campus-wide service learning program. The University Service Advocates Program (USA Program) provides student leaders the opportunity to further develop their own skills in civic engagement, as campus leaders in efforts to unite the university and community in reciprocal service learning partnerships. Each year, 14 student leaders are trained to become University Service Advocates (USAs). USAs co-teach service learning courses with faculty, engaging students in critical reflection about their service experience. USAs also provide partnership support for community organizations and serve as mentors for service learners at community service sites. After graduation, USAs have a strong track record of further engagement in civic leadership positions as AmeriCorps volunteers, volunteer coordinators for social service agencies, teachers and youth workers.

PROGRAM IMPACT

What has been the impact of this innovative effort to cultivate an ethic of social responsibility over the past six years? How have students responded to being required to take service learning courses? Has service learning had an impact on student's attitude toward community service? Over the past six years, CSUMB has systematically surveyed students upon the completion of their service learning courses. After six years of data collection from over 2500 students in service learning courses campus-wide, we can unequivocally say that the program has had a positive impact on developing students' skills for and commitment to community service.

Attitudes and Capacity toward Service and Civic Engagement

Survey responses show that students are leaving their service learning courses with a more positive attitude toward community service and with more skills relevant to civic engagement. As a result of participating in a service learning course:

- 72% of students said that their attitude toward service has become more positive;
- 91% of students felt more comfortable participating in the community;
- 80% of the students indicated that they were encouraged to think about social justice issues in ways they had not before;
- 83% of the students felt a stronger sense of commitment to being involved in their community as a result of this course; and,
- 95% of students felt that they were able to make a meaningful contribution to the community.

These results clearly indicate that service learning has a positive contribution to students' attitudes toward service, their comfort level as providers of service, and their sense of efficacy --that they can make a difference.

In addition, pre- and post- assessments have been conducted of students taking the lower division course: *SL 200: Introduction to Service in Multicultural Communities*. The results over six years consistently show statistically significant increases along two important dimensions: (1) **civic responsibility**, the value students place on participating in the community through service; and, (2) **service self-efficacy**, students' belief that they have a positive impact and can "make a difference" in their communities (Service Learning Institute, 2000).

	Fall 1996	Sp 1997	Fall 1997	Sp 1998	Fall 1998	Sp 1999 n=56	Sp 2000 n=33	Fall 2000 n=33	Sp 2001 n=71	Fall 2001 n=67	Sp 2002 n=73	Fall 2002 n=37
Civic Responsibility	↑	↑	↑	⊘	↑	⊘	⊘	↑	↑	↑	⊘	↑
Service Self-Efficacy				↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑



↑ Indicates a statistically significant increase in student positive attitudes over the course of the semester.



⊘ Indicates no statistically significant change from pre- to post-assessment over the course of the semester.

Attitude Toward CSUMB's Service Learning Requirement

Survey results also show that students leave their service learning experience having had a meaningful experience and with very positive attitudes toward CSUMB's service learning requirement.

- 89% of students say that their service work significantly enhanced their learning of the core subject matter in the class;
- 67% of students say they would enroll in another service learning course beyond the CSUMB requirement; and,
- 56% of students plan to continue working with the community program after completing the course.

Thus, service learning courses clearly provide students with meaningful connections to community life and with meaningful opportunities to contribute to civic society. CSU Monterey Bay's experience confirms that service learning can be a viable approach to developing students' commitment to social responsibility and multicultural civic engagement.

SOURCES

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