

Chapter 67

Impact of Community Engagement in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of community engagement on college students. It is an exploratory study investigating the attitudes and perceived impact of college students having participated in CE, measuring how effective CE is and how well these goals are met on a college campus. Mainly examined is the relationship between impact and student participation in CE. The amount of connectivity a student feels to the community will play a role in their continued college career. General civic engagement attitudes of respondents are assessed. Online surveys with demographic, Likert scale and open-ended questions are administered to give students the opportunity to put their experiences into their own words. Based on previous research in the area, researchers expect that students will gain employable attributes from their participation in CE during college as well as will report high impact and connectivity to the university and the community.

INTRODUCTION

Community engagement is growing amongst educators across the nation, even the globe. As community engagement programs are being implemented and carried out through educational institutions, it is important to assess the impact of these programs, contributing to the prevalent impact community engagement is making. This chapter will assess the impact of community engagement on a scholarship program at one university. Programs similar to the one studied in the present research can be tested in any educational setting. Measurable outcomes become more important as institutions across the globe reassess funding for innovative teaching.

One objective of this chapter is to demonstrate, based on previous research, the anticipated benefits and impact community engagement can have on college students. A second objective is to assess basic

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attitudes toward community engagement after having participated as part of a university program. A third objective of this chapter is to assess perceived impact on college students after having participated in community engagement as part of their college experience. And lastly, a fourth objective is to identify trends that may emerge during data assessment, further explaining student responses, even displaying actual student quotes. The expected outcomes are as follows: feeling they have gained employable attributes during their experience, having gained hands-on experience, having felt more connected to the university and to the community and other such trends emerging from their reflective responses to a survey.

BACKGROUND

The term *community engagement* is becoming more widely used across college campuses because it encompasses all forms of service individuals may become engaged in as college students. It also gives credibility to the level of assistance with which college students can provide to the community, encouraging them to put the skills to use that they are learning within their disciplines. The terms community service and service learning, although often mistaken one for the other, each imply some form of community engagement project or program involvement. Service learning more clearly identifies community engagement as part of a course. Community service does not require a student to be part of a service-based course. Students can participate in community service as part of a club, on their own, as extra credit, or for any number of reasons. Whether engaging in community outreach as part of a course or outside of a course, the term community engagement still applies. It is an umbrella phrase, if you will, under which both service learning and community service fall. This section will compile a full understanding of each concept in order to further investigate the impact community engagement, as a whole, has on a college campus.

Community Service

Through programs such as AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, The Corporation for National and Community Service facilitates volunteerism across the nation. They fund programs, train volunteers, award college campuses for empowering students to serve, and provide opportunities for people from all walks of life to actively improve the lives of their fellow Americans. Their mission is “to improve lives, strengthen communities and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2015). This mission is how one may even *define* community service, volunteerism, simply meeting a need in the community or solving a social problem. For a college campus, “meaningful, measureable outcomes in the communities they serve” should be added (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2015).

Service Learning

Campus Compact is a program that works to create and sustain service learning programs and centers on college campuses in America. “Service-learning incorporates community work into the curriculum, giving students real-world learning experiences that enhance their academic learning while providing a tangible benefit for the community” (Compact, 2014). The idea is that when professors and instructors get students out of their college classrooms and into the community, allowing them to gain hands-on

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