



ENGAGE STUDENTS

Promoting social responsibility of students by embedding service learning into higher education curricula

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Findings of a study with n=41 teachers in higher education on inputs, processes, and outputs of service learning

SLIHE Conference, Bratislava, July 14-16, 2020



The project

Main topic: Didactic approach to Service-Learning for Higher Education

Aims and objectives

Teachers

- To implement and test new teaching methods, especially service learning;
- To link theory with real community needs;
- To foster collaboration between teachers.

Students

- To acquire the ability to develop, run, and reflect upon a service;
- To develop a sense of responsibility and civic engagement;
- To experience a new mode of learning;
- To broaden career choices and employability.

Key activities

1. **Needs Analysis** in local communities including an **internal kick-off events** and stakeholder analysis;
2. **Service-Learning Methodology Toolkit** including → **interviews with teachers about how they apply service learning** and a desk research how to structure different methodologies of service learning;
3. **Workbook „How to do service learning“ for teachers**, written, tested and used in a one-week training event for teachers in Austria;
4. **Study on student experiences** with service learning including a student blog, a summer school, and measuring their experiences with service learning.

The partners



- University Politehnica Bucharest (RO)
- University of Vienna (AT)
- Dublin City University (IE)
- University degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza (IT)
- Kaunas University of Technology (LI)
- University of Porto (PT)

Background

- Teachers play a central role in Service-Learning when they decide to offer this kind of applied coursework;
- Through incorporating Service-Learning projects within their teaching and research, teachers enrich their courses with multiple benefits for all involved stakeholders: students, faculty, community partners and finally also for their own professional development;
- The study done within ENGAGE STUDENTS investigated the perspectives of higher education teachers on Service-Learning – perceived inputs, processes, and outputs – since there is extensive research about students’ perspectives, but those of teachers are described as “relatively invisible in the discourse of service learning” (Boland 2014)

Research questions

- How do teachers in higher education assess inputs, processes, and outputs of Service-Learning? How balanced are the perceived inputs, processes, and outputs?
 - In which ways do teachers in higher education feel institutional support for Service-Learning? (*input dimension*)
 - Which strategies do teachers apply to approach stakeholders or community partners in order to provide Service-Learning courses? (*process dimension*)
 - Which benefits do they associate with Service-Learning? (*output dimension*)

Methodology

- Semi-structured interviews consisted of eight open-ended questions;
- Teachers were asked to express their opinions and experiences about available support for Service-Learning (*input dimension*), the process of preparing Service-Learning and approaching community partners (*process dimension*), and about potential benefits of applying this approach (*output dimension*);
- Sample:
 - In total, n=41 higher education teachers participated in the study between April 4th-July 23rd, 2020;
 - The participating teachers came from a range of disciplines;
 - 31 of the study participants were female, and 10 were male.
 - 5 teachers came from Ireland, Lithuania, and Italy each, 12 from Austria, 6 from Romania, and 8 from Portugal

Findings

Input: Institutional support for Service-Learning

Teachers in the sample reported either:

1. Non-supportive institutional conditions for Service-Learning or,
2. Supportive institutional conditions for Service-Learning in terms of matching platforms and portals, support with contractual issues, continuous training for students, practical support, and national supportive framework conditions for Service-Learning.

Findings

Input: Institutional support for Service-Learning

"My institution does not promote service learning very much and it does not encourage and support it with adequate resources (...), so that often students have to support out of their own pocket (...) which can necessarily only be of very short duration." (IT37)

"A lot of support is happening in silent ways." (IE3)

Findings

Process: Approaching stakeholders for Service-Learning

- Teachers reported maintaining existing relationships with stakeholders in continuous communication processes on the one hand and on the other hand approaching new stakeholders through a variety of methodologies;
- We identified two main categories in the data: Teachers differentiated between:
 1. self-signaling stakeholders, who approach the higher education institution on their own initiative, and
 2. promotion strategies for approaching stakeholders on behalf of the higher education institution.

Findings

Outputs: Benefits from Service-Learning

- Service-Learning was mentioned to bear specific outputs for students, universities, and the communities involved;
- Most benefits were viewed on the side of the students: *“During the Service-Learning process, students turn from passive “recipients” of information into active learners, who study all the time, monitor changes in their knowledge, skills and regulations.”* (LT8)
- On the student level, teachers perceive an impact for students in skills development, contribution to civic engagement, acquisition of work-related skills, and outputs for personal growth and development.

Findings

Outputs: Benefits from Service-Learning

- From an institutional perspective, Service-Learning contributes to reducing the stereotyping of universities as too theoretical or ‘unreachable’ for real needs and allowing them to be perceived as socially responsible institutions that are embedded in their communities;
- Teachers report specific outputs for community partners as well, in particular related to the respective topic of Service-Learning, receiving feedback and contributing to community development.

Conclusion

- This study shows that although Service-Learning is perceived as a method of applied coursework with various benefits (output dimension), inputs and outputs are generally out of balance according to the interview data;
- While teachers assess the outputs as manifold, institutional support (input) for Service-Learning is either not available, not needed, or depends on the institutional ethos for Service-Learning;
- In the future we need to strengthen the process dimension and faculties' roles in matching courses and community needs. The “silent support” perceived by teachers in our study has to be turned into visible and traceable support strategies available to all teachers on faculty level.
- The role of supportive technology for Service-Learning (e-Service-Learning) has not been studied much in recent years; currently, higher education institutions are desperately in need of developing digital solutions for Service-Learning and are working to provide e-Service-Learning due to enhanced digitalization and growing risks of pandemics, while at the same time having to provide placements in practice for students.

ENGAGE STUDENTS outlook

- *What's next?*
- Workbook: How to implement service learning (available in October 2020) for higher education teachers;
- Comparative study on Service-Learning with students in 6 countries using a student blog to document students' experiences
- Website: <https://www.engagestudents.eu/>



Contact us

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