Office of Student Academic Success & Department of Geography

Taking service-learning to scale – matching university and partner needs

Ola Ahlqvist, Claire Sweigart, Kelli Bates, Sue Wolford

INTRODUCTION

Service-learning is one of several so-called High Impact Practices that allow faculty and departments to engage with communities through student coursework. Effective service-learning addresses community identified needs while enriching the student learning through a pedagogy based on experiential learning theory that incorporates cycles of experience, reflection, synthesis and active experimentation. While there is plenty of evidence of positive community impact and student learning outcomes through service-learning, best practices are mostly confined to smaller class sizes, typically 10-30 students. Some of the reasons are the limited ability to coordinate large number of students to have substantial service assignments and the capacity of partner organizations. Community needs and student demand motivated the Office of Service-Learning at The Ohio State University to look for large scale partnerships that could scale to hundreds of students at a time.

"The library partnership was intentionally designed to fit many different types of courses. The only requirement for this model to work is that the student-learning experience is enhanced by engaging with local youth, and what our students learn in the course is of interest to those kids. It's a recipe that I'm convinced many Ohio State courses could buy into."
- Ola Ahlqvist, Director, Office of Service-Learning

TEMPLATE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Partnership developed around common needs and goals using an institution-wide perspective vs. course/department-specific perspective.
- Identifying matching mission and capacity
- Subject matter agnostic or very wide scope (libraries, parks & recreation, science museum, zoo)
- Negotiation of boundary conditions, requirements (time, size, commitments)
- Template syllabus development, testing

"The best part of this project was applying the GIS mapping skills we learned in class and in labs to produce a map-based activity entirely of our own design and that could help the students at the Homework Help Centers,"
- Cynthia Jennings, GIS & International Studies major

Students at a Columbus Municipal Library Homework Help Center engaging in their mapping project.

TEMPLATE SCHEDULE

Prior to First Class	Volunteer applications are shared with students Class roster is shared with CML Volunteer Manager
Week 1	Paperwork is completed with support from CML Volunteer Manager Branch Snapshots shared with students Syllabus shared with HHCS staff at CML library locations
Week 2	Student placements and car pools coordinated by CML Volunteer Manager OSL/CML provides orientation & cultural awareness training to students HHCS staff available for Q&A
Week3	Students start in the Homework Help Centers and receive library location-specific orientation from Homework Help Center Specialist
Week 4	Students provide HHC service
Week 5	Students provide HHC service
Week 6	Students provide HHC service
Week 7	Students provide HHC service
Week 8	Students provide HHC service
Week 9	Students provide HHC service
Week 10	Students who plan a project discuss with host Homework Help Center Specialist to plan implementation. (can be earlier depending on project)
Week 11	Students provide HHC service
Week 12	Students provide HHC service
Week 13	Optional service depending on course – project implementation
Week 14	Optional service depending on course – project implementation
Week 15	

"The best part of this project was the excitement I saw in the kids as they were doing the map activity and when they saw how their work informed the final product."
- Arin Blair, City & Regional Planning graduate student

THE UNIVERSITY – LIBRARY MODEL

A flexible model that can be applied to a wide variety of courses, while at the same time alleviating the pressure on individual instructors to develop partnerships with service sites from scratch.
- Ohio State students spend a minimum of 15 hours in one of the library Homework Help Centers (HHCS); students will be assigned to one of 21 locations
- The service experience includes helping k-12 students with homework and, if desired or required of the class, implement a course related "project" in the homework help center.
- Projects are an option and should be a natural extension of what the college student is learning in class and something that engages students in the Centers.
- Service hours are typically allocated to the out-of-class portion of a course
- Transportation to and from location is the responsibility of the students, therefore courses with primarily juniors and seniors are preferred (this makes arranging car pools easier)
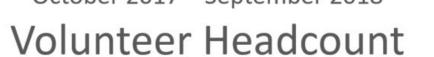
COURSE EXAMPLE

A geography service-learning course, Elements of Cartography: Serving the Community Through Cartography (GEOG 5200S) implemented a final mapping project in the library's Homework Help Centers (HHCs). In the course students learn the art, craft and science of creating maps. In its first semester, more than 90 students served once a week in ten library locations across the city. They helped elementary and middle school children with homework and developed a mapping project to close out the semester.
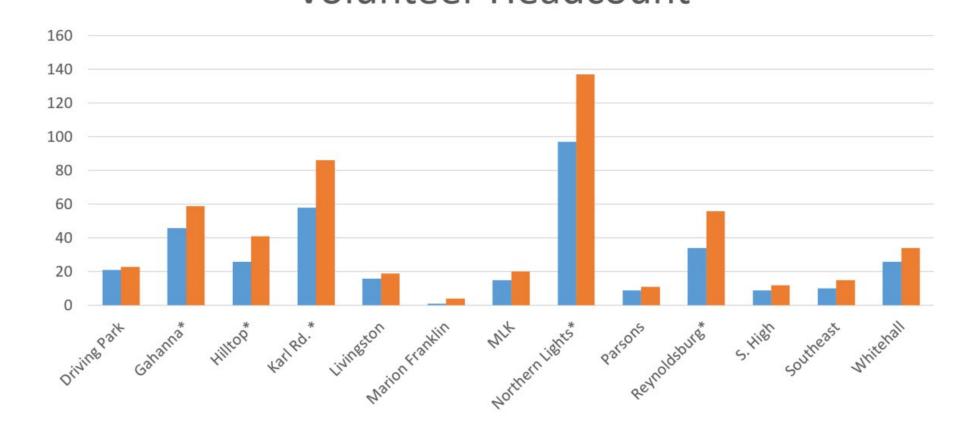
"My overall experience in both the class and at the library was so positive that I have decided to stay on volunteering at the Hilltop Library. I really like helping and interacting with the kids. The staff at the library was so nice, and I was really made to feel at home. I felt like I was really encouraging these kids to try hard and never give up."
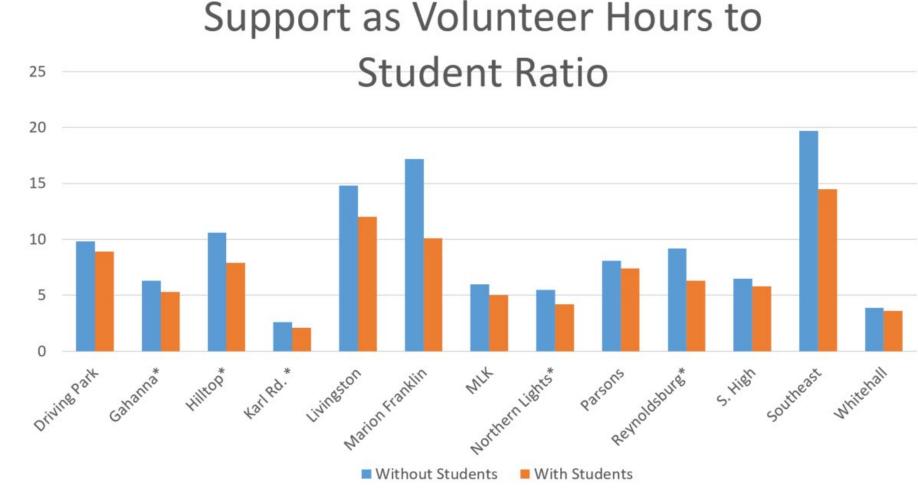- Amanda Padamadan, Civil Engineering major

PROGRAM IMPACTS

Service Learning Impact on Columbus Metropolitan Library Homework Help Centers
October 2017 – September 2018
Volunteer Headcount

Support as Volunteer Hours to Student Ratio

* Focus on branches with the highest attendance; more volunteers were assigned to these branches

http://u.osu.edu/servicelearning/
https://www.columbuslibrary.org/