Service Learning in the Sciences: Student Perception Before and After Working with a Community Partner

Michael S. Berger

Washington State University Vancouver, School of the Environment / School of Biological Sciences, 14204 NE Salmon Creek Ave, Vancouver WA 98686 USA (msberger@wsu.edu)

Many courses in the natural sciences are focused on the generation of quantifiable data and empirical results in student assignments. Because service learning projects do not necessarily provide a quantifiable end product, they are not commonly integrated into science courses. As a result, students are not exposed to the transformative nature of service learning and do not develop partnerships with the community that could carry well beyond a single course. An understanding of a student’s perception of a service learning project can help faculty, service-learning administration staff, community partners, and graduate student teaching assistants develop effective service-learning assignments that result in a transformative learning experience.

I discussed the integration of a service learning assignment in a non-majors general biology course. Pre- and post-assessment Likert-scale survey data was presented to address student learning goals: (1) whether working with a community partner would be rewarding; (2) perceived benefit of service learning as a transformative experience; (3) contribution to the community. I addressed potential limitations and solutions to service learning projects involving non-traditional student populations on a commuter campus. The alignment of work between community partners and course concepts, and student’s perception of future civic engagement, was discussed.

Keywords: service learning, projects, community partnership, non-majors biology

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