Introduction

Understanding the research process is critical to an effective undergraduate Psychology program that prepares students for graduate or professional training within the context of the larger community can provide students with a deeper understanding of the discipline and the application of knowledge, as well as the impetus to serve others. In 2011, taking a service-learning approach to undergraduate research meets students' academic and professional needs, while also benefiting others.

In 2007, the American Psychological Association (APA) developed critical learning goals and competencies for undergraduate programs. These include content area knowledge, critical thinking, information and technological literacy, the understanding and application of research methodology and statistical analyses, and effective communication skills. PSYCH 4100 Experimental Psychology was designed several years ago to address all of these goals. Students had the opportunity to engage in independent, primary research. Providing appropriate levels of autonomy and responsibility to students over the direction and outcome of their work can enhance their capacity to accomplish significant tasks (Stukas, Clay, & Snyder, 1999). However, while students had an advantage over most graduates from other Psychology programs, they often expressed a desire for their work to have greater meaning by helping others.

In order to address both the need for a rigorous academic experience and student interest in work that can serve others, a partnership was established with the Director of Residence Life and PSYCH 4100 was redesigned to include a service-learning component. This pedagogical approach purposefully integrates community service into the structure of a course in order to foster meaningful knowledge for students, encourage their personal development, and address real community needs (Slavick, 2007). Additionally, it can cultivate a stronger sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1998).

There is great value in the service learning approach of student research to the goals and mission of Residence Life. Student research and its impact on the community breaks down into two areas, each contributing to a broader understanding of college student needs. The first is the research of the students themselves. Even if the samples are not representative enough to draw definitive conclusions, the data can provide direction for areas of further study within the community. Furthermore, the research literature that the students have gathered can educate Residence Life staff and administrators, providing them with theoretical and empirical explanations for the student issues that they encounter. The second impact on the community involves the research of students themselves, going through their own developmental process. Benchmarking their areas of concern and interest can create a greater understanding for Residence Life of the larger student population.

Course Design

The purpose of the course was for students to develop, implement, and present an empirical study on a topic of interest among their own students. Students were able to choose a specific topic of interest for a graduate or professional training within the context of the larger community and the application of knowledge, as well as the impetus to serve others. In 2011, taking a service-learning approach to undergraduate research meets students’ academic and professional needs, while also benefiting others.

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Research Categories & Articles

1. Millennials in College
   Possible topics: attachment style and coping strategies, decision-making , attributional style, intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation.

2. Stress management
   Possible topics: sources of stress, unhealthy vs healthy coping strategies, support systems, role of Emotional Intelligence, personality factors, attachment style.

3. Social networking, the virtual social world, and student well-being
   Possible topics: cyberbullying, texting behavior, identity development, academic performance.

4. Roommate relationships
   Possible topics: matching first year students as roommates, sources of roommate conflict, factors affecting roommate satisfaction.

Outcomes & Conclusion

Three sections of the course were run during the 2010-2011 academic year. Student projects varied widely despite the overlaps in theme, for example:

- Predictors of Academic Success: Performance, Parenting Style, and Perfectionism, L. Cyr
- Relationships among Perceived Stress, Job Satisfaction, and Self-Care in College Resident Assistants, F. DeCusati
- Facebook Jealousy and Attachment, A. Ferli
- The relationship between Emotional Self-control and Perceived Stress in College Students, A. Guttill
- Relationship Between Exercise Motivation and Stress Perception of College Students, L. Lam

Effects of Body Dissatisfaction and Social Comparison on Motivations to Exercise, B. Merrill

Roommate Relationships: Attachment Style, Self-Disclosure, and Quality of Relationship, A. Roberts

Two students were accepted to present their research at the 2011 APS convention, and several others have decided to continue their research as part of their senior capstone.

This model has several advantages and disadvantages:

- Advantages:
  - The application of methodology and statistics is helpful to understanding the research process.
  - The experience of going through the IRB process is valuable for students and institutions.
  - General topics assist in narrowing the research focus.
  - The format develops both the ability to collaborate and work independently.

- Disadvantages:
  - IRB review process limits the time to collect data
  - IRB restrictions on student research limit the complexity and scope of the designs.
  - Research categories can be restrictive for some students.

General Conclusion

The course model (a) meets necessary student learning goals articulated by the APA, (b) addresses the needs of the college community, and (c) provides students with invaluable experience that makes them competitive for graduate programs and professional employment. Student research can lead to practical applications (e.g., R.A. training, educational programming) that better serve the undergraduate population. Students themselves have a sense of ownership of their work and develop a deeper appreciation of the value of research.

References
