Service-Learning, Diversity, & the Development of Higher-Order Thinking Skills

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University of Southern California

Continuums of Service Conference
San Diego, California
April 27, 2011
Frameworks
Frameworks

• Diversity Courses
  • Now a requirement at the majority of all institutions of higher learning
  • Outcomes for students:
    • Increased cultural and racial understanding
    • Reduced stereotyping
    • Cognitive and moral development
    • Improved higher order thinking skills (e.g., critical thinking)
    • Increased sense of community
Frameworks

• Service-Learning
  • Service-learning courses now offered at most colleges and universities
  • Outcomes for students:
    • Increased cultural and racial understanding
    • Reduced stereotyping
    • Cognitive and moral development
    • Improved higher order thinking skills (e.g., critical thinking)
    • Increased sense of community
Clear Affinity Between Diversity and Service-Learning

“I learned more about how to work with people different from myself (in terms of race, class, culture, gender, age, etc.) through my experiences in JEP.”

(Spring ’05-Spring ’10, N=4170)
Context of the Study
Context: USC Student Demographics

- **USC Student Body:**
  - 37,000 students (17,500 undergraduates)
  - **Race/Ethnicity (2010 Freshman Class):**
    - African American / Black: 7%
    - Latino / Hispanic: 13%
    - Asian / Asian American: 25%
    - White / Caucasian: 42%
    - Native American / Pacific Islander: 2%
- **Gender:**
  - Female: 55%
  - Male: 45%
- 6,900 international students: 11%
- First generation college students: 12%
Context: University Park Community

- Population: 66,832 (excludes on-campus student population)
- Race & Ethnicity:
  - 21% African American
  - 57% Latino
  - 8% Asian American
  - 11% White (non-Hispanic)
  - 1% Other
- Large immigrant population:
  - 44% of population foreign born
    - 38% from Mexico
    - 24% from El Salvador
    - 10% from Guatemala
  - 61% speak a language other than English at home
USC Rossier School of Education

- 3-year, Teagle Foundation-funded project (2008-2011)
- Darnell Cole & Melora Sundt, Co-PIs
- Study of required diversity courses at USC and their impact on college students’ higher order thinking skills, intellectual and personal growth
- Partnered with JEP in Fall 2009
USC Joint Educational Project

• Established in 1972
• Place 1100-1200 students from 100+ courses in service-learning assignments every semester
• Work with approximately 20 courses every year that meet the USC diversity requirement
• Overrepresentation of underclassmen (64%), White and Asian students (72%) and women (70%)
• Collect demographic data on all participants, conduct pre-post surveys (voluntary), archive students’ weekly essays and online discussions
The Diversity Project

• Research Question:
  • How do diversity courses with a service-learning component contribute to the development of higher order thinking skills in students?

• Mixed-Methods
  • Collegiate Learning Assessment
  • Analysis of pre-post essays (quantitative and qualitative)
  • Interviews with service-learning students
Collegiate Learning Assessment
Higher Order Skills

• Analytic reasoning and evaluation
  • Interpreting and analyzing information accurately
  • Identifying logic flaws, questionable assumptions, conflicting info
  • Explaining why evidence is credible, unreliable or limited

• Problem solving
  • Considering and weighing info from discrete sources
  • Drawing conclusions that logically follow from valid arguments, evidence and examples
  • Considering the consequences of decisions

• Persuasiveness
  • Providing relevant, credible evidence and examples
  • Presenting a logically cohesive argument
  • Addressing all elements of the assignment

• Mechanics
  • Writing, grammar, syntax, diction
University Park, Los Angeles

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

University Park is a historic neighborhood in Los Angeles, California, a few miles southwest of Downtown Los Angeles. University Park refers to the University of Southern California (USC) campus in particular Exposition Park and North University Park. The area's main thoroughfares are Figueroa Street, Jefferson Boulevard, Exposition Boulevard, Hoover Street, and Vermont Avenue. The area also houses Mount St. Mary's College's Doheny campus in North University Park.

Contents

1 The neighborhood today
2 Downtown or South Los Angeles
3 Education
4 Transportation
5 References
6 External links

The neighborhood today

24th Street Theatre
Bacaro LA Wine Bar
The 2-9 Cafe
Rosso’s Pizzeria
Ragazzi Room

Adams/Vermont Farmers Market 2 - 5 p.m. Wednesdays, 1432 W. Adams, 323-777-1755
L.A. Urban Oasis Farmers Market 5010 11th Avenue, 323-291-8748, 7 a.m. – 2 p.m. Saturdays
Central Avenue 8 a.m. – noon Saturdays, Carver Middle School, 4410 McKinley at Vernon 90011
Trojan Fresh Market 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. Thursdays, USC campus—Alumni Park
Expo Park Farmers Market 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. Saturdays, south lawn of Natural History Museum

Downtown or South Los Angeles

There is some debate as to whether the University Park neighborhood is a part of Downtown Los Angeles or South Los Angeles. Historically, when USC was founded next to Exposition Boulevard, the area around what is now Olvera Street at the northern end of the current Downtown Los Angeles neighborhood. Over the years, the area and neighborhood has been considered a part of the historic District.

Since 1998 there has been a movement, supported by businesses and organizations in the region of University Park and North University Park, to redefine the neighborhood as a part of the historic Downtown Los Angeles District.
The CLA Prompt and Essay

- Assigned pre- and post-service-learning experience
- 4-6 pages
- Assess and modify the Wikipedia entry for the University Park neighborhood, drawing from an analysis of documents (listed below) and experiences in the community:
  - Wikipedia page for University Park, Los Angeles, California
  - 2000 Census data and map Daily Trojan op-ed (2005 discussion of university’s expansion plans)
  - LA City services map
  - Los Angeles Times article on University Park community
  - Los Angeles Police Department Crime Info (USC & UCLA areas)
  - Figueroa Corridor Map (Strategic Action for a Just Economy)
## Collegiate Learning Assessment Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGHER ORDER SKILL</th>
<th>EMERGING</th>
<th>DEVELOPING</th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>MASTERY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does not identify or explain the strengths and weaknesses of arguments presented in the Document Library.</td>
<td>Identifies, but does not explain, strengths and weaknesses of arguments presented in the Document Library.</td>
<td>Identifies and briefly explains several strengths and weaknesses of arguments presented in the Document Library.</td>
<td>Clearly identifies and explains the strengths and weaknesses of all major arguments presented in the Document Library.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ignores or severely misinterprets important information or provides no evidence of analysis.</td>
<td>Ignores or misinterprets much of the information in the Document Library or provides analysis that consists mostly of restating information as is.</td>
<td>Identifies and briefly explains a few strengths and weaknesses of arguments presented in the Document Library.</td>
<td>Provides accurate interpretations of much of the Document Library content and provides original analysis.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Does not make claims about the quality of evidence and focuses response mainly on unreliable evidence.</td>
<td>Does not make claims about the quality of evidence and may present unreliable evidence as credible.</td>
<td>Identifies and briefly explains a few strengths and weaknesses of arguments presented in the Document Library.</td>
<td>Makes a few accurate claims about the quality of evidence and sometimes explains those claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANALYTIC REASONING &amp; EVALUATION</strong></td>
<td>Provides a recognizable or incorrect conclusion(s) (decision or course of action) or incorrect conclusion(s) with a basis that is weakly supported with evidence.</td>
<td>Provides a recognizable conclusion(s) (decision or course of action) and some reasoning that supports it. However, the conclusion is weak and may be contradicted by unaccounted evidence.</td>
<td>Provides a clear conclusion(s) (decision or course of action) with credible evidence to back it up.</td>
<td>Provides a clear conclusion(s) (decision or course of action) and a solid rationale based largely on credible evidence from multiple sources.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If applicable, does not propose a course of action that follows logically from the conclusion.</td>
<td>If applicable, briefly proposes a course of action, but some aspects may not follow logically from the conclusion.</td>
<td>If applicable, proposes a course of action that logically follows from the conclusion and may consider consequences.</td>
<td>If applicable, proposes a course of action that logically follows from the conclusion and may consider consequences.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If applicable, does not suggest additional research or information.</td>
<td>If applicable, suggests additional research and/or information if it is warranted by the conclusion.</td>
<td>If applicable, suggests additional research and/or information that may be useful.</td>
<td>If applicable, recognizes the need for additional research and/or information to make an absolute determination, and suggests further study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROBLEM SOLVING</strong></td>
<td>There is no argument, and the writing is disorganized and confusing.</td>
<td>Fails to develop an argument or provides an unclear argument by presenting support in a disorganized fashion or undermining own points.</td>
<td>Provides some support for positions and cites sources, but support is not explained in detail.</td>
<td>Provides a clear conclusion(s) (decision or course of action) and a solid rationale based largely on credible evidence from multiple sources.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support for positions is non-existent, irrelevant, vague, or inaccurate.</td>
<td>Provides little support for positions. Support is not explained in detail, omits convincing evidence, or includes gross inaccuracies. Sources are often unclear.</td>
<td>Provides thorough support for positions, cites sources, and explains support in reasonable detail.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fails to address several elements of the task.</td>
<td>Fails to address several elements of the task.</td>
<td>Directly addresses all elements of the task.</td>
<td>Directly addresses all elements of the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSUASIVENESS</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrates no control of grammatical conventions (no evidence of control) with many errors that make the response difficult to understand.</td>
<td>Demonstrates poor control of grammatical conventions with several distracting errors.</td>
<td>Demonstrates fair control of grammatical conventions with few errors.</td>
<td>Demonstrates outstanding control of grammatical conventions.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writes sentences that are repetitive, incomplete, or difficult to understand.</td>
<td>Consistently writes sentences with poor structure and length, and several are difficult to understand.</td>
<td>Writes well-constructed sentences with some varied structure and length.</td>
<td>Consistently writes well-constructed sentences with some varied structure and length.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses limited vocabulary. Uses some vocabulary inaccurately or in a way that makes meaning unclear.</td>
<td>Likely borrows vocabulary heavily from the Document Library. Uses some vocabulary inaccurately or in a way that makes meaning unclear.</td>
<td>Uses vocabulary that communicates ideas clearly but lacks variety.</td>
<td>Uses vocabulary that is precise, purposeful, and varied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MECHANICS</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrates very good control of grammatical conventions with few errors.</td>
<td>Demonstrates fair control of grammatical conventions with several distracting errors.</td>
<td>Demonstrates good control of grammatical conventions with few errors.</td>
<td>Demonstrates outstanding control of grammatical conventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consistently writes well-constructed sentences with some varied structure and length.</td>
<td>Writes sentences that tend to be poorly constructed and vary in length, and a few are difficult to understand.</td>
<td>Consistently writes well-constructed sentences with some varied structure and length.</td>
<td>Consistently writes well-constructed sentences with some varied structure and length.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses vocabulary that communicates ideas clearly but lacks variety.</td>
<td>Generally uses vocabulary that communicates ideas clearly but lacks variety.</td>
<td>Uses vocabulary that is precise, purposeful, and varied.</td>
<td>Uses vocabulary that is precise, purposeful, and varied.</td>
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</table>
CLA Rubric and Scoring

Higher Order Thinking Skills:
- Analytic reasoning and evaluation
- Problem solving
- Persuasiveness
- Mechanics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Excelling</th>
<th>Mastering</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
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Findings
# CLA Higher Order Skills: Pre-Post Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Order thinking Skills</th>
<th>Fall 2009</th>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2010</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Pre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic Reasoning and Evaluation</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>(+.21)</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>(+.30)</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasiveness</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>(+.33)</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>(+.34)</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>(+.29)</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fall 2009: (Pre Essay) N=158, (Post Essay) N=141  
p < .000 for F09 and S10
Student Essays: Pre-Test

• Essay content:
  • Fact- and data-based
  • Listing places in the community—especially university-affiliated and/or student-oriented locations
  • Focus on the “negative” (poverty, crime rates, etc.)

• Higher Order Thinking Skills: “Emerging”
  • Students typically so not identify strengths and weaknesses of arguments presented in documents
  • Some key misinterpretations of important data
  • Limit conclusions to information provided by documents (not coursework or community experiences)
  • Limited argumentation
  • “Developing” writing skills (mechanics) – reasonably sound use of grammatical conventions, vocabulary, sentence construction
Pre-test quotes

“First off, to make the Wikipedia better, I would include more facts. I would start by including a lot of the statistics from the census data. There are a lot of useful points such as education statuses of residents. I would add much more to the education section by including data from the US census such as the fact that only 44.3% of University Park residents graduated from high school as opposed to the just over 80% percent of United States citizens.”

-- Brad

“Dangerous Effects: Although University Park is safer than before, people still need to be careful. According to the USC Department of Public Safety, there are still many dangers surrounding the USC campus. The Department of Public Safety recommends that at night a person should not go out alone.

-- Joo Young
“Modern Times: The Bad Reputation. What Happened?
Today University Park is not inhabited by the city’s most influential families but instead holds a reputation as a dangerous ghetto. The 2000 census shows some outrageous data for the 90007 zip code. There is a relative lack of a senior citizen population, the percentage of whites is extremely low where as the percentage of Hispanics or Latinos is more than quadruple the national average, residents are much more likely to rent their housing than own it and to be foreign born while they are much less likely to have a high school diploma, and the percentage of families and individuals below the poverty line is shockingly above the national average. “

-- Whitney
Student Essays: Post-Test

- Essay Content:
  - Much richer descriptions
    - Stories about real people, schools, etc.
  - Relationship between USC and the community (positive and negative)
    - Accounts of programs like JEP, positive impact on community
    - USC’s “Master Plan”
    - Historical analyses of town-gown relations
    - Gentrification and community development
  - More positive as well as more critical accounts
- Higher Order Thinking Skills: “Developing”
  - More analysis of strengths, weaknesses and gaps in supporting documents
  - Stronger but still not entirely coherent arguments
  - Draw more extensively from course work and community experiences
“The creator of the [Wikipedia] article should, however, have submitted a diversity section. Since Los Angeles is such a large metropolitan and has many different types of people, especially in the University Park area, it seem necessary to include data about the diversity. Some facts that should be included may be that 45.6% of residents are foreign born or perhaps that over 60 percent of households speak Spanish at home as opposed to 17.9 percent elsewhere in the US. Interestingly, the topic of the “index of dissimilarity” was mentioned in my Diversity and Racial Conflict class. It is the degree of segregation. It tells how people are spread across neighborhoods and what percentage of all types of people would have to move in order to have all the races be equal in all the neighborhoods. It would be very beneficial to add this to the diversity section, because presumably the index of dissimilarity for University Park would be high as in most of LA.”

– Brad
“At first, I thought that expansion of USC into University Park would definitely be a good thing, because USC could help children in the area and keep the people of the area safe, as President Sample promised. But JEP has made me think about expansion as infringing on public property. Expansion would change what is considered public property and what is considered the property of USC. If USC owns more property, does that necessarily mean that the area will become better? Will having safety officers standing around protect all people in the area or just protect USC students from the people in the area? I now question [the Daily Trojan editor’s] opinion on expansion, instead of just agreeing with it.”

-- Tiffany
Giving Back to the Community: USC often holds community services, on campus and around the University Park area, in order to improve the living conditions of residents. They also work together with the local schools, police department, and other security officials in order to ensure that the area and the people around University Park are well taken care of. The University Village, and other stores in University Park also employ mostly people from around the area, in order to help with unemployment. Offering a wide variety of services such as restaurants and other shops around this area also encourage residents to shop within the area, thus supporting the neighborhood businesses. University Park’s museums and parks also give the residents a positive way of passing their time.

-- Amanda
What do students think about diversity and service-learning?

**Interview data**

- N = 15 Students (All Female)
- 67% Freshmen and 33% Sophomores (14 of 15 traditional college age)
- Race & Ethnicity:
  - 33% Multiracial
  - 33% Asian/Asian-American
  - 27% White/Caucasian
  - 7% Latino/Hispanic
- All serving in elementary schools, child care centers or local non-profit organizations
Interview findings:

• Relevance of a Diversity Course Requirement
  • Material discussed in class more relevant, compelling when observed in the “real world”

• Service-Learning and Diversity Courses
  • An optimal, mutually reinforcing combination

• Exposure to diverse social contexts
  • Benefits of an urban education
  • Reflecting on differences between own backgrounds and experiences and those of the community members they met
  • Greater interaction with other students

(Wendy Stewart, 2010 dissertation)
Limitations

- Tip of the iceberg
- No comparison group – yet
- Have not controlled for many potential intervening factors
- Need more attention to other learning outcomes related to diversity (not just higher order thinking skills)
Summary and Implications

• Findings support the notion that service-learning and diversity coursework develops higher order thinking skills in students.

• Integrating service-learning into diversity courses can contribute to other desired learning outcomes related to moral development, civic engagement, etc.

• Campuses can capitalize on the affinity between diversity course requirements and service-learning by integrating the two when possible.

• Doing so requires additional expertise.
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