Making Gold from Gray: Service Learning in Psychology

Wingate University
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Overview

This report details the activities of the planning and implementation of a service learning (SL) course at Wingate University in an Adult and Aging Psychology course.

In this report, you will learn (1) What service learning is. (2) What service learning looks in a Wingate University course. (3) What the benefits of service learning are for our students and community members.

1
What is Service Learning?

Defining Service Learning

Service learning (SL) may mean different things to many people, especially because it uses two things that we all know well, 'Service' and 'Learning.' Researchers and educators have however set out to define this teaching practice and differentiate it from other sorts of practices.

Important Distinctions

To understand what SL is it is helpful to distinguish it from some other common activities.

Non-Service Learning Activities

Community Service
Students engage in activities that primarily focus on the service being and the benefits the service activities have on the recipients. These activities are not typically linked to course content or student led.

Community Based Learning
Students use community members and places as resources for learning more about their course content. These activities do not typically involve service to the community.

Field Education
Students perform service activities as part of a program that is designed primarily to enhance students' understanding of a field of study, while also providing substantial emphasis on the service being provided. These service opportunities are typically assigned and not student led.

"Every individual matters.

Every individual has a role to play.

Every individual makes a difference.

And we have a choice:

What sort of difference do we want to make?"
   - Jane Goodall

Service Learning

Service Learning programs are distinguished from other approaches to experiential education by their intention to benefit the provider and the recipient of the service equally, as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring.

The following describes three components of SL (KIDS Consortium, 2011) which when incorporated into a service learning course provide the maximum benefits, not only for student learning, but also for improving our community members' wellbeing (Stukas, Clary, & Snyder, 1999).

These practices are key components that were used in the project that you will read about in this report and serve as the foundation for the service learning programming that we hope to continue to build at Wingate University. While these are important components, there are even more practices that educators can incorporate into their service learning courses that you can read more about the National Youth Leadership Council's Service Learning Best Practices on their website here: www.nylc.org/page/standards

Academic Integrity
Service must be clearly related to course content and provide an opportunity for students to apply the knowledge that they have learned in the course.

Student Ownership
Students must have a voice in selecting, planning, and implementing their service learning project.

Apprentice Citizenship
Students must work on authentic community issues driven by community partner collaborations in which students learn with and from community members.

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What does SL Look Like?

Preparation

In preparation for the implementation of service learning in this Adult & Aging Psychology course, Dr. Lapan, in collaboration with Wingate Collaborative for the Common Good, held a senior partner luncheon to identify potential community partners and learn more about our senior community needs.

Learning

In application, the "learning" actually comes before the "service" component of the course. Students must first become experts in the course content so that they could then apply it in creating their projects.

This course teaches students about the physical, cognitive, and social changes of adulthood. First, students learn how our bodies and senses change over time. To bring this unit to life, students complete an aging simulation in which typical physical declines, such as vision loss, are simulated through the use of different materials.

Students then learn about changes in cognitive skills such as memory, intelligence, and problem solving. Students' preconceptions are challenged as they learn how many cognitive skills are retained with age. Additionally, they learn that lifestyle choices can be just as important to maintaining our cognitive abilities as our physical abilities.

Students learn how our social relationships and social goals develop. We discuss changes in social roles (e.g., becoming parents) that adults experience, the social relationships that become more important with age, and the effects that relationships have on our wellbeing.

"To care for those who once cared for us is one of the highest honors."
  • Tia Walker

"It is a mistake to regard age as a downhill grade toward dissolution. The reverse is true. As one grows older, one climbs with surprising strides."
  • George Sand

Service Projects

While learning in class, students were also learning about our community's needs and assets by volunteering at senior organizations. They learned that seniors were excited to form new relationships and learn new things, yet they often lacked opportunities to engage in social and cognitive activities. By mid-semester, students proposed their projects, which were informed by these observations and evidence based practices. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students couldn't implement their projects. However, students created all plans for the projects so they can be implemented in the future.

Decade Trivia

Students planned a trivia night with questions from various decades for the Ellen Fitzgerald Senior Center. Trivia question topics would be informed by a survey given beforehand. Senior would play in teams to build relationships & practice their memory skills.

Reading Buddies

Student planned to bring a group of elementary students to visit Monroe Rehabilitation to read with the residents. Children and residents would meet with students beforehand to make short books that they would read together during the visit.

Senior Prom

Students planned a prom for Monroe Rehabilitation that would provide the chance to dance and get to know others. Students created a playlist that would be based on feedback from residents, a photo booth with props, and voting for prom king and queen.

Recreate a Memory

Students visiting Brookdale Assisted Living noticed that residents often did solitary activities. To help improve their cognition and get them interacting, they planned an art night in which residents would paint a significant memory and share it with the group.

Tech 101

Students learned that seniors wanted to learn more about technology so they planned to implement a series of events via the Council on Aging to teach older adults about common technology and then test their knowledge in fun Jeopardy style games.

SL Project Pictures

Tech101 Jeopardy

Computers/Laptops	Smart Phones (iPhones, Android, etc.)	Entertainment Apps	Communication Apps
$100	$100	$100	$100
$200	$200	$200	$200
$300	$300	$300	$300
$400	$400	$400	$400
$500	$500	$500	$500

YOU ARE INVITED TO...

HOLLYWOOD PROM

SATURDAY | APRIL 18, 2020 | 3PM
MONROE REHABILITATION CENTER DINING HALL

Decades Trivia Night

April 15th, 2020 at 3 pm

Ellen Fitzgerald-Game Room

Join us for a night of fun trivia questions from memorable decades

Door prizes

Light refreshments

Recreating Memories Event!!!

Come out and enjoy a nice painting session with friends and think about the good times! all supplies included.

May 3rd
@4PM
Brookdale Union
West Wing Room

The Old Man & The Neighborhood
By: Roman Kepes

There once lived an old man in a quiet neighborhood. One day, he woke up to a man knocking on the door. "I wonder who that could be" said the old man.

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What were the Benefits?

Student Impact

To assess the benefits of SL for students, all students completed post service learning surveys. These measured their academic performance & engagement, civic engagement, and knowledge. These students' response were compared to those of students who took the course in a previous semester, but without the service learning component.

Community Impact

To assess community impact, students reported periodically on how many seniors were served during their site visits. All project groups also created impact surveys that would have been given to seniors following the implementation of their projects.

Community Findings

- Students engaged with 7 different community organizations.
- Student completed a combined total of 56 visits to community partner organizations.
- During these visits, students interacted with and served 886 seniors.

Student Findings

- Students reported positive outcomes on all measures including academic learning, positive feelings toward learning, and engagement in the community.
- Students generally viewed the service learning experience positively.
- Importantly, students in the SL class learned more and were more engaged in class, however these differences were not statistically significant. This is likely due to the small number of students. More data is needed in the future.

"I did enjoy being able to interact with the community in a meaningful way before everything was on restriction. I feel like I was well prepared for interactions I did have, and I gained the confidence to think through other ideas that would help the community, as before this, I didn't feel like I had any tools to be able to do anything about anything."
- **Wingate Student**

Benefits

Although students were unable to implement their projects, they did get to spend valuable time helping our community's seniors before the pandemic began. They were also able to think through the important decisions that they needed to for their projects, which facilitated their learning and increased their concern for our community.

Academic Performance
Students in the SL course had significantly higher final course grades (see Fig. 1) and they also had higher scores on an end of semester assessment (see Fig. 2).

Concern for Seniors
Students in both classes reported similarly high feelings of concern for seniors. This suggests that just learning about aging may increase students' thoughts and feelings about older adults.

21st Century Skills
Students in the SL class reported somewhat higher 21st century skills (see Fig. 3), which include skills like teamwork and problem solving.

Academic Engagement
Students in the SL reported somewhat higher engagement in class (see Fig. 4). This means that students were more interested in class and learning the course content.

Figure 1. Student grades distribution comparing the control (non-SL) and intervention (SL) classrooms. Students in the intervention classroom had significantly fewer D's and F's
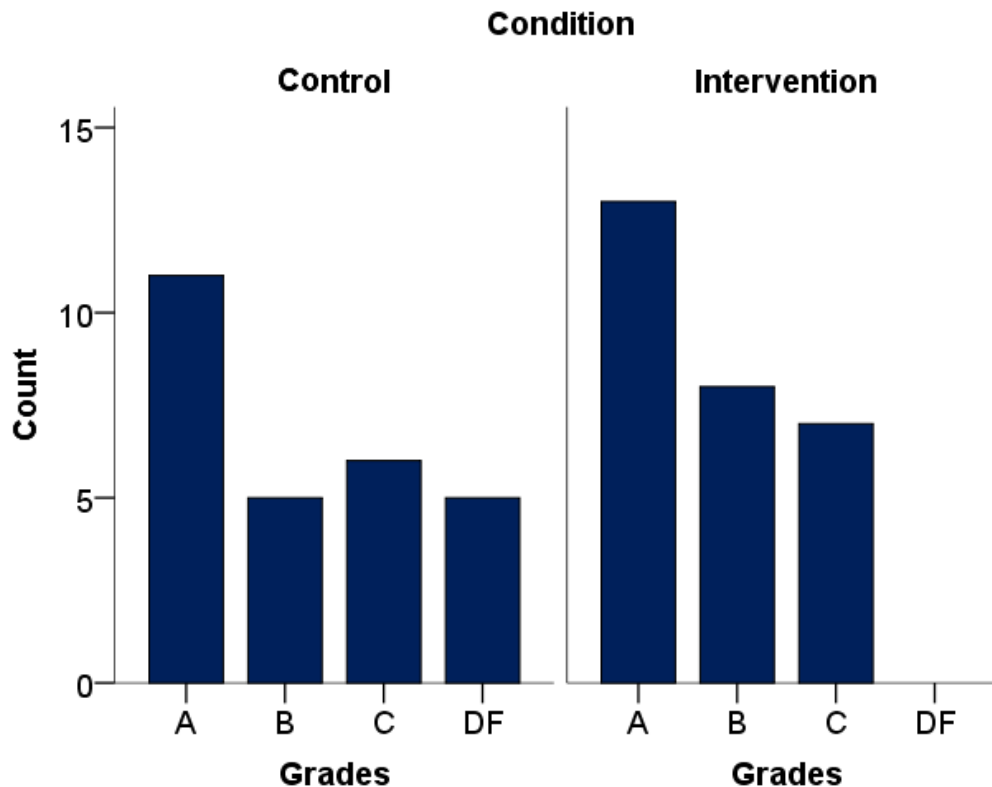

Figure 2. Students' performance on a post course 'Aging Quiz'. Students in the intervention (SL) classroom performed significantly better on the quiz compared to those in the control (non-SL) classroom. The control class had a D average, whereas the SL classroom had a C average.
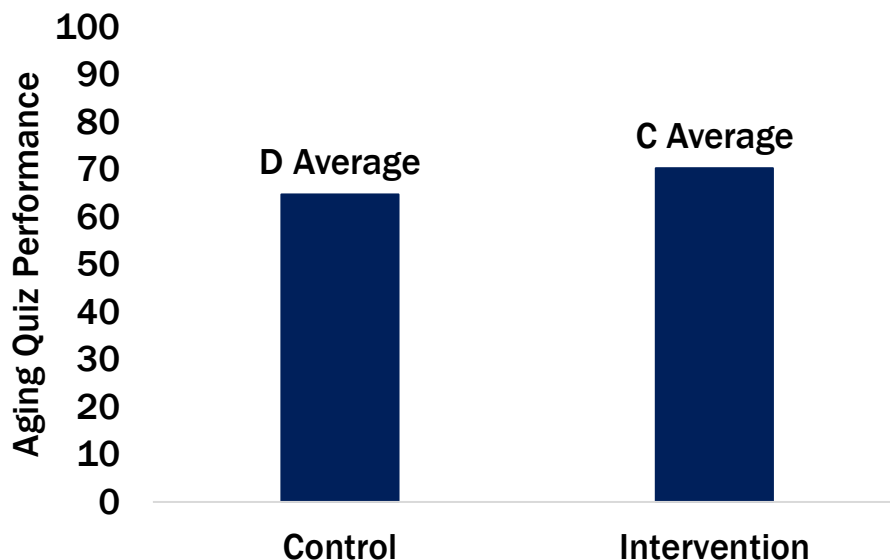
Figure 3. Twenty-first Century Skill scores in the SL classrooms was somewhat higher than the control classrooms, although not statistically different.
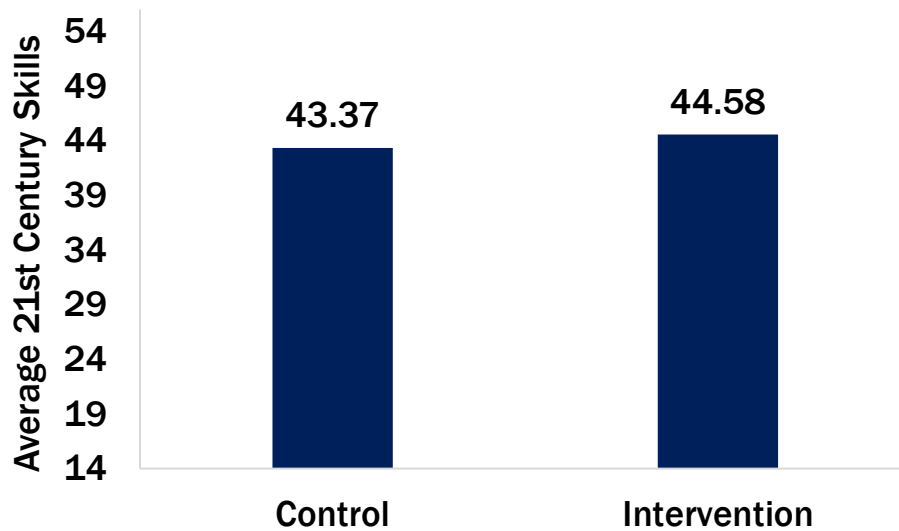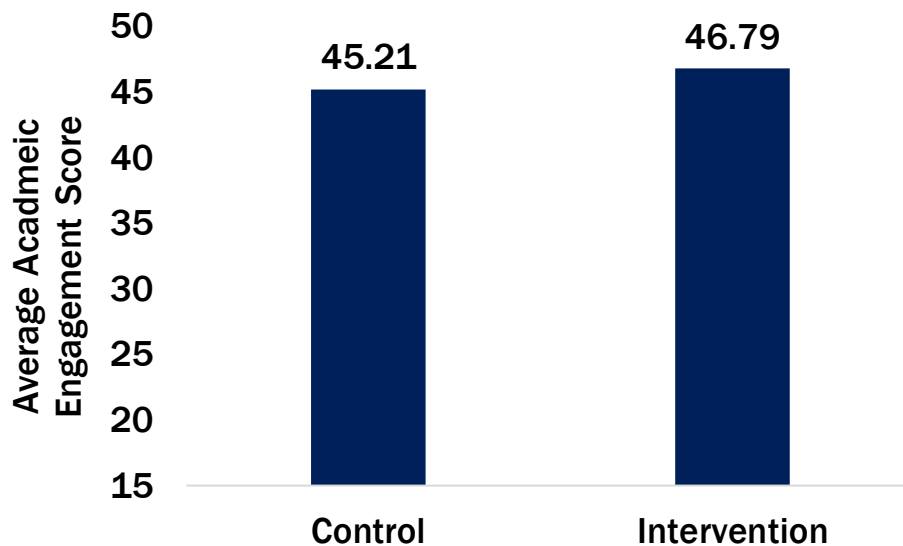

Figure 4. Academic engagement scores in the SL classrooms was somewhat higher than the control classrooms, although not statistically different.

Summary & Future Directions

This study demonstrated that students show interest and excitement in engaging in service learning approaches to learning. Further, community partners are also open and enthusiastic to have Wingate students work with them, as was evident by the number of community partners that engaged with the course. Importantly, this preliminary data adds to the significant body of literature which already demonstrates that SL is an impactful pedagogical tool that empowers students, improves learning, and improves our community. In the future, we plan to engage many faculty in developing and implementing other SL courses which will be assessed like the current course. This will allow us to assess the broader impact of this teaching practice, including student retention over time as well as economic, social, and ecological improvements to Eastern Union County.