



Service-Learning in the Digital Age

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 that was taught in a synchronous online format during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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.

Community Engaged Learning

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.



2

What does SL Look Like?

Preparation

This course was a continuation of prior service-learning courses taught by Dr. Lapan. In previous semester, community organization had collaborated in this course with students. Many agreed to continue the partnerships in this semester. Some partners were also new collaborators.

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 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 virtually engaging with senior organizations including the Union County Council on Aging, Ellen Fitzgerald Senior Center, and the Senior Nutrition Program. Students learned that seniors were feeling particularly isolated due to the pandemic and lacked social connection. Although technology was a tool for this, some struggled to adapt to the quick change. Also, many seniors were increasingly sedentary because they couldn't leave their homes.



Fitness Videos

Students partnered with the Council on Aging and created a series of instructional workout video suitable for folks of any age. These were used to facilitate a work out sessions that seniors attended and could be used in the future.



Zoom Instructional Videos

Also working with the Council on Aging, another group of students worked to create instructional videos to show older adults how to use Zoom.



Senior Student Chat Time

One of the normal facets of programming missing during Zoom events at the Senior Center was the typical socializing. Students implemented a number of chat sessions at the beginning and end of current Zoom events to connect with the older adults and help them connect with one another.



Festive Zoom Trivia

Seniors sometimes found engaging in the Senior Center programs challenging because they struggled with Zoom. Another group hosted a festive Holiday Trivia event that also had Zoom tips and tricks along the way.



Thanksgiving Healthy Living Newsletter

One group partnered with the Senior Nutrition Program which provide meals to seniors in need, although now only by dropping food off at home. Students created a newsletter that provided healthy living tips, information on how to stay connected virtually, and some jokes and puzzles to brighten spirits.

SL Project Pictures



Chat Time
Communicate, interact, and Enjoy!





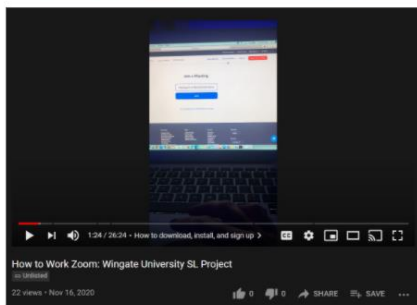
Time - 9:00 - 9:30am
Day : Wednesday November 18 2020
Zoom Link will be available soon!



**Hot Topic :
Favorite Range
of Motion
Activity**



Term: Fall | Issue 1 | November 2020



NUTRITION	SURVEY LINK	STAY CONNECTED
<p>Nutrition is about eating a healthy and balanced diet so your body gets the nutrients that it needs. They include carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, minerals, and water. Good nutrition is important, no matter what your age. It gives you energy and can help you control your weight. It may also help prevent some diseases, such as osteoporosis, high blood pressure, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. But as you age, your body and life change, and so does what you need to stay healthy.</p> 	<p>Please complete the following survey so our group can receive feedback from you all. Your input is important to us!</p> <p>https://www.surveymonkey.com</p>	 <p>Although this is a hard time, there are many ways to stay connected with the world. Some ways to do this include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Play popular board games online - Find a Pen Pal to communicate with - Try to learn something new everyday - Attend a virtual event hosted by the Ellen Fitzgerald Senior Center
<p>THE FUNNIES</p> <p>Q: Why did the turkey cross the road twice? A: To prove he wasn't a chicken!</p> <p>Q: What happened when the turkey got into a fight? A: He got the stuffing knocked out of him!</p> <p>Q: What key won't open any door? A: A turkey!</p>		



3

What were the Benefits?

Student Impact

To assess the benefits of SL for students, all students completed post service-learning surveys. These measured their civic engagement, 21st century skills, relatedness, and knowledge. These students' response were compared to those of students who took the course the same semester, but without the service-learning component.

Community Impact

To assess community impact, students reported periodically on how many seniors were served during their project. 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 3 different community organizations.
- Student completed a combined total of over 50 hours of interaction with community partner organizations.
- During the course of the semester, students interacted with and served 828 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 civically engaged, more connected to their peers, and had improved communication skills.

“Because of my service-learning experience, I would say that I am more empathetic towards the senior community and aware of their needs. Although we all like to say that we do not just think of ourselves, it can sometimes be hard not to when we are in our little bubbles and programmed to only participate in activities that make us look better. This experience made me realize that I could really do something to help others and not just further my agenda. Not everything is about whether or not it looks good on your resume; we should be doing these acts out of the goodness of our hearts and for betterment of our society.”

- **Wingate Student**

Benefits

Data showed that students in the SL version had a number of benefits from being in the course including better grades, feeling more connected to their peers, improved their communication skills, and were more engaged in their communities.



Academic Performance

Students in the SL course had marginally higher final course grades (see Fig. 1). On average, this resulted in approximately half a letter grade improvement.



Connection with Peers

Students in the intervention class reported somewhat higher levels of peer connection (see Fig. 2). This included feeling like they got along better with their peers, liked their peers, and had friends at Wingate.



21st Century Skills

Students in the SL class reported some higher 21st century skills (see Fig. 3). In particular, students reported improved communication and public speaking.



Civic Engagement

Students in the SL class reported somewhat higher civic engagement (see Fig. 4). This means that students were more involved in taking civic actions and giving back to their communities.

Figure 1. Student average end of course grades comparing the control (non-SL) and intervention (SL) classrooms. Students in the intervention classroom had approximately half a letter grade higher end of course grades.

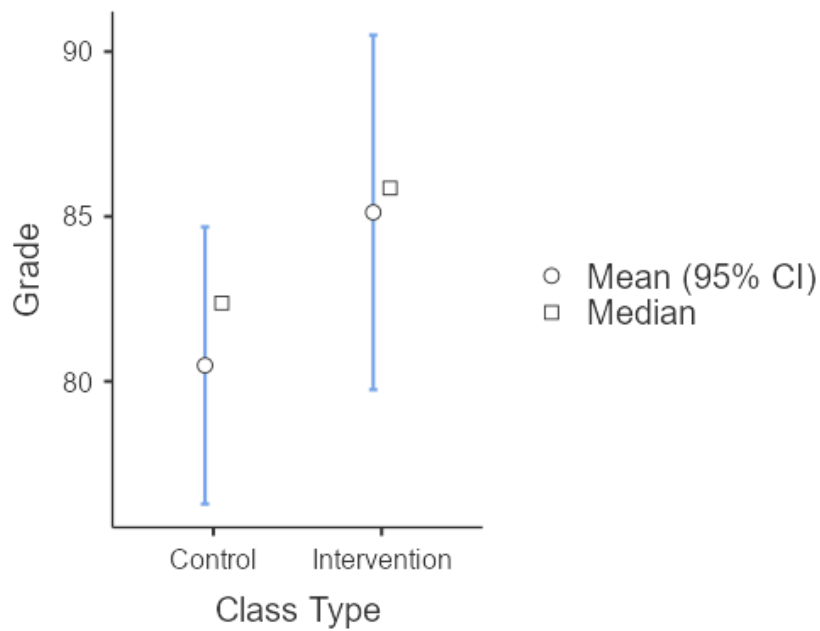


Figure 2. Students' average relatedness to their peers was higher in the SL course compared to the non-SL course

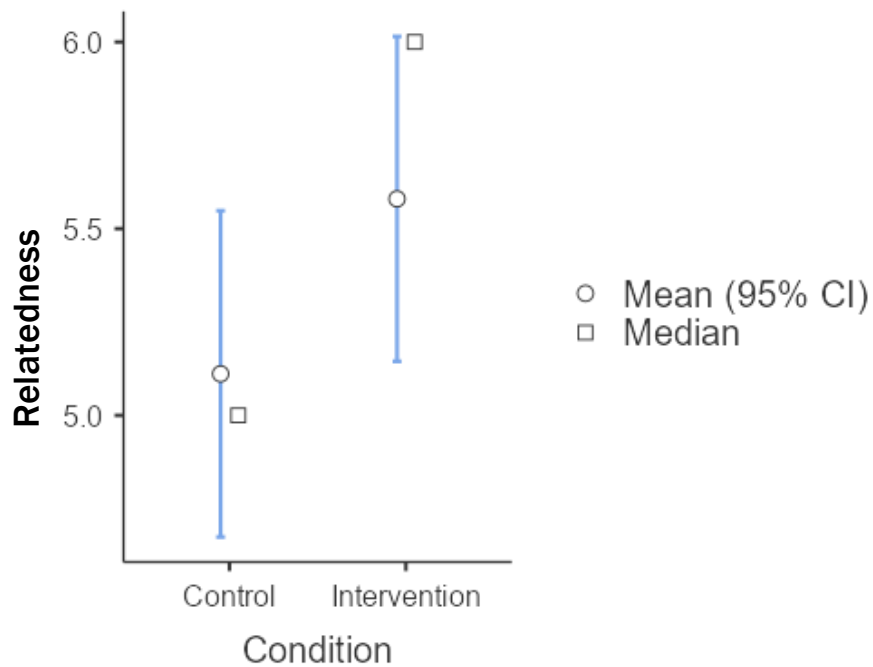


Figure 3. Students' in the SL class reported on average better ability to communicate their ideas in front of other people.

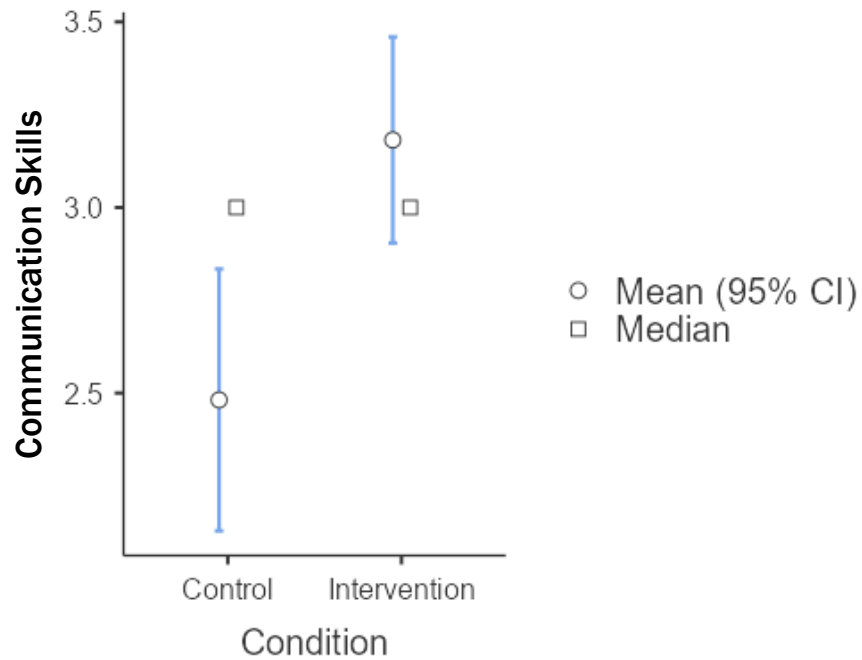
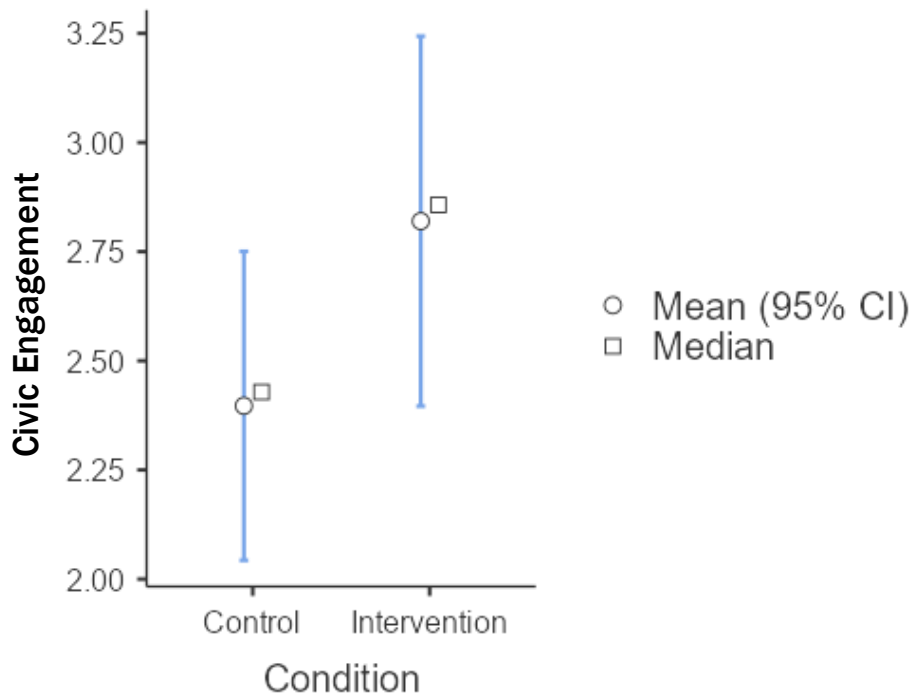


Figure 4. Students' average engagement in civic action was higher in the SL course compared to the non-SL course.





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. Furthermore, it demonstrates that even in a virtual learning environment, faculty can engage students in meaningful community engaged experiences and improve students' connections to the community and one another.