

COMMUNITY–ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS: DEVELOPING A SERVICE–LEARNING FRAMEWORK



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Academic partnerships with hospitals and health care agencies for authentic clinical learning have become a major focus of schools of nursing and professional nursing organizations. Formal academic partnerships in community settings are less common despite evolving models of care delivery outside of inpatient settings. Community–Academic partnerships are commonly developed as a means to engage nursing students in service–learning experiences with an emphasis on student outcomes. The benefit of service–learning projects on community partners and populations receiving the service is largely unknown primarily due to the lack of structure for identifying and measuring outcomes specific to service–learning. Nursing students and their faculty engaged in service–learning have a unique opportunity to collaborate with community partners to evaluate benefits of service–learning projects on those receiving the service. This article describes the development of a service–learning framework as a first step toward successful measurement of the benefits of undergraduate nursing students' service–learning projects on community agencies and the people they serve through a collaborative community–academic partnership. (Index words; Service–Learning; Community–Academic partnerships; Nursing clinical education) *J Prof Nurs* 31:395–401, 2015. © 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC partnerships with hospitals and health care agencies has become a major focus of schools of nursing and professional nursing organizations ([American Association of Colleges of Nursing \[AACN\], 2014](#)). Although service–learning experiences supported through community–academic partnerships (CAPs) have existed for some time, they tend to be less formalized and are commonly developed as a means to engage nursing students in service–learning

experiences with a focus on student learning rather than on the service provided ([Murray, 2013](#)).

Service–Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, meet academic course outcomes, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities ([Seifer & Connors, 2007](#)). The literature is rich with evidence supporting service–learning as a pedagogical strategy that promotes learning in nursing education ([AACN, 2008](#); [Community-Campus Partnerships for Health \[CCPH\], 2013](#); [Groh, Stallwood, & Daniels, 2011](#); [Jacoby, 1996](#); [Richards & Novak, 2010](#); [Seifer & Vaughn, 2002](#); [Stallwood & Groh, 2011](#)). However, the benefit of service–learning to community partners and populations receiving the service is largely unknown ([Groh et al., 2011](#)).

Mutual decision making, shared goals, reciprocity, along with meeting agency and community needs have been identified as hallmarks of healthy CAPs ([Seifer & Vaughn, 2002](#); [Stallwood & Groh, 2011](#)). Service–Learning has the potential to be reciprocally beneficial to populations, communities, and individuals served ([CCPH, 2013](#); [Bailey, Carpenter, & Harrington, 2002](#)). This article describes a collaborative project to create a

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service-learning framework to guide nursing faculty in planning service-learning projects that support reciprocity and mutual benefit for both the learner and those receiving the service. The project was led by two nursing faculty from a health sciences university in partnership with representatives from three community agencies who had previously participated in service-learning projects.

Background

CAPs developed over time provide rich clinical learning experiences for nursing students. In the setting for this project, nursing students had participated in a variety of service-learning projects providing needed services to individuals, families, populations, communities, and agency partners. Community partners had indicated that significant contributions had been made as a result of the service-learning projects. However, this input was anecdotal because the service-learning projects had not been structured for measuring benefits to those receiving the service. Many community partners agreed that benefits to the agency and those they served could not be measured without clear project planning and outcome measures. It was believed that a service-learning framework would support greater reciprocity between student learning, the community being served, and the partnering agencies; provide a mechanism for students to learn about outcome-driven practice; and capture the benefits of service-learning projects on populations, individuals, and community agencies. It was for this reason that two nursing faculty partnered with representatives from three community agencies who had historically participated in service-learning projects to develop a service-learning framework. The project's aims were to (a) ensure a collaborative process of service-learning project development and (b) support reciprocity through a mechanism for measuring the benefits of service-learning projects on those receiving the service.

Review of the Literature

Service-Learning

Service-Learning is increasingly being incorporated into university curricula as a teaching-learning strategy across multiple professions and disciplines and, particularly, in health sciences education (Champagne, 2006; Groh et al., 2011). The National Community Service Trust Act of 1993 defines service-learning as a "method under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs, are integrated into the student's academic curriculum, provide structured reflection, and enhance what is taught by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community" (National Community and Service Trust Act of 1993; as cited in Cauley et al., 2001, p.174).

Service-Learning is a valuable educational pedagogy that enables students to apply classroom content to real-life situations through experiential learning (Murray, 2013). Students engage in activities that address human and community needs with opportunity for reflection to meet learning outcomes (Jacoby, 1996). Service-

Learning has been identified as an innovative teaching-learning strategy that provides students with opportunities to experience practice and application of professional concepts and skills in preparation for professional nursing in contemporary health care settings (AACN, 2008; Richards & Novak, 2010; Seifer & Vaughn, 2002).

Nursing faculty have adopted service-learning as a pedagogical strategy for authentic learning because it exposes students to real-life health challenges in community and inpatient settings, including experiences in interprofessional collaboration, problem solving, ethical decision-making, change management, and cultural competence (AACN, 2008; Stallwood & Groh, 2011). Further, service-learning has the potential to increase civic responsibility, communication skills, and awareness of health care disparities, social injustice, cultural proficiency, and personal growth (Groh et al., 2011, Murray, 2013). Murray (2013) concluded that "service-learning is supported by the current literature as a valuable and applicable teaching pedagogy to enable nursing students to achieve competencies that are necessary to go forward as a professional nurse in a diverse, changing healthcare environment" (p.626).

Service-Learning and CAPs

Historically, nursing faculty have initiated and managed partnerships between academia and community agencies with a focus on providing clinical learning experiences for students (Foss, Bonaiuto, Johnson, & Moreland, 2003). In recent years, there has been a shift toward greater collaboration and mutuality between community agencies and academia (AACN, 2014; Bailey et al., 2002; CCPH, 2013; Foss et al., 2003). Partnering with community agencies to address individual-, population-, and system-level gaps through the establishment of mutual goals is essential in service-learning (Bailey et al., 2002). The ideal CAP is a positive experience whereby both partners are involved in the development and evaluation of service-learning projects that align with the everyday life of the agency (Bailey et al., 2002).

Community-Campus Partners for Health (CCPH), a nonprofit membership organization that promotes health equity and social justice through partnerships between communities and academic institutions, published a set of principles for greater collaboration between academic institutions and community partners (2013). When adhered to, the principles of partnership serve as standards of reciprocity and provide a foundation for service-learning that includes shared decision making and joint responsibility for the successes, failures, communications, and modifications to service-learning projects (Foss et al., 2003). According to CCPH (2013), mutually agreed upon guiding principles, high-quality methods, robust metrics, and collaborative experiences that promote positive change are the drivers of successful CAPs.

CAPs in service-learning are possible when problems and solutions are identified together, when problems are addressed mutually, and when clear responsibilities, expectations, and objectives are established between the

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