

Exploring Service-Learning with Dance Students

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Introduction

In 2010, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) published *The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report*, which recommended using high-impact educational practices and assessing their potential impact on student success to demonstrate the value of libraries. High-impact educational practices, which include practices such as diversity/global learning, undergraduate research, and writing-intensive courses, are those shown in research to significantly affect student engagement and retention (Kuh, 2008). However, engaging in such practices can be challenging, especially given decreasing funding in higher education and libraries in particular. Many of these practices require sustained resources and support for success. In order to maximize resources, it is important for libraries to support programs that demonstrate their value but are also sustainable. It can be particularly difficult for libraries to demonstrate the value of involvement in co-curricular learning experiences because they occur outside of the formal classroom environment. However, co-curricular activities enrich students' learning experience by providing a complementary and supplementary educational environment. This chapter describes some strategies libraries can use to support and assess student success via the high-impact practice of service-learning in a co-curricular setting.

Service-Learning

The goal of service-learning is to “give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community” (Kuh, 2008, para. 10). Experiential learning, of which service-learning is a form, can also be a part of diversity/global learning, another high-impact educational practice which “helps students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own” (para. 9). Both service-learning and diversity/global learning are identified as high-impact educational practices. Felten and Clayton (2011) note that service-learning provides an opportunity to connect learning in the classroom with public and civic responsibility. They define service-learning as experiences that:

- advance learning goals (academic and civic) and community purposes;
- involve reciprocal collaboration among students, faculty/staff, community members, community organizations, and educational institutions to fulfill shared objectives and build capacity among all partners; and
- include critical reflection and assessment processes that are intentionally designed and facilitated to produce and document meaningful learning and service outcomes (p. 76).

The focus on learning, reciprocity, and community engagement make service-learning a natural fit with co-curricular learning since it emphasizes both academic and civic growth. Research on service-learning, synthesized in Eyler (2010), also shows that service-learning has small but significant effects on students, improving their personal growth and civic development, among other skills.

INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING

Several researchers have addressed the specific impact of international service-learning. Bringle and Hatcher (2011) define international service-learning as

a structured academic experience in another country in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally (p. 19).

Although both domestic and international service-learning opportunities are valuable, Niehaus and Crain (2013) found that students on international service-learning trips connected with and learned more from community members than students in similar domestic programs. Similarly, Nickols, Rothenberg, Moshi, and Tetloff (2013) argue that “the experiences available to students in an international setting, particularly one without a familiar infrastructure in relation to language, physical comforts, culture, and/or belief systems, stretch students in both expected and unanticipated ways” (p. 98). Crabtree (2013) also suggests that even short-term service-learning projects can be a point of transformation on students’ educational paths.

SERVICE-LEARNING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

However, service-learning also presents challenges. Crabtree (2013) notes that student participants may develop new ways of looking at the world but may also disrupt community relationships in the areas they serve or cause other community conflicts. She advocates looking carefully at multiple considerations, such as participant preparation and project partnerships, to make sure that the project does not destabilize community relationships or burden communities unnecessarily. Multiple scholars also address the need to integrate reflection into the curriculum to support student learning (e.g., Crabtree, 2013; Keen & Hall, 2009). Felten and Clayton (2011) also suggest that service-learning is most effective when learning and service goals are integrated, when student work supports these goals, and when communities collaborate in the design process. They also highlight the importance of a flexible curriculum that adapts to dynamic environments and allows students to integrate learning inside and outside the classroom (p. 81).

Co-curricular service-learning offers a great opportunity for students to learn outside of the traditional classroom. Bass (2012) argues that increasing opportunities for experiential learning, as well as the informal peer-to-peer culture of the internet, have disrupted higher education and that institutions need to recognize that formal learning is not the only or even the primary way that students learn. Bass (2012) also notes the need for institutions of higher learning to provide resources for service-learning, noting that “we have supported the experiential co-curriculum (and a handful of anomalous courses, such as first-year seminars) largely on the margins, even as they often serve as the poster children for the institutions’ sense of mission, values, and brand” (p. 2). This shift in learning practices offers librarians a chance to connect with faculty and students in a new way, highlighting information literacy skills both inside and outside of the classroom.

SERVICE-LEARNING IN LIBRARIES

Librarians still have work to do in terms of showing the value that they can bring to such learning. Halperin and Schmidt (2016) note that experiential learning opportunities like service-learning are dynamic and follow less-traditional modes of classroom engagement, which may make it harder for faculty to understand how and why to include librarians. They explain that “research has shown that even the most research-intensive senior seminars or capstone courses—including those that may include community-based projects—do not rely on librarian support unless that work is negotiated between the faculty member and the librarian, and there is intentionality built into the projects” (p. 3). Therefore, librarians interested in service-learning must work harder to develop relationships with faculty and find opportunities to involve themselves in service-learning. Kott (2016) asserts that libraries need to play a greater role in service-learning by coordinating campus resources for service-learning, partnering with other campus entities who do service-learning, creating a service-learning plan for the library, and integrating it with other strategic initiatives. In particular, she suggests that each library should assign a person or group as the locus for service-learning initiatives and that libraries assess their collections and services as they relate to service-learning (Kott, 2016). Integrating libraries into the many partnerships that foster service-learning makes sure librarians are on hand to offer their services.

In particular, librarians can emphasize their ability to help students develop information literacy skills by finding resources to complete their projects. Stark (2016) argues that librarians teaching in service-learning classrooms need to provide information about how to find both scholarly and community sources. She suggests that students can connect what they learn with their experiences more effectively if they do this.

Information literacy, in particular, is a potential point of confluence that has not yet been fully considered as an area for deep connection with service-learning. Students enrolled in service-learning courses could benefit tremendously from a form of information literacy instruction that encourages them to use research as a mode of building a bridge between the academic and service information environments (Stark, 2016, p. 51).

Sweet (2013) also notes that service-learning can help students practice information literacy skills outside of the classroom, explaining that

most well-designed service-learning courses require this sort of background research from students to better understand the problems at hand and the organizations/communities that students will be working with. This type of contextual research may not be referred to as information literacy by either the instructor or students, but it is quite commonplace in most authentic service-learning courses (p. 269).

Although it may not be recognized as information literacy instruction initially, librarians can play a key role in helping service-learning students and the faculty who teach them find the contextual information necessary to prepare for the program.

Ballet and Modern Dance in Panama

The University of Utah has a longstanding commitment to student success, demonstrated by its strategic goal to “promote student success to transform lives,” which includes a commitment to “increase participation in high impact programs (deeply engaged learning opportunities)” (University of Utah, 2018, para. 1). The School of Dance is one of several departments in the university that offers service-learning opportunities to its students in a variety of ways, including international service-learning trips to teach and share dance. In 2017, the School of Dance offered students the opportunity to participate in Ballet and Modern Dance in Panama, a weeklong service-learning trip to Panama to teach dance to Panamanian youth through an organization called Movement Exchange.

Although similar types of service-learning trips had previously been offered through the School of Dance, personnel changes meant that a new dance faculty member took over as the head of the Ballet and Modern Dance in Panama program. With new program leadership, the opportunity arose to pilot a new collaborative and interdisciplinary approach. The goals for the pilot were to explore the possibility of a long-term

collaboration between the library and the School of Dance in support of service-learning projects based on information literacy and social justice. Program leadership wanted to introduce students to a curriculum focused on cultural competence, information literacy, and dance pedagogy and to explore whether or not students found this curriculum helpful in the context of a service-learning trip. The J. Willard Marriott Library was an ideal partner for this pilot because of its strategic goals, which call for employees to “promote student success to transform lives” and to “foster collaborative partnerships with campus and community” (Marriott Library, 2018). In addition, the library has been interested in supporting service-learning as a new way to build collaborative relationships, fitting well with the goals of this program. The library also actively seeks opportunities to develop additional collaborations with other faculty and departments on campus. The lead author, a librarian in the Marriott Library Faculty Services division, served as instructor along with the new head of the Panama program.

CURRICULAR GOALS AND FRAMEWORK

The two instructors decided from the beginning of the partnership to develop a curriculum that integrated dance pedagogy and information literacy. Librarians at the Marriott Library regularly provide information literacy instruction in a variety of contexts in support of the library’s goals of supporting student learning and fostering collaborative relationships. Ballet and Modern Dance in Panama instructors would explore cultural competence and social justice through the lens of information competency and fluency. The instructors’ focus on integrating information literacy with service-learning and dance fit well with the library’s interest in promoting learning for practical and academic contexts.

When developing the curriculum, the instructors aligned information literacy learning goals to the ACRL *Framework* (ACRL *Framework*, 2015). The instructors employed the Authority is Constructed and Contextual frame to develop a learning goal about dominant narratives. Students would be able to recognize that there are many people whose stories and voices about Panama or local service-learning may be silenced by dominant narratives about US service-learning. A related learning goal was that students would learn to use research tools to uncover these multiple views and assess their credibility. The curriculum also emphasized that Information Has Value, reminding students that some voices, like those of the students they were teaching, might be systematically underrepresented in scholarly literature. The instructors deliberately focused learning goals on social justice aspects of information literacy to help students understand that they would be exposed to many different viewpoints.

Based on these learning goals, the instructors identified several areas in which the library could provide support for the service-learning program:

1. Librarian-led classes on cultural competence to help orient the students for the trip
2. Librarian assistance to students searching for resources about dance pedagogy, since many of the students would be teaching dance for the first time
3. Librarian assistance in helping students find resources that would support their reflections about their learning goals and personal development

4. Librarian support in developing a curriculum that would integrate information literacy concepts, critical thinking, and cultural competence to prepare students for the trip
5. Librarian engagement during the trip to reinforce content learned during the pre-trip workshops, encourage critical reflection based on that content, and conduct observation and other methods of qualitative research that would be useful in developing the curriculum for future iterations of the program

PRE-TRIP WORKSHOPS

Once the learning goals were developed, the next step was to design and deliver instruction in preparation for the trip. The instructors designed a series of four half-day workshops that occurred the semester before the trip. In-between each workshop session, students had readings and tasks to complete for the next session, such as developing an outline for their dance activities with Panamanian students. Students participated in the curriculum design by completing a pre-workshop online questionnaire asking them about their learning goals and areas of concern. In addition to dance pedagogy, the workshop curriculum included an overview of cultural competence principles, an introduction to finding and using library materials related to Panama and dance, and a series of reflection activities to help the students think about how to use what they learned. Librarians also provided basic Spanish vocabulary lessons and demonstrated how to access Spanish-language resources because many students were anxious about their lack of Spanish-language skills. Workshop participation was not limited to those traveling to Panama, as several students who were not able to participate in the Panama trip attended the workshops because of their interest in service-learning and culture competence.

DURING THE TRIP

After the workshops were complete, the instructors and participating students traveled to Panama for the week-long service-learning trip. During the trip, students volunteered with multiple organizations, including a group home for children and a dance school. The librarian role on the trip was multi-faceted. The lead author was actively involved in service-learning activities, chaperoning at least one group per day to their service-learning activity and conducting regular check-ins with students, reminding them of concepts they learned during the pre-trip workshops. Another major role was student support, as the lead author coached students through their concerns and anxieties about teaching and encouraged them to integrate cultural competence and information literacy concepts into their thinking. The third primary librarian role was related to assessment. Ahead of the trip, the instructors developed assessment tools to assess student perceptions of learning, requesting and receiving an Internal Review Board exemption for the research. During the trip, the lead author conducted observation and other methods of qualitative research that would be useful in revising the curriculum for future iterations of the program.

Assessment

Although assessment of instructional activities is always a best practice, assessment of the Panama service-learning program was identified as particularly important.

Library involvement in the program was on a pilot basis, and this pilot required considerable time and resources involved on the part of librarians. Although library administrators supported the service-learning pilot, they were unable to provide financial support to cover the costs of librarian travel. Instead, the lead author covered her costs using personal funds. Because this funding model was unsustainable, it was important to demonstrate the value of the pilot to library administrators in order to make the case for library funding for future service-learning projects. In particular, the lead author aimed to show that librarian participation in a service-learning trip would enrich the relationship between the library and faculty departments, support deep student learning using library resources, and lead to continued collaborations with faculty members.

The instructors collected assessment data that was intended to demonstrate the impact of the social justice-focused information literacy content as well as the dance curriculum. Accordingly, the instructors developed pre- and post-trip questionnaires to assess participants' perceptions of their knowledge of such topics as white privilege and cultural competence as well as their confidence in teaching dance skills. The instructors focused on these areas based on the curricular goals of teaching social justice and cultural competence using an information literacy lens and helping students explore dance pedagogy through teaching.

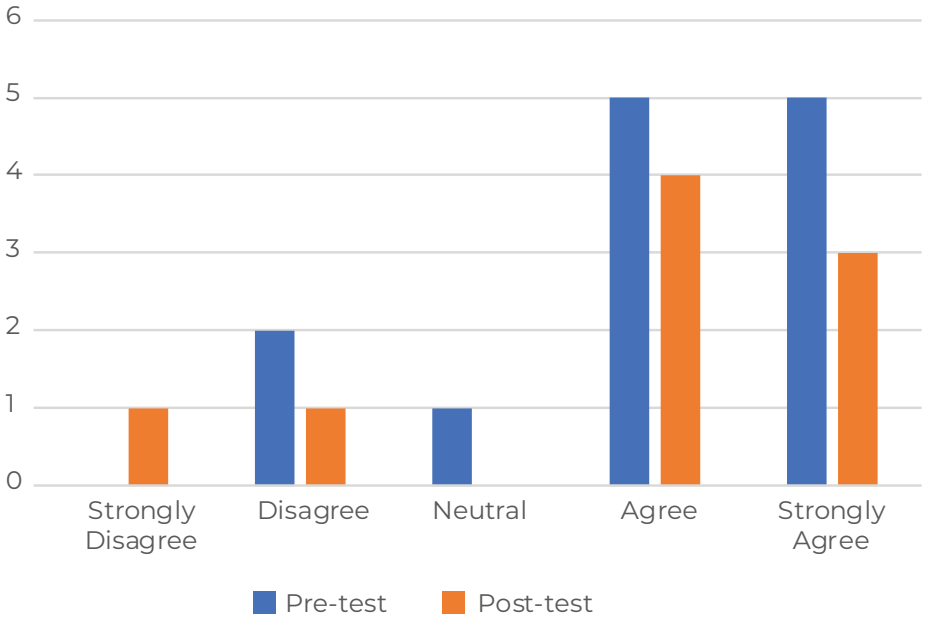
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One focus of the pre- and post-assessment was to determine whether students felt that they progressed in their understanding of social justice issues covered in the workshop. Accordingly, in the pre- and post-trip questionnaire, the instructors asked participants to self-assess their understanding of common terms such as implicit bias and cultural competence as well as their comfort levels with aspects such as working with individuals from other cultures. Instructors asked participants in the service-learning trip to complete the questionnaire before and after the trip to gauge how their self-assessments changed as a result of the trip.

For the learning goal of understanding more about Panama and the voices that may be silenced in dominant discourses, instructors expected to see an increase in student self-evaluation of their knowledge as a result of their information literacy training and participation in the service-learning program. Instructors found that, as expected, when asked to rate their response to the statement "I have a strong understanding of the history of Panama's relationship with the United States," all participants rated themselves more highly at the end of the trip. This suggests that participating in the instructors' information literacy sessions and going on the trip changed students' perceptions of their understanding of Panama in an international context.

However, instructors also found areas in which participants rated themselves more poorly at the end of the trip. Questions such as "I understand the meaning of implicit bias," "I feel comfortable working with communities other than my own," and "I understand how implicit biases may lead to cultural conflict" resulted in lower self-assessments from participants (Figure 12.1).

I understand the meaning of implicit bias



I feel comfortable working with people in communities different from my own

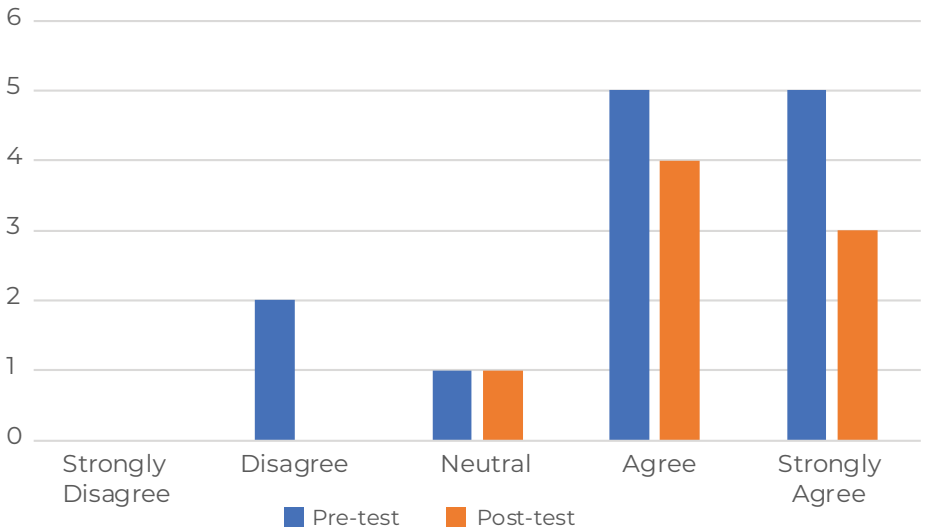


Figure 12.1
Student Pre-and Post-Test Responses

Table 12.1

Participant Response Codebook

Codes:	Code examples:
Dance	Teaching dance, aspects of community-engaged dance
Departing	Leaving at the end of trip
Differences	Differences in culture
Importance of topic	Questioning the importance of bringing dance into the community
Interaction with local community	Opportunity for collaboration with local organizations
Interpersonal with group	Cliques, trash talking
Interpersonal with target population	Welcome from local community
Learning environment	Environment conducive to learning
None	No comments or suggestions
Time	More time
Trip organization	Communication, preparation for trip
Trip structure	Structure of trip, ability to manage time

Based on this codebook, the authors were able to identify both successful aspects of the trip and areas to improve. For example, Table 12.2 shows coded participant responses to the question “What was the best part of the trip?” Overwhelmingly, participants mentioned the interpersonal relationships that they developed with their Panamanian partners as the most positive aspect of the trip. The word “relationship” also appears as one of the dominant terms in the word cloud in Figure 12.2. Instructors recognized that students were initially very worried about their ability to connect with the people they worked with in a culturally competent way and considered these responses as an indicator that the information literacy and cultural competence preparation were helpful. This response further indicates that the students derived value from the experience of traveling to Panama and working closely with individuals from another culture.

Table 12.2

What was the best part of the trip?

Question: What was the best part of the trip?	Frequency
Interpersonal with target population	9
Dance	4
Differences	3
Interpersonal with group	3
Learning environment	1

This data suggests that the Ballet and Modern Dance in Panama service-learning program helped students to actively engage with information literacy concepts as well as social justice concepts like implicit bias and cultural competence. Librarians are long familiar with the challenges involved in teaching information literacy to students overconfident in their searching and information evaluation skills. A common strategy for challenging this overconfidence is to create an opportunity for students to experience failure in information-seeking and then introduce new skills to help overcome this failure. The Panama program suggests that service-learning trips can be another strategy that librarians can use to reduce this overconfidence and reach students at a moment when they are ready to learn. Students' self-evaluations of their knowledge of important concepts such as implicit bias and cultural competence reveal an overconfidence ahead of the service-learning opportunity and suggest that an intensive service-learning opportunity helped students better assess their own expertise in these areas.

Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The Panama trip was a pilot to explore the possibility of a long-term collaboration between the library and the School of Dance in support of service-learning projects based on information literacy and social justice. Although assessment was considered a key element of the program, there were limitations to these assessments. Because this was a pilot effort for both instructors, they did not have the benefit of field experience to determine the most effective assessment methodologies or which content areas were most critical to assess. The assessments were also intended to speak to multiple audiences. The primary purpose of the assessment was programmatic improvement; student responses would inform changes to the curriculum in future iterations of the service-learning program. Another major goal of the assessment, though, was to share a narrative of impact on student learning. The instructors hoped to be able to share assessment data with library and School of Dance administrators to gain support for a continued partnership between the library and the School of Dance, possibly in the form of a credit-bearing course.

Unfortunately, designing assessments aimed at both improving programs and demonstrating value was much harder than the lead author imagined. Although the assessments suggest that information literacy instruction made a difference, the impact of library involvement might be more explicit had the instructors developed a more granular assessment plan. For example, adding a pre- and post-workshop assessment in addition to the pre- and post-trip questionnaire might have given the instructors a better understanding of the specific impact of the workshop series. For future projects, the instructors would develop additional and more granular assessments that would more precisely measure the impact of specific aspects of the program. Pre- and post-trip reflections would allow students to share more about their experience and the information literacy skills they learned, creating a qualitative narrative of the student growth. And pre- and post-testing or reflection after each workshop would allow instructors to build a larger data set to assess student learning. These additional assessment measures would help

the instructors make iterative changes to the curriculum, and they would also help them craft a narrative of impact for administrators, which would in turn serve as a key element for librarian involvement in future service-learning opportunities.

Finally, although the students who participated in this service-learning opportunity felt that they learned many new skills and ideas, it did require a heavy commitment of resources, including faculty time away from regular duties as well as a significant cash outlay since both instructors paid out-of-pocket to attend. Fortunately, however, there are plenty of ways to participate in co-curricular service-learning opportunities that use fewer resources. For example, tying such projects to university or external grant-funding opportunities could be a great way to finance the cost of a trip and research. In some cases, departments collaborating with libraries might also be willing to contribute to the cost of such research. Likewise, librarians could explore long-term partnership opportunities that don't involve librarian travel, which could save substantial funds. For instance, librarian involvement could be limited to instruction in workshops that prepare students for a service-learning trip. This model could be particularly successful after participating fully in a pilot project since the librarian would have personally experienced the full service-learning experience. Alternately, librarians could focus on developing information literacy materials to be used on campus. The curriculum developed to support the Panama trip workshops could be adapted and expanded into a co-curricular learning experience in which librarians could provide support and instruction without the financial challenge of travel. Although there is a great time commitment with any instruction, tying information literacy to real-life student needs is a great way to get students engaged in the learning.

Conclusion

Although many libraries recognize the potential impact of library involvement in high-impact educational practices such as service-learning, many librarians already struggle to manage the varied demands on their time. Therefore, even librarians who are interested in becoming embedded in a service-learning project can struggle to make the case to administrators for the time and resources necessary for full involvement in these activities. Because they are time-bound and require only a short-term commitment of resources, pilot projects can be an easier sell to administrators than a longer-term commitment to a program. By participating in pilots like Ballet and Modern Dance in Panama, librarians can experience the full scope of the service-learning experience and garner ideas for how the library might be able to provide sustainable support on a programmatic basis. But in order to gain long-term support, assessment is crucial. Librarians should prioritize developing and implementing a detailed and granular assessment plan that investigates the impact of a service-learning project on student learning and tracks alignment with library and institutional goals. This type of assessment can help librarians craft a narrative of impact and demonstrate that impact to a variety of stakeholders, including collaborators, administrators, and even the librarians themselves.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Dr. Jennifer Weber at SUNY-Brockport, the Dance faculty lead for the trip discussed in this case study.

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