

“Instigating agents for change”: Undergraduates Engage with the Land- Grant Mission

National Outreach Scholarship Conference 2012

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National Context

- Higher education’s civic, community engagement, and public service elements often touted as among their most important aspects (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Kellogg Commission, 2001; Stanton, 2008)
- But, may not be integrated with institutions’ teaching and research missions, or apparent to students...



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AACU National Study (2009) found:

- >57% of students felt that contributing to the larger community should be a major focus of their institution, only 46% believed it actually was such a focus
- <1/3 believed university helped them become more aware of the importance of community engagement; even fewer felt it helped them “learn the skills necessary to effectively change society for the better”



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Connecting the Dots...

- “civic engagement is an explicit or implicit **part of every institution’s mission**, and it is the role of academic leaders to **explain this mission** internally to their community of faculty, staff, and students and to their many external constituents” (Plater, 2004, p. 7)
- Example of how the “chain of purpose and authority from mission to an articulated program of civic engagement to specific programs and practices” (p. 8) can develop



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Setting: University of Georgia

- Land- and sea-grant, large public Research I university (about 26,000 undergraduates)
- 2010 Carnegie Foundation Classification for Community Engagement
- Historically strong Public Service & Outreach (PSO) mission, with a Vice President for PSO, 8 stand-alone units, >450 public service faculty members on campus and state-wide
- Mission of teaching, research, and public service



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Rationale

- Proposed in PSO's *2010-15 Strategic Plan*, adopted Fall 2010, as a program that would “**allow undergraduate students to engage deeply in a Public Service and Outreach initiative that addresses critical statewide needs. Students will develop an understanding of the role of public service in society, hone their civic leadership skills, and apply academic learning to public issues**” (Goal 2, Strategy 2.2)
- Interim VP-PSO tasked Office of Service-Learning with program development and implementation



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Program Goals

- Develop students' understanding and awareness of PSO's purpose, breadth, and depth
- Engage students directly in UGA's land- and sea-grant missions through supervised service experiences with PSO and communities
- Foster greater connections between PSO activities and academic teaching and learning
- Expose to critical Georgia issues
- Encourage students to consider public service careers and experiences



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PSO Units at UGA

- Archway Partnership
- Carl Vinson Institute of Government
- Fanning Institute
- Georgia Center for Continuing Education Conference Center & Hotel
- Marine Extension
- Office of Service-Learning
- State Botanical Garden of Georgia
- Small Business Development Center
- Also, OVPPSO



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Spring 2011 Pilot

- 10 selected, 9 completed
- Cohort meetings, weekly, focused on themes
- Trip to marine education center on Georgia coast
- 150-hour paid internship with hosting PSO unit
- Recognition & showcase
- Not course-based...



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2011-12 and 2012-13 Cohorts



- Spring semester: PR & selection (10 in 2011-12, 11 in 2012-13)
- Fall semester: Cohort meetings hosted by PSO units; fall retreat; marine education trip
- Spring semester: Individual, unpaid 150-hour internships in PSO units; final presentations
- Summer: optional paid internship



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Participants

Gender	Ethnicity	Year in School	Cohort
22 Female 9 Male	14 White 7 Asian 5 Black (incl. African) 4 Hispanic 1 Asian/Black	6 Sophomore 13 Junior 12 Senior	10* 2011 pilot 10* 2011-12 11 2012-13 *1 did not complete



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Funding

- Funded by the Vice President for Public Service & Outreach
- Stipends for PSO faculty mentors (\$500)
- Program covers retreats, materials, activities, shirts, registration at PSO annual meeting
- Originally, funding for internships, but complicated...
- Currently, summer funding available for limited slots for additional internship work in state or abroad



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Modifications

For 2011-12:

- Implemented fall retreat and did marine extension visit in fall
- Weekly meetings more unit-focused
- Year-long with internship separate
- Unpaid spring, but paid summer internships

For 2012-13:

- Included grad assistant and program alumna
- Changed location of fall retreat
- Tweaked timing of marine education trip



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Assessment of Impact

- Pre-participation and post-participation online questionnaires



- Quantitative:
 - Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale
 - Civic Attitudes Scale
 - Public Service Motivation Scale
- Demographic Info
- Program-specific impacts/PSO ($\alpha=.826$)



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PSO-Specific Measures

1. I am able to describe how public service and outreach (PSO) relates to the university's mission.
2. I am able to describe UGA's land- and sea-grant mission.
3. I am able to define how service-learning is different from community service.
4. I am able to describe specific initiatives or activities for all eight UGA Public Service & Outreach units.
5. I can explain specific ways that UGA's PSO units support community and economic development.
6. I can explain specific ways that UGA's PSO units engage with environmental and natural-resource issues.



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PSO-Specific Measures

7. I can explain specific ways that UGA's PSO units promote and provide education and training.
8. I can explain specific ways that UGA's PSO units identify community needs.
9. I can explain specific ways that UGA's PSO units address issues relating to Georgia's changing demographics.
10. I can explain specific ways that UGA's PSO units address issues of health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.
11. I am able to describe ways that public service and outreach relates to my career interests.
12. I can describe how to find academic service-learning opportunities at UGA.



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Post-Participation Assessment

- Post-participation overall satisfaction scale (1-5, mean 4.59)
- Also included open-ended questions regarding internship, learning outcomes, and how PSO relates to their future
- Summer internship items



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Analysis of Outcomes

- Open coding for themes regarding “top three things learned”; categorized 54 comments into 4 themes
- Paired-samples t-tests of composite variables;
- Concerns:
 - Ceiling effect
 - Low Power
 - Self-report



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Spring 2011, & 2011-12 Cohort t-tests, n=18

Scale/Composite variable	Mean (SD) Pre	Mean (SD) Post	t, paired sample	p, 2-tailed
Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale	8.18 (2.12)	9.19 (.96)	2.10	.051*
Civic Attitudes Scale	4.70 (.49)	4.72 (.37)	0.27	.794
Attraction to Public Policy (PSMS)	3.35 (.80)	3.55 (.83)	1.42	.174
Commitment to Public Interest (PSMS)	4.10 (.58)	4.17 (.47)	.50	.623
Compassion (PSMS)	3.63 (.44)	3.68 (.52)	.46	.651
Self-Sacrifice (PSMS)	3.91 (.32)	3.95 (.58)	.34	.738
PSO Outcomes	3.16 (.75)	4.84 (.25)	9.80	.000*

*p<.10 (2-tailed)



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Themes from “Top 3 Things Learned”

1. *Understanding Public Service & Outreach and its Fit with the University* (18/54 comments)

- I learned that the University of Georgia is much more than a research university, we help the communities around Georgia to become better places to live and work. (2011-12, 6A)
- I learned about the other PSO Units and how they're working to help communities in Georgia (2011, 5B)
- Outreach is an important component of UGA as a land-grant university. (2011-12, 9C)



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Themes from “Top 3 Things Learned”

2. *Professional Skills* (17/54 comments)

- How to interact within a professional setting (2011-12, 5C)
- I learned how to write a grant proposal and work as a team to attain common goals. (2011-12, 6B)
- Networking skills (2011, 2B)
- I learned how to conduct interviews and focus groups. (2011, 7B)



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Themes from “Top 3 Things Learned”

3. *Understanding Self / Relating Public Service to Self and Career* (11/54 comments)

- The most important thing I learned is that I want to work in public service after I graduate from UGA. I value public service as a part of my career choices. (2011-12, 6C)
- My interests and skills can be applied to a number of different fields. (2011, 4A)
- Even the little things I do can make a great impact (2011-12, 8B)



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Themes from “Top 3 Things Learned”

4. *Specific Learning from Internship Sites / Communities* (8/54 comments)

- Through my research project and looking at statistics, I've learned a lot about the breakdown [of the] state's public education system in rural counties. (2011, 9C)
- Awareness and importance of native plants. (2011-12, 2A)
- Simple changes can make all the difference to the success of a business (2011, 6C)



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“What Else Would You Like to Tell Us?”

- “I loved it! And it helped me love UGA even more!”
- “It was a very meaningful experience and definitely gave me a perspective that I did not previously had about public service.”



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“What Else Would You Like to Tell Us?”

“The Public Service and Outreach Student Scholars Program was one of the best experiences I have had at the University of Georgia thus far. The combination of meeting members of the UGA public service community as well fellow students who share an interest in making a positive impact in Athens, the state of Georgia and the world more broadly was truly fantastic. I feel like I have learned so much more about the university and about myself through participating in the program, and I would recommend anyone with a desire to serve to apply!”



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“What Else Would You Like to Tell Us?”

“I have really enjoyed this experience and PSO Student Scholars is one of my favorite activities that I have participated in throughout my college career. I hope to stay involved with PSO as an undergraduate and also continue the mission behind PSO to help guide my career path and life. This program has made me even more proud to be a Georgia Bulldawg and I am so thankful that I have been a part of such a meaningful organization.”



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“What Else Would You Like to Tell Us?”

“I have really enjoyed participating in this program and learning about all the different PSO units. The experience during cohort meetings is always fun and informative. My internship has also introduced me to both research and outreach relevant to my major and future. The program allowed me to contribute to a part of UGA that I was not exactly familiar with before.”



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Benefits for Student Participants:

- Increased self-efficacy for public service
- Enhanced professional skills
- Improved understanding of community issues, strengths, and possible solutions
- Direct experience via internship
- Network of support (e.g. letters of recommendation, cohort group, etc.)
- Expanded ideas for career trajectories



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Benefits for Society:

- Participation in experiential programs can enhance students' civic-mindedness beyond their pre-existing proclivities (Kirlin, 2002)
- Students with a strong sense of public interest are more likely to enter careers in the public sector (Perry & Wise, 1990)
- Participants indicated plans to continue with service activities



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Benefits for Institution:

- Deepened understanding of the purpose and activities of UGA's public service and outreach
- Helps reduce gap (Dey et al., 2009) between a university's practice of civic engagement and student awareness of those activities
- Creates core of informed student advocates for PSO and land-grant missions
- Greater affection for institution



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Some Next Steps

- Continue program publicity
 - “Amazing Students” on UGA home page
 - Targeting specific majors/departments
 - Goal: multiple qualified applicants for every unit
- Build cohort strength and program alumni
 - Facebook page, alumni “mentor”
- Longer-term evaluation
- Funding/development opportunities



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Questions?

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Forthcoming “projects with
promise” article in *Journal
of Higher Education
Outreach & Engagement*

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