SERVICE-LEARNING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND ACTIVISM IN HAWAI‘I

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Civic Engagement

- “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes” (Erlich, 2000).

- Students encouraged to see themselves as systemic change agents.

- Strengthen community and improve environmental indicators by instilling an ethic of engagement.
Civic Engagement through Service-Learning

- Service-learning in environmentally themed classes can have a positive impact on students’ views of themselves as agents of change.

- Develop social capital using service-learning as a tool to engage students and develop community building and responsible environmental behavior skills.

- Service-learning can be a site of empowerment for our student population
  - See challenges and participate in developing solutions within course content in a safe space.
Community Driven Projects and Partnerships

- Potentially problematic power hierarchy embedded in relationships between academia and community.
- Faculty must reflect on their own positionality.
- Projects must remain community-driven through dynamic reciprocity.
- Research agendas and teaching practices must have value for our communities.

Students with MA’O work day leaders 2016
Service-learning and cultural practices in Hawaiʻi

- Hawaiʻi context - ‘āina-based education
- “talking story”
- Develop relationship with ‘āina and with each other.
- Students chant oli to ask for permission to enter and indicate respect for spaces they are visiting.

Students chanting with other community groups at Heʻeia Fishpond 2016
Environmentally Responsible Behavior

- Service-learning helps students overcome commuter student barriers.
- Rooted in community.
- Leads to self-efficacy and motivation to participate beyond the confines of class.
- Enable students to find creative ways to solve problems and apply skills.
- Develop capacity for activism and environmentally responsible behavior.
- Goal of classes is to create environmental citizens with focus on systems-thinking.

Ka‘ala Farms 2019
Methods

- Analysis of student comments on open-ended course evaluation questions
- 16 classes over past 8 years
- 506 relevant comments
- Environmental Politics, Politics of Food, Politics of Water
- Nvivo 12 software used to code comments into themes
Course formats

- Environmental Politics
  - Full semester, in person and online

- Politics of Food
  - Part of term (6 weeks), in person and hybrid

- Politics of Water
  - Part of term (6 weeks, hybrid only)

- Student enrollment range
  - 12-30 students

- All include required service-learning component

Heʻeia Fishpond
mangrove removal 2019
Findings

- **Emergent themes**
  - Environmental awareness (n=36)
  - Environmental behavior changes (n=34)
  - "Life-changing" (n=25)
  - Community (n=14)
  - Networking (n=8)
  - Natural resource management (n=2)
  - Culture and sustainability in Hawai‘i (n=5)

- **Limitations** – lack of connection to:
  - Social justice (n=1)
  - Environmental justice (n=1)
  - Climate change (n=2)
  - Other limitations (n=7)
Student Voices

- “It is truly a life changing course. I was able to not only learn about the politics behind food, but I was able to reconfigure my diet, lifestyle, and being mindful of what food industries I support and what food I purchase in the stores.”

- “This course forced me to evaluate my daily life. The foods I eat, the places I shop, the companies I support. I have made huge changes to my personal life as it has truly opened my eyes.”

- “This was an excellent course. The hands-on experience turned lectures into life lessons that we will not forget. This course encourages healthy living, encourages becoming involved in local politics and learning how to support your community and learning sustainable living.”

- “Truly life-changing experience, balanced with knowledge and hands-on activity.”
Environmental Awareness Concept Map

- Community
- Network
- Engagement
- Environmental Behavior Change
- Limitations
- Environmental Awareness
- Service Learning
- Experiential Learning
- Agriculture/Farming
- Water
- Food
- Food System
- Social Justice
- Environmental Justice
- Natural Resources
- Sustainability
- Culture
- Learning
- Experiential Learning
- Life Changing Course
- Network Engagement
- Limitations
- Food System
Conclusions

- Environmental awareness learned through service-learning influences positive environmental behavior changes in students.
- Service-learning does not necessarily engender civic engagement.
- Students could be self-selected.
- Students view possibilities of individual behavior change, not necessarily systemic.
- No students mentioned inconvenience or pessimism as barriers to environmental behavior change.
- No longitudinal perspective available.