

Shifting from service learning to social impact: supporting student-led initiatives at Yale-NUS College

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Abstract (1,000 to 1,500 words):

1. Introduction

This section should briefly state the background or objectives of your work, present what problem or question you address, and describe why this is an interesting or important challenge.

Service learning is often faculty-led, and situated between polarities of charity and justice. This poster describes how service learning is student-led and approached through the lens of social impact through an integrated office at Yale-NUS College, a young liberal arts college in Singapore co-founded by Yale University and the National University of Singapore. Driving social change and/or impact is an important dimension of leadership and citizenship, and is woven into in various facets of the college experience such as through the curriculum e.g. students taking a foundation course in methods for social science undertake house cleaning as part of participatory research; or as part of residential life through service activities organized by residential colleges. It can also be student-led, and pursued through channels such as student organizations and social impact grants. The underlying ethos and programmes offered via this particular office are first described. Impact is subsequently illustrated through 2 case studies before concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical framework/literature review

This section should consist of theories and concepts to relevant scholarly literature and theory that is used for your study or include an overview of significant literature published on service-learning by accredited scholars and researchers.

Service learning, also termed community engagement, is an orientation where student learning is integrated and/or accomplished through working in or with a community. It is typically faculty-led, and designed through collaboration with community partners. Service learning entails learning by doing where skills training is delivered for students vis-a-vis impact for community (Bandy, 2019). While the benefits of service learning for students are well illustrated, its community impact (Wexler, 2016) has been constrained by factors such as time (i.e. limitations around the academic or module schedule), knowledge, or alignment of learning versus community needs (Marullo et al., 2009). Another critique of service learning is its tendency to foster a charitable orientation, that goes against the fundamental tenets of justice (Marullo and Edwards, 2000).

3. Methods/analysis

This section should describe what was done to answer the research questions, describe how it was done, justify the experimental design, and explain how the results were analyzed.

The Centre for International and Professional Experience (CIPE) at Yale-NUS College is an integrated office overseeing experience-based learning that complement students' residential and academic experiences. Apart from internships, study abroad and research attachments, CIPE offers several signature programmes through which students can work on social impact and service. These include 1. A week-long social impact training aimed at developing foundational skills for students (known as Social Impact Bootcamp), and 2. grants for student-led initiatives (namely the Social Impact Fellowship, and Service in the City). Both involve learning by doing, with a focus on sustainability, community and impact. Participation is entirely opt-in.

Social Impact Bootcamp (SIB) is an annual week-long training organized to hone foundational skills for effective social impact. It is typically attended by 30-40 student participants, often in their first or second year of college, who have a demonstrated interest in social impact or service work. Delivered by practitioners and experts across public, private and civic sectors, students are trained on skills such as negotiation, rapid iterating for change, public narratives for advocacy and fundraising. An orientation to social impact is also transmitted through attention to justice, and sustainable community empowerment. For example, students are encouraged to consider rethink hand-outs as hand-ups in a session on pitching; they are also asked to keenly observe community practices and power dynamics with the community when undertaking fieldwork. SIB focuses on applied learning, and has recently evolved to include a student-led activity where student participants, on a voluntary basis, lead and organize a session for their peers. To accommodate diverse student interest and/or creative ideas, the only ask of student organizers is that the session be aligned with Bootcamp's ethos of learning by doing, take the form of any service or social impact programme, and be arranged contingent on community participation and consent. Student learning and impact are subsequently assessed through individual and group reflections.

The Service in the City (SiTC) and Social Impact Fellowship (SIF) are grants structured to support student initiatives across a diverse student population – 40% of students are international, with over 35 countries represented. SiTC is intended to support social impact or service initiatives in Singapore that span at least 6 months to a year. SIF supports similar endeavors over summer (i.e. typically May to August each year) in Singapore or abroad. While applications for SiTC can be submitted anytime during the year, applications for SIF are typically due in late February or early March each year. Both grants offer seed funding amounting to SGD10,000 or SGD2,000 respectively for student-led initiatives. On average, 3 to 5 awards are made each year.

Projects are entirely student-led, and emphasis is placed on 3 key areas: clearly articulated and unique impact¹ measures (either qualitative, quantitative or a mix of both), community-engagement especially relating to needs and assessment, and sustainability where empowerment and collaboration are key. Other areas that are evaluated include a connection with personal passions, academic pursuits or career exploration; interaction with community stakeholders and practitioners; and the team's competency in undertaking the proposed project. Students who wish to apply are first asked to submit an idea introduction form where they briefly detail their ideas. Then, they meet with the CIPE advisor before they submit a formal application. Throughout their, participants are requested to share regular updates, and may receive additional coaching or feedback. At the end, they are asked to undertake reflection detailing their insights, and articulating their project's impact. We illustrate, through 2 case studies, students' engagement and takeaways from their participation.

¹ Students often conflate output or outcome with impact measures; the latter is what the grant requires.

4. Results and Discussion

In the Results section, you should report the key results, including any statistical analysis and whether the results are significant or not. While in the Discussion section, you need to interpret and explain your results, answer your research questions, justify your approach and critically evaluate your work.

Case study 1: M, a junior that was born and educated in Singapore before enrolling in Yale-NUS College

Project Description and Objectives: M conducted a 5-day workshop for primary school children aged 10 to 12, that involved reimaging a more inclusive and sustainable Singapore through arts and civic education.

Impact: M's project intended to nurture compassion and self-reflexivity in students through an Arts and Design Thinking curriculum based on investigating Urban Poverty in Singapore.

Community engagement: The workshop was participative and layered in that students engaged a range of community residents in situ, after spending time in the community on their own.

Sustainability: The curriculum M developed was subsequently shared with her partner, and made publicly available online.

Participant's takeaways: M noticed how differently participants were impacted – while some reflected greater sensitivity to community needs through the proposed models of schools they built for the community, one student was moved to compel her family to donate a bag of supplies for the children in Jalan Kukoh. She also observed how the use of different pedagogies enabled more reliable impact assessment for her project where students' comprehension and compassion came through their suggestions on what to include (and why) in a built community space, as opposed to their written or verbal responses to evaluative statements.

Case study 2: S, a sophomore that was born in Bogota, Colombia. He attended high school in the United States before enrolling in Yale-NUS College.

Project Description and Objectives: S's SIF project involved designing and implementing an educational initiative that leveraged grassroots partnerships to teach photography and storytelling techniques to migrant communities in two Latin American cities (i.e. Afro-Ecuadorian youth in Quito, Ecuador; and female victims of forced displacement in Bogota, Colombia).

Impact: He engaged a total of 13 youth and women through the series of workshops he conducted. Subsequently, he was able to put together a photo exhibition and a photography booklet comprising participants' work for fundraising and advocacy for his partner organization.

Community Engagement: As part of this process, S engaged a faculty member in putting together the curriculum for his workshops. He also worked closely with his community partners to recruit participants, launch the photo exhibition and produce a photography booklet.

Sustainability: Participants continued to apply acquired skills towards articulating their own voices and at least 1 has passed it forward by educating fellow peers to do the same. His community partner has also used the materials and curriculum developed to create more authentic narratives of their projects and support psycho-social treatment of newly arrived women.

Participant's takeaways: S noted how he learnt to work in an agile manner, keeping an eye on impact when confronted with a set budget and the original intention around expression. He also observed how the pedagogy of his workshops empowered participants by allowing them to express their realities through their own voices.

5. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice

The Conclusion section should briefly summarize the overall conclusion of the results based on the purpose of your work, and also explain the importance of the major findings to the theory and/or practice.

The student-led activity at Social Impact Bootcamp is still nascent and will continue to be evaluated against student learning, group learning and community engagement. The sample of students who have undertaken a student-led grant remain small (less than 20 projects in total) and is expected to remain so given the demands of the grant. Unsurprisingly, we find that successful applicants have chosen to work in communities that they either belong to, or are familiar with. More than 80% of the projects involve education in some form. In all post evaluations, we find individualized support from the CIPE advisor before and during the process a key element in working towards individualized, student-driven learning and sustainable community impact.

The process and parameters of these programmes have directed student-led initiatives to focus on impact and community needs. This has shifted focus away from outputs, to outcomes and empowerment, while fully working with students' interests and autonomy. While project impact is currently defined and assessed by students, this can evolve to include partners' input, assessment and feedback for future projects. Prioritizing community engagement has directed students to corroborate their personal perceptions against practitioner and ground sentiment. It has also illustrated the contrast in working theoretically versus working "live" and in situ. While students undertaking the SIF have only the summer to work with, students undertaking SitC have the flexibility to determine a longer period of engagement. In most projects, we find that sustainability typically comes through strong collaboration with community partners. The focus on social impact also means any student-led project with demonstrated impact is eligible, and 2 student-led social enterprises have also recently been awarded grants for their work. Exploring support for establishing social enterprise may be an alternative pathway to enable students' pursuit of financially viable, sustainable social impact work.

Keywords: service learning, active learning, student-led, social impact

References

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- WEXLER, E. 2016. When Service Learning Doesn't Really Serve. *Inside Higher Ed*.

Biographical sketch of each presenter

Please send the biographical sketch of the presenters together with the proposal using the following format:

Presenter 1:

- i. Last name followed by first name: Yock-Theng Tan
- ii. Position/department/organisation/country: Centre for International & Professional Experience (CIPE)
- iii. Short biography (word count should not exceed 70 words)

Yock Theng manages leadership and social impact programming such as the Leadership Certificate, Social Impact Fellowship, Service in the City, and Social Impact Bootcamp at the Centre for International & Professional Experience (CIPE). Her prior experiences relating to applied health and social policy research inform her work around social impact. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics from the National University of Singapore, and has recently completed her MA in Economics for Transition from Schumacher College where she explored leadership premised on complexity and a relational orientation.

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