Making an IMPACT: A service-learning program for incoming first-year students

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Overview

Innovative first-year programming is essential to assisting students in their transition to college, as is engagement in high-impact practices and connection to their new community. Through participation in these activities, students are better able to find their passion and purpose for their time in college. In an effort to provide more opportunities for service and scholarship that will prepare students for lifelong engagement in societal issues and diverse perspectives, as integral to the mission of the Honors College and Michigan State University, the HC IMPACT Service Week program was created.

Learning Outcomes

The goals of this program were to:
- use a service-learning model to educate students on social issues of inequity and inequality, using the particular context and challenges of our local community
- instill/continue an ethic of service early in the college career
- model effective citizenship and leadership in one’s community
develop cultural understanding through opportunities that stretch a student to move across social, economic, and cultural boundaries

Structure & Themes

Twenty-five student participants lived on campus in an MSU residence hall, accelerating their connection to campus and allowing for travel to nearby sites for field experiences. Partners included teaching faculty and academic colleges, the Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement, Residence Education and Hospitality Services, and non-profit/community-based organizations. The service week also included reflection exercises, a poverty simulation, and faculty-led lecture & discussion.

Potential participants and IMPACT Mentors were recruited and selected with the goal of creating a group representative of diverse perspectives. Factors considered in the review process included a review of applicants’ attitudes about inequity & inequality, service experience, and motivation for program participation.

Academic & Community Engagement

Faculty/Community Speakers

- Dr. Patricia Edwards – Professor of Teacher Education at MSU; first African-American President of the Literacy Research Association
- Dr. Ruben Martinez – Professor of Sociology and Director of the Julian Samora Research Institute at MSU
- Joan Nelson – Director of the Alan Neighborhood Center in Lansing, MI
- Karla Perker – Works with Center of Health Equity Practice of the Michigan Public Health Institute
- Dr. Michael Rosseler – Core Member for the Homewave Angels, serving the homeless population in Lansing, MI
- Dr. Dave Weatherpoon – Professor and researcher in the Food and Resource Economics department at MSU

Community Partners

- Haven House – Provides emergency housing and support services for parents and children
- Volunteers of America – Provides assistance to the homeless and veterans
- Tri-County Office on Aging – Provides resources to promote and preserve independence of the aging population
- Alien Neighborhood Center – Neighborhood hub promoting health and well-being for Lansing’s Eastside community
- Mount Hope STEAM School – 4th-6th grade school serving the Lansing school district with a specific focus on education in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics

Resource Fair

In collaboration with the Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement at MSU, 12 community organizations participated in “speed networking” with participants with the goal of sharing community resources and service opportunities.

- Organizations included: Alternative Spartan Breaks, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Capital Area Literacy Coalition, Capital Area Mentoring Partnership, Eastside Community Action Center, Edgewood Village, Inpression S Dance Center, MSU Sexual Assault Program, REACH Studio Art Center, Refugee Development Center, Total Martin Youth Leadership, Salus LGBTQ Resource and Community Center

Outcomes

Participant Feedback

“My favorite aspects of HC IMPACT were the connections we made with people in the community through our service, the open discussion we had about important topics with highly educated professors and Honors College staff, and the fact that I made 24 new friends that I will start school with.”

“This week really opened my eyes to the families and situations people are living with every day. It made me more passionate about making a difference and made me want to become involved in my [first] semester.”

“After HC IMPACT, I am more conscious of how poverty can exacerbate other social issues and what inequality looks like in East Lansing. Also, I am even more motivated to serve in the community.”

Future Considerations

Potential Program Adjustments
- Increase program size
- Additional IMPACT Mentors
- Link program to existing Honors College service initiatives (e.g. Honors College Service Club)

Additional Thoughts
- Fundraising (Poverty Simulation facilitation training)
- Grant-writing

Further Assessment

Given that we assessed participants on their connection to MSU, the Honors College, and the Greater Lansing community, as well as their learning about service & inequity/inequality, we could expand assessment to capture effectiveness of individual service activities, presenters, and community partners.

Program Schedule

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<td>8AM</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Service Haven House</td>
<td>Service Tri County Commission on Aging</td>
<td>Community &amp; Faculty Speakers</td>
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<td>2PM</td>
<td>Program Opening</td>
<td>Community &amp; Faculty Speakers</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
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<td>7PM</td>
<td>Poverty Simulation</td>
<td>Community-building Activities</td>
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Poverty Simulation

The Poverty Simulation (facilitated by CEDAM – Community Economic Development Association of Michigan) was a unique, interactive workshop where participants were assigned a role as a member of a family in poverty. Participants then completed daily activities (attend work/school, pay bills, grocery shop, etc.) through a simulated month’s worth of time. At the conclusion of the simulation, participants gained a better understanding of poverty, as well as its effects on individuals, families, and their communities.

References


For more information, visit honors.college.msu.edu/hcimpact.html or contact murraya@msu.edu or eitraigg@msu.edu.