

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: The Effects of Service-Learning on Millennial Students

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DATE: December, 2010

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When service-learning began to gain prominence as a legitimate academic pedagogy in the early 1990's, it was believed that through intensive service experiences, students developed a greater understanding of themselves, felt empowered to make a difference in their community, made a connection to course material, and made a commitment to continue serving their communities post-graduation. Research conducted in the mid to late 1990's confirmed that students completing service-learning courses were responding positively in all these stated areas (Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Osborne, Hammerich, & Hensley, 1998). However, a new generation of students began entering higher education institutions in the fall of 2000. Labeled the Millennial generation and because these students were different from any other previous generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000), it was appropriate to ask whether these students would respond to service-learning experiences in the same way.

The purpose of this study was to assess whether the assumptions made about the effects of service-learning were accurate for the contemporary Millennial student, as defined by Howe and Strauss (2000), and to more accurately know whether those service-learning experiences were meeting students' expectations. This research assessed the way

Millennial students at Ball State University were affected by service-learning in three primary ways: Expanding Academic Learning, Personal Growth and Development, and Civic and Social Awareness.

A sample of 256 undergraduates enrolled in service-learning courses at Ball State University at the beginning of the fall 2009 semester were given a service-learning pre-assessment test that consisted of 18 questions in three different subcategories: Expanding Academic Learning, Personal Growth and Development, and Civic and Social Awareness. The pre-assessment was designed to evaluate what students expected to gain from their service-learning experience. A post-assessment was given at the end of the fall 2009 semester and asked students to report on what they actually received from their service-learning experience.

Overall, Ball State Millennial students reacted in very similar ways to their service-learning experience as the generation before them. Ball State Millennial students had high expectations that, as a result of their service-learning experiences, their classroom studies would be more meaningful, their higher level thinking skills would be enhanced, and their service-learning experiences would be an important part of their education. There was not a statistically significant difference between the pre-assessment (expectations of service-learning) and the post-assessment (service-learning experiences). Students had high expectations for what they would achieve from their service-learning experience and overall their expectations were met. When looking at the individual subcategories, there were statistically significant differences between the pre-and post-assessment for Expanding Academic Learning and Civic and Social Awareness, but not

for Personal Growth and Development. This research also demonstrated that service-learning affects students in similar ways regardless of the age of the students, class standing, grade point average and years of previous service. There was, however, a statistically significant difference based on service-learning course taken.