Supporting Community Connections: Experiential Student Philanthropy and Engaged Learning in Social Work

Katherina Nikzad-Terhune and Jessica Averitt Taylor

Abstract

Community engagement and philanthropic learning have gained traction in university settings as a method to help prepare students for both workplace competency and citizenship. Experiential student philanthropy is a learning method that offers students an opportunity to examine community and social issues and nonprofit organizations while providing them with the unique opportunity to invest funding in nonprofit organizations. This study examined the impact of an experiential student philanthropy project in a graduate-level social work course at Northern Kentucky University (NKU) through the use of a pretest and posttest administered to involved students. The results indicate that incorporation of the Mayerson Student Philanthropy Project (MSPP) with this class ultimately strengthened learning outcomes as related to both course engagement and community engagement.

Keywords: community, community engagement, student philanthropy, engaged learning, social work

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Higher education is committed to producing competent individuals who are prepared to enter the workforce with proficiency, critical thinking, and a desire to improve their communities. In this context, community engagement and philanthropic learning have gained traction in university settings over the years to help prepare students for both workplace competency and citizenship. Indeed, university campuses and the surrounding communities have a shared purpose in the support of human discourse and development of civic-minded culture that addresses societal needs (Boyer, 1996; Votruba, 1996). These aligned principles connect traditional classroom learning with experiential learning to help instill in students an understanding of their role and responsibility in the community. This study examined the impact of the Mayerson Student Philanthropy Project (MSPP) in a graduate-level social work course at Northern Kentucky University (NKU) through the use of pretest and post-test survey data among involved students. In total, 46 students were included in a pretest and posttest survey, with the results indicating that incorporation of the MSPP with this class ultimately strengthened learning outcomes as related to both course engagement and community engagement.

Review of the Literature

Experiential Student Philanthropy

Experiential student philanthropy is a learning method that offers students an opportunity to examine community and social issues and nonprofit organizations while providing them with the unique opportunity to invest funding in nonprofit organizations (Campbell, 2014). This teaching strategy allows students to become actively engaged in their classroom curriculum by experiencing firsthand the role of nonprofit organizations in their community while developing civic-minded perspectives and

experiencing the grant proposal process (Bloch, 2018; Olberding, 2009). Experiential student philanthropy has expanded over the past 15 years and has strengthened partnerships between universities and community affiliates (Millisor & Olberding, 2009).

There are currently two models of experiential student philanthropy: the direct giving approach and the indirect giving approach (Olberding, 2009). The direct giving approach provides classes with an amount of funding, typically donated by local corporations. Students then have the opportunity to invest these funds in a nonprofit organization through a process of researching appropriate organizations, inviting identified nonprofits to apply for the funds, and directly deciding which organization will receive the funds (Olberding et al., 2010). The indirect giving model (developed at NKU in 2007) involves students partnering with a local business to help review grant proposals submitted by nonprofit organizations. Although students who participate in the indirect giving model do not directly give funds to the nonprofit organization, they provide recommendations to the local corporation regarding which proposals should be funded. Both models provide students with a valuable opportunity to obtain a more thorough understanding of community needs and the structure of nonprofit organizations (Olberding et al., 2010). In addition, both models empower students to serve as evaluators of small grant proposals. The indirect giving model that originated at NKU has since served as a foundation for other universities across the country.

In reviews of the literature on experiential student philanthropy and service-learning, we identified the following goals of student philanthropy:

> Enhance awareness of social problems and nonprofit organizations in the community; increase knowledge of philanthropic processes, particularly grant seeking and grant making; influence attitudes, interests, intentions, and behaviors related to civic engagement and social responsibility; enhance understanding of the academic content of the course by integrating theory and practice; and improve critical thinking, communication, leadership, and other work-life skills. (Olberding, 2009, p. 465; see

also Dicke et al., 2004; Markus et al., 1993; Reinke, 2003).

In relation to these goals, infusing experiential student philanthropy and community engagement within the classroom has yielded various academic benefits for students across disciplines. Ahmed and Olberding (2007) were among the first to extensively assess the goals of student philanthropy through analyzing quantitative data from 1,000 students who participated in the MSPP over a 5-year period. Results indicated that students reported an increased awareness of both social problems (89.6%) and nonprofit organizations (94.9%) and an intent to donate money to charity (83.7%) and do volunteer work (82.6%; Ahmed & Olberding, 2007). Subsequent research on experiential student philanthropy indicates increases in students' awareness of community needs and problems; increased student awareness of area nonprofit organizations; increased student intentions of participating in future philanthropic activities; enhanced budget and resource management skills; and greater personal interest in community involvement (Bloch, 2018; Larson, 2017; McClendon et al., 2016; McDonald & Olberding, 2012; Taylor et al., 2015). Additionally, experiential student philanthropy is directly linked to an increased understanding of the grant proposal process (Bloch, 2018). Olberding (2012) was among the first to explore the long-term impact of student philanthropy, finding that the majority of alumni (queried at intervals ranging from 1 to 10 years following their student philanthropy experience) reported that their experience had a positive impact on both their awareness of community needs/problems and nonprofit organizations, thus supporting the long-term influence of student philanthropy beyond higher education.

Northern Kentucky University

Northern Kentucky University is a regional teaching university, located in the Greater Cincinnati metropolitan area and the tristate region of Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. The university hosts a campus population of over 14,000 students from rural, metropolitan, and suburban backgrounds (Institutional Research, 2017). The majority (55%) of undergraduate students commute to campus, and approximately 65% of degree-seeking undergraduate students require financial assistance in order to attend (Institutional

Research, 2017). Community engagement and regional progress are prioritized at NKU, through both formal inclusion in the university strategic plan and through integration of service projects with the curriculum (Langley-Turnbaugh & Neikirk, 2018; Northern Kentucky University, 2013). Through directed projects such as the one discussed in this article, the university has involved over 4,000 students in philanthropy-integrated learning (Northern Kentucky University, 2017).

NKU MSW Program

The NKU Master of Social Work (MSW) program offers two tracks: a 1-year advanced-standing option for students who possess a recent BSW, and a 3-year option for students who do not possess a recent BSW. The MSW program offers a wide concentration on children and families, with specific focus areas that include food justice, violence prevention, aging, and immigration. The first class graduated in May 2013, and the program currently admits 60–80 new MSW students each year. Community engagement is an integral component of the social work profession and this program, and students experience an integrated approach to community connections and support (Gaitskill, 2015; Herald et al., 2014). This case study involved 46 MSW students (25 of whom participated in the MSPP) enrolled in a graduate-level social work course titled Social Work Practice With Groups.

The Mayerson Student Philanthropy Project

Northern Kentucky University is an institution with widely recognized expertise on student philanthropy, and multiple campuses have modeled programs on the MSPP. After nearly two decades, over 4,100 students from 41 academic disciplines have participated in the MSPP, and over 1.5 million dollars has been contributed to nonprofit organizations (Northern Kentucky University, 2017).

The MSPP was initiated in 2000 at NKU as a way to educate students about philanthropy, nonprofit institutions, and community stewardship. This "learn by giving" model was created with the goal of helping NKU students become lifelong community stewards. University courses that participate in MSPP are given a sum of money (up to $2,000 per class) and are asked to select and evaluate local nonprofit organizations in the community, with the intent of investing in an organization deemed to make the most effective use of the funds. Faculty members structure the MSPP course to clearly highlight the nexus between course content and philanthropic elements (see Table 1).

A series of core procedures are embedded in MSPP courses. (1) Students divide themselves into small groups referred to as "community boards" and are instructed to identify and research needs and the nonprofits in the area that address these needs. (2) Students conduct a site visit to their chosen nonprofit or, in some instances, complete 20 hours of volunteer work with the organization. (3) Chosen nonprofit organizations are invited to submit a Request for Proposal (RFP) form summarizing their mission and intended use of funds if awarded. (4) Community boards create a presentation for the class summarizing their observations of their chosen nonprofit, in which they aim to persuade the class that their chosen organization deserves the $2,000 grant. (5) The class discusses and then votes at the end of the presentations to select the grant recipient. At the end of the semester, the philanthropy funds are awarded to the nonprofits, and the professors, students, and nonprofit representatives reflect upon and celebrate the MSPP experience. This MSPP selection process is presented below in Figure 1.

Course Structure

Although outcomes of experiential philanthropy programs have been examined in various fields of study (e.g., accounting, public administration), there is noticeably less literature that examines their impact within social work education (Maccio, 2011; McClendon et al., 2016). Furthermore, social work students have opportunities for experiential learning through required field practicums that provide invaluable exposure to community needs and agency infrastructures; however, opportunities for experiential student philanthropy are not always available to students in higher education (McClendon et al., 2016). This Institutional Review Board (IRB)–approved study examines the impact of the MSPP on MSW students at NKU who participated in a graduate-level practice course, Social Work Practice With Groups.

Survey data were collected from four different course sections; two sections par-

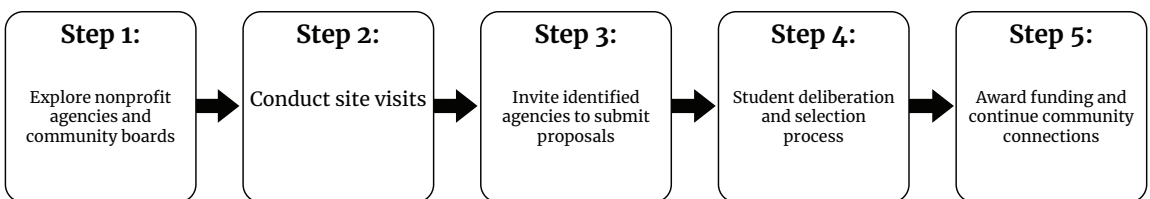| Table 1. Student Outcomes in Social Work Practice With Groups	
Student Learning Outcomes	Philanthropic Outcomes
1. Demonstrate knowledge of group design, facilitation, and evaluation. *This links to philanthropic outcomes 1 and 3.*	1. Learn more about civic engagement and gain awareness of social problems and nonprofit organizations in the region. *This links to learning outcomes 1–6.*
2. Identify techniques for effective group facilitation. *This links to philanthropic outcomes 1 and 3.*	2. Increase knowledge of philanthropic processes, particularly grant seeking and grant making. *This links to learning outcomes 3–6.*
3. Compare and contrast various theories and approaches to group work.*This links to philanthropic outcomes 1 and 3.*	3. Build upon critical thinking, communication, leadership, and other work–life skills. *This links to learning outcomes 1–4.*
4. Apply critical thinking skills and a critical perspective to group work. *This links to philanthropic outcomes 1, 2, and 3.*	
5. Identify, discuss, and analyze how research, ethics, and social work values inform and define the best practices in group work. *This links to philanthropic outcomes 1 and 2.*	
6. Explain how diversity issues manifest themselves in group work. *This links to philanthropic outcomes 1 and 2.*	

Figure 1. MSPP Selection Process

ticipated in a direct giving student philanthropy project, and two sections did not participate in it. Pretest data were gathered from surveys distributed to a total of 45 students at the beginning of the semester, and completed posttest data was gathered from a total of 31 students at the end of the semester. The MSPP utilizes a survey to measure student perceptions of community engagement and philanthropy. The majority of the students who completed both the pretest and the posttest were participants in the MSPP, and these data therefore largely reflect that experience. Because of this, we refer to the groups as "MSPP group" and "non-MSPP group" as opposed to "experimental" and "control" groups (see Figure 2).

In total, 46 students were enrolled in all sections of the course. During course registration that occurred in the previous semester, students were unaware that their course section would participate in the student philanthropy project. Once the semester began, students who participated in the MSPP course were made aware of the project. Students in all course sections were given the same readings, assignments, lectures, and exams that pertained directly to the course. Students in the MSPP course were provided with additional course materials pertaining to experiential student philanthropy and community engagement. Students in the MSPP course were informed of the class integration with the MSPP on the first day of class.

This course, Social Work Practice With Groups, focuses on the development of groups, the use of relationships in group work, and group membership skills in working in groups with children and families. This course emphasizes a "real-life" approach to learning that provides students an opportunity to observe a group in the community and explores the interaction of groups and systems with their external environment. The MSPP was embedded in two sections of this course and included four major elements, as follows. First, course readings and lectures were infused with the traditional course material, and students were frequently challenged to reflect and identify links between the course content and supplemental materials regarding community engagement and philanthropy.

Second, students participating in the MSPP course formed two teams, with each team identifying which nonprofit organizations they wanted to further research. Students were encouraged to identify nonprofit organizations that provided group services to the community (as this was directly related to the course content). However, it was not a requirement for students to select organizations with a group focus. Students were able to identify organizations based on their personal interests. Once each team narrowed down their choices, they contacted the nonprofit organizations to arrange a site visit. The student teams collaborated with the nonprofit organizations throughout this process in order to create the strongest possible proposal. The nonprofit organizations have the choice to be as involved as they want to be, and in many instances, they provide supplementary information to the

Social Work Practice with Groups

Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
9 students enrolled	12 students enrolled	12 students enrolled	13 students enrolled

non-MSPP group	MSPP group

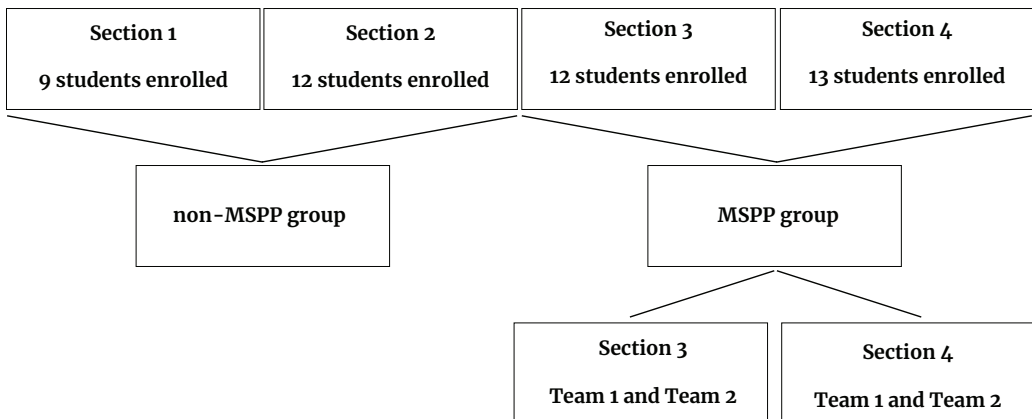| Section 3	Section 4
Team 1 and Team 2	Team 1 and Team 2

Figure 2. Social Work Practice With Groups Course Structure

students (e.g., compelling stories, photos, agency statistics, marketing materials). Third, the selected nonprofit organizations were invited to submit a grant proposal using a Request for Proposal (RFP) form provided by NKU's Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement. This RFP included information such as mission, targeted population, and a description of the intended use of funds if awarded. Finally, each team developed class presentations that synthesized information from their site visits. Presentations were designed to persuade the class why the organization was deserving of the funds. All students had an opportunity to review each grant proposal and any additional information provided by the agencies (e.g., brochures). Copies of these materials were provided for the students by the course instructor.

Following class presentations and grant proposal reviews, each team voted on which agency to award the grant funding of $2,000. Students decided during the first week of class that the total of $2,000 would be awarded to one agency rather than dividing the funds between two selected agencies. The voting process was challenging, as each group felt strongly about the mission and importance of their agency. Once the winning agency was determined, they were notified about being selected as the recipient of the funding and were invited to participate in an awards banquet with faculty and students at the end of the semester.

Evaluation of Experiential Student Philanthropy

During the second week of the class (to account for students who may have dropped the course after the first week of class), a representative from the Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement administered pretest surveys to the students during regularly scheduled class time. The pretest survey included the same questions for both the MSPP and non–MSPP groups. Consent form language for the pretest surveys differed slightly for the two groups, as the MSPP group discussed the MSPP in detail, whereas the pretest consent form for the non–MSPP group discussed teaching methods in a generic manner in order to best address the design of each particular section (non–MSPP courses received a consent form for data collection purposes). The posttest surveys for both groups were the same for Questions 1–43. For the MSPP group, Survey Questions 44–46 and 50 directly assessed the MSPP project and were not included in the posttest survey for the non–MSPP group. Questions 47–49 on the posttest survey for the MSPP group were similar to questions 44–46 on the posttest survey for the non–MSPP group, with the direct reference to the MSPP project omitted for the non–MSPP group. For this evaluation, findings significant at the .05 level will be reported.

Results and Discussion

In Tables 2–5, we present the preliminary findings from data collected before implementation of the MSPP and after completion of the MSPP. This descriptive data includes responses from 45 students who completed the pretest and 31 students who completed the posttest. The 45 students who completed all or part of the pretest included 24 enrolled in the MSPP section and 21 in the non–MSPP section. The 31 students who completed all or part of the posttest included 25 who were enrolled in the MSPP section and six who were not enrolled in the MSPP section. We excluded both pretest and posttest surveys from participants who completed only the demographic portions of the survey (such as section number) and did not also complete the substantive questions related to experiences. Only paired responses were included in the analysis, so this article presents the results of 28 or 29 matched surveys, depending on the particular question. Although both parts of the survey were administered to all students enrolled in the course, the posttest garnered a low response rate among students from the course sections that did not participate in the MSPP component.

The response categories for each question included a Likert-type scale with five possible options: 1 indicated a *very negative effect*, 2 indicated a *negative effect*, 3 indicated *no effect*, 4 indicated a *positive effect,* and 5 indicated a *very positive effect*. For one question, a single respondent did not provide a response category on the pretest and posttest. For this reason, most of the data analysis includes 29 questions, with the exception of Question Pair 9 ("I have a personal responsibility to the community in which I live"). Our preliminary findings indicate that incorporation of the MSPP with this class ultimately strengthened learning outcomes as related to course and community engagement.

Table 2. Description of the Data				
		Mean	*N*	Standard Deviation
Pair 1	Pretest	4.10	29	1.205
I am aware of the needs and problems of people living in Northern Kentucky and Greater Cincinnati.	Posttest	4.34	29	.614
Pair 2	Pretest	4.07	29	1.252
I am aware of nonprofit organizations in Northern Kentucky and Greater Cincinnati.	Posttest	4.41	29	.568
Pair 3	Pretest	3.69	29	1.312
I am interested in this course.	Posttest	4.14	29	.833
Pair 4	Pretest	3.93	29	1.193
I am interested in student philanthropy or service learning.	Posttest	3.93	29	.923
Pair 5	Pretest	4.34	29	1.396
I want to stay in college or complete my degree.	Posttest	4.38	29	.820
Pair 6	Pretest	3.86	28	1.113
I am interested in belonging to and participating actively in a group or association.	Posttest	4.21	28	.738
Pair 7	Pretest	3.29	29	1.295
I plan to work with someone or some group to solve problems in my community.	Posttest	4.28	29	.702
Pair 8	Pretest	4.28	29	1.222
I have a responsibility to help others in need.	Posttest	4.48	29	.634
Pair 9	Pretest	4.29	28	1.084
I have a personal responsibility to the community in which I live.	Posttest	4.36	28	.621
Pair 10	Pretest	4.17	29	1.197
I believe that I can make a difference in the world.	Posttest	4.48	29	.634
Pair 11	Pretest	4.21	29	1.207
I intend to volunteer in the future.	Posttest	4.28	29	.591
Pair 12	Pretest	3.97	29	1.322
I plan to seek a career in nonprofit organization.	Posttest	4.28	29	.841
Pair 13	Pretest	3.62	29	1.237
I will personally walk, run, or bicycle for a charitable cause.	Posttest	3.83	29	1.104
Pair 14	Pretest	3.62	29	1.237
I plan to help raise money for a charitable cause	Posttest	4.14	29	.833
Pair 15	Pretest	3.66	29	1.261
I intend to donate money to charity in the future.	Posttest	4.24	29	.636

Description of Data

Once the data was matched, we included all of the pretest and posttest responses to examine each item. The results demonstrate a tendency for respondents to indicate interest in or engagement with philanthropy and facets of nonprofit work. Many of the respondents intended to stay in college to complete a degree, which is perhaps more expected given that this project only included graduate students. In addition, there was a high level of agreement that each respondent felt a responsibility to help others in need, even on the pretest survey (mean = 4.28). This descriptive data is shown in further detail in Table 2.

Comparative Responses

Table 3 presents a paired samples t-test. This was utilized to examine the response differences in pretest questions as compared to posttest questions. Although the mean response did improve for most of the questions from pretest to posttest, it is notable that Pair 4 (interest in philanthropy) did not change from pretest to posttest. This might be related to the overall course and composition of the student body, as students might perceive experiential philanthropy differently based on demographic factors such as major and gender. For instance, perceptions of experiential student philanthropy may differ slightly among graduate students as compared to undergraduate students. This is perhaps related to increased focus in the particular subject matter, as graduate students are more likely to be enrolled in courses that specifically relate to their identified goals and interests (McDougle et al., 2017).

Given the small sample size, statistical significance among the paired samples is difficult to determine. However, the posttest results indicate possibly significant change on two particular measures: pair 14, with "I plan to help raise money for a charitable cause" (p = .029); and pair 15, with "I intend to donate money to charity in the future" (p = .030). In addition, level of interest in the course (pair 3) indicated positive change from pretest to posttest (p = .062). This is also shown in further detail in Table 3.

Table 4 presents an overview of several variables that were measured only in the posttest. These measures included 29 total participants, and the response categories included the same Likert-type scale as with the previous questions provided in the pretest and posttest. For these two measures, participants were asked to reflect on the effect of their participation in the MSPP on their own charitable giving and volunteer time. It is clear that, for the majority of participants, participation in the MSPP positively impacted both measures.

Most of the students reported a positive experience as related to participation in the MSPP. As shown in Table 5, students did perceive that the goals of the overall class aligned with the MSPP (mean = 4.41). In addition, the students were mostly satisfied with the class decisions regarding allocation of the MSPP grant money for nonprofit organizations (mean = 4.31).

Conclusion

Experiential student philanthropy yields various benefits for students in higher education and offers a unique approach to helping students better understand civic responsibilities. Responses of students who participated in this project signify that incorporating the MSPP into their course ultimately strengthened student learning outcomes (outlined in Table 1) as they pertain to course and community engagement. The results of the current study support findings from prior studies on experiential student philanthropy, and also provide potential practical implications to be considered in social work higher education.

There was a high level of agreement that students felt a responsibility to help others in need, even on the pretest survey. Although this may not seem surprising from graduate-level social work students, it is interesting to note that responses also indicated that student interest in philanthropy did not change from pretest to posttest. Two potential explanations may shed light on this particular finding. First, students who pursue graduate social work education may be more likely than the general student population to enter with an established interest in philanthropy, thus accounting for the lack of change in interest. Alternatively, this finding could be attributed to the concept of philanthropy often being conceptualized only as monetary contributions by individuals or organizations. Perhaps this traditional concept of philanthropy is not aligned with the current goals and priorities of graduate students. This finding

Table 3. Pretest and Posttest Comparisons					
		Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Significance
Pair 1	Pretest	4.10	29	1.205	.354
I am aware of the needs and problems of people living in Northern Kentucky and Greater Cincinnati.	Posttest	4.34	29	.614	
Pair 2	Pretest	4.07	29	1.252	.210
I am aware of nonprofit organizations in Northern Kentucky and Greater Cincinnati.	Posttest	4.41	29	.568	
Pair 3	Pretest	3.69	29	1.312	.062
I am interested in this course.	Posttest	4.14	29	.833	
Pair 4	Pretest	3.93	29	1.193	1.00
I am interested in student philanthropy or service learning.	Posttest	3.93	29	.923	
Pair 5	Pretest	4.34	29	1.396	.907
I want to stay in college or complete my degree.	Posttest	4.38	29	.820	
Pair 6	Pretest	3.86	28	1.113	.077
I am interested in belonging to and participating actively in a group or association.	Posttest	4.21	28	.738	
Pair 7	Pretest	3.29	29	1.295	.240
I plan to work with someone or some group to solve problems in my community.	Posttest	4.28	29	.702	
Pair 8	Pretest	4.28	29	1.222	.386
I have a responsibility to help others in need.	Posttest	4.48	29	.634	
Pair 9	Pretest	4.29	28	1.084	.769
I have a personal responsibility to the community in which I live.	Posttest	4.36	28	.621	
Pair 10	Pretest	4.17	29	1.197	.240
I believe that I can make a difference in the world.	Posttest	4.48	29	.634	
Pair 11	Pretest	4.21	29	1.207	.783
I intend to volunteer in the future.	Posttest	4.28	29	.591	
Pair 12	Pretest	3.97	29	1.322	.222
I plan to seek a career in nonprofit organization	Posttest	4.28	29	.841	
Pair 13	Pretest	3.62	29	1.237	.326
I will personally walk, run, or bicycle for a charitable cause	Posttest	3.83	29	1.104	
Pair 14	Pretest	3.62	29	1.237	.029
I plan to help raise money for a charitable cause	Posttest	4.14	29	.833	
Pair 15	Pretest	3.66	29	1.261	.030
I intend to donate money to charity in the future.	Posttest	4.24	29	.636	

Table 4. Effects of Participation in the MSPP			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The actual amount of funds that you currently donate to charitable organizations.	29	3.72	.996
The actual amount of time that you currently volunteer.	29	4.00	.802

Table 5. Evaluation of MSPP Experience			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall quality of the proposals submitted by nonprofit organizations for your consideration.	29	4.17	.928
[Satisfaction with] Group decisions by your class for monetary award(s) to nonprofit organizations.	29	4.31	.891
The fit between the MSPP and the goals and outcomes of your class.	29	4.41	.867

could compel course instructors to expand the conceptualization of philanthropy to include additional elements of social responsibility (McClendon et al., 2016) and examples of philanthropic giving through time and talent in addition to monetary giving. Expanding students' understanding of philanthropy can help them recognize their potential and opportunity to become philanthropists even while obtaining higher education.

Posttest results indicated significant change in student interest in belonging to or actively participating in a group or association. As the current course was a social work practice with groups course, the natural elements of the course (e.g., readings, lecture materials, assignments), coupled with the MSPP, may have contributed to students developing a greater interest in group participation. Higher education courses, particularly social work courses, with a preexisting groups component may serve as a fitting platform for infusing student philanthropy teaching methods.

Lending support for the MSPP, students who participated reported positive impacts on their charitable giving and volunteer time. Furthermore, the majority of students reported a positive experience participating in the MSPP, and perceived that the goals of the overall class aligned with the MSPP. Additionally, students were mostly satisfied with the class decisions regarding allocation of the MSPP grant funds for nonprofit organizations. These positive findings offer valuable insights for instructors in higher education who are considering the utilization of experiential student philanthropy as a teaching method. These findings also align with the growing mission of universities to strengthen engagement with the community and generate professionals who become strong community stewards (Saltmarsh et al., 2014). Furthermore, graduate social work students who subsequently become employed in nonprofit organizations, where they may one day hold leadership and/or development roles, could benefit from projects such as the MSPP, where they are provided with a foundation of what is required to be successful with active community engagement, seeking and applying for funding, and other philanthropic endeavors. Nonprofit organizations also simultaneously benefit from experiential student philanthropy projects by building connections with students who may become future employees and enhancing their connections with surrounding universities.

Social work students engage in fieldwork through practicum requirements, but it is important to note the distinctions between required fieldwork and experiential student philanthropy. Both provide students with important learning elements and exposure to community issues, yet both offer distinct experiential opportunities, with student philanthropy providing specific civic-minded components in addition to the professional skills gained through field experience (Maccio, 2011). Instructors in higher education may consider the infusion

of experiential student philanthropy to augment traditional social work field education to help enrich the experiences of students.

Limitations of the current study include a relatively small sample size of four sections of a social work groups course at one university, with students self-selecting their courses prior to the beginning of the semester. A larger randomized sample would help make the findings more generalizable. Nonetheless, findings partially support student philanthropy as being an important and effective teaching method in social work education that offers students an opportunity to develop skills and perspectives that can positively impact their experiences beyond the classroom and influence the communities they will ultimately serve.

About the Authors

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