Community Problem Solving in Criminal Justice: Breaking Barriers through Service-Learning

Todd E. Bricker, Ph.D.
University of Central Florida

Introduction

The value of service-learning for undergraduate students has been well documented (Astin & Sax, 1998; Wang & Rodgers, 2006; Conway et al, 2009; Lersch, 1997; Burke & Bush, 2013). Service-learning enhances the learning process by requiring students to apply important concepts to real world issues in a manner that positively impacts a targeted community (Penn, 2003). Effective learning occurs when students are motivated to move outside their comfort zone of existing intellect and creativity. Surpassing this boundary is accomplished by exposing students to key principles and concepts, challenging students to become effective problem solvers through classroom work and the application of knowledge to new situations. By linking research with practice, students can achieve an in-depth understanding of the application of knowledge in the form of policy.

In undergraduate criminal justice courses, specifically law enforcement courses, it is sometimes difficult to identify and coordinate service-learning projects that get students involved with practitioners. Often, law enforcement officers are hesitant to work with undergraduate students, or policy may prohibit collaborative relationships with students due to liability or safety concerns. Logistics also may become problematic when working with various project constituents such as university officials, members of the business community or residents. A cursory search of existing service-learning projects at various universities revealed a paucity of existing research on the design and implementation of service-learning projects directly involving students working

ABSTRACT

Service-learning is a valuable pedagogical practice for undergraduate students. It provides meaningful community engagement for students and assists in linking theory with practice. This article provides information regarding the planning, execution and outcomes of an undergraduate service-learning project conducted in a law enforcement class. A model of best practices is discussed as well as benefits to students, the university, law enforcement and community members.

with university officials, law enforcement and community residents to assist in developing useful policy to solve and prevent community problems.

This author took on the challenge of developing a service-learning project for an introductory undergraduate law enforcement course at a medium-sized public university. The project involved several constituents: undergraduate criminal justice students, university administrators, campus and municipal law enforcement officials, business owners and community residents. This qualitative study addresses the design of the project, stakeholder participation, identifying and overcoming barriers to the service-learning process, and utilizing project outcomes to create meaningful policy to assist in solving community issues.

Project design

The first step in designing the project was to focus on the desired outcomes. What knowledge should students gain from completing the project? The two most important project outcomes were: (1) Student learning in the form of application of knowledge learned in the classroom to real-world problems; and (2) A direct benefit to the community, the university, and law enforcement in the form of research data and policy recommendations.

At the beginning of a 16-week semester, sixty-eight students in an introductory undergraduate law enforcement class were asked to provide suggestions for a service-learning project. Students were placed in focus groups, and they were asked to brainstorm a project in which they could receive hands-on experience in dealing with issues that police officers deal with on a regular basis and something that would benefit the community.

The students selected a project involving common quality of life issues that existed in the campus community and that are common in many college towns. Colleges and universities across the United States have typically experienced some degree of tension between students and community residents due to disorderly acts, alcohol violations, verbal and/or physical disturbances. These issues have strained relations between the students, university officials, community members and criminal justice practitioners. Every year these constituents must deal with student misconduct ranging from simple acts of mischief to more serious property and personal crimes. Often, the media exacerbates the situation by repeatedly broadcasting these incidents. The university conducts student orientations to assist in preventing these incidents by explaining the consequences of such acts, especially to criminal justice students. However, some students do not heed the warning.

At the inception of the project, a media story was published that stressed the need for additional law enforcement measures to quell the tension between college students and community residents. Many complaints had been received about vandalism, trespassing, theft, drinking in public, loud parties, and other noise violations. This article was the driving force for the service-learning project.

Over the past several years, quality of life issues in the community had risen to the surface. Some permanent residents were quick to blame college students and the university for student misbehavior and disorderly acts that occurred in the community,

while students believe that residents do not respect them and fail to treat them as adults. Responsibility for the community problems quickly turned into a blame game.

Several steps were taken at the beginning of the project to ensure the best possible outcome for all constituents. Individual meetings were scheduled with the university Chief of Police, the municipal Chief of Police, the College Dean, and the Dean of Students. These meetings were designed to inform them of the project and get their permission for student involvement in attempting to solve a community criminal justice issue. During the meetings, each constituent was asked for input to enhance the student learning experience. Several ideas were brought to light including student ride-a-longs with police officers, assisting community groups in neighborhood and park clean-up projects and visits to the municipal court to view cases involving college students. The data collection process was also discussed. The intent was to explore community issues and help to create policy that would assist in building a stronger relationship between the university and the community.

Another important aspect of the project was student supervision. Due to the large number of students in the class, it was decided to use a graduate research assistant to help supervise the project. The graduate student participated in classroom teaching and field supervision. The workload was divided between the instructor and the graduate research assistant during the project.

After consulting literature on best practices for service-learning (Bowen, 2010; Ash et al, 2005; Mintz & Hesser, 1996; Service-learning best practices, n.d.), an outline was created containing essential elements or best practices for this service-learning project.

1. Curricular Goals – clearly defined and stated.
2. Service Goals – project goals meet a community need.
3. Preparation – possessing the knowledge and skills to undertake elements of the project.
4. Challenges – moving students beyond their comfort zone of existing intellect and creativity.
5. Participation – all constituents share project selection, design, and evaluation.
6. Assessment – achievement of goals is regularly assessed.
7. Evaluation – service goals are evaluated.
8. Community Connections – connections that build knowledge about the community, resources, and partnerships.
9. Reflection and celebration – multiple methods of reflection and the recognition of achievements.

Because this was an introductory undergraduate law enforcement class, it was necessary to front load the course with pertinent course material that would normally be covered throughout the semester. During the first four weeks of the course, students were exposed to the role and day-to-day operations of policing. Patrol procedures, community policing, community relations and public perceptions of police were also discussed. The SARA problem solving model (Scanning, Analysis, Response,

Assessment) developed by Herman Goldstein was discussed in detail as a basis for the service-learning project (Goldstein, 1990).

It was also necessary to discuss basic research methods since most of the students had not yet completed a research methods course. Topics including, survey design, design of interview questions, interviewing skills, and basic data analysis were covered. It is important to note that the regular course material was also presented throughout the semester in conjunction with working on the service-learning project. Specific days throughout the semester were designated for students to work on the project during class time. Additional group meetings were held outside of class time with the instructor and the graduate assistant.

Data collection

To explore the extent of current community-university problems, a rapid appraisal was conducted to gain insight into the situation in the surrounding community. Sixty-eight undergraduate criminal justice students in an introductory law enforcement course conducted an exploratory analysis of existing community problems. Students were divided into groups and were asked to discuss methods of obtaining data that would satisfy the first element of the SARA model: Scanning for the existence of problems. The goal was to ascertain what problems really exist in the community in relation to university-community relations.

Students decided that mailing surveys to potential respondents would result in an extremely low response rate and take too much time. As such, they decided that the best way to obtain relevant data was to conduct face-to-face interviews. It was decided that data would be collected from interviews of a convenience sample of community residents, college students, university administrators and police officers. It is important to stress that the sample is not random, but valuable information was obtained that provides insight into community dynamics and the importance of quality-of-life issues that can be helpful in directing public policy.

It was decided to utilize the SARA problem solving model developed by Herman Goldstein (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment) as a foundation for this project (Goldstein, 1990). Students were expected to complete the first two elements of model and use collected data to make policy recommendations for the university and the police. The response and assessment elements were left to the discretion of university officials and law enforcement.

Panel discussion

The initial stage of the project involved organizing a panel discussion to identify and discuss quality of life issues in the community that directly involved college student behavior (the Scanning segment of the SARA model). The instructor invited specific attendees. A project summary was distributed along with the invitation. Members of the panel included the University Chief of Police, the municipal Chief of Police, three patrol officers, the Dean of Students, and three members of a local neighborhood watch group.

Prior to the panel discussion, students worked in groups to develop questions that they wanted to ask the constituents. The student groups were then brought

together, and all the questions were reviewed by the entire class to create a master list. Questions were assigned to specific groups of students to engage panel members during the discussion.

During the panel discussion, students were able to ask the questions and provide input on real or perceived problems. They also recorded notes to guide their project. There was a great deal of dialogue during the discussion.

The results of the panel discussion revealed several major community problems including underage drinking, out of control parties, vandalism, littering, loud noise, and trespassing. Part of the discussion also centered on property owners and lack of upkeep of properties. Students indicated the need to force property owners to be accountable for their properties. Many students lived in apartments where they were charged exceptionally high monthly rent and the property owners failed to maintain the properties.

Members of the panel were informed about the timeline for the project and the activities that the students would be undertaking throughout the semester. These activities included interviews with residents, business owners, police officers, government officials and students, police ride-a-longs, and the preparation of a final report detailing their findings. They were asked to return at the end of the semester for a final panel discussion and project celebration for the students.

Field interviews

Following the panel discussion, each student group was assigned the task of interviewing a group of constituents. Interviewees included a non-random sample of university students, community residents, business owners, and police officers. Student groups were assigned to different areas to prevent duplication of interviews. One group of students was assigned to interview a local judge and the code enforcement officer. It was hoped that valuable information could be obtained regarding alleged and confirmed criminal offenses committed by college students to be used as a basis to confirm or not support any perceived community problems.

The students developed interview questions based on the information garnered from the initial panel discussion. All questions were open-ended to encourage discussion from respondents (See Table 1).

Table 1: Proposed Interview Questions for Students, Community Residents and Business Owners

Prior to beginning the interview, obtain the age of the person. (Do not interview if under 18 years of age)

1. Are you a resident of the community?
2. Are you a business owner in the community?
3. Are you a student?
   Do you live on or off campus?
4. If living off campus, do you rent or own your property?
   If renting, is your rental property well maintained by your property owner?
   If not, what are the problems?
5. How would you describe the relationship between college students and other community residents and businesses?
   If there is a problem, what can we do to improve relations?
6. Have you experienced any problems with crime or disorder in your neighborhood or at your business?
   If so, can you tell me about them?
   What do you think can be done to prevent these problems?
7. Are you aware of the neighborhood watch group?
   If so, what is your opinion of the work that they are doing?
   If not, explain to them how the neighborhood watch group is working to improve community relations.
8. Would you be willing to become actively involved in improving community relations?
   If so, how?
9. Do you think the police are responsive to community and or business owner needs?
10. How do you think the police can assist in improving community relations?
11. What can residents and/or business owners do to improve community relations?
12. How do you think that students can assist in improving community relations?
13. What can the University do to improve community relations?

Reports from students indicated that the interviews went very well. Community members, fellow students, business owners, and local law enforcement were very receptive and provided valuable information regarding perceptions of the community. A majority of respondents thought it was a great idea for the students to be undertaking such a project for the community.

A total of 166 respondents were interviewed regarding their perceptions of important community issues. The respondents were a mix of permanent residents, college students, police officers and business owners who reside in the community. The students did an excellent job at probing for responses during the interviews.

Police ride-a-longs

Five students were invited to ride with police on patrol. Weekday evenings and weekends were purposely selected because these were the primary recreational times for students. The students were able to see the types of issues that officers deal with involving college students and permanent residents. They were also able to see the geographic problem areas.

During one of the ride-a-longs, a student asked about community policing and how the department promotes this strategy in the community. The student suggested that police should engage in more community policing to help solve the crime problem. However, during one loud party call, profanity was directed at the police and the door was slammed in their face. One officer turned to the student and asked, "How do we community police that?" The student had no answer.

This type of field experience is invaluable to students who will be entering the criminal justice field. During the police ride-a-longs, students were able to see the level of disrespect that some students and community members had for police. They were also witness to several resident-student arguments and domestic violence incidents influenced by alcohol consumption. Some of the largest problems they witnessed were intoxicated college students at parties and students walking the streets. They saw these students knocking over trash cans, urinating in public, and heard them yelling and screaming in the early hours of the morning, disturbing other residents.

Findings: Problems and proposed solutions

1. Maintaining cleanliness of the streets and properties

A majority of respondents (68%) indicated that there is a need to clean up the streets/community. They rated the town as dirty and needing improvement. The primary causes of this problem were described to be a lack of caring or respect by college students and property owners, as well as a lack of personnel available for enforcement of laws and code violations.

Most students that were interviewed (69%) indicated that their property owners were difficult to contact, did not maintain the property, and charge too much for rent based on the quality of the property. One student's response was, "If students do not litter the streets, neighborhoods would not look the way they do. On the other hand, there are many students who have horrible living conditions because of the slumlords, so why should they even bother to pick up the trash around their property?"

This perception was reinforced during an interview with a local judge. During the interview he stated, "It is hard to respect run down properties that no one seems to care enough about to fix. If the property owners do not care, then why should the students? The day that the inspectors can come down harder on absentee property owners there will be positive results in the community. Until that happens, we will continue to see the problems get worse and the community decline."

The timely inspection of properties was found to be another issue. An interview was conducted with the building codes inspector to provide information regarding local

ordinances and absentee property owners. The conversation focused on building codes and the inspection of rental properties. He was asked how often housing inspections were conducted and how many rental properties were inspected. He stated, " I inspected about sixteen-hundred rental homes over a three-year period."

Another problem that was emphasized was absentee property owners. At the time of the interview, there were no ordinances that dealt with absentee property owners. Most property owners that live outside of the area have a local representative. Some representatives are friends of the property owner while others are real estate agencies. When a representative sends a notice about property discrepancies, he or she will send one to the property owners as well as the tenants. These notices cover lawn maintenance, furniture on porches and lawns, dangerous sidewalks, or just an absence or failure to meet building code standards.

The building inspector indicated that his workload prevented him from conducting regular inspections of properties as much as he would like. He stressed the need for additional codes enforcement officers. However, the budget did not support the hiring of additional personnel at the time of the interview.

Proposed solutions for the littering problem:
The student groups met in class and discussed the results of the community cleanliness and property owner issues. They proposed several solutions:

- Stricter enforcement of waste disposal ordinances by police and codes enforcement.
- Hire a grounds crew or use student interns to clean up trash on property fronts and charge residents for the clean-up.
- Sentencing criminal offenders to perform community service with the grounds crew.
- Obtaining a grant that would provide trash receptacles that could be bolted down at key locations in the community.
- Require fraternities and sororities to participate in an Adopt-a Street or block program to assist in cleaning up the community.
- Require university discipline to include community service with community clean-up crews.

Proposed solutions for the property owner problem:
- Advise students how to search for off-campus housing and their rights as tenants.
- Create a website for students that provide comments and a list of potential rental properties.
- Create an off-campus student housing office to address residential complaints, violations, or any other housing issues.
- Require property owners to register rental properties with the housing office.

- Require property owners to meet with tenants prior to signing the lease and conduct an inventory of the property with any repairs to be made (a copy of the lease and inventory should be provided to the housing office).
- The housing office could function as a mediator when a property owner is unresponsive or when other legal issues arise with student law violations or code violations.
- Permanent community residents can contact the housing office with complaints about student tenants making the university aware of the problems.
- Reduce the density in each apartment.
- Hire more building code officers or utilize college student interns.

2. Alcohol-related Issues

During the interviews, one recurring theme was that alcohol played a key role in many of the community quality of life issues. Interviewers were able to tap into perceptions of students, residents, and police regarding the use of alcohol by college students.

Student perceptions

Of the students who consume alcohol, most indicated that they drink to have a good time, to be social and for something to do. They do know that some students get out of hand, but they see it as releasing frustrations and venting. They do not support students destroying property but provided a defense to the act of vandalism by stating "sometimes you don't know what you're doing because you were drinking too much, and plus, people shouldn't leave things outside if they don't want anything to happen to them. This is a college town and things like this will happen." Others indicated that students committing crimes make all college students look bad and they should be arrested and possibly expelled from college.

Resident perceptions

A surprising number of residents interviewed (72%) indicated that they expect drinking by college students in the community. One resident stated, "Seeing how we live in a college town, we should expect partying from the students." However, when asked about the loud noise and vandalism, residents indicated their displeasure. Some mentioned that they have small children, and the noise wakes them in the middle of the night. The residents do not understand why students feel the need to destroy the property of others. They support the arrest of students who vandalize property.

Police perceptions

During an interview with the municipal Chief of Police, he stated, "While this may seem a bit cold on the side of the police the students are the ones making the violations, so it should be partly up to the students to fix these problems. We are not a babysitting service. They need to grow up and act like responsible adults."

Other police officers agreed by indicating that they know that students will be having parties and drinking. However, they expect students to act like responsible

adults by showing some respect for the community. They suggested that students monitor their parties, only allow guests older than 21 and keep the noise to a minimum during late night hours. Additionally, they stated that students need to cooperate with police when a call is received regarding loud noise from a party.

Proposed solutions for alcohol-related issues
- Create a College Party Action Plan. If the police shut down a noisy out of control party and residents are sent a notice informing them that the house is capped for the year. This means that there can be no parties there. If the cap is violated, they are arrested, and fines are levied.
- Party permits - students would have to obtain a permit from the police department specifying if alcohol will be present and provide an estimate of how many guests will be there. This will give police officers an idea of where potential problems may occur and direct their patrol.
- Lower the volume of music or levy fines for a noise violation.
- Only allow persons that are 21 or older to attend parties if alcohol is being served. Hold renters legally liable for permitting underage guests to consume alcohol.
- Inform neighbors about the party and be considerate of their requests to tone it down after a certain hour.
- Create neighborhood nuisance ordinances. Repeat violations of ordinances would result in eviction.
- Maintain a strict zero-tolerance policy for underage drinking.
- Provide a night bus or shuttle for college students. Having transportation for those that drink would cut down on trespassing, driving under the influence, vandalism, littering and fights that may occur when students are walking home.
- Create a university hotline for community residents to report complaints.
- Obtain community awareness grants to address the use and abuse of alcohol.
- Hire university and/or community funded community service officers. These officers would be non-sworn and part time. They would be tasked with handling public nuisance and quality of life calls.

3. Community and student relations

Because of the recurring problems in the community related to college student parties and disrespect, community and student relations are strained. Addressing the drinking problems and loud parties should go a long way in beginning to improve relations.

Resident perceptions
Most of the residents interviewed were not pleased with the relationship between students and residents. One respondent summarized the perception of many residents

interviewed, "Problems originate from university students being immature, not showing respect, and not taking into consideration the feelings of those around them. They also originate from the homeowners of the community being stubborn and not trying to solve the problems by going to the source itself. Instead, they are taking more drastic measures and going right to the police, which in turn makes everything more out of control than it really needs to be."

Other residents had similar comments, "Students are perhaps too immature to handle the freedom they have suddenly obtained, and substance use or abuse may fuel their destructive behavior. People need to respect each other's property and morality."

However, during one interview, two student researchers were invited into an elderly couple's home. They were offered pie and a drink and sat at the kitchen table to talk. When asked about their perception of college students and community relations, the reply was surprising. The female stated that they like having the college students around. It adds character to the community. She continued, "We used to have problems with our patio furniture and decorations being stolen, but we bolted everything down and now we don't have a problem anymore."

During further conversation, the students found out that the woman's birthday was in two days. A group of students purchased a card, a gift and a small cake and delivered it to her home to wish her a happy birthday. They were again, invited inside to have cake. It is evident that students involved in the project are already trying to improve community relations.

Student perceptions

Student perceptions regarding resident relations varied. One student said, "We have never even met our neighbors." This was a recurring theme. Others indicated that they speak to their neighbors regularly. Some invite neighbors to their parties. The students indicated, "This is best way to let them know that there will be a party and to tell them to contact us if it gets too loud."

Proposed solutions for the community and student relations issue
- Exchange phone numbers with neighbors.
- Build rapport – have a cookout for students and neighbors to get to know each other.
- Form a committee comprised of students, administrators, and residents who meet on a monthly or bi-monthly basis or as needed to prevent problems and devise strategies and community activities for students and residents.
- Have planned events for students and community members.
- Have members of the police departments speak to students during orientation about ordinances, laws, and policies as well as consequences for improper behavior.
- Hire criminal justice student interns to assist in policing the university.
- Pursue grants for additional police and student intern funding.

Neighborhood watch

A newly formed neighborhood watch was created as a mechanism to address community issues and formulate ideas on how to reduce or eliminate community problems. They have been urging community leaders to press property owners, rogue students, and university administrators for change. The group has a few main goals:

- Lobby university administrators to force freshmen and sophomores to live in on-campus residences.
- Modify the zoning ordinance to reduce the number of unrelated people permitted to live in the same residence.
- Launch a consistent campaign to fine property owners who ignore tenant problems.

These goals may be attainable if the neighborhood watch group along with supervisors, police, university officials, and property owners work together. During an interview with the neighborhood watch director, she stated, "One of our first programs initiated was to distribute door hangers throughout the town to explain the need to maintain and improve the community by taking responsibility for our homes and us. The door hangers stressed the importance of getting to know our neighbors, which could help with distressed relations currently between residents and college students living alongside each other."

Thus far, the neighborhood watch has not been very successful. One problem is that the neighborhood watch lacks power because of small membership and a lack of representation. Another problem is that they are reactive rather than proactive.

Students suggested several solutions to assist in strengthening the neighborhood watch program:

- Try to recruit more members to strengthen the program.
- Meet on a regular monthly basis to discuss current problems and devise solutions as well as methods for preventing problems before they occur.
- Get involved with the new student orientation process and let new students know what the neighborhood watch is and its purpose.
- Start a university club that revolves around the goals of the neighborhood watch and community.
- Contact sororities and fraternities to assist in neighborhood clean-up and other community initiatives.

Current police response to student behavior

The recent shift to a zero-tolerance approach when dealing with alcohol related problems has led to an enormous number of arrests. The increase in disorderly conduct and public disturbances motivated police officials to take action to curtail the problem. According to a police supervisor, "Our first weekend on duty after the opening of the semester resulted in 4 assaults, 101 disorderly conduct arrests, 22 underage drinking arrests, and one car chase that resulted in a car accident with injuries. A plain-clothes operation during homecoming weekend resulted in 98 arrests for similar crimes."

The zero-tolerance approach is working but it does have its drawbacks. According to a local judge, "The first-time offender program is not generally an option I use in sentencing alcohol offenders in my courtroom. This is a state program that emphasizes rehabilitation over punishment and uses community service as one component of the program. I do not use it very often. The community is fed up with this behavior and doesn't want to see the first-time offender program used in these cases, and in situations like homecoming weekend, where would I put over 100 people into community service?"

Satisfying the best practices for this service-learning project

At the onset of the project, an outline was created to provide the goals for this service-learning project. All goals were achieved.

1. Curricular goals
   - Students spoke with police officials, community members, students, and university officials about specific community-relations problems.
   - Students used a proven method of problem identification and analysis (the SARA model).
   - Relying on brainstorming and research findings, students proposed workable solutions to important community issues.
   - Students learned how policing philosophy and practices apply in problem resolution.
   - Students were exposed to the politics and bureaucracy involved in policing.
   - Students prepared and presented a technical report to peers, police officials, and community members.

2. Service goals
   - Students used community theories to assist in community improvement.
   - Students proposed solutions to assist in improving the quality of life for community residents.
   - Students proposed ideas for improving community relations.
   - Students assisted police in crime reduction/prevention through service-related research.
   - Students provided policy recommendations for cleaning up the community and reducing criminal violations.

3. Preparation
   - The first four weeks of the course were devoted to preparing the students for the service-learning project. Topics covered during this preparation period included: broken windows theory, community policing, communication in law enforcement, field inquiry, research methods, the function and structure of society and police agencies, how to record interviews and maintain proper records of interviews.
   - A graduate assistant was utilized to help supervise this project.

4. Challenges
   - Maintaining the motivation of students.
   - The dynamics of a group project are sometimes challenging.
   - Organizing a division of labor.
   - Monitoring student interaction with police, community members, and university officials.
   - Finding community members willing to be interviewed by the students.
   - Finding solutions for problems identified by the community as problems with university students.
   - Implementation of programs to reduce strained relations between the community, police, university officials, and students.

5. Participation
   - Students participated in designing the interview questions.
   - Students chose which problems in the community that they felt were most important to address.
   - Students conducted interviews with members of the community, business owners, law enforcement and government officials.
   - Five in-class meeting days in which the instructor collaborated with students about learning issues and problems.

6. Assessment
   - Group progress was monitored on five group meeting days during the semester and during regular class meetings.
   - Checklist of problems identified by each group.
   - Identification of student learning outcomes.
   - Preparation of a technical report.
   - Class roundtable presentation with community members.
   - Project grade was based on instructor and group input (i.e., 80% of the project grade was from the instructor, 20% was from a group assessment)

7. Evaluation
   - Chiefs of Police, neighborhood watch members, and the Dean of Students reviewed the technical report from each group and provided feedback.
   - Students completed a survey regarding their experience with the project.

- The graduate assistant and instructor interviewed project stakeholders to gather their impressions of the project (police chiefs, Dean of Students, and neighborhood watch).

8. Community connections
   - Students connected to the community through the neighborhood watch program, and interviewing members of the community.
   - The groundwork for lasting partnerships was created.
   - The neighborhood watch asked about the Criminal Justice Club becoming involved with an adopt a street program.
   - Community resources were identified (trash services, community service, and police services).
   - The project built a rapport between the Criminal Justice Department and University police, Municipal Police, and community members.

9. Reflection and celebration
   - At the end of the project all students participated in roundtable meetings to evaluate their group accomplishments during the project.
   - Students evaluated problems that they encountered and workable solutions.
   - Students completed a survey regarding their impression of the project and what they learned.
   - Students completed a self-assessment.
   - Students were issued certificates for outstanding service to the University and Community, signed by the Department Chair and the Dean of the College.
   - A pizza party was held for students at the conclusion of the project.
   - Students invited members of the community, police agencies, and university staff to attend a formal presentation of their research findings.

Conclusion

As a culminating experience for the project, the students conducted a formal presentation. A representative from each student group presented information. The same stakeholders that participated in the initial meeting were invited to the presentation. It was attended by the Dean of Students, the College Dean, the Department Chair, three faculty members, police officers, the university Chief of Police, the municipal Chief of Police and two neighborhood watch members.

The students created a PowerPoint presentation outlining the project and their findings. Proposed solutions to community problems were emphasized. Audience members were given the opportunity to ask questions. The stakeholders thanked the students for their work during the semester. Valuable information was provided to assist in guiding new policy.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the professor and the College Dean presented all the students with certificates for outstanding service to the University and Community. A celebration was held with food and beverages for all attendees.

This service-learning project was a remarkable success. Learning objectives for the course and the project were achieved. Burk and Bush (2013) found that students acquired a deeper understanding of course content and civic responsibility after completing a service-learning project in criminal justice. This project was no different. In a cursory comparison of students who participated in the project with former classes that did not, the service-learning students obtained a better understanding of key concepts about law enforcement and community relations. Students also had nothing but positive things to say about the project. Here are select comments from the students regarding the project:

"I gained more knowledge about community problems from the viewpoints of the police, students, and residents."

"I learned that involving yourself with community members is not as easy as it seems."

"Students along with members of the community are more aware of the problems facing the community."

"I liked the project because it involved trying to solve a real-life community problem."

"I was interested in the project from the very beginning. It gave me a controlled environment to express my feelings on various topics."

Select comments from members of the police community and residents regarding the project:

"This project allowed me as a police officer to get an idea of student perception and viewpoints of community issues."

"I enjoyed being a part of this project and being able to express my ideals and the views of the University and my concerns for student safety."

"The project opened my eyes as to how students view the community and its residents. It showed areas that need work and areas that have improved."

In the end, the project revealed several problems in the community. There is no quick fix to these complex problems. Remedies for these problems will take a significant amount of time, money, and effort. Perceptual differences between residents and students must also be considered. If animosity continues to exist between the stakeholders, the odds of improvement are minimal. The community is dealing with a joint problem that needs to be resolved not only by the police but by all the parties involved. Although this project required a great deal of planning and execution, the results were well worth the effort.

References

Ash, S. L., Clayton, P. H., & Atkinson, M. P. (2005). Integrating reflection and assessment to improve and capture student learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 11*(2), 49-59.

Astin, A. W., & Sax, L. J. (1998). How undergraduates are affected by service participation. *Journal of College Student Development, 39*, 251-263.

Bowen, G. (July 2010). Service learning in the scholarship of teaching and learning: Effective practices. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 4*(2), Article 18.

Burke, A. S., & Bush, M. D. (2013). Service learning and criminal justice: An exploratory study of student perceptions. *Educational Review, 65*(1), 56-69.

Conway, J. M., Amel, E. L. & Gerwien, D. P. (2009). Teaching and learning in the social context: A meta-analysis of service learning's effects on academic, personal, social, and citizenship outcomes. *Teaching of Psychology, 36*(4), 233-245.

Goldstein. H. (1990). Problem-oriented policing. McGraw-Hill.

Lersch, K. M. (1997). Integrating service learning in undergraduate criminal justice courses: Bringing academics to life. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education, 8*(2), 253-261.

Mintz, S. D., & Hesser, G. W. (1996). Principles of good practice in service-learning. In B. Jacoby (Ed.), *Service-learning in higher education: Concepts and practices* (pp. 26-52). Jossey-Bass.

Penn, E. B. (2003). Service-learning: A tool to enhance criminal justice. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education 14*(2), 371-83.

University of Kentucky Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement (n.d.). *Service-Learning Best Practices*. https://servelearnconnect.uky.edu/service-learning-best-practices

Wang, Y., & Rodgers, R. (2006). Impact of service-learning and social justice education on college students' cognitive development. *NASPA Journal, 43*, 316-337.

About the Author

Todd E. Bricker, Ph.D. is an Associate Lecturer of Criminal Justice at the University of Central Florida. todd.bricker@ucf.edu