

Academic service-learning courses prepare, motivate students
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Students can choose from a wide range of enriching opportunities to engage in civic leadership and address essential social issues and those efforts will be recognized on the transcript for those enrolling in a designated academic service-learning course.

For more than 10 years, Madonna University's faculty have been increasing their capacity for non-profit organizations within a credit-bearing course. Within these courses, professors of academic service-learning encourage students to engage in projects that assist non-profit organizations with direct or indirect needs. Over time, this form of essential community engagement has developed into a solid program.

These specialized courses are vital because students learn new ways to comprehend course objectives.

Currently, these courses are designated. This is significant because the course will show up on student transcripts with a 'SL'. The 'SL' informs future professionals that the student participated in a course with service-learning components.

"The designation includes students to complete at least 15 hours of intentional community service that is linked to course learning outcomes, engage in service that is of equal benefit to the learner and the community partner, participate in activities to assist in reflecting on the service and the learning, and address civic responsibility and lifelong engagement," said Olga Martinez, Director of the Office of Service-Learning.

Each course incorporates a pre-survey, and a project that introduces students to a crucial social issue. Once complete, students fill out a post-survey to explain what they've learned.

"The number of S-L designated courses is growing. They include broadcast and cinema arts, dietetics/nutrition, English as a Second Language, hospice and palliative care, humanities, marketing, nursing, religious studies, social work, sociology, and transition to higher education," says Martinez.

This is an influential tool if students are thinking about applying to graduate school. Presently, Madonna is the only private university in our region to have a designation and transcription process.

Madonna University requires all incoming freshmen to take UNV 1010: Transition to Higher Education. This course is meant to help freshmen manage their first-year by offering numerous service and learning opportunities to help them transition into college more easily.

"I hope that by having all of the students in UNV 1010 doing service-learning that there are a lot of different outcomes. I hope that we are able to provide meaningful services to the community. I hope that our students get the chance to experience learning outside the classroom in a city or

environment that they might not have had the chance to explore yet,” said Nicole Nagy, First-Year Experience Assistant.

If interested, students can choose to participate in service-learning study abroad trips. All students should look into the Costa Rica trip that takes place during spring break, March 2-9, 2014.

“We walk beaches, turtle patrols, for sea turtles laying their eggs. We then relocate the nests to protect them from poaching. We have also cleaned beaches in this area to make it easier for turtles to get up on the beach and lay eggs,” said Veronica Riha, Biology Department professor.

This is a breath-taking trip that gets students to step outside of the classroom to the sublime view of Costa Rica. Even though the trip is only a week, students can expect to learn a lot.

“I hope they learn about other cultures, why the sea turtles and wildlife are so important to the ecosystem. I also hope they gain an understanding of how much work goes into farming, building a house and maintaining the diverse ecosystem found in Costa Rica,” says Riha.

Barbara Hughes, Associate Professor for the Social Work Department, has valuable experience working with students who have been involved in her academic service-learning courses.

“As the Instructor for SW 2300: Introduction to Social Work, I highly value the 30-hour academic service-learning component of the course. At a time when students are exploring the profession and developing their professional identities, this provides them with an excellent opportunity to stay grounded in the needs of our communities and experience first-hand the valuable role that social workers play in meeting those needs. They bring their experiences back into the classroom which provides a much richer learning environment to continue their learning and development. The synergy is powerful,” said Hughes.