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Incorporation of Service Learning into an Interpersonal Skills for Leadership Course Using the SERVE Model

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Interpersonal Skills for Leadership has been taught at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for more than 30 years and has been a key course students use to satisfy the communication/interpersonal skills requirement in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. While interpersonal skills topics are covered and practiced in the course, additional practice occurs through service learning with a client in a community agency. This requirement equates to approximately 6,500 service hours provided annually in the Lincoln community. This level of service requires a well-developed placement and evaluation process. The course incorporates the SERVE model for integrating service learning into the curriculum. Select the service: a core group of agencies have been cooperators for many years. In order to become a cooperating agency a good match must exist between agency mission, course intent, and opportunities for students to develop one-to-one relationships over a semester.

Educate and inform: New and past cooperating agencies meet each semester with incoming teaching assistants and instructors. Additionally, directories are provided for students that describe the agency's mission, client base, location, hours, etc.

Respond to the need: Students are asked to provide a minimum of 10 hours and 10 visits with the client. Students set project goals for service with the agency. Value significance and reflect: Each week students are given in-class opportunities to link class concepts with their project experience and suggestions on ways to more effectively work with their client. Mid-semester evaluations of the student add to the reflection on the development of the relationship. Reflection journals provide students with essential opportunities to make linkages between course concepts and service experiences.

Evaluate and celebrate: End-of semester evaluations by project supervisor

provide feedback of students' participation. Students evaluate the "goodness of fit" of the course objectives to their service experience. Evaluation and informal feedback from instructors is used to maintain and develop the agency base for the course. Final project paper critically analyzes project success and failures.

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