

Using Service Learning to Enhance a Hybrid Course Curriculum in the “Politics of Food”

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Abstract

This case study investigates the benefits and challenges of using service learning to enhance the curriculum in a hybrid course rooted in the politics of the food system in Hawai‘i. Student learning outcomes are assessed, as are students’ notions of civic engagement. Students’ views on the impact of service learning on community partners is discussed, as well as the impact of the course curriculum on the students’ daily lives with regard to their awareness of the industrial agro-food system and sustainable agriculture’s varying degrees of success in contesting the former’s dominance. Challenges to the hybrid service learning model are discussed, as well as benefits and limitations of the multi-method approach used in this study. This paper argues that non-traditional students benefit from various types of access to service learning (online, hybrid, etc.) which increases student retention and student learning.

Key words: Service learning, hybrid course, civic engagement, community partnerships, sustainable agriculture, qualitative methods, non-traditional students.

Introduction

The University of Hawai‘i, West O‘ahu (UHWO) is a baccalaureate granting institution serving communities on the north, central and west sides of the island of O‘ahu in the state of Hawai‘i. Its student population is currently around 3,000 with a majority of non-traditional students. Due to the opening of a new campus in August 2012, the student population is rapidly growing. UHWO’s mission statement states that the university is committed to servicing workforce development based on state and regional needs through both in person classes to students in the university’s service area, as well as online, to students on the neighbor islands. UHWO’s local and online service area is relatively large, but somewhat sparsely populated compared to its larger sister institution, UH Mānoa, which serves urban Honolulu. Within this geographic area, there are several very disparate districts, some with high concentrations of second homes and high incomes, large swaths of agricultural land, new suburban residential developments, as well as high concentrations of Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, grinding poverty, high instances of drug use, homelessness and a host of other social problems. Included in these characteristics of UHWO’s service area are a wide ranging diversity of student ethnicities. Additionally, UHWO serves the highest proportional percentage of Native Hawaiians in the UH system. Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, particularly on the low-income Waianae or Western coast of O‘ahu, tend to have a host of diet and lifestyle related diseases. For example, nearly half of Native Hawaiians are obese, just about double the rate of obesity found in the rest of the population in Hawai‘i, they are 30 percent more likely to be obese than non-Hispanic whites, (“Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders and Obesity” 2013) heart disease is a major cause of death and disability among Native Hawaiians, and they are over 5 times as likely as non-Hawaiians to experience diabetes between the ages of 19 and 35 (Asian and Pacific Islander Forum, 2003). This trend is parallel to that of the mainland United States. As Francis Johnson argues, obesity clusters are not just a health-related issue; they are caused by complex sociocultural and political factors, and are one of the defining health issues of our time (Johnson 2009: 66). However, Native Hawaiians are able to call on the “rich cultural traditions of *malama* (to care for) and *kuleana* (special responsibility to the community)” (Morton and Franco 2004: 28) to overcome some of these social ills. The role of service learning in the UHWO area bridges the gap

between social problems and cultural traditions. It enables the university to engage in a shared responsibility to help foster community health and well-being at the same time as it educates its mostly non-traditional, student population. This case study argues that using e-service learning in a hybrid course reaches UHWO's target student population of working students by 1) providing opportunities for student civic engagement; 2) improving retention of the course material through reflective writing, and 3) fostering increased awareness of re-growing community food systems.

Literature Review

At its most basic, service learning provides experiential learning for students and studies have shown that it fosters civic responsibility (Carpenter and Jacobs 1994), increased student learning through service and reflection, and meets both academic and community needs (Davidson et al 2010: 443). In Hawai'i specifically, where the tourism industry's low-paying service jobs have replaced the plantation economy, the cost of living is among the highest in the nation, and professional opportunities are relatively limited, place-based service learning helps students understand their respective responsibilities to the wider community (Morton and Franco 2004: 28). Service learning fosters civic engagement, thereby enabling students to build a specific set of skills that are essential for political engagement of any kind (Eudey 2012: 237). Much of the literature on political engagement revolves around joining political organizations, voter registration drives, hosting a political fundraiser, etc. (Boyd and Brackman 2012: 46). This view assumes that the only type of political engagement possible is through voting and election related behavior. However, I argue that the political process is much more complex and all-encompassing than that. It has the potential to both change individual students' lives, as well as has an impact on their respective families and communities.

The service learning literature suggests that participation in service projects situated within an institution of higher education leads to higher achievement of learning outcomes, as well as other positive sociopolitical impacts (Guthrie and McCracken 2010a; Guthrie and McCracken 2010b; Braumsberger and Flamm 2013; Bolea 2012; Ramsey 2011) related to the experience such as increased community participation after graduation, greater understanding of diverse population, and increased critical thinking (Eudey 2012: 239; Gross and Maloney 2012). Service learning requires reflection, and the online space fosters that process by definition. As Eudey argues in her study of a feminist service learning online course, "when engaged within the context of a course, assignments can be designed that afford opportunities for reflection, connection and engagement to expand the initial consciousness-raising impacts for the students and perhaps also for those with whom they have networked" (241). This reflective space fulfills both academic and civic learning outcomes for students (Bringle, Hatcher, and Clayton 2006) encouraging them to understand the applicability of their service learning experiences to their lives and communities.

Strait and Sauer's early work (2004) on the creation of e-service learning to provide a variety of formats for experiential learning opportunities to students is key in accommodating diverse disciplines from education to language arts. Political Science is one of the disciplines which lends itself to the application of their model. Waldner, McGorry, and Widener's 2012 comprehensive literature review of the variety of e-service learning models is also instructive in situating this study. The Politics of Food class falls squarely in their Type I e-service learning with online instruction and on-site service. Dailey-Hebert, Sallee and DiPadova's 2008 book on best practices and models for e-service learning also affirms how various online components of e-learning can enhance the service learning experience in a markedly different way than an in person class. Strait and Nordyke (2014) have provided an updated version of this earlier work, integrating new technologies and reflecting on the potential impacts of various models of e-service learning. Related literature on distance learning focuses on the role of online pedagogy in increasing service learning (Bennett and Green 2001; Killian 2004); how accelerated distance learning courses address service learning outcomes (Burton 2003); how community building and awareness can be fostered through technology (Johnston 1999; McGorry 2006; Swan 2002); and finally, how service learning can be incorporated into a completely online course (Waldner, McGorry, and Widener 2010). These various perspectives on the combination of service learning and distance education serve as a framework for the development of service learning pedagogy in the hybrid class presented in this case study.

Course Format

The service learning for Politics of Food is structured as follows: students engage in approximately 20 hours of service throughout the semester, which includes about 15 hours of actual service performed together at various farms and other agricultural endeavors around the island, as well as about 5 hours of reflection time and writing. The online component of the course provides students with the opportunity for discussion participation, lecture material, and readings, in order to provide a context for the service.

Integrating service learning into an online class presents several challenges, especially due to the geographical restrictions found in Hawai'i. For example, it would be difficult for neighbor island students to participate in such a class. The prohibitive cost of flying to O'ahu each weekend to attend the service learning class days would prevent them from taking the class in the first place. However, a hybrid class presents opportunities for mostly non-traditional students to engage with an online curriculum in a holistic way through 1) experiential learning; 2) building a supportive community to foster increased student learning and civic engagement; and 3) fostering connections between the university and community partners.

The online component of the course, including course lectures, discussion board participation, and assignment posting consists of the delivery of the curricular context to complement the service learning portion of the course. The curriculum then, offers students an opportunity to understand the service they are providing to the various community partners in terms of the larger frameworks of food politics on a global, national, and local scale as indicated in the student learning outcomes. Furthermore, as Eudey suggests, service learning can be used as a means to "alleviate a sense of disconnection from classmates and instructors, recognize the self-directed aspects of online learning and create opportunities for students to test out their knowledge and understanding as a way to self-check progress" (235). The hybrid course curriculum delivery then, enables students to engage in these two simultaneous processes, increasing their engagement with the course material through experiential and blended learning. Students make connections with each other while working side by side in the fields, or waist deep in a Hawaiian fishpond. In addition, the instructor can get to know the students individually and assess their understanding of the course material through discussion and one-on-one interaction.

Were it not for the availability of this course in a hybrid format, the course material would not have reached nearly as many students, nor would they have been so "present" in every way during each of the service activities. The course was filled to capacity (there is a 30 student maximum for any hybrid or online class taught at UHWO) and included three auditors as well. All students who enrolled in the course finished it without exception, making for a non-existent attrition rate.

The hybrid format also presented a challenge for the course: the fact that we only met one day a week in person for six weeks was identified as a draw back by a few students in their course evaluations. Two students wanted more "facetime" with each other and with the instructor, in order to be able to ask questions, raise issues, and get answers in real time. This could be addressed in future classes through a chat session, or a Google Group Hangout session for willing participants, among other possible technological marvels. However, the inclination to enroll and serve as many non-traditional students as possible with the enticement of a one day a week course was key to the course's high enrollment.

In order to create a space for effective integration of service learning in a hybrid modality, the course format has to be flexible enough to accommodate different student and community partner schedules, as well as maintain high academic standards. With attention to these aspects, the "Politics of Food" class is a hybrid course with an online curriculum and an in-person service learning component. It is taught on a compressed schedule, lasting six consecutive weeks, with five 5 hour-long Saturday class times in order to provide opportunities for mostly non-traditional students to engage in the service learning component of the course. This includes five Saturday morning workdays at different farm sites and subsequent reflection writing on the service learning experience. The fact that the course only meets one weekend day per week in person offers increased access for the working students and parents who comprise about 83% of the student body at UHWO (UHWO Student Services Office, personal communication with author). Traditional service learning classes either require or provide optional opportunities for students to do service learning on their own time, beyond the timeframe of the course. While engaging in service learning may be feasible for a traditional student, non-traditional UHWO students would be unlikely to take a class where service learning was required. Therefore, they would not have the opportunity to be exposed to the wide variety of benefits gained from service learning courses. The online component of

this hybrid course is available to students throughout the week. The Saturday class time is the service time. This leads to the alleviation of time and access problems for non-traditional students.

The community partners for this class were very diverse in their agricultural endeavors. Students do service at the following sites, among others: 1) a traditional Hawaiian fishpond aiming to restore ancestral abundance; 2) school gardens needing assistance with clearing weeds in order to enable elementary school children to plant and harvest their own crops; and 3) a large organic farm with a youth leadership component, among others. At this last farm, Native Hawaiian youth from an impoverished community in the UHWO service area train to be community leaders and agricultural professionals.

The students in the Politics of Food class do not consistently attend the same community partner throughout the semester. Neither do students volunteer individually on their own time. Rather, the students come to each site as a group, which is helpful for certain farms where they may need large groups to make progress. However, it is not as conducive to service in another setting, such as a classroom or hospital for example.

Service learning cannot occur in a vacuum; if personal and social change in the food system is what the course is after, simply the service part of the service learning is not going to foster social change. Indeed, this case study aims to respond to Bringle and Hatcher's call to assess service learning in the curriculum using student reflection writing as evidence to assess student learning. In addition, it argues that a hybrid course format that includes service learning enables students to demonstrate knowledge of the course learning outcomes in a successful and measurable way (Bringle and Hatcher 2006: 45). This is accomplished through writing and reflection on the connection between the students' respective service learning experiences and the online course content.

The student learning outcomes (SLOs) for the Politics of Food include the following:

- SLO 1: demonstrate knowledge of key debates in food politics;
- SLO 2: demonstrate knowledge of the role of the policy making process surrounding food globally, nationally, and locally in Hawai'i;
- SLO 3: demonstrate knowledge of the role of service learning as well as civic and community engagement in political activism surrounding food systems in Hawai'i;
- SLO 4: Students should be able to read, write, and think critically about and through the concepts presented in class.

Students need to grasp the context for their service through the online curriculum provided which in turn, enables them to demonstrate that knowledge through their various writing assignments. The course topics lend themselves to critical analysis more than the memorization of facts and figures. Students are assessed not only on their writing, but also on the quality of their participation in the service portion of the course. Do they ask pertinent questions about and to our community partners? Do they demonstrate that they have done some research on each community partner beyond what has been provided online prior to the site visit? Do they understand the various challenges and opportunities faced by each community partner in a socio-political context? This demonstration of knowledge is found in student writing and, to a certain extent, in their oral course participation on the weekend service days.

The blended online and service learning course components provide an ideal space for students who need alternative times for day/evening/online courses. Indeed, the model for hybrid course service learning cannot be too narrow. Most UHWO students are non-traditional, minority students. Similarly to other student populations in the United States, they tend to balance their educational endeavors with commitment to family, work, and other community obligations (Robbins 2012: 24). This balance is incredibly difficult to achieve for them as well as institutionally. The flexibility provided by UHWO to these students is what has consistently enabled them to pursue innovative learning modalities in order to meet the challenges they face.

Multi-method Approach

Students in this class were asked to reflect on their perception of the community partners' experiences with service learning. Furthermore, they were asked to reflect on how the service learning affected them

as individuals, their families, and/or their respective communities. Contrary to Most's work which did not test the community-embedded learning model (2011: 300), the multi-level analyses required of the student writing asked them to craft sophisticated responses to the various aspects of service learning. In order to assess student learning in this course, thirty one "snowball" papers were reviewed in addition to student journal portfolios and course evaluation qualitative comments. The snowball paper premise is as follows: each week, students wrote a journal covering the online lecture material, the course reading, and assigned films they were tasked to watch on their own time. They were asked to make connections between that material to each of the service learning activities and sites they visited that week. The instructor provided feedback and specific queries to each student's weekly journal, and students then did some outside research to address those queries. At the end of the course, the final "snowball" paper was a compilation of each of those journals, but instead of being organized chronologically, students were asked to reorganize them thematically.

Themes generally come from students' personal educational interests, disciplines, and life experiences. For example, a student majoring in Political Science wrote her snowball paper with a policy theme. Due to her interest in agricultural policy, she provided an analysis of the various structural and political barriers faced by some of the sustainable and organic farms we visited. A pre-service teacher in the education program at UHWO focused on the connection between education and sustainable agriculture and chose a relevant theme around this issue. This student looked at the journal material she/he had already written through an educational lens. This pre-service teacher developed a feasibility analysis of farm-to-school programs on O'ahu. It was based on her service learning experiences at school gardens, informal interviews with farm-to-school coordinators at the service learning sites, and some of the course readings based on the impact of farm-to-school programs on academic achievement in various parts of the country. Another student chose a cooking and nutrition theme due to his interest in health and well-being. His snowball paper highlighted the importance of eating and cooking whole foods, and their potential impact on health disparities faced by many people in the UHWO service area due to unequal access to fresh, healthy food might be addressed. Finally, a business student interested in sustainability focused her snowball paper on the "farm-to-table" idea by analyzing the economic multiplier effect of encouraging people to buy locally grown foods.

These papers reflected not only the student learning outcomes in their content, but also asked students to provide analyses from different perspectives than originally provided in their journal portfolios, thereby scaffolding the assignment. All of the student work was submitted online in the week following each service learning experience. This made portfolios and snowball papers logistically easier to manage, since all of the work was housed in one online assignment tool that allowed for two-way student-instructor interaction. An instructor can use a variety of online tools, such as Microsoft Word's "Track Changes" tool, or Google Docs' "Edit and Share" feature, to ask pertinent questions and help the students develop their respective themes. While in-person courses certainly do have their advantages, the opportunity for student work to be compiled in this way, in an easily-referenced manner online is a key component to the success of the snowball paper assignment, and to the success of the overall service learning hybrid course as well.

The quality of the student writing was extremely high as evidenced by the grade distribution for the journals and subsequent snowball papers: students were able to make distinct connections between the course curriculum and the service learning experiences. Knowing that the course only met one day a week, but for a significant length of time (5 hours each week), students were able to gain background information through course lectures, reading, and online discussions with each other asynchronously throughout the week and come prepared to learn more while they were working together at the various service learning sites. The student snowball papers demonstrated connections the students made between the course components and the experiential learning performed at the various service sites.

Challenges

There are obviously challenges posed by only using one class to assess the effectiveness of service learning in a hybrid setting on student learning outcomes through student writing. Indeed, Bringle and Steinberg recommend that researchers avoid using single case studies in order to increase generalizability (2010: 438). This class had been previously taught six times in a face-to-face format. The seventh time, it was taught as a hybrid course so comparisons were inevitably made between the two

course delivery modalities. While this is the first time this course has been taught as a hybrid, portfolios of student journals and snowball papers were assessed throughout and after the course, providing a richer depth of qualitative data from which to draw (limited) conclusions.

Bringle and Steinberg recommend that even a limited study, carefully executed, can be useful for program evaluators and practitioners who are designing service learning courses (2010: 430). Furthermore, Bringle and Hatcher (2009) ask researchers to “move from student self-report measures to more authentic forms of evidence, such as student products to structure narrative reflection prompts, that capture student learning” (45). Thus, for the purposes of this study, the student journal portfolios, the snowball papers, and specifically chosen qualitative course evaluation prompts tasked the students to produce quality work. These were reflective of the impact of the course on their lives and the notions of community impact and engagement. This individual service learning hybrid course case study provides limited options for large generalizations about service learning and educational effectiveness. However, the student journals and snowball papers did demonstrate that the hybrid course format enabled them to interact with the course material in a meaningful way. This interaction occurred online over the course of each of the five weeks in order to enable the students to be fully prepared to engage with the service learning experience each weekend.

Results

Civic engagement, or civic mindedness refers to a person’s understanding of her/his community, and her/his place within that community. Service learning provides a space for students to “try out” civic engagement as part of a course, providing a pathway for them to continue that engagement after they’ve finished the service learning class, or even left the university altogether once they graduate. Civic engagement through service learning leads to socially responsive knowledge and contributes to a democratic society (Bringle and Steinberg 2010; Bringle and Hatcher 2009). Students may experience an impact on their career goals, but more importantly, there is a shift in their attitudes toward food and the food systems which surrounds us on a daily basis.

Working on farms, in school gardens, with a Native Hawaiian fishpond, etc. the service learning experience leads students to think critically about various aspects of the food system. Indeed, many of the lessons students learn from their work in the agricultural community tend to translate from specific farms to broader lessons they take home (Davidson et al. 2010: 450) in terms of their ability to make a difference in the food system through what they purchase at the grocery store, the farmers’ market, or a community supported agriculture scheme, and subsequently changes their family eating habits to reflect less fast food purchases and more cooking at home with their families.

To assess student learning, the journals and snowball papers were sorted by student-generated themes and key words. The frequency of themes reflecting increased community and civic engagement, especially through the lens of students’ respective academic disciplines were identified. One hundred and thirty seven journals were searched for words relating to sustainability, community, food systems, agriculture, awareness, health, politics, and education. Of those, one hundred and eleven contained one or more of the key words. Of the thirty snowball papers turned in, *all* contained one or more of these key words.

Some student snowball papers expanded on these trends in more detail:

With every dollar spent I answer the question of “Who do I support, and what do I stand for?” I look deeper than the nutritional content of the meal and I look into where my money is going. (Joe M.)

Previous to taking this politics of food course, I had little insight or knowledge about the “politics” behind the food we consume. You could say that I was careless about the food I ate; taste and price were always the number one factor that determined what fed me. However, the experiences and knowledge that I had gained from this course shone light on issues that remained hidden and undermined. (Raela N.)

These two students’ papers indicate that the course material led them to making changes in their shopping habits and respective diets, not just as a response to following a recommended list, but through thinking critically about what they were eating and most importantly, why they were doing so. These two

powerful reflections of critical thinking about the food system and the parts consumers play in it are key demonstrations of students' understanding and subsequent implementation of the course's learning outcomes into their lives.

Indeed, one student wrote in her journal that the most significant premise she gained from the course experience was the following:

People can work together to create a huge impact on the well-being of a community, and how a small group of people have the power to create change within a community and a state. By working together we got the job done faster, we got to meet new people, and we learned about an astonishing farm to school system that works for this school with the help of parents, farmers, and other community members. My only hope is that one day federal and state policies will be changed to allow all schools the chance to experience this type of program through nutrition lessons and hands on experiences, and that policies will allow students to consume the food that they grow in their gardens. (Cherie A.)

This student writes specifically about one of the learning outcomes of the class through her journal portfolio by demonstrating knowledge of the connections between the local agriculture education and state and federal policies surrounding the food system. She is also demonstrating an understanding of another learning outcome. She acknowledges and honors the importance of community, not only in working together in a service learning activity, but also in gathering together to become agents of change in support of Hawaii's food system.

Some of the quotes from the students' journal portfolios highlight the process of understanding the connections between the service learning activities, the course material, and their own life experiences, before, during, and after the class.

At the start of this class I thought ok, I'll get to learn a little bit about the politics surrounding the food industry and how it affects us. I wasn't aware of the damage I was doing to my own body and that of my children with the amount of processed foods we consumed. As I prepared for the upcoming weeks, I knew the service learning trips would increase my love for farming, but I wasn't prepared for just how much of an impact these five weeks would have on my mentality surrounding food, sustainable food communities and my life. I no longer look at food the same as I did on the first day of class. Raising awareness, activism in farming and the politics surrounding sustainable foods has become so important to me that I cannot buy food without questioning its ingredients and where it came from. (Soteria F.)

If we made the effort to demand healthier choices, the farmers would have to begin supplying us with what we demand. I feel like this would be the beginning of a ripple effect. We may not have to protest and stand in front of the government to voice our opinions regarding our food selection. Instead we make our point known by simply buying local organic foods. Eventually the other companies may catch on that we do care about what we put into our bodies and not just anything will suffice. If we support our local farmers through CSA programs, the farmers win and the consumers win. If the government allows for programs like 'Aina in schools, the children win. The ripple has to start somewhere and this class really helped to open my eyes to the truths of the importance of our food and our food system. (Tiffany L.)

These quotes clearly illustrate how much relevance the course material had to the students' everyday lives. They also refer back to several of the student learning outcomes revealing that the assessment of student writing for the purposes of understanding the power of experiential and service learning is a key component of supporting student engagement.

Students in the Politics of Food course similarly showed enhanced interest in the course material as it related to their daily lives and future aspirations – whether health, diet, or career-related. In their respective course evaluation qualitative comments, several different students emphasized their understanding of lifestyle changes as well as community engagement:

This course has *life changing effects* in the decisions to live a healthier and *more informed life for myself and family*. If I want to be a great educator I must take care of my health first. This course got me out in the community and exposed to supporting organic and local industries. This way I can *support those that support the community*. (Anonymous course evaluation comment -author's emphasis)

I thought I had a grasp of this subject. However, my eyes were completely opened to both the *local and global impact of the food movement*. I have already made *life changes* due to the effectiveness of this course. (Anonymous course evaluation comment – author's emphasis)

The information became useful. *I was able to use what I learned and apply it to other classes*. Not only to other classes, but the awareness of eating. My diet has gotten healthier after watching the videos. I try not support big chain fast food companies but rather to prepare my food that was purchased from the local market. I also like relaying my messages to other people, especially when I run into people at the store. *I get excited telling them what I learned*. (Anonymous course evaluation comment – author's emphasis)

Students' sense of political efficacy surrounding the food system seemed to reflect a shift in perception about their respective political agency as a result of the course. Unlike those students in Davidson et al.'s study (2010) who believed that the societal problems they saw through their service projects could be too big to be able to change, the students in the Politics of Food course were able to make individual, family, and community changes. For example, some students pledged to improve their food choices by eating more locally grown food, and as one student put it: "less daily cheeseburgers." While some of the literature covered in the class does seem to indicate that the global industrial agro-food system is too broken to fix, the fact that there are varying levels of commitment to change available as options to students helps them to make a transition between a complete lack of awareness and a growing sense of political efficacy to create food system change.

Our class would make weekly trips to a particular place in which specific organizations are taking an initiative to promote a project. Not only are we to work side by side with these incredible individuals but also learn from their experiences of why they are so drawn to what they do. In addition, we get to learn about the development happening in other places that can ultimately cause a ripple-effect to our people and community. SO, not only are we learning locally but also cross-culturally and internationally. (Anonymous course evaluation comment)

The service learning component provides the space for local civic engagement which is precisely what makes food system change seem more achievable. It's not abstract; it's real and tangible, and it leads students to a fuller understanding of the local food system when they have had the opportunity to actually *do work* in the community and see what it takes to grow good, healthy food in various agricultural venues.

Discussion

Online learning, especially for busy non-traditional students can lead to a solitary educational experience. However, the structure of this hybrid class avoids this potential pitfall. It affirms a shared commitment to service in the community for five hours each Saturday morning throughout the duration of the class, as well as additional reflection on the connection(s) between the weekly service learning experience and the course content. As Eudey suggests, students become conscious of their experiences and politics through writing their reflections and sharing them with the instructor. Students are therefore able to "deepen their considerations of the interplay of theory, practice, experience, and impact" (Eudey 2012: 247). Experiential service learning engages students with the course material so that they can see demonstrable results once they are done with their site visit. For example, a certain field is cleared of weeds, elementary school garden boxes are ready for planting by school children, or rocks have been moved to repair a break in a fishpond wall. However, the student writing demonstrated much more than that in this course. It enabled students to reflect on their respective service learning experiences; how their service helped the community partners through the completion of various tasks requiring many hands to accomplish; how it may have helped them learn something about growing their own food and

why doing so might benefit Hawai'i's local food system; or perhaps understanding some of the policy challenges faced by organic farms seeking certification and why this may lead to higher costs for organic foods being passed on to the consumer. These examples show that students understood the relationship between the course curriculum and each week's service learning experience.

As most of the students at UHWO are adult learners, the service experience is particularly salient to their educational pathways. They are able to apply their own life experiences to the course curriculum (Most 2011: 296). In this course, as it relates to food, a source of nourishment in which everyone has to partake, this relationship is remarkably striking. Food choices and family diets tend to change as a result of the course content found online, as well as putting the curriculum into practice through the service learning experiences. Once students have worked on a farm in the hot sun for a few hours, pulling weeds, moving compost, or transporting branches, they are more respectful of the difficulty of farming as an occupation, and tend to have a greater understanding of why locally grown food – likely grown on a smaller scale than the 85% of the food imported to Hawai'i likely grown in large industrial agro-food systems – might be more expensive.

The shared challenges of working together in situations outside most students' comfort zones encourages them to create a classroom community, and this translates to greater online participation in the discussion board, a sharing of resources such as relevant articles to the course material on the discussion board, and an increased understanding of the complexity of the food system. As Coe-Regan and O'Donnell found in their study integrating technology and service learning in a youth development program, student participants developed empathy for the communities they were serving, as well as their fellow students (Coe-Regan and O'Donnell 2006). The creation of a community extends beyond the classroom and enables students to understand their respective roles in improving the food system in Hawai'i.

Conclusion

This case study has provided suggestions for best practices in using service learning to enhance a hybrid class at a small regional comprehensive university with a significant working, non-traditional student population. While the service opportunities are obviously rooted in a local context, this model can be applied elsewhere, even perhaps with a different curricular focus. There are also opportunities for further study within a context such as this one. There is a lack of literature on non-traditional students and service learning. Indeed, the student population at UHWO, mostly non-traditional minority students who work full time is generally weakly represented in the service learning literature. They "often balance their educational pursuits with high personal, family, employment, and community obligations that can hinder traditional service learning models" (Robbins 2012: 24). The traditional model for service learning can be too narrow to accommodate this particular population's needs. This is especially important since studies suggest that "service learning can meaningfully contribute to the increased likelihood of first generation retention and graduation" (Robbins 2012: 26).

The civic engagement demonstrated in the student writing for this class provides an example for similarly situated universities with large adult learner populations. Flexible design of the service learning model, along with the option of a hybrid approach serves both as many students as possible as well as a variety of community partners. It behooves any university serving a similar population to invest in various types of access to service learning (online, hybrid, etc.) and institutional assessment of its benefits and challenges in order to increase student retention, student learning, as well as continuing to build upon existing community partnerships. In these ways, students can demonstrate knowledge of meaningful and engaged learning practices rooted in their respective communities.

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