

California Campus Compact
Youth to College Initiative
(Learn and Serve America Higher Education Grant
Corporation for National and Community Service)
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Introduction:

This report is the first year of data findings (of a three year grant project) involving four California campuses who received funding from California Campus Compact through a Learn and Serve America Higher Education grant as part of the Corporation for National and Community Service in an effort to increase college readiness among youth from disadvantaged communities. Lead institutions served as regional hubs for service-learning projects while collaborating with other colleges and community partners. Below are brief descriptions of each institution.

California State University, Fresno (CSUF), focused on services that foster personal, social, and academic competencies of disadvantaged youth in the Central Valley. A combination of tutoring/mentoring, college literacy training, and service learning courses were utilized to promote the goals of the project and success of the youth involved.

Humboldt State University (HSU), implemented community partner-campus collaborations to provide tutoring and mentoring for youth, and campus tours for youth and their parents. Other efforts focused on faculty development workshops and college and youth engagement in MLK day activities.

University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), worked with their two campus partners, the Vice Provost Initiative for Pre-College Scholars (VIPS) and the Center for Community College Partnerships, as well as with other college institutions to reach high school youth in a reciprocity of learning where youth shared knowledge with college students, administrators, and faculty about their barriers and challenges in attempting to gain access to college.

University of San Diego (USD) partnered with youth from the member organizations of a Linda Vista Youth Coalition in college preparatory activities including tutoring, mentoring, college workshops, and joint service projects such as AIDs Walk, MLK parade, and Special Olympics.

Performance Measure Goals:

This report focuses on two of the performance measure goals. 1) College students participating in the service-learning activities will demonstrate an improved attitude toward learning for academic engagement. Specifically, by year three of the grant, 75% of college students will indicate an improved attitude towards learning for academic engagement as reported on a survey. 2) Youth participants will demonstrate an improved awareness of how to navigate the educational system. Specifically, by year three of the grant, 75% of disadvantaged youth that have participated in service-learning projects will indicate an improved awareness of how to navigate the educational system as reported on a survey.

Survey Development:

In collaboration with grant directors at the four lead institutions, two surveys were developed to measure performance goals. Emphasis was placed upon creating surveys that could be easily administered, efficiently completed, and quickly tallied while accurately measuring dimensions of the core concepts of interest.

The College Student Survey, in an attempt to measure “improved attitude towards learning for academic engagement”, contained seven items which students were asked to rate on a Likert-type scale (1-4) from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Students were requested as a result of their participation in the service-learning experience to rate their level of: 1) increased understanding of their knowledge and skills to improve the community; 2) increased understanding of how to use course readings and information to gain insight into community issues; 3) increased understanding of how their college education can benefit themselves and the community; 4) increased likelihood to complete their college degree; 5) increased likelihood to involve themselves in community service in the future; 6) increased

capacity to become a community leader; and 7) increased capacity to create positive community change.

The Youth Survey, in an attempt to measure “improved awareness of how to navigate the educational system”, contained 8 items which youth were asked to rate on a Likert-type scale (1-4) from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Youth were requested as a result of their participation in the service-learning experience to rate their level of: 1) increased understanding of what classes to take in high school to prepare them for college; 2) increased understanding of how to use resources and support services at high school to prepare them for college; 3) increased understanding of how to apply for college admission; 4) increased understanding of how to apply for financial aid for college; 5) increased understanding of how a college education can help improve their future; 6) increased understanding of resources and support services available to them at a college campus; 7) increased likelihood of attending college in the future; and 8) increased likelihood of earning a college degree in the future.

Both surveys also included some basic demographic questions: gender; race/ethnicity, and year in school. Lead institutions that collected the data also indicated whether the service-learning was conducted as part of a college course, single service-learning experience (e.g., MLK day), or extended service-learning experience (e.g., Alternative Spring Break).

Results:

Since this was the initial year of the grant, data were collected only for the Spring 2007 term.

College Survey:

502 College students who participated in service-learning activities completed the survey including 135 males and 364 females (others did not respond to demographic items). Of these, 33% are first year students (freshman), 15% 2nd year students, 20% 3rd year students, 20% 4th year students, 10% 5th year students, and 3% 6th year students. Race/ethnicity representation includes: White = 219; Asian/Pacific

Islander = 126; Black/African American = 14; American Indian = 3; Hispanic/Latino = 103; Multiracial = 27. Of the respondents, 68% were in a service-learning course, 7% participated in a single service-learning experience, and 23% in an extended service-learning experience.

College student responses to the survey items indicate overwhelming project success with respect to improving student attitudes towards “*learning for academic engagement*”. Over ninety percent of the college students agreed that as a result of their service-learning experience they increased their:

1. understanding of how to use their knowledge and skills to improve the community (96.6%)
2. capacity to create positive community change (95.8%)
3. understanding of how their college education can benefit both themselves and society (95.4%)
4. likelihood of involving themselves in community service in the future (94.9%)
5. understanding of how to use course readings and information to gain insight into community issues (90.9%)
6. capacity to become a community leader (90.7%)

One additional survey item also indicates project success since the original goal was that only 75% of college student respondents would indicate improved learning for academic engagement by the end of year three of the grant. In this case, 78.9% of college students in the first year of the grant indicated that they are now more likely to complete their college degree. While this figure seems substantially lower than the figures above, the result indicates that the students took the survey seriously. It is likely that these students were already highly motivated to complete their college degree. However, the project successfully increased their learning for academic engagement since over 90% indicated improved knowledge, skills, and understanding.

Youth Survey:

589 Youth from disadvantaged situations who participated in service-learning activities completed the survey including 235 males and 327 females (others did not respond to demographic items). These numbers include 464 high school students (9-12 graders), 75 middle school students (6-8 graders), and 41 elementary students (4-5 graders) across various race/ethnicities (White = 195; Asian/Pacific Islander = 99; Black/African American = 141; American Indian = 27; Hispanic/Latino = 74; Multiracial = 17). (This is the largest data response set for youth currently known for a service-learning effort within the United States.)

Youth responses to the survey items indicate overwhelming project success with respect to improving “*awareness of how to navigate the educational system.*” Over eighty percent of the youth agreed that as a result of their service-learning experience they increased their:

1. likelihood of earning a college degree in the future (87.3%)
2. likelihood of going to college in the future (85.8%)
3. understanding of how a college degree can help their own future (85.6%)
4. understanding of the resources and support services available to them on a college campus (80.5%)

Two additional survey items also indicate a positive impact on youth. Nearly three-fourths (72.6%) indicated that they now have an increased understanding of how to apply for admission to college and the majority of youth (60.1%) indicated that they now have an increased understanding of how to apply for financial aid for college.

Summary and Recommendations:

The first year of the Youth to College grant initiative was extremely successful. College students who participated in the service-learning projects evidenced an improved attitude in learning for academic engagement. Similarly, youth from disadvantaged situations who collaborated with the service-learning colleges and community partners evidenced an increased awareness of how to navigate the educational system and an increased likelihood of attending and graduating from college.

Service-learning projects directed toward youth from disadvantaged situations varied considerably across the community partners and higher education institutions. In some cases, it was not the intent of the effort to cover specific application procedures for college admission or financial aid. Thus, the lower level of response rates on these survey items. It may be worth considering whether all service-learning projects want to attend to these issues more directly. However, success is clearly indicated in improving youth awareness of and attitudes toward college education. As previous research has indicated, attaining a college degree is highly correlated with individual aspirations and motivations. Certainly, the Youth to College initiative has in its first year already demonstrated a significant accomplishment in providing new learning opportunities for both college students and youth and the hope of an improved future for the state of California.