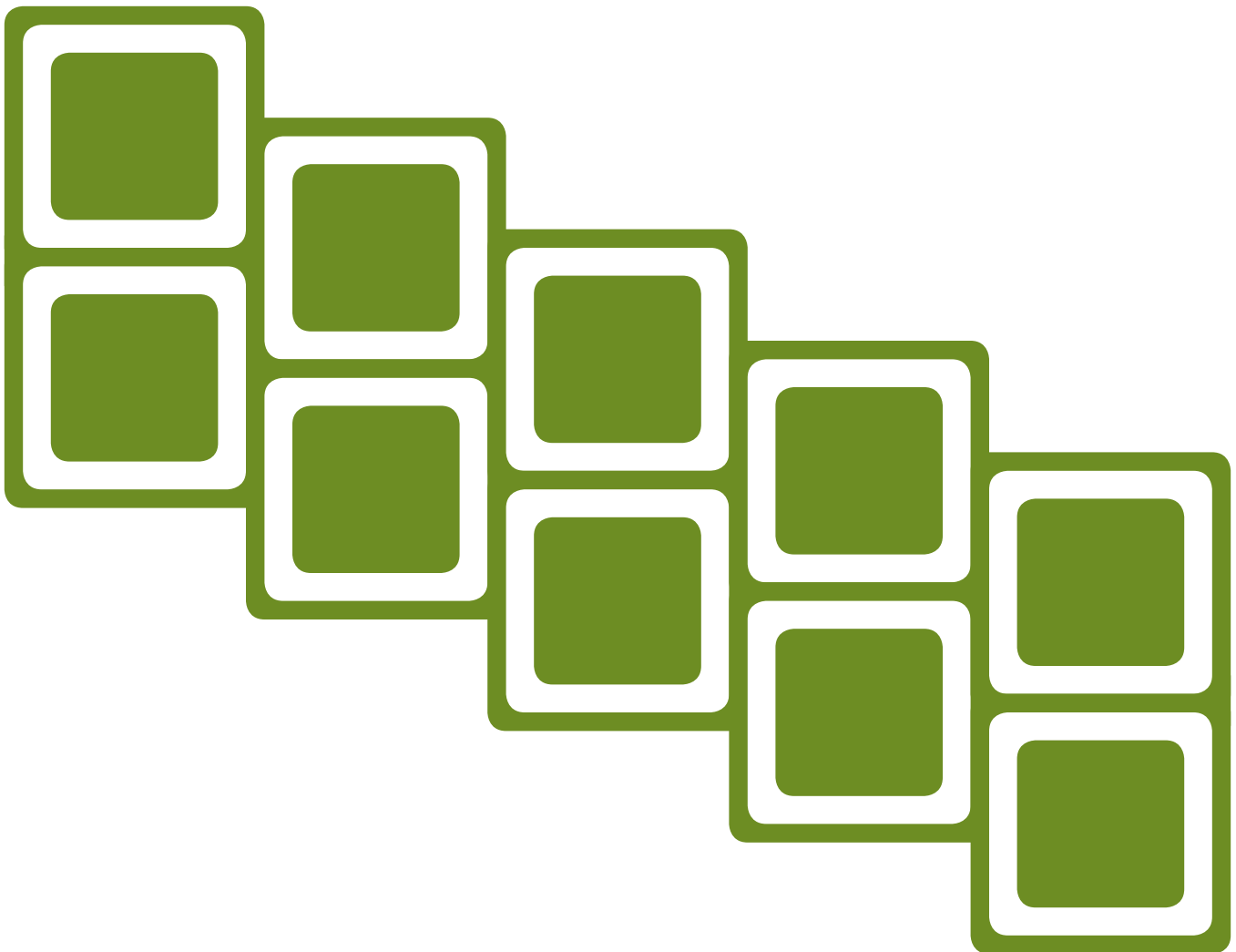


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Summer Service Learning: A Community-Based Approach

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Abstract

In 2011, the Summer School at Georgetown University piloted two service-learning courses to serve the needs of a growing student population during the fall and spring, and to assess the potential for future enrollment growth in the summer term. The pretest data consisted of enrollment figures for summer service-learning courses from 2007 through 2011 and enrollment data for a single service-learning course from four academic semesters in 2010 and 2011. The data set also included a qualitative component: anonymous and confidential student interviews conducted in September and October 2011 to discover and assess the specific interests in enrolling in service learning in summer. The analyzed data clearly demonstrated that the addition of an optional service-learning component to existing classes did not deter students from enrolling; nor did it attract more students to the courses, even though the university, perhaps because of its strong Jesuit tradition, attracts a large population of students predisposed to volunteerism. However, there was one significant and unexpected finding: the qualitative data revealed that the single largest hindrance to enrollments was the absence of information about service-learning opportunities. This finding cut across all semesters, fall, spring, and summer, and was supported by data that demonstrated consistent percentages of enrollments in all three semesters for service-learning courses.

Introduction

As the oldest Catholic and Jesuit university in the United States, Georgetown University regularly hosts 12,000 students each year at the undergraduate and graduate levels. A globally recognized research institution, Georgetown embraces a pedagogical tradition that includes numerous Jesuit ideals such as educating the whole person, faith and justice, and “women and men in service for others.”

The Summer School, like other parts of Georgetown University, regularly seeks opportunities to draw upon this Jesuit tradition. One example of the Jesuit tradition embodied in Summer School courses is service learning, which is an opportunity for students to provide service to their community that is related to their coursework. The Summer School consistently offers over 200 courses, from more than 35 departments, from five schools within the university, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. According to annual internal enrollment reports, each summer 12% of the student body, on average, enrolls in the Summer School. Additionally, each year, Georgetown hosts a growing population of visiting non-degree students. Since 2008, summer enrollments have steadily increased across all departments and schools. The increase in enrollments has been due to several changes in the approach to summer scheduling, including the following:

- standardization of class meeting times across summer sessions
- elimination of courses that did not clearly fulfill major or minor requirements
- standardization of course descriptions across fall, spring, and summer
- standardization of course numbers across fall, spring, and summer
- offering some courses in the summer that attract high enrollment in fall and spring

A Student-Driven Schedule

With this new approach, the Summer School began to work closely with specific populations to address student needs, including the growing desire for service-learning opportunities, as identified by student advisers. For example, the advisers for student athletes in particular requested service-learning courses for their students in the summer. Service-learning courses require at least 20 hours of service work per semester, in addition to the standard course work; for student athletes, who often reduce their fall or spring course loads to accommodate training and travel, the additional time commitment makes it difficult for them to participate in service learning during the academic year and fulfill these requirements. Other opportunities across the campus grew as more subject areas began to require service-learning courses in their major or minor fields. For example, two majors—sociology, and women’s and gender studies—either require or recommend service-learning courses, while two minors—education, inquiry and justice; and justice and peace studies—require service-learning courses.

Community-Based Learning

Community-based learning (CBL) is Georgetown's designation for service-learning courses that engage students in experiential opportunities in addition to course work. More specifically, CBL is "an academic pedagogy that involves student work with disadvantaged and underserved individuals and groups" (Center for Social Justice, 2011). Any department from the following schools may offer community-based learning courses: the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Nursing and Health Studies, the School of Foreign Service, the School of Business, the Graduate School, and the School of Continuing Studies. CBL courses are offered in three formats: an optional component in a qualified class, an independent research course, or a four-credit class with mandatory community service.

While the formats vary, the core requirements are the same in all formats: 20 to 30 hours of service at a local community organization, and a reflection component. The most popular CBL format is the optional component in a qualified class. To provide these options to students, professors apply to Georgetown's Center for Social Justice (CSJ) to have parts of their courses designated as CBL components. The applications must include syllabi demonstrating how the courses will meet the two core requirements for an offering: service work and a reflective component.

CBL offerings are inextricably linked to the CSJ, which must approve each application. CSJ is a concrete and innovative manifestation of the university's commitment to advance justice and the common good; it "promotes and integrates community-based research, teaching and service by collaborating with diverse partners and communities," (Center for Social Justice, 2011). In a CSJ-approved CBL course, students commit to local service work that will enhance their understanding of the course's academic material and the needs of the community that they serve. For example, students in a sociology class may address the issue of homelessness in the contemporary city. They then have the opportunity to volunteer at the local soup kitchen, where theory meets practice.

Because of the strong Catholic and Jesuit tradition and commitment of service to others, Georgetown recognizes the work of student CBL participants with a special designation on the university transcript.

Summer 2011 Pilot Program and Study

In 2011, the approach to the CBL offerings followed the same logic as for other Summer School courses: offer only courses that ran successfully in the previous fall and/or spring. In 2011, the Summer School launched a pilot program with two courses that could meet the twin requirements of producing a student-driven schedule and increasing enrollments: Social Deviance, and Introduction to Justice and Peace.

Two elements constituted the data set for our study: (1) pre-enrollment and post-enrollment data from both courses, to assess the impact of adding the CBL option, and (2) anonymous interviews with students who had successfully completed CBL courses.

Results

The first set of data revealed that adding the CBL option did not necessarily attract more students to these classes. Table 1 shows that for both courses the enrollment in summer 2011 was at or below the enrollment of the previous summer terms, indicating that offering the CBL option did not increase enrollments.

Table 1: Summer Course Enrollments by Year, 2007–2011

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Introduction to Justice and Peace	n/a	n/a	n/a	18	8
Social Deviance	9	11	15	11	11

While the data demonstrate that adding a CBL option did not impact course enrollments, this may be only a casual correlation. It is not certain why enrollments did not increase in these courses when they increased in the summer across all populations.

The second data set shows the Introduction to Justice and Peace course enrollments from all semesters, spring 2010 through summer 2011, including the percentage enrolled in the CBL option, since the course does not require the CBL work. (A similar data set for Social Deviance was not available due to its sporadic offering.) Table 2 shows the enrollment data and percentage of students enrolled in the CBL option in the four semesters. A pattern is apparent across the fall, spring, and summer semesters, and the percentage of students enrolled in the summer 2011 CBL option was only slightly lower than the percentage of students enrolled in the CBL option in the fall and spring.

Table 2: Enrollments for Introduction to Justice and Peace, Spring 2010–Summer 2011

	Section	CBL enrollment	Total course enrollment	% in CBL
Spring 2010	01	14	21	67
	02	10	21	48
Fall 2010	01	12	21	57
	02	7	18	39
Spring 2011	01	9	18	50
	02	10	23	43
Summer 2011	01	3	8	38

Because the percentage is about the same, it is possible to conclude that the CBL course option is a viable area for potential enrollment growth in the summer.

The final data set consists of anonymous and confidential interviews with students who completed CBL courses. There were five (n = 5) completed interviews out of 15 in the data set. Of the five interviewees, four were female and one was male; three were sophomores and two were seniors; one student was in the School of Business and four were in the College of Arts and Sciences. Anecdotally, two of the interviewees claimed that they decided their major after taking a CBL course, and one decided her career path because of her experience with CBL. The recurring themes, however, throughout the interviews related to both motivation and awareness of CBL on campus. The data showed that students who are attracted to the CBL option have a personal history of community service or volunteerism. Additionally, the data revealed that most students hear about CBL from other students or faculty. Each interviewee noted that his or her awareness of the CBL program on campus stemmed either from seeking out service options on their own or from friends or faculty seeking them out, offering service opportunities. The consensus among interviewees was that the student body in general does not know about the CBL program or its benefits. None of the interviewees indicated that they were aware of CBL courses offered in the summer term, but every interviewee noted that the summer offerings provided a more flexible schedule to pursue a CBL.

Future of Service Learning in the Summer School

Although the findings are marginal, there is evidence for potential growth of service learning in the summer, as indicated in an internal Summer School web-based exit survey executed in 2012. The survey results revealed that the majority of Summer School students (71.9%) indicated an interest in applied or experiential learning during the summer term. The feedback we have received from students suggests that other universities may want to consider offering community-based-learning courses in the summer term. Not only do students crave the hands-on experiential nature of these courses but they also have more time and flexibility in the summer compared with the fall and spring.

The research and experience have led to two recommendations for other institutions that are considering service learning as a summer offering. The first is to offer only courses that are also offered in the fall and spring semesters. There are two reasons for this approach. The first is that student demand in the fall and spring semester is a good predictor of student behavior in the summer. The second reason is a logistical one: the summer term's compressed offerings can often make it more difficult for faculty new to service learning to establish and maintain off-site relationships. Veteran service-learning faculty have long-standing relationships with community partners and can provide the guidance and opportunities to students that will result in meaningful learning experiences.

The second recommendation is to promote the service-learning programs independently of the traditional summer course offerings. For summer offerings to be successful, it is important to ensure significant outreach to the student body. Outreach includes dedicated marketing campaigns, web pages, and promotional items and events.

References

Center for Social Justice. (2011). *Community-Based Learning (CBL) Courses*. Retrieved from <http://csj.georgetown.edu/academics/cbl/>

Biographies

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