

## **Sabbatical Leave Report for Spring 2020**

Making a Positive Difference in People's Lives: How the Human Development Service Learning Program Supports the El Camino College Mission

Kristie Daniel-DiGregorio, Ph.D.  
Human Development Department  
Behavioral and Social Sciences Division  
El Camino College

### **Acknowledgements**

I am deeply grateful to the El Camino College Board of Trustees, Superintendent/President Dr. Dena Maloney, Vice President Dr. Jean Shankweiler, and the Sabbatical Committee for approving my sabbatical project. It has been my honor to serve the college in the classroom and in campus leadership for nearly two decades. The sabbatical project has been tremendously beneficial in allowing me to step back from my work on campus to immerse myself in study, refine my skills and knowledge, and generate ideas for the future of my teaching and my department.

I want to express my appreciation for my Dean, Dr. Christina Gold, and my department colleagues, especially Dr. Juli Soden and Dr. Yun Chu. Particularly in a small department like Human Development, the absence of a colleague means that faculty who are already shouldering numerous leadership roles must step forward and take on additional responsibilities. This was especially true spring semester, given the college's shift to remote learning.

I have always valued our Library Learning Resources team for their expertise, innovative approaches, and their commitment to service. After spending a semester immersed in the literature in my field, I have a whole new appreciation for the tremendous depth and breadth of resources they provide and how accessible, user-friendly, and well-organized these resources are.

Finally, I want to thank Dr. Renee Galbavy (Psychology) and Dr. Juli Soden (Human Development) who served as supervisors for my project. Combined, these advisors have nearly three decades of experience developing and implementing service learning programs at El Camino College, four-year institutions, and out-of-state colleges. Their insight and expertise have been invaluable in ensuring that my project is robust and relevant to the mission of our college.

## Sabbatical Project

The sabbatical project focused on deepening my expertise, expanding department resources, and strengthening community networks for the Human Development service learning program.

A distinguishing feature of Human Development classes is that, each year, student teams volunteer *more than 3,000 hours* in non-profit community organizations in support of the following community needs:

- food scarcity,
- homelessness,
- education and youth services,
- environmental sustainability,
- animal rescue,
- senior services, and
- health.

Human Development students have dedicated **approximately 40,000 volunteer hours** to the community since 2007, which is equivalent to more than **\$400,000 in labor costs**. Service learning continues to be a highlight reported in the department's Program Review and is a vital way that Human Development students support the college's mission to "make a positive difference in people's lives."

The sabbatical project integrated three learning initiatives:

1. A **review of the literature** on service learning,

2. **Outreach** to community organizations to strengthen existing partnerships and cultivate new ones, and
3. Development of a **repository of resources** for Human Development faculty to support the integration of service learning with department curriculum.

Despite the challenges associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and the Stay at Home orders issued by the state of California, I am proud to have been able to meet the goals and objectives of my sabbatical project with only minor modifications. Each of the three sabbatical initiatives noted above – including their purpose, the work completed, and their contribution to student learning, professional development, and departmental outcomes -- are discussed below.

### **Purpose, Summary of Work, and Outcomes of Sabbatical Project**

1. **Review of the literature on service learning**: The sabbatical project was designed to include a review of the theory, research, and practices related to service learning with the aim of enriching my content expertise, creating a departmental resource bank of supplemental readings, and informing evaluation and innovation within the Human Development service learning program. Initially, the areas of focus for the literature review included educational theory, student and community outcomes, pedagogy, and best practices in program design. As the Stay at Home orders were implemented, I expanded my research to also include the application of service learning in online environments.

By immersing myself in the service learning literature, I deepened my understanding of the role of service learning in democracy and higher education; common elements in service learning programs; student learning outcomes; considerations for community relationships; the

integration of service and online learning; and best practices in the “Three R’s:” reflection, reciprocity, and realistic (real-world) student experiences. The result has been a deeper understanding of how service learning contributes to students’ growth and development, the pedagogical strategies that most effectively generate reflection and critical thinking, and best practices for building partnerships with community organizations. As a result, I am better able to help my students understand the personal value of service learning, revise my course materials to deepen student learning, and better meet the needs of the community organizations that accept my students as volunteers. For example, I will incorporate updated student outcomes data in my courses, revise reflective assignments, and expand my communication with community partners (e.g., with letters of introduction, resources on the department website, regular checkpoints throughout the semester).

A bibliography for the literature review is included in this report and a thorough discussion of the literature can be found [here](#). At the department level, these references and the discussion of the literature will be used to create a resource bank of supplemental readings which will be shared, discussed, and incorporated into department professional development programs such as our annual Mini-Retreat and brown bag sessions. The resource bank is located on Google Drive and will be provided to all current and incoming Human Development faculty to enhance consistency in instruction and support new faculty as they integrate service learning into their teaching.

Human Development faculty can utilize these resources to support their own content expertise, to integrate into their teaching, and to enhance their course materials. At the college level, I share these resources with the goal of encouraging others to see the value of service learning and consider incorporating it into their curriculum.

**2. Outreach to community organizations:** Since 2007, Human Development faculty have cultivated relationships with approximately 50 community organizations. These organizations provide ECC students with volunteer opportunities, including training; orientation; supervision; and collaboration on active learning projects such as interviewing for information, researching organizational history and purpose, and analyzing social problems. The outreach component of the sabbatical project was designed to strengthen connections with existing community partners and expand our offerings for student volunteers by cultivating linkages with new community partners.

One of the ways I strengthened relationships with our community partners was by serving as a volunteer. From January to March of this year, I served weekly with Reading Partners. A significant proportion of our students choose to volunteer with Reading Partners, so maintaining a positive relationship with this organization benefits our students and our department. My experiences as a Reading Partner volunteer gave me a fuller understanding of the organization and their onboarding process, which I can share with my students to help smooth their transition as volunteers. Since 2007, I have made it a priority to serve at most of the community organizations the department partners with most closely. So, being able to serve at Reading Partners during my sabbatical added to the first-hand volunteer experience I can share with my students to help enhance their learning experiences.

Another goal for strengthening relationships with our community partners was to arrange site visits. However, visits to existing and potential sites (including my work as a Reading Partner) were cancelled once the Stay at Home orders were issued. Instead, I researched and networked online to identify potential service learning sites. Despite the uncertainty created by the Covid-

19 pandemic, I was pleased to be able to cultivate new relationships with in-person and online community organizations, including an online coding camp, assisted living facilities, and Boys and Girls clubs. Information about all of these resources has been added to the online repository for service learning resources, which is available to all Human Development faculty.

In addition, I substituted planned site visits with developing supporting materials to nominate one of our long-term supervisors for the 2020 Women's Wall of Fame. Ms. Kris Lauritson, Garden Educator for the Lawndale Garden Education Program, has committed 5,000 hours of volunteer work in our district designing, implementing, and maintaining numerous educational gardens and had the unanimous support of the department faculty. I also wrote a letter of support to the district principal with whom she works.

Finally, I used the outreach initiative in my sabbatical project to communicate, connect, and collaborate with existing and potential service learning sites regarding how their organization was adapting within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. New questions arose about whether community organizations were continuing their services during the quarantine, how they had adapted their practices, and what their plans were for the future. With guidance from the National Youth Leadership Council Service Learning Handbook for Educators and input from my Human Development colleagues, I designed a survey and an outreach campaign to community partners with whom the department works most closely as well as several new sites. Site coordinators were updated on the status of the Human Development service learning program and asked to report on their current offerings and future plans. Through one-on-one follow-up, I was able to connect with most of our ongoing organizations and was encouraged by the innovative ways they adapted to the current realities as well as their enthusiasm for

continuing our partnership. In addition, the potential new sites reaffirmed their interest in future collaboration. Some highlights from the survey are summarized below.

While 69% of our sites were not accepting volunteers during the pandemic, 31% were. Of those still accepting volunteers, 23% were still providing 100% of their services to the community and 31% had reduced service by 25% or less. For example, gardening programs were closed; however, after-school programs for differently abled young people shifted their services online. Of those accepting volunteers, 45% of the volunteer work focused on sorting and organizing supplies (such as in food banks), 27% were working with young people or students, and 18% were involved in administrative duties (i.e., in support programs for seniors). Thirty-one percent of the sites offered online volunteer opportunities (e.g., telephone outreach, online tutoring). Interestingly, an additional 23% planned to offer online services in the future. So, only 46% of respondents have no plans to offer online services in the future. When asked when they might return to normal, full functioning, most (67%) responded that they are unable to determine at this time due to the uncertainty of the pandemic. Survey results have been added to the department's online repository of resources and will inform department planning for the service learning program.

In sum, there were numerous benefits of the outreach component of the sabbatical project. They include the following:

- The department was able to sustain contact and communication with our established sites, despite the fact that El Camino College students were unable to complete their volunteer work during Spring 2020. The department has invested tremendous energy in

establishing positive working relationships with our primary sites, and maintaining these relationships is essential to the future success of the service learning program.

- The department was able to gather up-to-date information about how the organizations shifted their practices in the context of the pandemic and what their plans are for the future. This information will guide Human Development department planning for future online and face-to-face course delivery.
- During the outreach and online research, I was able to identify a variety of new volunteer placement resources and new face-to-face and online volunteer opportunities for our students. Increased offerings give our students more choice and enhance the likelihood they will have access to sites that provide job skills in fields related to their majors. In addition, service learning helps cultivate students' soft skills, enhance their employability, and prepare them for the workforce.

**3. Development of a repository of resources.** As noted, information and resources from my review of the literature and outreach to community organizations have been added to the department's online repository for service learning. In my research, I located additional information that will inform service learning practices for individual instructors and for the department as a whole. In addition, the resources will provide expanded opportunities for El Camino College students to gain experience, enhance career clarity, and develop workplace skills through service learning programs. Summaries of these resources is below.



- Resources for Locating Service Learning Sites: One of the most challenging aspects of establishing and sustaining a robust service learning program is identifying reliable, well-organized, and safe sites for student volunteers which are compatible with the Student Learning Outcomes for our courses. As part of my sabbatical project, I identified several local, state, and national resources that will support the department's ongoing recruitment process, including The Volunteer Center, All For Good, and Idealist. In addition, I discovered resources from "Californians for All" which provide a variety of suggestions and connections for in-person and remote volunteer opportunities related to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- National Service Learning Resources: I discovered numerous national organizations which provide course-related materials (sample syllabi, student and faculty handbooks, critical thinking tools), professional development (knowledge hubs and national webinars and conferences) and resources (grants information, national journals). These resources will support ongoing professional development for the Human Development department.
- Course and Program Materials: My review of the literature led me to additional resources that my department colleagues and I can incorporate into our teaching, including course materials, program evaluation tools, and guidelines for collaboration with community organizations. These resources will be useful for ongoing professional development activities for the department.

### **Personal and Institutional Benefits**

On a professional level, I have benefitted tremendously from this opportunity to study, reflect, and plan for the Human Development service learning program. It has been a gift to intensively immerse myself in the literature in a way that is very difficult while teaching, supporting

students, and serving the college during a “typical” semester. Although it was not part of my sabbatical project, I also had the privilege of serving on the dissertation committee for Dr. Anna Yukiko Mori Brochet this semester. Through her exceptional scholarship, I was able to learn about critical race theory, the history and implementation of financial aid policies, and the disproportionate impact on African American and Latino students who most need financial resources to pursue higher education. I am reminded how empowering and energizing it is to be able to devote yourself fully to the role of a learner. As I told Dr. Brochet, engaging in the literature in a deep and meaningful way has reminded me why I chose this profession. I had not anticipated that, during my sabbatical, I would also become a student of distance learning pedagogy and course management systems in order to shift all of my classes online upon my return to teaching. I have also been reminded how humbling, and often overwhelming, it can be for our students to launch themselves into new learning environments. Before the start of my sabbatical project, I told colleagues that I was most looking forward to being a student again and the experience exceeded even my high expectations.

My sabbatical project also benefits the college in numerous ways. My colleagues will now have access to several new service learning sites and a rich collection of resources related to research, theory, and the effective practice of service learning programs. This will inform our learning and our work as individual educators and as a department. My work confirms the data-driven approach to service learning in our department and that our program reflects many of the characteristics of best practices in service learning. These include our strong, reciprocal partnerships with community organizations, our emphasis on active learning and critical

reflection, and our use of curriculum which emphasizes the soft skills that students need for success in the workplace and have opportunities to cultivate in real-world settings.

A high impact practice, service learning is associated with numerous student outcomes, including personal growth, intercultural competence, civic outcomes, academic learning, cognitive skills, transfer of learning to other settings, and enhanced clarity about educational goals. Service learning is also uniquely suited to address some of the most pressing needs facing higher education and our communities: the needs to address equity gaps in educational attainment and income; develop antiracist institutions to combat systemic racism, and promote cultural competency among members of the community. Service learning offers an important lever for equity efforts; historically underserved students tend to benefit even more from high-impact practices than majority students. It is associated with enhanced appreciation for the causes and solutions of social problems. An understanding of causes of social problems is foundational to shifting away from deficit models of viewing disadvantage and toward antiracist approaches (i.e., taking action to eliminate racist views structures). This sabbatical project has affirmed that service learning provides essential *learning* opportunities for our students to be of *service* to the greater community. It provides a variety of resources to enhance our program to so it will continue to support the college's mission to "Make a positive difference in people's lives."

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