Student research in the social sciences: Provost Retreat 2018

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Student research in the context of experiential learning

(Lopatto, 2010; Russell, Hancock & McCullough, 2007; Wurdinger & Carlson, 2010).

Definition:

Combining reflection and practice, experiential learning provides opportunities for students to apply classroom knowledge to authentic situations under an instructor's supportive supervision

Examples:

- Service learning
- Volunteer work
- Internships
- Signature pedagogy of SW: Field learning
- Research

Benefits to students

- Evidence in STEM, mounting evidence in social sciences and across disciplines
- Greater knowledge of course content
- Improved engagement with learning academic performance across courses
- Better preparation for next steps (employment and graduate school)
- Enhanced clinical skills: Engagement, assessment, critical thinking

Benefits to faculty

- Sustains engagement: intellectual renewal, research assistance, mentoring/independent studies

- Adds value to internal and external funding applications (i.e., SRAB, FRAB, ORSP; seed grants, funds for students to attend/present at conferences)

- Promotes publication/presentation opportunities and collaborations

- Contributes to tenure and promotion (i.e., digital measures, Faculty Recognition Event)

Spotlight on 3 Modalities

- **Student research assistant**

- **Capstone Project and independent student research**

- **Undergraduate research**

Mentoring Students in Research

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The process

- Mentoring and support piece

- Developing tasks and assignments in the project

- Writing for publication

Mentoring and Support

- Working with students in this capacity develops a relationship that differs from the relationship in the classroom

- This relationship can lead to better engagement in content and material/overall college curriculum and lead to better graduation rates

- Providing support and real life applications to research can interest the student in taking their work to the next step

Developing tasks

- The "is this going to mean more work" conundrum for both faculty and student

- Finding that "sweet spot" of intersection between project need and each student's particular interest and skills

- Encouraging the development of new skills and broadening abilities, trying new things

Developing Tasks

- Administrative – i.e., data entry, tracking gift card incentives, creating survey documents

- Literature reviews – this helps to put course work into perspective for the student (Why?)

- Data collection/work in the field

Learning points – bringing the abstract to life

- Confidentiality – consent procedures with data collection

- Expectations when collecting data with vulnerable populations, particularly with undergraduates who may have less experience in the field

- Effectively searching the literature for relevant information related to the project/study – explaining why this is important, how it shapes the work

- Importance of consent procedures and incentive tracking and good record keeping – explaining IRB and human subjects protections

Publication and Presentation

- Mentoring students in the writing process

- Providing them with venues to present posters and papers

- The process of presentation/publication brings the work to life and provides the student with understanding of how the work they did fits into the larger literature base

Policy Research in a Capstone Course

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Policy Practice and Social Work Education

- ***Policy Practice*** – "efforts to change policies in legislative, agency, and community settings, whether by establishing new policies, improving existing ones, or defeating the policy initiatives of other people" (Weiss-Gal, 2016, p. 2).

- ***Policy Practice Education*** – "education that seeks to teach or train undergraduate and graduate social work students to engage in policy practice" (Weiss-Gal, 2016, p. 1).

Policy Research

- Policy research as experiential learning with opportunity to influence policy

- *All social work competencies are addressed in a capstone*

- *Practices that might not usually be demonstrated are when SWK students are engaged in policy practice*

Policy Research as Policy Practice in a Capstone Course

1. Students identify an issue
2. Students write a policy brief
   - Problem formulation
   - Review of wide range of data (literature, census, more)
   - History and development of policy, current context
   - Policy recommendations
   - Student presentations: Local politicians, community groups

Prep work

- Secure Chair approval, and approval of colleagues teaching the same sequence

- Select an appropriate course

  - Core course (reaches more students) or elective

  - Fit between research experience and the goals of the course

  - Previous experience teaching the course and experience with student-led research

- Secure funding? Recognition?

Building on an existing assignment: From term paper to research paper

Field Seminar Term paper

1. Describe your agency's context, services, and clients

2. Describe and evaluate your role within the agency

3. *Identify research that can inform and improve your practice*

4. Present what you have learned to your classmates

Research paper:
What are obstacles and facilitators to service provision and utilization at your agency?

- Integration of research language:

   Assignment title: From "Term Paper" to "Research Paper"

   From "description" to "data collection" (multiple integrated data sources)

   From "evaluate" to data analysis

   Add "Implications": Response to over-arching question

   Presentation of findings in small groups (posters?)

Timeline, grading, evaluation

- Semester-long, scaffolded assignment

- Independent and small group work

- Clearly defined grading rubrics, i.e., organization and structure, effective use of resources, timeliness, completeness, realistic solutions to identified problems, collaboration, effectiveness of presentation

Outcomes for students

- Improved perceptions about capacities as students and social workers

- Greater understanding about the role and methods of research

- Enhanced knowledge about complexities of service provision and utilization

- Gained status in the agency when shared research findings

- Improved student experience: Extended small group work promoted social relationships

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Brief Exercise

Take a couple of moments to think or talk about how to use one of these modalities

- Identify a project that could include a student. What would he/she be responsible for? What steps would be necessary to train him/her

- Identify a policy practice assignment that could provide students with a hands on experience that would include research

- Identify a course in which you could include a research experience. What would this consist of? What would students be responsible for? What would you be responsible for?

Thank You!

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