

Results of Student Surveys on Community-Based Research

We discuss the results of a detailed survey we administered to two sections of the class in the fall of 2012 and 2013. The survey collected student information in four categories: (1) detailed information about the student, (2) the student's perspective about their experience in the community-based learning project, (3) the student's attitude toward community involvement, and (4) their personal reflections on the experience. Of the 48 students who completed the class, 27 students completed the survey in its entirety. For brevity, we provide a brief summary of the quantitative and qualitative results (the full set of summary statistics can be found in the tables below).

Several themes emerged from the survey responses. First, students found the project to promote a deeper understanding of the material and nearly all students could see how the experience connected to the curriculum. For example, one student commented: "Unlike a regular Econ course, where you are likely never to use what you learn after you graduate, in this class I felt like I learned things that will stick with me. I learned about people who were struggling and this understanding of poverty was enhanced by the on-site visits since I could see what people were going through."

Every student in the sample reports that they learned how to become more involved in their community as a result of the community-based research project. Learning more about the area surrounding the university aligns with our goals of building a better sense of community. For example, one student commented that "I also gained a new perspective on the surrounding area and the amount of poverty that is so close to us." Another student said that "We were experiencing the things that we spoke about in the classroom in a different environment. We were exposed to the individuals who were the subjects of the course material, and we became better able to understand their experiences."

In addition, the students were better able to understand the realities of government programs by interacting with individuals who run anti-poverty organizations. One student commented that "I have learned first-hand what organizations do to fight poverty."

The larger goal of making an impact on the community was apparent throughout the student feedback. All but two students thought that the work they did would be useful to the community partner and thought the project met the needs of the organization, indicating that the project was mutually beneficial. One student said that "It was nice to go out into the community and help with the organizations. Especially with respect to the project we performed, we felt we really made a difference to the long-term efficiency of the food program by giving them tools that they could easily use."

In addition, students perceived that the group work and presentations enhanced their leadership skills as well as their ability to communicate ideas in real world context, suggesting that our fourth goal of developing other life skills was achieved.