High Impact Practices (HIP)
Cover Sheet 2013 - 2014

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Name of HIP: Aggie Service-Learning Experience
Approximate # of TAMU students involved in the HIP: 20

Please check the TAMU learning outcome(s) associated with this HIP:

Bachelor’s:
- Master the depth of knowledge required of a degree
- Demonstrate critical thinking
- Communicate effectively
- Practice personal and social responsibility
- Demonstrate social, cultural, and global competence
- Prepare to engage in lifelong learning
- Work collaboratively

Master’s:
- Master the degree program requirements
- Apply subject matter knowledge
- Communicate effectively
- Use appropriate technologies
- Develop clear research plans
- Choose ethical course of action

Doctoral:
- Master the degree program requirements
- Apply a variety of strategies and tools
- Communicate effectively
- Develop clear research plans
- Use appropriate technologies
- Teach and explain the subject matter

Please check the QEP learning outcome(s) associated with this HIP:

- Improve student learning by developing habits and skills for lifelong learning — Curiosity, Initiative, Independence, Transfer, Reflection
- Improve student learning by developing habits and skills for integrative learning — Connections to experience, Connections to discipline, Transfer, Integrated communication, Reflection and self-assessment
Abstract

The Aggie Service-Learning Experience is a collaborative effort between the Department of Student Activities, The Memorial Student Center, and Texas A&M—Qatar. This experience provides students the opportunity to utilize skills, strengths and leadership abilities to create positive change in an international community through intentional service-learning experiences. Students participate in a seven day service-oriented and adventurous learning opportunity. Discussions throughout the week focus on defining service, understanding cultural differences, and working together across difference to reach a shared goal. Examples of projects include teaching English, building structures, working outdoors, painting, and any other community need that arises. Ultimately, students walk away from this experience with a better understanding of service and the significance of working with a community to create change. They also gain personal insights by being adaptive in an unfamiliar culture.

Description of the activity

a) **Invest time and effort to purposeful tasks. Please describe the length of time of the experience.**

Students from both campuses are selected by March. With the experience occurring in May, this gives students over two months to get to know one another and engage in discussion about their trip. Three well planned pre-departure meetings are scheduled and a variety of topics are discussed, including but not limited to, trip expectations, international travel tips, defining service-learning and community needs, cultural awareness, as well as logistical elements such as completing travel documents and forms.

During the seven-day experience, students from both campuses work together as a unified team. Service projects, meal times, and even down time in the evenings have an element of inclusion among all the participants. Students learn about the needs of the local community, discuss the service project, meet and work with local community members, engage in adventure activities, and reflect on the meaning and impact of service, both locally and internationally.

b) **Interact with staff, advisors, and/or faculty about substantive matters usually over extended periods of time.**

Staff advisors interact with students prior to the trip regarding cultural norms, increasing self-awareness, understanding service-learning, active citizenship, and working collaboratively. While on the trip, staff advisors have the opportunity to debrief activities and experiences with students and facilitate reflection. In the past, students and staff have discussed the challenges of working across cultural, recognizing differences in communicating with others, and understanding and learning to appreciate religious and spiritual differences. After the trip, staff advisors follow up with students about their reflections and learning and the impact this experience has had on their lives.

c) **Interact with peers about substantive matters usually over extended periods of time.**

Students interact in both the structured trip activities and informally during free time. In this cohesive environment, staff advisors have noticed that students choose to be together to discuss in more depth their differences and gain a greater understanding of themselves and
others. It is not unusual to learn that students were up late sharing their college experiences and as a citizen of their home country. Staff advisors have also noticed students stay connected via social media long after the program has ended.

d) Experience diversity through contact with people who are different from themselves

Working collaboratively across cultures is a key component in the service-learning experience. Students meet individuals who identify as different; culturally, racially, ethnically, religiously, socioeconomic status, student status, etc. Students experience two cultures in addition to their own: the culture from the other A&M campus, and the local culture. The food, norms, transportation, time relevance, and priorities are diverse, which challenges students to learn how they are going to successfully reach a shared goal with others who have different perspectives from their own.

e) Receive frequent feedback about their performance – both formal and informal – in settings that allow them to respond to that feedback

Students are given informal feedback regarding their participation, attitude, language choice, etc. throughout the experience, but there is no formal opportunity to give feedback regarding performance.

f) Are provided opportunities to integrate synthesize and apply knowledge gained from their classroom/discipline to their co-curricular experience and vice versa. Students are provided opportunities to discover the relevance of learning through application and practice in a range of contexts.

Students’ cultural awareness and ability to articulate the root of issues/needs of communities are transferred to their inside and outside of the classroom experiences. Staff advisors highlight the need for students to be able to work in a diverse world and think critically about why problems are problems in the first place. By asking questions and facilitating intentional reflections, students have the opportunity to make connections between what happens in an international community to what is happening in their own communities.

g) Are provided opportunities to become aware of their values and beliefs and thus to better understand themselves in relation to others and the larger world.

Students are challenged, both by staff advisors and each other, to think about what they believe and why they believe it. In the past, some students have shared that this experience shifted their paradigm, or their worldview. Students do walk away from this experience with a better understanding of who they are and what they believe in the context of service and a global perspective.

Assessment

Students take a post/then assessment which addresses program components and student learning. Questions address personal values, decision making, reflection, communication, positive change, awareness of social issues, and respect for difference. Students are asked to articulate their definition of service, sharing what they learned from the experience, and how they will intentionally apply what they
Division of Student Affairs

learned. Informally, students from College Station are asked to share their journal reflections. Programmatically, students are asked if they:

- Learned new leadership skills
- Increased self-awareness
- Learned about other cultures
- Enhanced their ability to work as a member of a team striving towards a common goal
- Challenged themselves physically