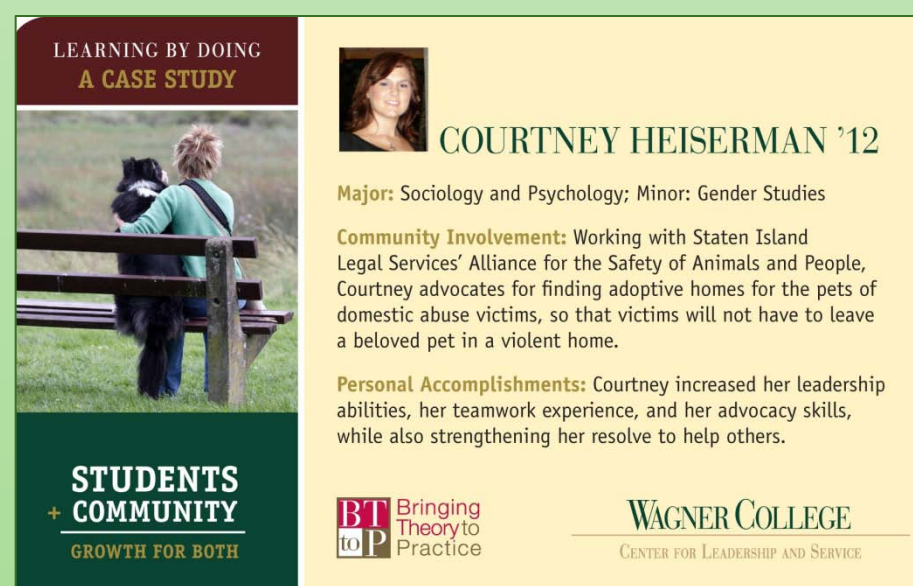


Introduction

Wagner College's signature curriculum, The Wagner Plan, places students in three learning communities during their undergraduate program. The First Year Program (FYP) is composed of three courses linked by a common theme, taught by two faculty members from different disciplines. The courses also are linked to fieldwork in communities and organizations, where students discover the connections between ideas and real-world problems. This experiential learning component can be comprised of service learning, field trips, and/or community research. Examples of sites include social service organizations, schools, museums and businesses on Staten Island and the other boroughs of New York City.

In 2010 and 2011, students and faculty in the FYP were surveyed about civic engagement, experiential learning, and student well-being. The research was supported by the Bringing Theory to Practice project associated with AAC&U.



Surveys and Sample Questions

Students and faculty in the First-Year Program were surveyed about the relationships between civic engagement, experiential learning, and student well-being.

Faculty members reported about the following aspects of their learning communities:

- ❖ Communication with experiential learning site(s) prior to the semester
- ❖ Orientation by faculty members and/or the community partners
- ❖ Extent to which faculty accompanied students to the site(s)

Students were asked about the extent to which their experiential learning helped them to:

- ❖ Develop problem solving skills
- ❖ See how the subject matter can be used in everyday life
- ❖ Feel a personal responsibility to meet the needs of the community partner site/agency
- ❖ Better understand the lectures and readings in this course

Students also completed the Flourishing survey, reporting how often they felt in the past 2 weeks:

- ❖ Interested in life
- ❖ Belonged to a community
- ❖ Liked most parts of my personality
- ❖ Life has a sense of direction or meaning to it

Results

Results included the following:

- **Students engaged in service learning reported higher levels of well-being than students engaged in field trips.**
- **Four “faculty-student-site connection” factors were key to student well-being:**
 - Faculty communication with site(s)
 - Orientation to experiential learning by faculty
 - Orientation to experiential learning by the site(s)
 - Faculty accompanying students to the site(s)
- **Students engaged in service learning had higher levels of “faculty-student-site connection” and higher “experiential learning connection to the Reflective Tutorial course” than students primarily engaged in field trips.**
- **There were no differences across type of FYP experiential learning for first-year student retention.**

A survey of alumni yielded the following:

- There were no differences across type of experiential learning and satisfaction with their undergraduate experience.
- Alumni whose experiential learning focused on field trips were more likely to report that their undergraduate experience enhanced their appreciation of the arts, literature, music, and/or drama.

Next Steps

Results have been shared with faculty so that experiential learning practices can be modified to increase connections between faculty, students, and the site(s). Subsequent surveys of students and faculty in the FYP will be conducted to assess whether faculty practices are changing and to continue to assess student well-being.

Resources and references

The **Bringing Theory to Practice Project (BTtoP)** encourages colleges and universities to advance the potential and well-being of each individual student, and to advance education as a public good that sustains a civic society. The Project supports campus-based initiatives that demonstrate how uses of engaged forms of learning that actively involve students both within and beyond the classroom directly contribute to their cognitive, emotional, and civic development.

www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/

Keyes, C. L. M. 2006. Mental Health Continuum -Short Form (“Flourishing survey”).

