

## DISTRICT-BASED SERVICE-LEARNING

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### ABSTRACT

District-based service projects can build an effective service model for bringing long-term benefits to the local communities. It can also foster caring culture, promote social inclusivity and expand social capital through concerted effort in carrying out integrated and sustainable service projects. With the success of the Shamshuipo District-based Service-Learning Program in Hong Kong during 2010-12, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University has extended the Program to the Yau Tsim Mong District in Hong Kong from 2012. This paper will focus on the effectiveness and result of the extended program in the Yau Tsim Mong District during 2012-14.

Key Words: Service-Learning, District-based community service, Inter-disciplinary collaboration

### 1. BACKGROUND & AIM

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) is the first university in Hong Kong to introduce a mandatory Service-Learning Requirement (SLR) in the undergraduate curriculum. All undergraduates are required to complete a credit-bearing SL subject for graduation. PolyU's pioneer work not only can promote the development of service-learning education in Hong Kong, but also facilitate collaboration between universities, government, welfare sector and business community for the betterment of our society.

With the combined efforts of PolyU, the Shamshuipo District Welfare Office, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and schools, the District-based Service-Learning Program was first introduced in 2010 in the Shamshuipo (SSP) district. It is the poorest district in Hong Kong with the lowest median household income, a high percentage of elderly over 65 years old, and a high population of new immigrants, according to the statistics reported by the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department (C&SD). In 2010-12, over 500 students had participated in serving more than 4,000 people in SSP district and contributed over 5,000 service hours. This Program won the MacJannet Prize for Global Citizenship presented by the US-based Talloires Network in 2012. The project was awarded the third prize and PolyU was the only university from Hong Kong out of the 72 nominations from 52 universities in 21 countries around the world.

Following the success of the District-based Service-Learning Program in Shamshuipo (SSP) District, PolyU has extended the Program to Yau Tsim Mong (YTM) District in 2012.

### 2. THE PROGRAM

District-based service projects often can create bigger impacts to the community because this particular service model has the following advantages:

- better identification of community needs
- consolidated resources in community building
- integration of services in serving the needs of local people more holistically
- sustainability of services and measurement of longer term impacts to the community

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The extended program in the YTM district was organized with the combined efforts of PolyU, YTM District Social Welfare Office, and over 18 NGOs or schools in the YTM District. The district is amongst the oldest districts in the urban area in Hong Kong. It has a high population density, ranked the third in Hong Kong (C&SD, 2011). Demographic profile ranges from the elderly to the youngsters and from old residents to new arrivals and ethnic minorities. Needy groups identified in the district include disadvantaged children and youths, ethnic minorities, new arrivals, low-income families, and disadvantaged elderly.

During 2012-14, over 400 students from different disciplines worked collaboratively in 17 SL service projects with various nature including health care, education, improvement of the living environment and social integration. For instance, students majoring in Textiles and Clothing teamed up with students from other disciplines helped ex-mentally ill persons integrate into the society through fashion design and catwalk show; Optometry students joined hands with students from different disciplines to provide vision screening services to school children and the elderly, etc.

### **3. METHODOLOGY & RESULTS**

Students participated in the service projects held in the YTM District during 2012-14 were invited to complete the pre-and-post surveys. The surveys aim to: (1) measure the impact of the service-learning experience on the development of students' generic competencies, (ii) evaluate students' service-learning experience, and (iii) collect student feedback and suggestion for improvement on the SL subject/project. All data collected are analyzed by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Since September 2012, over 400 students had participated in 17 SL service projects in the YTM District and committed over 15,500 service hours, serving the needs of the elderly, school children, new immigrants, ethnic minorities, lower-income families and ex-mentally ill people. The findings indicate that students (n=410) have gained a statistically significant improvement in the four generic competencies measured, including interpersonal effectiveness (effect size = 0.452,  $p < 0.001$ ), teamwork (effect size = 0.317,  $p < 0.001$ ), problem-solving (effect size = 0.370,  $p < 0.001$ ), and social responsibility (effect size = 0.520,  $p < 0.001$ ).

### **4. CONCLUSION**

District-based Service Learning has proved to be an effective mode of service delivery. Through the provision of diversified services, various needs of the community people are better addressed. Also, by focusing our services onto one district, our resources can be better consolidated and utilized. With the university's full implementation of Service-Learning as of 2012, we shall continue our services in the YTM District in the years ahead. By carrying out more sustainable service projects, we shall consolidate our project and student learning outcomes. Further research will also be carried out in measuring the impacts of our long-term services to the community.

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