INCREASING ENGAGEMENT, ENHANCING COURSE KNOWLEDGE, AND FOSTERING STUDENT SUCCESS WITH VOLUNTEERISM

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Abstract

Student engagement and student success are highly sought-after aspects of higher education, though achievement can be difficult. High impact practices, including community-based learning, are believed to improve persistence in earning a degree as well as increasing engagement. In a review of students at the university, dropout rates can be over 50% with low four-year graduation rates. With a desire to increase student success and retention, an alternative assignment was provided to students in an upper division Criminal Justice course.

The purpose of the alternative was to allow students a choice for their major course assignment. The students were freely able to choose between completion of a term paper or volunteer at an approved community site and complete a wiki/journal assignment about the experience. Both options held the same weight for the final grade. Volunteerism cannot be required for the course as it is a lecture-based course without being denoted as an activity or lab-based course. A survey was provided at the end of the course to determine the impact of the assignment on those who chose the activity and why they made the choice. The alternative assignment was offered, and surveys were conducted in both on ground courses (traditional lecture) and online courses. The grades of students who completed the different options were compared, in addition to past courses where the alternative assignment was not offered. Insight on the assignment, setup, and execution will be discussed.

Keywords: Student Success, Student Engagement, Volunteerism, High Impact Practices, Increase Content Understanding.