

Issue Education
&
Saturday Service Project Handbook:

An Integrative Service Project Summary submitted to the University of Utah in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Service-Learning Scholars' Program through the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center.



June Hiatt
Bennion Center V.P.



Christy Tobolski
Bennion Center Staff



JaNae Lilly
Bennion Center Staff



Dr. Ann Engar
Faculty Advisor

Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Abstract..... | 2 |
| Introduction and Background..... | 3 |
| Literature Review..... | 4 |
| Procedure..... | 5 |
| Results..... | 6 |
| Reflection..... | 7 |
| References..... | 8 |

Abstract

The Issue Education and Saturday Service Project Handbook will act as a lasting component of future event planning within the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center at the University of Utah. In recent years, the Bennion Center has struggled to maintain a consistent form of issue education and quality/themes within its Saturday Service Projects. One of the main culprits of this is the high turnover of both staff and student leaders alike. This resulted in volunteers within the Bennion Center not always having a full understanding of the social, political, economic, or systemic issues behind much of the service they were performing. The mission statement of the Bennion Center reads, “The Bennion Center fosters lifelong service and civic participation by engaging the University with the greater community in action, change, and learning.” The lack of consistent issue education has in some ways inhibited the Bennion Center from fulfilling its mission statement. This is due to the fact that education is necessary to specifically affect, “action, change, and learning.” As such, the primary purpose of this Handbook is to help the Bennion Center better fulfill its mission statement.

With its roots in the Issue Education Coordinator position, the Issue Education and Saturday Service Project Handbook has developed into a resource available to all Bennion Center students to learn about various methods of researching, planning and executing a Saturday Service Project or issue education piece. Within its covers lie examples of social issues, learning modules, academic resources, suggested timelines and lists of helpful contacts. After working extensively with Bennion Center staff, it has been confirmed that this will become the primary resource for the Bennion Student Board when planning any of the six to eight Saturday Service Projects throughout the academic year. In addition, the handbook will be available in a digital format on the Bennion Center’s server to allow for updating and constant revision.

Introduction and Background

My involvement with the Bennion Center began in the spring of 2008 when I participated in an Alternative Spring Break that addressed the issue of immigration in San Diego, California. The week long immersion in service and issue education was so impactful that the very Monday after we returned to Utah, I was back in the Bennion Center looking for ways to remain involved. It was then that I happened upon S.P.A.C.E. which stood for Service Politics and Civic Engagement. This was an arm of the Bennion Center that specifically looked at the issues behind the service the Center performed. Over the course of that year, however, it was determined that the needs of the Bennion Center had changed and that a new approach to issue education was needed. Hence, the position of Issue Education Coordinator was created which I was absolutely delighted to fill during the 2009-2010 academic year. One of my main responsibilities in this position was researching, planning and executing issue education pieces that would be presented to members of the Service Council. They would in turn present those pieces to their individual program directors and then that information would eventually make it to the program volunteers.

While this model had its benefits, it was far from perfect. A recurring problem student leaders faced was a lack of connection between the Bennion Center's Issue Education theme and the Saturday Service Project. For many of the projects planned in 09-10, the theme was not heavily considered when planning an event. In response to this, it was determined by staff members in January of 2010 that the best model for issue education was one that allowed for multiple people to teach and be taught alike as opposed to one individual setting the agenda for the entire Bennion Center. As such, the position of Issue Education Coordinator was dissolved and incorporated into the various other positions of the Bennion Student Board and the Bennion Center staff. This would allow for each of the student leaders to feel more ownership of issue

education pieces and Saturday Service Projects and as such compel them to more willingly participate. It was at this point that I saw an opportunity to share all that I had learned in working with S.P.A.C.E. and as the Issue Education Coordinator. As a student who learns by looking at examples and making adjustments as I see fit, I felt that the Issue Education and Saturday Service Project Handbook would become a valuable resource to new and current volunteers looking for ideas.

Review of Literature

Another inspiration for this project came from visiting the Ginsberg Center at the University of Michigan in the fall of 2008. This community service organization is one of the most nationally recognized campus centers and operates on a very large scale. While there with a few other Bennion Center students, Ginsberg Center volunteers showed us a concept they utilized known as an Issue Box. These boxes were labeled with different social issues such as, “HUNGER, GENDER, ABORTION etc.” Inside each box was information about the issue, a list of resources that directly or indirectly engaged with the topic, and an activity that demonstrated a particular aspect of the issue. According to the staff member we spoke to, these boxes got a lot of student use whether it was for planning an issue education piece/service project or even writing a paper for class.

This idea eventually made it into the job description of the Issue Education Coordinator position and ultimately was implemented by me with mixed success. As mentioned before, it was difficult to establish a connection with the Issue Box and the Saturday Service Projects, but it was also difficult to encourage program coordinators to present the pieces to their individual groups. I feel that one of the main reasons why this approach was not as effective as it was with the Ginsberg Center was due to the differing nature of the two campuses and student bodies.

Procedure

Before beginning this project, I sat down with various members of the Bennion Center staff to discuss the best method to present the information I had learned while working with issue education for the past two years. It was from those discussions that the ideas of including information about planning Saturday Service Projects and making the document digital and therefore continually sustainable came to be two of the major elements of the project. Additionally, staff also suggested providing not only an issue education sheet for each of the issues addressed in the binder, but also a learning module for small groups, a module for large groups and a module for Saturday Service projects. This way, a student leader in the Bennion Center could literally pick up the binder and run an issue education piece that was tailored to the individual group with which they were dealing.

Another group I sought out was the Bennion Center Service Council. Throughout my time as Issue Education Coordinator, I have constantly evaluated the effectiveness of the learning modules I have used to convey various ideas. After each issue education piece, I would routinely survey 5-6 people on the council to assess the overall reception of the information. Through this process, I was able to get direct and immediate student responses which turned out to be invaluable when creating and researching other modules.

After all of these discussions, I met with Dr. Ann Engar to discuss various teaching methods that she found effective in engaging students both inside and outside of the classroom. Her advice of making the modules based on the idea of “self discovery” as opposed to lecturing was very helpful as I began to heavily research the issues in the handbook. With these meetings behind me, I began assembling my research from the past year and gathering more information for new issues and different learning modules. One of the main guiding principles I used while

creating these pieces was the idea of diverse research. Once I found a good article on an issue, I examined its validity and looked for an opposing viewpoint to counterbalance. I feel that this has made the binder all the more effective and accessible to the student population. I also wanted to use Bennion Center branding as much as I possibly could so that if sections of the handbook were used for other purposes that those receiving the information would be able hear about the Bennion Center.

Results

Unfortunately, I am not in an ideal position to evaluate the direct results of the Issue Education and Saturday Service Projects Handbook as I am graduating this semester and all of the Issue Education pieces and Saturday Service Projects have been completed for the year. However, I have been reassured by Bennion Center Staff members that this will be an invaluable resource for future student leaders and will certainly be recommended for use. This has been one of the most gratifying results of this whole process. The knowledge that nearly every staff member knows about this project, all the way up to the director, makes me feel that the project will be continually used and improved to fit the changing needs of the students of the University of Utah and the Lowell Bennion Community Center.

Reflection

Looking back at all that I have done at the U, the activities that stick out the most are the ones where I was engaged in service with the Bennion Center. In many ways, I feel like I have been working on this project since that very first A.S.B. to San Diego. Ever since that time, I have been serving and learning about the communities that surround me. I am so grateful for all of the opportunities that the Bennion Center has extended to me, especially the ability to complete this project. The Issue Education and Saturday Service Project Handbook is something I hope will be

used by every student leader in the Bennion Center in one way or another. I also hope that the Handbook will be able to change and adapt to the needs of the Bennion Center staff and students and eventually impact every student at the University of Utah. With all that I have done with the Bennion Center, I have found that the things I remember most are the people I served with that the lessons I learned while performing service. That is why I felt the need to create this handbook so that all students could emphasize the importance of education in service.

Finally, having the support of so many dedicated and wonderful people is what really made this project possible. When my first proposals were rejected, I was a little discouraged and actually contemplated not completing the Service Learning Scholars Program. Had it not been for JaNae Lilly, Christy Tobolski, June Hiatt, and Dr. Engar, I would have been totally lost on this project. Their insights, suggestions and overall positive attitudes made all the difference in this process and for that, I am eternally grateful.

References Cited

Ginsberg Center at the University of Michigan (2010). Retrieved March 30th, 2010, from http://ginsberg.umich.edu/about/directors_message.html

The Lowell Bennion Community Service Center at the University of Utah (2010). Retrieved March 30th, 2010, from www.bennioncenter.org