Investigating the expectations and experiences of young undergraduate students at Asian universities concerning community engagement field research activities

Kevin Ramsden
Aaron P. Campbell

〈Abstract〉

Undergraduate field research in the social sciences can enhance a student's understanding of the research process, help improve their critical thinking and analytical skills and provide them with opportunities for personal and professional growth. Furthermore, it often allows students to apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in the classroom to real-world situations. This practical experience will generally include elements of problem-solving, communication, and collaboration, all highly valued by employers. However, research into producing a good basic model that will benefit all participants is essential to design projects and activities that fit well with the abilities and interests of various student types across different disciplines and often cultural divides. This paper describes a university-community engagement project involving 43 undergraduate students from five Asian universities, allowing them to conduct field research and interviews on various individuals and organizations working to solve problems in their community, with guidance from faculty advisors. Surveys aimed at understanding student expectations, perceptions, and experiences revealed largely positive outcomes, including enhanced knowledge, skills, and motivation, along with a greater need for enhanced cross-cultural interaction. We analyze these results to suggest improvements for future field research models.

〈要旨〉

　大学教育において，社会科学分野のフィールドリサーチは，教室内で習得した知識やスキルを実社会にて実践する機会であり，課題解決・コミュニケーション・協働など多くの点で教育的効果が高いと言われている。グループによるリサーチプロジェクトを実施する場合，学生の能力・関心・学び方・文化背景は多様であり，全参加者に学習効果をもたらすためには，プロジェクトの基礎となるモデル構築の研究が必要となる。本稿では，アジアの５大学から43名の学生が参加し，各地域で行なったリサーチプロジェクトの実践を報告する。具体的には，地域の問題の解決へ向けて活動する現地の個人や団体を取材しインタビューを行った。参加学生の意識や経験についての事後調査では，知識・スキル・意欲の向上，そして異文化交流へのさらなる欲求など，概

ね肯定的な結果が得られた。この結果を分析し，今後のフィールドリサーチモデルの構築に向け，改善点を提案する。

Introduction

Research opportunities for undergraduate students at universities and colleges is not exactly a new concept, with many students from the pure science and engineering disciplines, for example, engaging in projects and internships with private companies and local governments, etc., and often as a practicum element in the degree courses in which they are enrolled. A good number of these activities, however, are offered either in collaboration with, or under the direct instruction of, a faculty member or individuals from an outside organization, and require strict adherence to relatively tight parameters. For students who elect to study in departments and on courses related more closely to the liberal arts, similar chances are not so easily forthcoming, and many students seek out extra-curricular opportunities in community or civic engagement through participation in volunteer activities with NGOs and NPOs on their own volition, which, whilst certainly most admirable and civic minded, may provide little in the way of connection with their studies at their institution. In some countries, however, exposure to research methods is considered a key component of social science education and steps to introduce measures to facilitate this have already been activated (Kierniesky, 2005; Rhineberger, 2006). With so many universities and colleges in Japan now offering courses in Global Studies and Community Engagement, there is definitely a need to provide more active and experiential style learning opportunities that are both embedded in the curriculum or at least closely linked to university-community engagement programs.

In this paper, we document a research project whose main purpose, in addition to providing a rich educational experience for the participants, was to reflect upon and assess the expectations and experiences of undergraduate students in a community engagement field research project to gain insight into how future such projects can be better designed and implemented. We first offer a definition of types of university-community engagement research, the benefits accrued, and challenges faced by both undergraduate students, faculty and administrators involved in such activities, and the many voices calling for greater implementation of projects and programs to bring academia and the greater society together for the common good. Following this, we outline how we devised and executed a community-engagement-style field research project, The Young Global Researchers Project (YGRP), involving undergraduate students and faculty members from five universities across the Asian region, ultimately producing a project website and hard copy journal with an ISSN numbered accreditation that gave students an authentic community engagement experience and a publication. Finally, we attempt to answer the following research question: What

are the students' pre-project expectations, pre- and post-project perceptions of community engagement, and quality of experiences throughout the project. We present the findings from pre- and post-project surveys of the participants involved in this project, which provides insights into further developing an effective model for the future, potentially benefitting other undergraduate research endeavors in the social sciences, while raising public awareness of the community engagement efforts being made in various communities at home and abroad.

University-community engagement research

Community engagement at the university level, either in the form of voluntary extra-curricular projects or as programs embedded in the curriculum, has attracted a variety of different labels: service learning (SL), community-based learning (CBL), community-based research (CBR), and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), to name a few. However, as has been well noted, they are not always stand-alone entities, but rather are frequently converging, overlapping, and encompassing one another, (Kendall, 1990). Certainly, SL has a long history of use in schools and universities as a way of allowing students to go into the local community and engage with its residents, usually in the form of volunteering activities, for which they are awarded credits by their school. This is also often the first step for many young people to be involved in civic engagement, and it can lead to life-long involvement with a particular social issue or charitable endeavor. However, service learning programs are more often than not organized by the institution itself, and therefore less likely to allow the students any real independence or flexibility in how they undertake any tasks or research elements of the experience.

CBL, by contrast, is often seen as a progression on from the usually more directed style of SL, and allows for more collaboration between students, university and the community. Rather than have students simply join in activities arranged in the community, they are provided more opportunities for community involvement and learning through projects that require, for example, investigation of issues and problems affecting the community and the people and organizations involved in addressing and helping solve those problems.

On the other hand, the goal of CBR is usually to carry out a project that meets the needs of the community into which the students are placed. In these cases, good communication between the students, their institution and the community is required to address and identify the need, often with the community taking the lead and not the researcher(s), effectively sharing authority wherever possible in every stage of the research process. As Strand points out, "The essential difference between CBR and traditional academic research is that an explicit goal of CBR—indeed, the central purpose for doing such research—is to contribute in some way to improving the lives of

those living in the community." (Strand, 2000, p. 85)

Fundamentally then, the field of university-community research has been developing exponentially since the beginning of the 21st century, and there is now a large body of research covering its effectiveness and implementation into university curricula in many institutions worldwide. Choosing the right model for undergraduate students in any particular school or program is not straightforward though, and there are a number of variables to be taken into consideration. Hall and Hall moot the need to take a somewhat eclectic approach in this regard when they talk about the Liverpool model of applied research [which] is part of a wider movement in Britain and other countries, and which they say, "brings together a number of different strands of educational development: independent thinking, work-based learning, experiential learning, development of personal skills and or key skills, university-community collaboration, service learning and active citizenship." (1999)

The benefits and challenges of undergraduate field research

Student-faculty research collaboration has been hailed as the "pedagogy for the twenty-first century" (Dotterer, 2002, p. 81), and its use has been gaining in popularity at many institutions. Without a doubt, some of the primary benefits for undergraduate students who engage in field research are opportunities to develop self-confidence, grow a higher level of independence, learn to navigate unfamiliar environments and interact with diverse populations. In addition, such activities will invariably expose students to new perspectives on what they may have already studied and broaden their horizons as they deepen their understanding of social issues. It would also, in general, supply them with a new set of skills outside of those they are familiar with using in classroom-based research and enquiry. Such skills and enhanced personal development are considered very attractive to potential employers and institutions offering post-graduate programs, and in certain countries this has been well documented (Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) (undated)), and in the words of one UK-based academic:

> *Students come to university not just for education, they come for a student experience. We believe that helping and encouraging them to engage in volunteering will broaden their experience, and they will benefit from that. [It] gives them more of the skills that employers actually look to in terms of flexibility, self-determination, and resilience. (Brewis et al., 2010, p.1)*

In order to plan and execute good field research, students would need to address, usually in collaboration with a faculty advisor or research partner, appropriate research questions, data collec-

tion methods and data analysis techniques. Likewise, in terms of communication, participants would also need to ensure that their research be conducted in a culturally sensitive and respectful manner, and that the confidentiality and privacy of all participants is protected. Learning how to be diligent and thorough in these areas, and thereafter document and report their findings in a clear, concise and professional way, would likely be extremely beneficial in their future career paths.

Unfortunately, despite the numerous benefits for undergraduate students engaging in field research, there are clearly some challenges that need to be considered. Some of these may be of a logistic nature, such as identifying a suitable research site, organization or individuals to approach, making travel arrangements, and even finding suitable accommodation, if the location for research is in a remote or unfamiliar location. There is also the question of financial support for a project, as securing funding from many institutions or external sources is becoming extremely difficult, and even with the assistance of faculty advisors or university offices, not always sufficient to manage long-term or larger projects.

Participation rates are also particularly low for the social sciences and humanities (Katkin, 2003: p.26). Limiting factors include the lack of laboratory-based research in these disciplines and limited research funds to pay students for their activities. This is particularly true, of course, in certain areas of the developing world that are struggling with economic and social crises or dilemmas. Finally, undergraduate research can present certain ethical challenges, and this means all participants must be fully informed of their rights with regards to complying with research questions and requests, and that all appropriate and necessary permissions are sought before research activities begin. However, once all these issues have been addressed appropriately, successful field research is a very viable and desirable option for extending experiential learning outside of the institution and into the community - a process that has mutually agreeable benefits for all concerned. Researchers at the University of Gloucester, UK, have summed it up very well, "A key issue in the 21st century higher education is how to link and map student learning through public and community engagement explicitly to graduate skills and attributes for employability so that all stakeholders (students, communities, universities and employers) are aware of its value." (O'Connor et al., 2011, p.3). Similarly, other academics recognize that those at the top of departments in higher education institutions (HEI's), need to take the lead on bringing about fundamental changes in promoting undergraduate research. As Jongbloed et al. (2007, p.46) state, "The challenge for those in charge of the university is to achieve a situation where community engagement is realized through the core activities of teaching and research and not have it regarded as a residual activity."

Materials and Methods

Following on from the valuable lessons learned from involvement in the 2021 'Ukyo Voices' community engagement project that was enacted by students, faculty and administrative personnel at KUFS, and which both the authors were instrumental in devising and co-creating (Ramsden T, 2023; Ramsden K and Campbell, 2023), it was decided important to examine, and build upon, the theoretical and active research benefits raised by its successful completion. In order to do this, we sought the collaboration of the students and faculty of four partner universities in Asia, from Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, all of whom belong to the Asia-Pacific University Community Engagement Network (APUCEN) to engage with us in the Young Global Researchers Project (YGRP). To ensure smooth communication amongst the participants in this project, we employed the use of an online platform for the purposes of gathering information, sharing ideas and building strong inter-cultural relationships.

The first phase of the YGRP project, "Changemakers in the Community", was launched in late May, 2022, with a Zoom meeting for all the student participants, along with their faculty advisors, from each institution. The institutions involved in this phase of the project, all members of APUCEN were:

Kyoto University of Foreign Studies (KUFS), Japan: 10 students + 2 faculty advisors

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Malaysia: 10 students + 5 faculty advisors

University of Surabaya (Ubaya), Indonesia: 10 students + 3 faculty advisors

San Pedro College (SPC), Philippines: 10 students + 2 faculty advisors

Chiang Mai University (CMU), Thailand: 3 students + 2 faculty advisors

In June and July of 2022, pairs of students from each institution conducted research on specific issues. While criteria for selection was decided by the faculty advisors from each institution, none of the research was credit bearing; it was on a voluntary basis. Students used both primary and secondary sources, interviewed relevant organizations, and often volunteered with these groups related to their chosen themes. There were also further Zoom sessions where all participants were given opportunities to discuss the issues and deliver research updates with their peers. Following the fieldwork activities, and with the guidance of their faculty advisors, participants then compiled written reports, with transcribed interviews, photos and supplementary material. The majority of reports were submitted on, or close to the deadline in mid-August, and were thereafter proofed and edited by the lead researchers' team in Kyoto.

Considering the international nature and make-up of the project's participating institutions,

faculty and students, it was necessary to build a multi-purpose website to facilitate the provision of information to all participants, ensure smooth channels for communication, and showcase research results (https://kyotogaidai.org/ygrp/). In addition, in order to manage the input by a number of different research partners, it was also considered important to create a flexible project research template for all participants to follow which would allow for ease of data collection throughout the project duration.

All student participants (43 in total, generally working in pairs), with the support of their faculty advisors, engaged in background research and follow-up interviews over a fixed period with selected individuals or organizations in their local communities who are active in community engagement and issues involving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Each pair of students collaborated on the background research on the organization they had chosen to cover before the interview with the representative(s) of that organization. Basic information on the organization was retrieved from different online sources, as well as through primary source litera- ture. Any information researched and used in the report was translated into English first, if neces- sary, before being uploaded to the project website. Therefore, all information and details were presented in the students' own words (no plagiarism), and quotations fully referenced. Any images or materials taken from websites, etc., were also checked for usage permissions before the report could be uploaded to the project website.

The following process was initiated and observed to both complete the project goals and enable the authors to gather essential data for their own research:

- Conducting of pre-project, mid-project and post-project Zoom meetings to allow participants to express their ideas, concerns and reflections on the project and also allow the authors to gather some qualitative oral data for research purposes.
- Gathering of all reports from participants and uploading onto the website following final edits and checks.
- Compilation of participants' reports into an anthology for publication as a hard copy journal (with ISSN number).
- Creation and implementation of pre-project and post-project surveys of all participants in order to collect data on attitudes, motivations, and expectations on the one hand, and reflec- tions and outcomes on the other.

While enabling the students involved in the project, in most cases, to get their first taste of field research in the community and also gain a publication at the undergraduate level, we also needed to gather essential data on how the participants viewed their experience of the project overall, whether

it had lived up to their expectations, and if there were any negatives they could identify or improvements to the process that could be made for use in the future. To facilitate this, we developed and administered both a pre-project survey (Appendix A) and post-project survey (Appendix B) using a combination of 5-point Likert scale questions, ranking, and qualitative items. Both surveys were delivered online via Survey Monkey.

Results

Pre-Project Survey

In May of 2022, 42 undergraduate participants were surveyed from five different institutions in five different countries with the purpose to characterize their individual and overall attitudes toward and experiences with community engagement, along with their motivations for joining the project. 69% of the students came into the project having had previous experiences doing volunteer work in their respective communities (Q7), while 57% had already experienced community engagement activities at their respective universities since they had become students (Q9). In fact, community engagement activities or courses were reported by 43% of the participants to be an academic requirement in their respective departments (Q8). When asked what kind of social issue or problem personally concerns them most (Q3), 'environmental issues' was the biggest concern (45%) followed by 'equality issues' (17%). However, when asked which social issue was the main one affecting their local regions (Q4), the majority (41%) selected 'economic issues'. When asked to define 'community engagement' in their own words (Q6), answer varied widely but some of the more common responses included "volunteering" or "working for the community" to "solve problems" and "help people in need".

Unlike standard classwork, where work is assessed by the instructor and credits are earned, participation in the YGRP was completely voluntary. Students were asked to rank their reasons for participating in the project (Q10) based on six answers pre-selected by the co-authors based on their judgement of what the most likely reasons would be. Their responses varied (see Table 1), but "opportunity to study a societal issue or problem I am most concerned about" was the strongest (4.58), followed by "opportunity to communicate with students at an overseas university" (3.83). The "opportunity to use, and improve on, my English communication skills" was the weakest reason (2.83) for participating in the project.

The subsequent survey item (Q11) was designed to capture any other reasons not included in the Q10, which was answered by only 21% of respondents. The most common reason amongst this minority was "an opportunity to develop research skills."

What participants expected to learn or achieve by participating in the project (Q12) also varied,

Table 1. Reasons for Participating in the Project

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	Score
Opportunity to take part in a volunteer activity	22.5% 9	7.5% 3	25.0% 10	12.5% 5	15.0% 6	17.5% 7	40	3.58
Opportunity to work with other students at my university	7.50% 3	10.0% 4	15.0% 6	15.0% 6	25.0% 10	27.5% 11	40	2.77
Opportunity to communicate with students at an overseas university	20.0% 8	17.5% 7	20.0% 8	15.0% 6	22.5% 9	5.0% 2	40	3.83
Opportunity to engage with people in the local community	15.0% 6	17.5% 7	12.5% 5	25.0% 10	25.0% 10	5.0% 2	40	3.58
Opportunity to study a societal issue or problem I am most concerned about	30.0% 12	32.5% 13	10.0% 4	22.5% 9	2.5% 1	2.5% 1	40	4.58
Opportunity to use, and improve on, my English communication skills	9.52% 4	14.29% 6	16.67% 7	9.52% 4	9.52% 4	40.48% 17	42	2.83

but many of the responses centered around the themes of communicating with others, learning more about problems in society, and interacting with the community.

> *I expect to learn many societal issues from my country and various different country and what organizations are participating in fighting those issues. By knowing some issues that other students reveal I can open my eyes and increase sensitivity about problems that I might never realize happened around me. I also hope to increase my communication skill in general. With joining this program, I can increase my English communication skill and skill to communicate with organization and my partners that I will work with. (Participant 25)*

Another participant saw the project as a way to develop empathy:

> *From this program, I want to achieve my self-fulfillment or my purpose in life, which is to help others. I know it's maybe a little hard for me to do it by myself. So, by collaborating with my team from other countries and maybe non-profit organizations that have the same purpose, can help me to extend my ability to give something back to society. Furthermore, by joining this program, I hope that I can improve my empathy towards others and by having this, I can find a proper solution to solve many problems happened around me. (Participant 32)*

Developing research skills was another motivational factor in joining the project:

> *I hope this opportunity is able to give me good experience and knowledge. This project is also able to increase my confidence in conducting research, especially at the university level. At the same*

time, my involvement in the community will also become more frequent. (Participant 39)

One participant saw the project as a way to network and enhance career opportunities:

> *In addition to those people who you hope will act as references in the future, you should walk away from an internship with a handful of new connections: senior employees, clients, fellow interns, etc. These people can provide guidance and advice, help you in future job searches, and may even become friends. But it's up to you to stay in touch with these connections, keep them in the loop on where you are in your career, and offer to help them whenever you can. (Participant 41)*

The above four responses to Question 12 are representative of how a majority of participants felt hopeful and motivated at the beginning of the project.

Post-Project Survey

In October of 2022, just after the website was published featuring the students' articles and photos, participants were delivered a post-project survey designed to characterize their experiences and reflections (see Appendix B). When asked to rate their overall experience participating in the project (Q2), 77.78% of respondents selected 'excellent', while 18.52% selected 'good', indicating a strongly positive experience.

Participants were also asked to rank various aspects of the project on how enjoyable they were (Q3, see Table 2). Their responses revealed that 'interviewing' people making change in the community was overwhelmingly the most positive aspect (4.96), while 'working with a partner' (3.81) and 'communicating with students at other universities' (3.48) were also deemed to be enjoyable. The least enjoyable aspect of the project was 'working with a faculty advisor' (2.70).

Table 2. Ranking the Most Enjoyable Aspects of the Project

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	Score
Background research	11.11% 3	14.81% 4	14.81% 4	14.81% 4	25.93% 7	18.52% 5	27	3.15
Interviewing	40.74% 11	33.33% 9	7.41% 2	18.52% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	27	4.96
Report writing	11.11% 3	3.70% 1	22.22% 6	18.52% 5	14.81% 4	0.00% 0	27	2.89
Working with a partner	11.11% 3	25.93% 7	18.52% 5	25.93% 7	14.81% 4	3.70% 1	27	3.81
Working with a faculty advisor	0.00% 0	7.41% 2	22.22% 6	18.52% 5	37.04% 10	14.81% 4	27	2.70
Communicating with students at other universities	25.93% 7	14.81% 4	14.81% 4	3.70% 1	7.41% 2	33.33% 9	27	3.48

Interviewing was clearly beneficial to students, as they found it insightful, educational, and empowering.

> *Interviewing gives us more insights about the experiences of our chosen organization. Hearing their struggles and how they emerge from the situation is truly inspiring and very moving. Moreover, it makes you feel empowered as an individual. (Participant 8)*

> *Interviewing helped me to enhance my interpersonal skills and better my understanding towards the organization we have chosen. (Participant 3)*

> *It was a rare opportunity that we could interview and talking with the community member who works to resolve the issue of our region. (Participant 13)*

One participant even got to meet a person who commits great sacrifices for the benefit of others, someone they call a 'hero':

> *I have learned a lot of things during the interview that I did not know exist. I realized that there really are people who are willing to go through danger just to save other people's lives and my interviewee, Dr. Magno, is one of them. The Davao Volunteer Fire Brigade is a hero to everyone. They finance their own tools and equipments just to be able to help victims from flood and fire. Even though they had their own careers, they were able to impart what they can to those who needed them. (Participant 5)*

'Working with a partner' was high on the enjoyment scale as well, as participants seemed to enjoy the cooperation, support, and comradery of working together with a peer:

> *Working with a partner was very enjoyable as we got to meet a complete stranger and develop something with them. We learned new things together and raised awareness on a topic we ourselves recently learned about. (Participant 20)*

> *The most enjoyable in this project is working with a partner. It is help us to go to somewhere to experience and learn the situation in our community. (Participant 15)*

Indeed, when asked the hypothetical question: If you could do the project again, would you prefer to do it with a partner or alone (Q9), an overwhelming majority (88.89%) indicated that working with a

partner would be preferable. When asked to explain (Q10), most students said that it made the work easier, more interesting, more comfortable, and social. One participant wrote:

One of the most intriguing aspects of mine is to working with a partner and communicating with them. Getting to know a person better while still having something to work together with is a very fun experience! That is why I would prefer to work something with a partner. (Participant 11)

While another one had this to say about pair work:

Working with partner is very fun. By learning with partner it is help us can learn and experience more by discussing, talking and helping with each others. Moreover, it is feel calm instead of working this project alone. (Participant 15)

Interestingly, responses indicate a split in the experience of 'communicating with students at other universities'. While most students had a positive experience, 33.33% of participants reported it to be the least enjoyable aspect of the project. When asked to explain why they chose this as the least enjoyable aspect (Q5) we get some insight:

I think it was the least enjoyable aspects because we don't have enough time to know each other. We only doing a meet to present our research so from that we still don't know each other, but it can improve at the other time like meeting each other either online or face to face maybe one day. (Participant 21)

It appears that it was the lack of more opportunities to connect and communicate that was the source of mild disappointment with these students, not the quality or act of communication itself.
In spite of this, 100% agreed that the aims and guidelines of the project covered everything they wanted to do (Q14) and that all of them felt that they were provided with enough guidance to help them complete the project (Q16). When asked whether or not they would consider joining a project like this again (Q18), 81.48% responded positively. In their explanations as to why (Q19), reasons were varied. Some enjoyed the interaction with both other students and their communities:

It will always be an enriching experience to converse with other people separated by culture and beliefs. Listening from (to) *them made me appreciate more our diversity. (Participant 8)*

YGRP is one of my new fascinating experience that I ever got. I've never really had the chance to

meet and became an acquintance with other person from another country, so this opportunity is quite a big thing for me from the very beginning. Even after finishing the project, I was still quite excited waiting for the website to be finished. (Participant 11)

Another participant recognized the experience as an opportunity to enhance their skills:

It is an opportunity to grow and learn new things. You can enhance your research skills, communication skills, and other skills. Through this project, the organizations were given recognition to their works and it create a platform for them to be more known and inspire other people. (Participant 24)

Discussion

The Young Global Researchers Project was carried out as planned, and the resulting articles successfully showcased how various social issues and problems are being addressed at the community level by volunteers and organizations in five different Asian countries. The majority of the participants had overwhelmingly positive experiences working together with their peers, researching important social issues, and going out into the field to make first-hand observations and interview people who are working hard to make a difference in the world. Furthermore, these undergraduate students had the opportunity to discuss their research and experiences with their peers at foreign universities via Zoom, and work with a faculty advisor to write up and publish their research on both a website and in an international journal. Survey results suggest that not only did they learn a lot more about the chosen social issue firsthand and gained useful skills along the way, but in some cases the young researchers were inspired by what they experienced.

The YGRP is a model that can be used in a wide variety of interdisciplinary undergraduate contexts. The young researchers identify an issue, do the background research, go out into the field and conduct primary research including interviews, and write up their results and publish them online and/or in a journal. Along the way, they discuss their process and findings with peers in other countries doing the same type of research in their respective regions. The intercultural communication that occurs between diverse groups of young researchers further provides insight into the role that culture plays in both creating and solving such problems.

Phase One (year 2022) of the YGRP, entitled *Changemakers in the Community*, was conducted with the understanding that future phases would be carried out and would build upon the lessons learned in previous phases. Reflection on the results of Phase One reveals several areas that could be strengthened or enhanced in future versions. One of the most salient aspects in need of enhance-

ment was the level of interaction between participants in one country and their peers in other countries. Only three Zoom sessions were held in Phase One: an introductory session at the beginning, a process-oriented discussion in the middle, and a results-oriented discussion at the end. Researchers were placed into breakout rooms and asked to share and discuss, but outside of that, there was no true, sustained, inter-cultural collaboration.

One idea that could solve this issue in future phases could involve forming groups of young researchers from different countries who work closely to research the same social issue in their respective regions and co-publish a paper. This would involve much more frequent communication and interaction – both synchronously and asynchronously – and provide a much more challenging, but potentially enriching experience for all participants.

Finally, another enhancement that should be considered is the expansion of the range of participants to include young researchers from other continents, such as the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Oceania. While a project consisting entirely of Asian participants is convenient logistically, in terms of time zones, having participants from other parts of the world can significantly enrich the diversity of views and opinions, not to mention the variety of approaches taken toward solving important community problems common to all people, regardless of region or culture.

Conclusion

As we move so quickly into the age of artificial intelligence and rapid globalization, now more than ever we need to connect young people to one another in meaningful ways to communicate, connect, and share. And in academic settings, a project like the YGRP can be an ideal vehicle to bring a diverse group of young minds together in a way that also helps them build skills that will help them in the immediate future, such as intercultural communication, negotiation, collaboration, digital literacy, social science research skills, interviewing skills, and writing, presenting, and discussion in English. We must disrupt traditional chalk-and-talk models of higher education by providing students with the kind of real-world, project-based, meaningful experiences that are far more likely to provide them with the skills they need while motivating and inspiring them to serve their communities. One of the YGRP participants captures this essence best when she writes:

I am still a student and I have a lot to learn. However, with my small hands and little powers, I have already started changing the world within my scope of current limitations. I think it's better to reach out to those who are willing and compassionate enough to commit to community engagement. Inspire those who want to learn and be part of the change. People are also into evidences. If one can see a mobilized project and an enticing program, I'm sure it will lit sparks in their hearts

to be an active part of the community- regardless of their age, race, gender, and all breakable barriers. (Participant 23)

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A

Pre-Project Survey

1. Your name:
2. Name of University:
3. What kind of social issue or problem **personally concerns you most** at the present moment?
    Environmental issues / Economic Issues / Educational Issues / Equality Issues
    Other (please state what the issue or problem is)
4. What do you think is the main social issue or problem affecting **your local area/region** at the present time?
    Environmental issues / Economic Issues / Educational Issues / Equality Issues
    Other (please state what the issue or problem is)
5. If you could change one thing about your local community, what would it be?
6. In your view, what is the best definition of *community engagement*?
7. Were you involved in any volunteer work in your community before you entered university?
    Yes / No
    If yes, please briefly describe your activities here (in 30~50 words).
8. Are community engagement activities or courses a requirement for students in the department you are in at your university?
    Yes / No
    If yes, please briefly explain what they are (in 30~50 words).
9. Have you engaged in any community engagement activities at your university since you became a student?
    Yes / No
    If yes, please explain what you have done (in 30~50 words).
10. What are your reasons for participating in this project? Please order the reasons given below from 1 to 6 (1 being the most important to you and 6 being the least important).
    Opportunity to take part in a volunteer activity
    Opportunity to work with other students at my university
    Opportunity to communicate with students at an overseas university
    Opportunity to engage with people in the local community
    Opportunity to study a societal issue or problem I am most concerned about
    Opportunity to use, and improve upon, my English communication skills
11. Do you have any other reasons for participating in this project (not listed above)? If yes, please describe.
12. What do you expect to learn or achieve by participating in this project? (Please answer in 30–50 words)
13. What you like to do in the future?

Appendix B

Post-Project Survey

1. Which university are you from?

    San Pedro College / Surabaya University / Chiang Mai University

    Universiti Sains Malaysia / Kyoto University of Foreign Studies

2. How would you rate your overall experience participating in the project?

    Excellent / Good / Average / Poor

3. Rank the following aspects of the project from most (1) to least (6) enjoyable.

    Background research / Interviewing / Report writing / Working with a partner

    Working with a faculty advisor / Communicating with students at other universities

4. Please explain why you chose the most enjoyable aspects above?

5. Please explain why you chose the least enjoyable aspects above?

6. Overall, how satisfied were you with your choice of theme/topic?

    Very satisfied / Quite satisfied / A little satisfied / Not satisfied

7. Please explain your reason for your answer above (Q6).

8. How well do you think you achieved the project goals through your personal performance?

    Very well / Reasonably well / Adequately / Not well

9. If you could do the project again, would you prefer to do it with a partner or alone?

    With a partner / Alone

10. Please give reasons for your answer above (Q9).

11. If you could do the project again, what would you you like to improve on with regard to your own performance? Please write your answer in as much detail as possible.

12. Do you think you were given the right amount of time to complete the project?

    Yes / No / Maybe

13. If your answer was 'no' or 'maybe', what amount of time do you think would be enough?

14. Do you think the aims and guidelines of the project covered everything you wanted to do?

    Yes / No / Maybe

15. If your answer was 'no' or 'maybe', please explain your reasons why.

16. Do you feel you were provided with enough guidance to help you complete the project?

    Yes / No

17. If you answered 'No' to the question above, what kind of guidance, skills or training do you feel would have helped you to better complete the project?

18. Would you consider joining a project like this again?

19. Please give reasons for your answer to the question above.

20. What else would you like to see done to help highlight community engagement activities and groups in your area? Please answer in as much detail as possible.