

INCORPORATING MISSION AND SOCIETAL IMPACT INTO ONE SCHOOL'S INTEGRATED LEARNING PROGRAM

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*Extended Abstract
Experiential Track*

OBJECTIVES

This paper provides a strategy for creating and implementing a community-based integrated learning program (CILP) which incorporates mission and societal impact. Our conclusions are based on the extent literature coupled with our experience designing and executing such programs. Furthermore, we offer impact measures so outcomes from a CILP may be analyzed over successive years with the intention to (a) improve on the experience, (b) lever skill-based volunteering and (c) generate best practices that may support other integrated learning programs.

INTRODUCTION

Our school has a strong experience-based learning (EBL) component but those experiences usually focus on a particular industry or business. Using the business school's mission ("...prepare students to be catalysts for change...") and the university's purpose ("...creating knowledge and leveraging our expertise to tackle some of society's greatest and most pressing challenges"), we created a CLIP which levers business skills to positively impact critical societal issues.

We set out to design a sustainable CILP that aligns value for students, corporate partners, community partners, and the academic community.¹ While student learning is an important objective of this program, this paper will focus on achieving the other following objectives.

- Maximize sustained impact for the community-based partner(s)
- Achieve student satisfaction objectives
- Establish more meaningful partnerships with external stakeholders

OPTIMAL CILP DESIGN

All volunteering efforts are generally thought to provide benefits. However, our goal is to maximize the possible benefits of all stakeholders in the CILP. This section contains a truncated summary of the extant volunteerism literature which informs the design principles.

A key to recruiting and sustaining highly satisfied volunteers is to match their motivations (Stukas, Snyder, and Clary, 2016). Focusing on the framework established in the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) (e.g., Clary, Snyder, and Stukas, 1998), the preponderance of evidence finds the highest motivation is the *Values* factor which is related to altruistic and humanitarian concerns. Therefore, we recognize that CILP topics should be about critically important social issues and focus on helping others. To achieve this goal, our design uses an annual theme which addresses the general issue of "access to" critical resources and opportunities.

Volunteers are also motivated by acquiring and/or improving experiences, knowledge, and skills. In the Smith et al. (2010) survey of over 4,000 university students, the top benefits to volunteering include "Opportunity to learn new things", and "Leadership skill". Therefore, the CILP should actively provide our stakeholders with the opportunity to acquire and improve these experiences, knowledge, and skills. Our design is focused around a short-term intense experience coupled with longer term knowledge acquisition.

A sense of community is another factor that make volunteering more likely, satisfying, and sustained. Community has many definitions including geographic location or a common cause. A sense of community can also be created or promoted by using

¹ For the purpose of this paper we consider our students as participants and stakeholders; and community, corporate partners and the academic community as stakeholders.

workshops about the topic to foster a psychological sense of community (CITE). Therefore, the CILP leverages the existing school community which is extended and amplified with various design elements including knowledge-based workshops and coaching around the topic. While the students are the primary recipient of the initial knowledge transfer, all stakeholders ultimately learn from each other.

Skills-based volunteering is a fast growing corporate trend which merges corporate citizenship and human resources (CECP, 2020). Compared to traditional employee volunteer programs (i.e., serving a meal, collecting toys), skills-based volunteering “is a *strategically driven activity* that involves employees *donating job-related skills* and *acquiring or developing skills* through voluntary contributions to an external non-profit organization *that requires certain skill sets*.” (Dempsey-Branch and Shantz, 2022)

Skill-based volunteering is a way to provide high impact for the community partner. By leveraging the business skills of the external and internal stakeholders, the CILP provides valuable expertise which may lead to significant insights and co-created actionable items. In addition, it benefits the program participants by further developing their skills (Bengtson, 2020; Letts and Holly, 2017). Therefore, the CILP needs to focus on a set of business skills which is shared and may be useful to all stakeholders. The distinct skillset we emphasize is data analytics. Importantly, high skill stakeholders willingly volunteer to support the next generation acquiring long-term skills while delivering immediate impact to the community.

SUPER ANALYTICS CHALLENGE

This CILP, the Super Analytics Challenge (Challenge), was initially created in the summer of 2020 and launched in March 2021. This new community-based initiative recognizes the importance of leveraging business skills to positively impact critical social issues.

The Challenges have an annual theme which address “access to” critical resources and opportunities. The 2021 Challenge addressed the complex issue of homelessness in the community and the community-partner was the local County Department of Human Services. In 2022, the Challenge focused on food insecurity and hunger and partner was the regional Community Food Bank. In 2023, the Challenge focus will be on improving mental health and better supporting frontline workers.

The Challenge design tries to maximize the value of volunteering by having specific roles for highly skilled volunteers (i.e., faculty and executive/senior managers). These include advisor, expert contributors, executive coached, and judges. To fully utilize the benefits of skill-based volunteering, the Challenge focuses on the skillset of business analytics. As with any CILP, there is also an emphasis on “soft-skills” such as leadership, team building, and communication. To leverage the skills of our corporate partners, the majority are in consulting, software, technology and applied analytics solutions industries.

PAPER OBJECTIVES AND PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

Based on the extant literature and our experience, a key result from the Challenge (to-date) has been to engage a broad number of stakeholders to contribute their skills in support of the students and, critically, the societal issue of the Challenge. For our students, this alignment of stakeholder support, volunteerism opportunity, and skill-acquisition programming has served to attract students into the program. The ability of our students to follow mission and realize an impact for our community drives the value of the Challenge.

ADDITIONAL PRELIMINARY INFORMATION (>1000 WORDS)

RESEARCH LITERATURE REVIEW

Design Principles

All volunteering efforts are generally thought to provide benefits. However, our goal is to maximize the possible benefits of all stakeholders in the community-based integrated learning program (CILP). In this section, we summarize the relevant extant literature related to volunteerism to inform the design principles.

General Volunteering Principles

A key to recruiting and sustaining highly satisfied volunteers is to match their motivations (Stukas, Snyder, and Clary, 2016). Focusing on the framework established in the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) (Clary and Snyder, 1992; Clary, Snyder, and Stukas, 1998), the preponderance of evidence finds the highest motivation is the *Values* factor which is related to altruistic and humanitarian concerns. For instance, in survey of over 4,000 university students by Smith et al. (2010), the highest two motivations were “It is important to help others” and “To work for a cause that is important”. (e.g., Caldarella et al., 2010;

Chacon et al, 2017; Davila and Diaz-Morales, 2009; Fletcher and Major, 2004; Jansen, 2010; Konrath, Fuhrel-Forbit, Lou and Brown, 2012). Therefore, CILP topics should be about critically important social issues and focus on helping others.

Volunteers are also motivated by acquiring and/or improving experiences, knowledge, and skills. This is measured by the VFI *Understand* factor which is usually the second highest motivation of volunteers. For instance, in the Smith et al. (2010) survey of over 4,000 university students, the top benefits to volunteering include “Opportunity to learn new things”, and “Leadership skill”. Therefore, the CILP should actively provide our stakeholders with the opportunity to acquire and improve experiences, knowledge, and skills.

A sense of community is another factor that make volunteering more likely, satisfying, and sustained. Community can be location based or it may commonality of focusing on an important issue. In addition, the sense of community can also be created or promoted by using workshops about the topic to foster a psychological sense of community. Relative to a no-workshop control, Omoto and Snyder (2010) show an increased sense of community and increased intentions to engage including volunteering and donating funds (e.g., Omoto and Packard, 2016; Stukas, Snyder, Clary, 2016). Therefore, the CILP leverages the existing school community which is extended and amplified with various design elements.

To design a CILP which is more likely to have highly satisfied and sustained volunteers, we use the primary results from the general volunteer literature. Our CILP will focus on critically important social issues and helping others (xxx). To achieve this goal, our CILP has an annual theme which addresses the general issue of “access to” critical resources and opportunities. To provide our stakeholders with an opportunity to acquire meaningful experience, knowledge, and skills; our CILP is focused around a short-term intense experience coupled with longer term knowledge acquisition. Finally, we have many community building experiences involving all stakeholders plus we provide many knowledge-based workshops around the topic (xxxx).

Employee Volunteering

The previous section focused on a general volunteering framework. However, the CLIP will lean heavily on organizational stakeholders so a discussion of factors which may be unique to these stakeholders is warranted.

The *VFI Understand* motivating factor is focused on gaining knowledge and skills but Turner, et al. 2021 found that using exiting skills is another motivating factor. More specifically, this paper studied university faculty members and found they are more likely to volunteer if they believe their skills would be valuable. Generalizing these results, highly skilled volunteers may also be motivated to share, not just develop, their skills. Therefore, the CLIP will emphasize this motive in the program design.

Skills-based volunteering is a fast growing corporate trend which merges corporate citizenship and human resources (HR) (CECP, 2020). Compared to traditional employee volunteer programs (i.e., day of giving, serving a meal, collecting toys for children), skills-based volunteering “is a *strategically driven activity* that involves employees *donating job-related skills and acquiring or developing skills* through voluntary contributions to an external non-profit organization *that requires certain skill sets.*” (Dempsey-Branch and Shantz, 2022)

Skill-based volunteering is a way to provide high impact for the community partner. By leveraging the business skills of our external and internal stakeholders, the CILP provides valuable expertise which may lead to significant insights and co-created actionable items. In addition, it benefits the program participants by further developing their skills (Bengtson, 2020; Letts and Holly, 2017). Therefore, the CILP needs to focus on a set of business skills which is shared and may be useful to all stakeholders.

With more employers incorporating strategically driven volunteering (CECP, 2020), it creates an opportunity to lever our regional and alumni networks. (DEVELOP) Therefore the CLIP will work with our corporate partners to merge their corporate citizenship and skills development.

To design a CILP which maximizes the value of employee volunteering we have specific roles for highly skilled volunteers (i.e., faculty and executive/senior managers). To fully utilize the benefits of skill-based volunteering, our CILP has decided to focus on one reasonably broad academic skill, business analytics. To leverage our regional and alumni network, we focused a majority of our corporate partners in the consulting and computer solutions industries.

Guiding Principles

Challenge Mission

In conceptualizing the Challenge, a central question was *how to maximize value for all stakeholders*. More specifically, we believed that if we strove to deliver impact and results for our Community-based Partners, we could further motivate our

stakeholders and garner commitment from them. This is what we refer to a value multiplier to rally support and credence for this program.

Challenge stakeholders include:

- Community-based Partners
- University of Pittsburgh Graduate Students
- Corporate Partners
- The University of Pittsburgh Academic Community

North Star

Driving value starts with impact, and our aim has been to address issues broadly effecting our communities. We discussed and selected issues that are:

- complex and difficult;
- multidimensional and interdisciplinary);
- local, national and global;
- research and data rich.

Importantly, a common theme per each issue for each year is that we must be able to, as a business graduate school, address a constraint related to access to resources or opportunities.

The selection of these societal issues has become what we refer to as a 'north star' to rally all stakeholders.

We heavily rely on a carefully selected Advisory Committee consisting of senior leaders from our community organizations, government partners, corporations, and national/ industry associations. These dedicated individuals have not only supported shape the construct of the Challenge so that the issue become addressable for our students, they have also marshalled resources (funds, data, and technology) and experts (both internal and through networks) who have supported our students during the Challenge and through subsequent idea implementation.

Practices

To enhance the student-experience and also effectively organize the Challenge, we were purposeful to concentrate on specific elements. These are now considered our best practices. Examples include:

Fellowships: To better drive impact and pull through from ideas generated in the Challenge, we linked fellowship awards to Teams. By leveraging the [Bridge Program](#), another integrated learning program offered by Katz for our students, we were able to pull through ideas generated in the Challenge into this eight-week student-team project program. Funding for student fellowships were provided by corporate partners Accenture and SAP, and additionally from PittBusiness donors.

Projects were scoped directly from ideas in the Challenge, but also additionally around the issue topic, for example in the summer of 2022 we linked an additional five student projects around the topic of food insecurity and hunger with community-based partners. The following [link](#) includes descriptions and outcomes from these projects.

Interdisciplinary Student Teams: By promoting the Challenge across the University of Pittsburgh graduate community, we were able to attract and then ultimately assign students from other programs such as public policy, economics, public health, computer science, engineering, nursing and physics. Additionally, considerable attention was placed in balancing team composition based on work experience, leadership aptitude, analytics skills, communication acumen, issue awareness, undergraduate degree, gender, and nationality, so as to ensure that we had well-balanced student teams. In the first year of the Challenge, we had 59 students apply and we selected 25 students comprising 5 teams. In the second year of the Challenge we had 71 students applied and selected 35 students comprising teams of 7 students each. The average selectivity rate has been around 50%.

Student Volunteers: We have also been purposeful in attracting and selecting student volunteers for the Challenge. Working alongside the Advisory Committee, the students have helped write the case and also curate data sources for the Challenge. Additionally, in 2022 we had a call for nominations for a Student-lead to join the Advisory Committee. This particular student had participated in the Challenge the previous year. The benefit of having a student nominated lead,

and the person having previously competed on the Challenge, was that they could serve as the voice of the student. This perspective supported rethinking aspects of the Challenge construct.

External Communications: To build awareness for the Challenge, and awareness for our Challenge partners who serve as community leaders related to the program, the Katz team has been purposeful in working with partners to communicate key findings and results from this Challenge. External communications have included participating in KDKA radio programs and TechVibe podcasts; having students interviewed in the *Pittsburgh Tribune Review* newspaper; and organized with University-grant support a symposium on the topic of food insecurity. We have additionally generated student-testimonial videos with support from our partner Accenture, and students supported create landing pages for the Challenge. Not only do these communications help promote the value and impact from the Challenge, they also spotlight the energy, ideas and enthusiasm that our students bring to the Challenge and subsequent fellowship projects.

Impact linked to Stakeholders

The Challenge has served as a value multiplier for stakeholders in the following ways.

Community Partners:

- Tangible implementation of recommendations supported by student teams & corporate partners
- Deepened network with local academic and corporate institutions
- Received additional volunteers and donations
- Reputation building and issue spotlights through media coverage

Students:

- Had led to job offers
- Developed critical, in-demand skills such as business analytics, communications, leadership, networking, teamwork, and applied consulting
- Practiced storytelling around data analytics
- Given back to community through efforts and participation
- Project fellowship awards

Corporate Partners

- Developed talent pipeline through direct interaction with students and teams
- Actively developed skill needed to support workforce growth
- Provide resource support for students and NGOs to execute on social impact missions
- Enhanced reputation of subject matter experts
- Professionally developed leaders by allowing them to serve as mentors and coaches
- Strengthen ties in Pittsburgh region – been spotlighted through external communications

The University of Pittsburgh's Academic Community

- Opened an opportunity to graduate students to enhance their graduate learning experience and directly network in with corporations and community-based partners
- Promoted broad university initiatives such as the 2022 *Year of Data and Society*, by directly connecting these programs and promoting results from these initiatives
- Challenge actively demonstrates benefit of organizing interdisciplinary team-based projects

Katz Graduate School

- Established a new Center for Integrated Learning to house this Challenge and also other such initiatives such as the Bridge Program
- Serves as a draw for the for applicants and prospective students
- Enhanced relationships with employers of choice for graduate students
- Drove tangible community impact leveraging R1 Research resources
- Supported thought leaderships: media hits in publications like AACSB *Insights Magazine* and at the MBA CSEA conference

Enhance the Value – Drive more Impact

Through this paper we propose to further measure impact with the purpose to enhance the value of the Challenge for our stakeholders. The paper will outline measures including:

- Community Partners:
 - Generate deeper insights into what we can do to further add sustained value for these organizations while provide minimal organizational drag, meaning a disruption to their current workload. Value generation could be achieved through supporting with strategy consulting projects, enhancing public relations for the Challenge tied to the topical issue, or supporting crowdfsource funding for their cause.
- The Student-Experience:
 - Enhance the post-Challenge feedback survey and process to better study the impact of pre-Challenge workshops, team formation, and topical volunteer opportunities tied to team output. Cross compare the student perceptions to judging scores, as a performance outcome from the Challenge.
- Corporate Partners:
 - Through in-depth consultations, understand how the University of Pittsburgh can better support talent-access pull-through through by (a) improving access to diverse talent pools, and (b) by better serving recruitment needs through the Challenge