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Utilizing Service-Learning for Watershed Enhancement: Water Quality Improvement Through Community/Campus Partnerships

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Abstract:

WaterLINK is a service-learning program available to college and university faculty and community watersheds in Kansas. WaterLINK aims to infuse service-learning into the college classroom, with the main goal of improving water quality on high priority watersheds through community/campus partnerships. Service-learning strives to mutually benefit both the community and the student. The end result enhances student's sense of civic responsibility, provides a true mastery of course learning objectives, and builds interpersonal, teambuilding and leadership skills. The community benefits from exposure and access to university resources, and services meeting community-identified needs. Any Kansas college or university faculty member can apply for WaterLINK funding. Proposed service-learning projects are funded on a competitive basis. Awarded mini-grants range from \$250 - \$7,500.

Past service-learning projects have included community water education fairs, water quality monitoring and assessment, urban community planning and design, integration of rain gardens and green roof design for stormwater runoff, and stormwater conservation demonstration projects. Projects have varied depending on discipline and are not limited to the hard sciences; for example, several journalism courses engaged in public relations campaigns to promote watershed improvement and other environmental reporting.

Impact Statement:

As of Fall 2005, WaterLINK has funded 45 service-learning projects resulting in multiple on-going partnerships with Kansas communities, colleges, and universities. Evaluation results from students indicated that the service-learning experience had the most impact on their perception of making a difference in the community, assisted students with course material and how it could be used in everyday life, and to better understand course content. The greatest accomplishments stated by faculty were the hands-on experience for students, the students' retention of information, the strengthened relationship with college and community, and created a more environmentally aware citizenry through the public presentations of results. Community partners indicated that students' involvement provided the most impact to their project because they brought "new eyes" to the problem. Community partners were complimentary of the students' efforts and the commitment of the faculty. WaterLINK is funded by the Kansas Department of Health and the Environment from U.S. EPA Clean Water Act, Section 319 funds.

Category: Human Dimensions

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