



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



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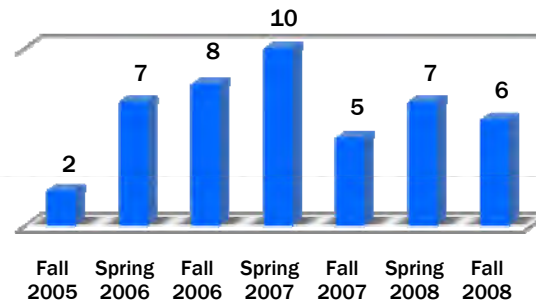
Evaluation Goal: to evaluate the progress made in meeting the WaterLINK program goal and objectives, the impact the program had on participants during various stages of implementation, and the challenges and strengths of service-learning in higher education.

WaterLINK Project Goal: to engage Kansas' colleges/universities with local communities as partners in water quality restoration and protection through service-learning, with the ultimate goal of improving water quality in high priority watersheds in Kansas.

WaterLINK Project Objectives

1. Identify community/watershed needs and link them to college/university potential technical resources; identify potential partnerships in service learning projects aimed at water quality improvement, based on needs and available resources.
2. Provide training and support for communities and college/ university partners in ways to effectively design and implement service learning projects in watersheds in need of restoration and protection.
3. Foster communication and information flow among potential participants and provide public information about the opportunities and accomplishments of service learning.
4. Monitor and evaluate the service learning process.

WaterLINK Projects
Fall 2005 - Fall 2008



Methodology

Data collection activities included:

Interviews with college/university faculty who had WaterLINK-sponsored service-learning component in their course(s);

Online survey administration of college/university students enrolled in a course with a WaterLINK-sponsored service-learning component;

Online survey administration of community partners who had a WaterLINK-sponsored service-learning project in their community(ies).

Evaluation results from student post-participation surveys indicated the service-learning experience had the most impact on their perception of making a difference in the community, and assisted with understanding course content and how course materials can be used in everyday life.



"I want to become an agronomist so it is important to me that my farmers and the community members do all they can to keep our water safe. When telling my farmers what to spray on the field I will be sure to explain to them the importance of only putting that amount on." - quoted from student post-participation survey

Question	Mean	St Dev	N
I can make a difference in the community.	4.10	0.82	367
The community participation aspect of the courses helped me to see how course material I learned can be used in everyday life.	3.97	0.90	373
Participating in service-learning helped me to better understand course content.	3.94	0.91	373

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

"The experience definitely gave a me an edge in the field that I am pursuing and allowed me to have a better understanding of what I want to achieve in the future." - quoted from student post-participation survey

The Office of Education Innovation & Evaluation designed, tested, and implemented a successful evaluation process for service learning projects involving water quality. Further, WaterLINK has funded over 40 service-learning projects resulting in multiple on-going partnerships with Kansas universities/colleges and community watersheds.

For faculty, the greatest accomplishment of the service-learning project was the hands-on experience and real-world exposure the students participated in. When faculty described the benefits to themselves and the community, most expressed ideas about the strengthened relationship between the college and the community.

The most successful component cited by the community partners was the students' involvement. One community partner described working with the students as "...exciting and worthwhile. Each student brought something to the table and gave 'new eyes' to the problem."