

# Advocacy as Service-Learning

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**ABSTRACT.** Service-learning has been used in a variety of educational settings and is a valued aspect of education. Advocacy as service-learning, on the other hand, is not as widely known or utilized. Advocacy is “the pursuit of influencing outcomes—including public-policy and resource-allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions— that directly affect people’s lives” (Cohen, de la Vega, & Watson, 2001, p. 8). Thus, when doing advocacy, individuals engage in “a deliberate process of speaking out on issues of concern in order to exert some influence on behalf of ideas or persons” (Rengasamy, 2009, p. 1). This paper bridges the gap that exists between advocacy and service-learning, and, through a case study of a family policy class using an advocacy as service-learning assignment, explains the advantages of integrating them. The results indicate that, when combined, the two work simultaneously to give students a beneficial and positive learning experience.

In this paper we will define advocacy and service-learning and describe how they have been used in higher education, particularly family science courses. Next, we discuss how advocacy and service-learning can be used in specific family science courses such as family policy courses. We end with lessons learned from designing an advocacy assignment as a service- learning experience in a family policy course.

## Advocacy

Typically, advocacy is defined as working with individuals, groups, or community clients to systematically address decisions and policies that are unjust or agencies and organizations that are unresponsive. The underlying principle of advocacy is a desire to make a difference by improving policies and practices as well as specific behaviors (Ezell, 2001). This “requires one to speak up, ask questions, work with and empower others, resolve differences, be assertive, and build a shared vision” (Spicuzza, 2003, p. 50). Advocacy has also been described as the pursuit of influencing outcomes—including public policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions—that

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This paper is based on a presentation at the National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, Little Rock, AK, November 8, 2008. For additional information, contact the first author at: Debra L. Berke, Wilmington University, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, 320 N. DuPont Highway, New Castle, DE 19720; 302-356-6760; [debra.l.berke@wilmu.edu](mailto:debra.l.berke@wilmu.edu).

directly affect people's current lives (Cohen et al., 2001). Thus, advocacy is a deliberate process of speaking out on issues of concern in order to exert some influence on behalf of ideas or persons (Cohen et al., 2001). It "aims to help powerless groups...improve their resources and opportunities" (Jansson, 2001, p. 451). For example, one could promote a particular piece of legislation or "campaign for an underrepresented group or policy alternative that could enhance family well-being" (Anderson, Walker & Braun, 2005, p. 63). Another option is to influence debate by taking a side surrounding an issue and educating key individuals about the position taken. Advocacy can occur on many levels, including personal, community, or legislative levels ("Not Without Us!," 2009).

Advocacy has been addressed in family life education with grandparent caregivers (Cox, 2008) and family caregivers (Glang, McLaughlin, & Schroeder, 2007; Moore, 2008), in undergraduate educational programs such as gerontology (Huber, Nelson, Netting, & Borders, 2008), physical therapy (Michaels & Billek-Sawhney, 2006), psychology (Greene, 2008), health education (Galer-Unti, 2006), social work (Spicuzza, 2003; Wolfer & Gray, 2007), and even in graduate programs such as counseling psychology and counselor education (Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins, & Mason, 2009; Steele, 2008), but advocacy does not appear to have been a skill widely taught, particularly at the undergraduate college/university level. However, engaging undergraduate students in advocacy introduces them to macro-level issues and macro-level practice skills. Macro-level practice "has been usually conceptualized as intervention related to changing societal institutions to make them less rigid and more compatible with current or evolving human need" (Tully, 2000, p. 110) as compared to micro-level issues/skills (e.g., working one-on-one with an individual or family). Because family science graduates working in human services will often be called to advocate for their client(s) at individual, local, state, or federal levels (macro levels), advocacy is an important skill for family scientists (Anderson et al., 2005; Berke & Geissinger, 2003).

### **Service-Learning**

Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teaches civic responsibility, and strengthens communities. Service-learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity changes both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content.

Service-learning courses are utilized in a wide range of educational settings, including K-12 classes (Kraft & Billig, 1997; McCarthy, 2008; Terry, Bohnenberger, Renzulli, Cramond, & Sisk, 2008), as well as in college and university classes. In a survey conducted in 2000 on 349 college campuses, more than 700,000 students reported that they had taken a course in which they had been required to complete a service-learning assignment (Campus Compact, 2001). Another study reported that at the end of the 2000-2001 school year more than 13 million students were involved in service-learning (Fiske, 2001). Therefore, it appears that many faculty members see the benefits of using service-learning as a pedagogical tool in their courses.

Social science disciplines such as social work (e.g., Sather, Weitz, & Carlson, 2007), gerontology (e.g., Karasik, & Berke, 2001, Vandsberger, & Wakefield, 2005), sociology

(e.g., Mobley, 2007, Roberts, Mason, & Marler, 1999), criminal justice (e.g., Lim, & Hellenga, 2006, Nurse, & Krain, 2006), and family science (e.g., Christiansen, Amby, & Bowers, 2001; Galbraith, 2002; Hamon, & Way, 2001; Toews, & Cerny, 2005) have only recently begun to use service-learning in student coursework. In fact, the first publications on service-learning relative to family science occurred in 2001 with a special issue of the *Journal of Teaching Marriage and Family* (now the *Family Science Review*) devoted to using service-learning in family science courses. In addition, positive outcomes of service-learning have been identified in aiding student development in the following areas: personal (e.g., increased self-efficacy), professional (e.g., increased communication skills), interpersonal (e.g., better understanding of other cultures), social (e.g., increased social responsibility), and academic (e.g., improvement in academic performance) (Toews, & Cerny, 2005, p. 80). Acknowledging these benefits, family science faculty have used service-learning in courses on family diversity (Toews & Cerny, 2005) and aging (Hamon & Way, 2001) in order to expose students to those who are different from themselves. In doing so, family science professors seek to enhance students' understanding of course content and social issues, while fostering the development of tolerance, empathy, and a sense of civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998; Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Sedlak, Doheny, Panthofer, & Anaya, 2003).

### **Family Policy**

When teaching skills and knowledge related to policy, studies indicate that “hands-on” activities are important (Giles & Eyler, 1998; Rocha, 2000). Active learning strategies, including service-learning advocacy projects, enable students to engage in critical thinking, evaluation, and reflection (Karasik & Berke, 2001). The majority of research on the use of service-learning in a policy course, and, more specifically, using service-learning to teach advocacy, has occurred in the social work field (e.g., Butler & Coleman, 1997; Rocha, 2000), which has long had a focus on policy; “the ability to carry out policy-related tasks is an important part of social work practice” (Rocha, 2000, p. 62). The focus on policy in family science is relatively new (within last 20 years) and in many ways driven by the Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) program because all CFLE-designated family science programs must include courses that address family policy. Two recent studies have examined pedagogical strategies designed to boost family science students' interests and skills in family policy (Anderson, Braun & Walker, 2005; Bogenschneider, 2006). One strategy that can be used to introduce students to the family policy arena is an advocacy assignment.

In this article, we present a case study of a service-learning advocacy assignment in a course—HDFS 253 - Community Services for Individuals and Families—which is required for human development and family science and family and consumer sciences education majors at Messiah College, located in Grantham, Pennsylvania. Although it is not unusual to have juniors and seniors in this course, most students are enrolled as sophomores. The course has been taught by the first author for a number of years.

In order to be a successful pedagogical tool, a service-learning activity must be directly linked to the course and its objectives and must be carefully interwoven into the learning process set out in the course (Hepburn, Neimi, & Chapman 2000; Weigert, 1998). One component of HDFS 253 is the advocacy assignment, designed to also be a service-learning assignment following the course based model outlined by Eby (2001). See Appendix A for a description of the assignment. Students select an agency and local social service organization

with which the instructor is familiar and who has agreed to work with the students in a small group. The students and agency supervisor then work together on the advocacy project designed by the agency. The role of the instructor in this context is to serve as a liaison, guide, and mentor for the student and the agency. Multiple opportunities are provided along the way for discussion and reflection, both within and outside of the classroom for the students.

The primary student learning outcomes of the advocacy service-learning project for HDFS 253 were that students: (1) will be exposed to possible internship and practicum sites, (2) will be exposed to macro level practice, as well as (3) have increased confidence that they can make a difference. Outcomes for the agencies included: (1) having an advocacy project successfully completed that they may not have had time or other resources to complete and (2) exposing them to our students and their capabilities. Outcomes for the instructor were: (1) to create a policy assignment where students would be challenged and excited about the policy arena, (2) to give back to agencies who have given to me, as well as (3) to competently design and assess the learning outcomes.

## **Method**

### **Sample**

**Students.** In spring semester 2008, 27 students were enrolled in HDFS 253, an undergraduate family science course designed to meet the CFLE content area of family policy. All were female, the majority (62%) were sophomores, and the average age was 19 years old. Twenty-five were human development and family science majors and two were family and consumer science majors. The last two authors of the current article were students in the course.

### **Procedure**

I contacted agencies and asked them if they would be interested in participating in this advocacy project. I encouraged the agencies to give me a short description of what the project would be and asked for the contact information of the individual who would be the agency supervisor for this project. Students were then asked to select their top three choices of agencies/projects during the second week of class. Students were assigned to small groups of approximately five or six based on their choices. Time was spent the third week of class meeting in groups and becoming more familiar with their agency/assignment. Students were also asked to contact their agency and arrange a meeting time with the agency supervisor so they could discuss the assignment further with the supervisor (as per the agency supervisors preferences). Students then spent a minimum of 10 hours each (or 50 to 60 hours per group) working with the agency supervisor completing the advocacy project for the agency. At the completion of the project, students presented their projects to the agency and gave an overview of their project to the class.

**Agencies.** Six agencies were recruited for HDFS 253, three in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and three on campus. The agencies represented diverse learning experiences and included the YWCA, Aids Community Alliance, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, the Gender Studies Project, Compassion Café, and the International Justice Mission.

### **Measures**

This course was assessed using both quantitative and qualitative measures that addressed outcomes for students, agencies, and the instructor. Students turned in a portfolio at the end of their advocacy experience. In the portfolio they were to include a copy of materials created during the advocacy experience, a summary or log of their experience, and a paper reflecting

on specific questions. At the end of the class, students also completed an anonymous online questionnaire assessing their learning relative to the educational objectives for the advocacy assignment. The questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes to complete and included both open-ended and closed-ended questions.

At the end of the class, agency supervisors also completed an online questionnaire assessing perceptions of the students, their willingness to participate in a service-learning advocacy project, and the benefits and challenges to them of doing so. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete, and also contained open-ended and closed-ended questions. Both questionnaires were developed relying on articles by Anderson et al. (2005), Droppa (2007), Karasik (2008), and Spicuzza (2003). Agency supervisors were also contacted periodically by the instructor to assess student progress on advocacy assignments.

Throughout the study, reflections were recorded by the instructor in a journal. The journal included her reflections on the process of setting up the advocacy opportunities, class discussions about students' experiences, and impressions of final results. Communications with agency supervisors were also documented in the journal, along with her responses to the agency supervisors.

## Results

Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies. Qualitative data were analyzed using qualitative techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), such as open coding. Open coding is the process of "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). Data were analyzed to create themes or categories.

### Student Outcomes

All 27 students completed portfolios and various other assessments throughout the semester while 26 of the 27 completed the on-line questionnaire. Therefore, quantitative data analysis is based on an *N* of 26.

The first outcome was accomplished to some degree from the perspective of the instructor. Small groups of students were exposed in some depth to one potential internship/practicum site while all students were exposed to all six sites through hearing about different group experiences with each site. From a student perspective, 42% ( $n = 11$ ) felt they were exposed to possible internship or practicum possibilities through the advocacy project while 38% ( $n = 10$ ) disagreed. Fifty-seven percent ( $n = 15$ ) of the students wanted to learn more about their agency while 42% ( $n = 11$ ) did not.

One of the major themes that emerged from the qualitative data was that many students acknowledged learning a great deal about their topic vis a vis their work with the agency. "I'm sure that someday I will have to help people that are victims of rape...I will know a lot more information about rape because of this project than I actually knew before," said one student. Another became "aware of how prevalent these issues are." One student realized she would be "interested in a possible internship in this area." The agency's response to the advocacy project also made a difference in terms of how students viewed a site as a potential internship or employment site. One student noted in her portfolio,

"After the research was completed and the ten hours of work was fulfilled the response from X agency was great. They were very thankful for all the help the group and I had done for them. They told us numerous times how much they

appreciate their volunteers. When we went to X agency's offices and were introduced to everyone as volunteers everyone's reactions were very positive. Everyone expressed their gratitude multiple times to us. Once X agency gave me/my group their feedback and responses I felt really good. I was glad they were so happy with our work and were very appreciate for giving them our time and effort. After they gave us positive feedback it made me want to keep volunteering and continue to help their agency in any way I could."

The second learning outcome, exposure to macro-level practice, was accomplished through the use of the advocacy project. Agencies assigned student groups to such projects as 1) creating a series of media posters, which could be used to communicate about HIV/AIDS to high school and college students, 2) surveying colleges and universities for programming related to sexual assault and updating a national database, 3) creating a voters' guide about domestic violence/sexual assault, child care, and living wage for Pennsylvania state legislators, and 4) designing and running sexual assault awareness events. Eighty-five percent ( $n = 22$ ) of the students felt that their service-learning project enhanced their understanding of advocacy.

Similarly, one of the major themes that emerged from student comments was students' greater understanding of advocacy work, in general. This project "made [advocacy] less intimidating." "Advocacy is a good way to increase the knowledge [of others] and promote change in social issues" said another student. According to one student, "I learned the meaning behind advocacy and how to do it with enthusiasm." One student summed up her learning about advocacy in this statement: "I...learned that advocacy is more about being a voice for the powerless and speaking up for those who have no voice." Through the variety of projects, students were also able to recognize the range of possible advocacy activities and gain an understanding of why advocacy is important. "Advocacy can be used to help people in many ways" said one student. A student noted "It made me realize that no matter what career anyone chooses they can be involved in advocacy." Students also realized how advocacy fit into the bigger picture for agencies. "It has helped me understand the process of advocacy, working with others, and how important the time put into it is for organizations."

Fifty-three percent ( $n = 14$ ) of the students responding indicated they discovered an interest in advocacy while 47% ( $n = 12$ ) did not. Student comments reflected this theme as many noted their understanding and like or dislike of macro-level policy/practice." I learned that advocacy doesn't always mean working directly with the people in need. There are a lot of things that need to be done behind the scenes in order to produce change." Another student noted "It made me aware of the fact that advocacy comes in many ways. While we weren't directly helping people with HIV or AIDS, we were doing a lot of good for the benefit of others." One student said she is "looking at doing volunteer work in advocacy" while another stated, "It made me think more about what I want to do once I graduate...I think advocacy is a real possibility." One student said "It opened my eyes to the political side of my career." One student had participated in advocacy prior to this class project so the assignment did not influence her feelings toward advocacy—she already had a passion for it. However, others learned they did not like macro level practice. One student said, "Although I learned a lot, I didn't interact with anyone which would have made the project a lot better, and I think I would have learned a lot more."

Several items on the questionnaire reflected issues relative to professionalism. Seventy-

seven percent ( $n = 20$ ) of students reported learning more about organizations and how they operate through this project. Students also noted increased skills in the areas of team work/collaboration, leadership, problem solving, creativity, and conflict resolution. Qualitative comments reflected professionalism issues. One student noted, “I learned a lot about being professional and working with others.” “Staying on task and working as a team were all good things that the project helped me to do that will enhance my career experience.” “It introduced me to a professional experience similar to the type of work I may be doing as my career. I will now be able to take the information I learned and apply it to my job.”

Many students made the connections between knowledge, passion, and action. One student realized that “learning just a little bit about an issue can ignite a passion that you never thought that you would have.” Another student whose response is representative of a number of others in the class said “I never had a view on advocacy but now I believe it is becoming a more positive view. I think it’s all about figuring out what you are passionate about and then advocating for that issue. You cannot advocate well without the passion behind the issue and to get that passion, we must become educated about the issues.” Knowledge, passion, and action are evident in the concluding paragraph in one student’s portfolio.

“Based on my experience, the future of advocating for these issues relies on disseminating information so that people see the significance of these issues. Moreover, we need domestic violence and sexual assault programs to be readily available to all areas. We need to insist that policymakers take a family perspective in their policymaking, especially with child care. We need to urge businesses to pay even their lowest employees a living wage before their highest executives make such large profits as well as urge cities and towns to set area specific minimum living wages. The most crucial aspect of making advancements with advocating these issues involves informing the public. We must prepare the common citizen with understandable information about issues that directly affect them and with tools to voice their concerns directly to the policymakers.”

The third desired outcome was to increase students’ confidence so that they can make a difference. Eighty-five percent ( $n = 22$ ) reported feeling more confident about being involved in advocacy and this theme was echoed in the qualitative data. One student stated, “I learned that everyone can be involved in advocacy and everyone’s involvement and voice is important.” Seventy-six percent ( $n = 20$ ) reported feeling they can have a positive impact on social problems as a result of this project (another theme). As one student noted, “I can see the benefits of speaking out for something that you truly believe in.” “I learned that a little bit of advocating can go a long way,” said one student. Sixty-five percent ( $n = 17$ ) felt they were now better able to empower others, a third theme. A student said, “I have come to believe that it is the social responsibility of all individuals to advocate and work to empower those who may not have a voice in society.”

Students were asked to offer suggestions for improving the assignment. One issue revolved around communication. Several mentioned they felt communication could have been clearer between the instructor and the agency supervisor, particularly in terms of explaining what a service project should be and/or what the agency would like accomplished. Some students felt the agency couldn’t communicate their project clearly to the student group. “I think the

agencies we are working with should have a clear, organized plan for the advocating we are to do,” said one student. Another student sums up her experience by saying, “I don’t think this project really helped me to learn a lot of information about advocacy. I just really did research and made fact sheets....The project that we were given wasn’t very clearly laid out for us and it was hard to figure out what we had to do.”

Another issue mentioned was the behavior/attitude of the agency supervisor. One student stated, “The representative for the organization who my group advocated for was often unreliable. Therefore, an improvement would be increased interest in the project from the organization.” Another stated their agency supervisor “suggested that the project could be done via email. Which made me feel like I wasn’t connected to the agency.” More direct involvement with the agency would have been helpful. While this is not something an instructor can guarantee, by educating agencies and agency supervisors about service-learning and advocacy, and what the instructor is looking for in a project, the likelihood of students having a positive experience would be greatly enhanced.

A third issue mentioned by students was group dynamics. One student said, “I think that next time I would appoint someone to be 100% in charge. It was hard to delegate at times because many people were trying to take control.” Another student would have liked “more guidance on how to split up group duties.” Several students said they learned how to work better in a group and how to utilize group members. As one student noted, “My group members all had different talents and skills so we used them to work towards a common goal.” One student said she learned she works “well as part of a team for large group projects.”

### **Agency Outcomes**

Outcomes for the agencies included: (1) having an advocacy project successfully completed that they may not have had time or other resources to complete, and, (2) exposing them to our students and their capabilities. Data were gathered from all six agencies throughout the process by the instructor. Unfortunately, only four of the six agencies responded to the quantitative questionnaire, despite numerous reminders. The first outcome was accomplished according to the agency supervisors. When agencies were contacted and asked to participate, they mentioned projects they had hoped to do but did not have the agency personnel or resources to complete. Supervisors were thankful to have a group of volunteers who would be able to do these projects for them. As one site supervisor said, “it was a GREAT help to our group on campus for the students to run this project, and it was a way for our group to branch out!” All four agencies overwhelmingly agreed that the students had performed all tasks assigned accurately and promptly, took the initiative to carry through on ideas and tasks, and had successfully completed the advocacy project.

Agencies who had only limited exposure to students learned more about students through this experience. All four agencies said they would definitely be willing to work with this class project in the future. As one agency supervisor stated “This group was GREAT to work with, and it was definitely a growing experience for myself and them. I was so thankful for all the hard work they put into the project!” Another agency supervisor said, “I thought the interaction was valuable and resulted in a quality project. Other colleges may be willing to utilize the posters” created by the students. A third agency said, “We enjoyed the energy that the students brought to our project.”

All four agency supervisors said they would encourage other agencies to be involved in projects such as this one because “it’s a great way to link to the community.” “One site

supervisor noted the reciprocity that existed between the students and the agency: “This was a great opportunity to help students connect classroom experience with real world situations and for organizations to learn from the leaders of tomorrow.” Another agency supervisor stated it was “a great learning experience for students and staff involved in the project.” Yet another said, “it is a great way to broaden our impact and learn fresh perspectives.”

Several agency supervisors commented on the professional skills the students learned. One supervisor said, “I could see that they learned not only how important it is to speak up and support those in need, but they also learned about the challenges that face any group who tries to pull off a successful fundraising/awareness event.” Another said the project “exposed students to real world issues and challenged them to find solutions/strategies to address the issue.”

Because this was the first year that the advocacy project was implemented as a formal service-learning experience in community agencies, agency supervisors were asked for suggestions to improve the project. One agency supervisor suggested meeting with the students immediately after they selected their project. Another suggested, “have the agencies interact more with the class as a whole and provide and receive feedback about the project.” One agency would have liked having the goals for the service project in writing as they did not feel the students could clearly articulate them when they met. Scheduling conflicts between agency supervisors and student teams were also mentioned by two of the four agencies who completed the questionnaire.

### **Instructor Outcomes**

Outcomes for the instructor were: (1) to create a policy assignment where students would be challenged and excited about the policy arena, (2) to give back to agencies who have given to me, as well as, (3) to competently design and assess the learning outcomes.

I believe I created a policy assignment that could challenge students and get them excited about policy, particularly from an agency perspective. The data indicate that a number of the students became passionate about different issues and learned they liked to advocate for issues that they cared about. Only one mentioned she had done advocacy prior to this class; the other 26 had not. Thus, this was a new experience for most of the class. As one student said, “I learned that advocacy occurs in many forms, and if people work together, a lot can be accomplished.” Many were much more enthusiastic about advocacy after completing their project. One student mentioned she is “interested in a possible internship in this area.” These comments energize me as an instructor and help me to know that some, if not all, now share my passion for advocacy.

I was able to give back to three agencies that have consistently provided me with free guest speakers and agency tours for a number of years. While I appreciated the fact that these agencies had donated their time willingly, I strongly believe in giving back to the community, and this was one way to do it. I know that several of these agencies were able to complete projects that would not have been done otherwise, and it was gratifying to know I had assisted in making this possible. Since I enjoy being part of a research team, I wanted to work with a colleague and two of the students in the class to evaluate the service-learning experience. The students assisted me in surveying the literature and critiquing assessment tools that had already been developed and ultimately selecting questions from various tools and modifying them to fit our needs. One of the students learned SurveyMonkey and created the online survey. In addition, I networked with other colleagues who have used service-learning in their courses

and benefited from their knowledge and experiences as well. Most research on this topic has utilized questionnaires to assess advocacy or service-learning experiences. This study utilizes multiple measures, one of which is a questionnaire. We believe this multiple method of assessment is valuable in that we were able to capture data at various points in the project from students, agency supervisors and the instructor.

### Discussion

We conclude that the use of an advocacy assignment as a service-learning experience for family science majors was successful for all concerned. While there are still minor adjustments to be made, the overall concept has a number of benefits for all parties concerned. More often than not, there was a positive reciprocal effect. Having students work with agencies energized the agencies and working with agencies energized the students. Most of the students ended the course with a positive view of advocacy at the macro-level, although a number discovered they would prefer to work with individual clients at the micro-level.

### Lessons Learned

The lessons learned from this experience can be categorized into two categories: course design and assessment.

**Course design.** Instructors may want to review all of the service-learning models offered by Eby (2001). The course based service-learning model worked well for this course but others may select the fourth credit option or a class project, for example. All models have pros and cons, and each instructor should decide what would work best for their course.

Like Droppa (2007), we realized communication between student groups and agencies needed to be increased. While several groups clearly appointed one member as the “go-between” or “director of communication” to serve as the mediator between the agency and the students, more attention needs to be paid to outlining the expectations of the communicator for both students and agency partners. Scheduled weekly or bi-weekly meetings between the students and agency partners may be appropriate.

Agency partners indicated they would like more information prior to the start of the project (Droppa, 2007). One challenge discovered early on in the process is that Messiah College does not have a service-learning partner template for agencies. Thus, agreements were negotiated with agencies, and many details were discussed in advance; however, expectations could be more clearly written prior to beginning the semester. A service agreement was created to use in the future (Appendix B). The agreement was based on Galbraith (2002), and could easily be modified for any college or university class.

Also, more time needs to be spent with the agencies defining advocacy and describing the kind of experience we want students to have. This should be done both orally and in writing. An agreement similar to the service agreement between agency supervisor and students can be developed. Droppa (2007) suggests that students and agency supervisors should meet at the end of the project to debrief. It may be useful if the instructor could also be at that meeting.

One of the agency supervisors suggested bringing the agency supervisors into the classroom, whether one time or on a regular basis, to help bridge the classroom-community gap. This would allow the agency supervisor to inform all class members about their agency and allow the agency supervisor and student group to present information about their project

at points during the semester. This would also help the instructor keep his/her pulse on each project as they can observe how well the agency supervisor is working with the student group and the progress of the student group on the project.

Most advocacy assignments involve working independently (exceptions include Spicuzza, 2003). I think having students work in groups was a valuable learning experience, plus it also helped deal with the issue of transportation as our campus is rural with no access to public transportation, and not all students have cars. In working as a group, “there was a need for cooperation, collaboration, support, problem solving, creative thinking, and accountability. Students learned to deal with uncertainty, relationship building, inclusion of group members, and conflict resolution” (Spicuzza, 2003, p. 55). Working in groups allowed students to continually reflect on their service-learning experiences with each other in addition to many other benefits (e.g., development of leadership skills, collaboration, etc.). In addition, the total number of hours available to an agency to complete a project was substantial, and enabled agencies to create larger projects that could be done with only one or two student volunteers.

Because this class was held during a 12-week semester and students needed to complete the project within a nine-week window, ensuring that there was adequate time to organize and complete the advocacy project was an issue for several groups. Waiting to begin the project was often the biggest issue for the groups, particularly those who had little or no contact with their agency supervisor. Again, regular, consistent communication among student group, agency supervisor, and faculty mentor could address this issue.

Another challenge related to the fact that most classes occur within a semester format is that occasionally students may not be able to see the end results. One student group was unable to see the fruit of their labor because the fact sheets they had prepared for the agency to distribute to state legislators would happen after the semester had ended. The agency supervisor did tell the students that “the information we provided for the Lobbying Day was very helpful and will be of great use at the legislative breakfast.” The student continued by saying “It is nice to receive this small amount of praise and feel as though we have made a difference. I feel by helping those with more power fight for these issues by providing resources we helped create a louder voice in the issues.”

**Assessment.** As many have noted (e.g., Eyler & Giles, Hamon & Way, 2001), careful planning and attention to detail both prior to beginning the service-learning experience as well as during it are essential. Hamon & Way (2001) suggest mid-semester evaluations of the service-learning project for the partner; in this case, it would be the agencies. We would encourage this for students and faculty as well. This would provide another data collection point, which could uncover issues and allow them to be addressed in a timely fashion.

I would also encourage the use of weekly journals (Hamon & Way, 2001) in addition to an end of the project summative evaluation of the experience. Weekly journals would have enabled me to keep better tabs on the progress and learning of each student/student group. I had the groups share in class throughout the semester, but I realized this did not uncover issues for each individual student, nor did it often uncover issues for the student groups as they were hesitant to discuss what they perceived as problems or failures with their peers in class. Weekly or even bi-weekly journals for my eyes only would have addressed this issue.

Beacham and Shambaugh (2007) offer ideas for incorporating advocacy in both introductory graduate level courses as well as capstone courses. Thus, advocacy can be designed to be developmentally appropriate for students at any stage of their academic career. They, too, used multiple types of data to assess the effectiveness of advocacy as a teaching

strategy and a learning outcome. We definitely support the continued use of multiple methods of assessing the usefulness of advocacy, particularly if it's done as a service-learning project.

### **Limitations**

This study does have limitations, including the small sample size, data collected from one class rather than multiple classes, and data collected at only one college site. There is a definite need for more data collection in this area. In addition, there is always an interaction factor to consider, e.g., the interaction between the dynamics of the group, the agency supervisor, and the project. Student groups who had a well-developed project but a less engaged agency supervisor may have experienced advocacy differently than a group who had a very engaged agency supervisor but a less well-designed project. As researchers, we attempted to address these issues through multiple data collection methods.

In conclusion, the data indicate that while overall this was a positive experience for all involved and outcomes were achieved, there were typical first time “snags” when redesigning an assignment. However, we believe that shifting the focus of the advocacy assignment to include a service-learning component done in groups was a valuable move by providing an opportunity for students to see their profession in a larger context and understand the potential impact they can have on the lives of others at a macro-level. Thus, we have highlighted advantages to merging service-learning and advocacy in a family policy course. We also shared insights relative to assessment tools for this type of assignment and concluded with suggestions for future integration of advocacy service-learning assignments into family policy courses. It is our hope that we motivate and provide tools for others to incorporate advocacy, particularly advocacy as a service-learning experience, into their courses, because as one student from this course said, “I think Ghandi had a valid point when he said, ‘Be the change you wish to see in the world.’”

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## Appendix A

### Advocacy Assignment

Advocacy is the act of arguing on behalf of a particular issue, idea or person; giving voice to an individual or group whose concerns and interests are not being heard. Individuals, organizations, businesses, and governments (for example at the level of the United Nations) can engage in advocacy. An example of advocating for a particular issue is attempting to persuade others of the importance of implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on gender and peace building. Advocating for an idea can include a wide range of subjects as broad as social justice. For example, someone can engage in social advocacy, which can include writing letters to the editor, contacting political representatives, organizing community meetings, distributing public education materials, participating in a public protest, or other means to communicate one's views for the purpose of policy and social change. An example of advocacy on behalf of a person includes international campaigns to release Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratically elected leader of Burma/Myanmar, from house arrest. This assignment requires you to engage in advocacy for individuals/families. You will be working in groups of 5 with different agencies/organizations (list to be handed out in class) and will do 10 hours of advocacy each for a total of 50 hours per group. The exact work will be determined by the agency in consultation with the instructor. You may earn a total of **50 advocacy points**.

Your advocacy involvement can take place at any point during the semester, but it should be completed by [date] at the latest (e.g., I must receive your portfolio by this date). Your portfolio should include: (1) a copy of anything you have written (letters, reports, overheads, etc.), (2) a summary of your experience (e.g., journal/log), and (3) a brief written statement of what this involvement meant for you, answering the following questions: How have your views changed (if they have at all) about the issue you advocated for? What facilitated this change or lack of change for you? What was the response you received about your advocacy, and how did you feel about it and or respond to the response? What personal/professional strengths and weaknesses did you learn about through this process? Based on your experience, how do you propose we advocate in the future for the issue you selected? The reflection paper should be 2-3 pages and is worth **25 points**. I will grade the reflection paper on each area/question covered on a scale (range 1-5), using 1 as little reflection, integration of key concepts, insight, etc., and 5 as outstanding reflection, integration of key concepts, insight, etc.

**Appendix B**

**Service Agreement**

[printed on University Letterhead]

Student Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Student Address(es) \_\_\_\_\_ Email(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Human Service Agency: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of Agency: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor/Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this service agreement is to clarify the goals and responsibilities of all those who may be involved in this volunteer service experience.

The individuals who will be providing service as volunteers are affiliated with a course called Community Services for Individuals and Families at Messiah College. Service-learning is an important component of the course because it provides a means whereby theoretical knowledge can be integrated with practical experience and it involves the students in preventing and working toward the resolution of problems within the community. [Name], the instructor for the course, will be working with students in the classroom to help them make connections between service experiences and course material. Any questions or comments may be directed to [name] at [phone; email].

The students will receive credit for serving as volunteers. Details of the arrangement will be strictly between the students and the volunteer supervisor at the human service agency [service supervisor]. The students are expected to serve 10 hours of advocacy each for a total of 50 hours per group over a period of approximately 7 weeks [dates]. By signing this form, both the students and the service supervisor acknowledge that this service agreement is between the students and the human service agency and that the college is not responsible for providing needed training, supervision, or liability coverage. For grading purposes, the service supervisor or a representative of the agency will be asked to complete an evaluation of the students' work performance at the midterm and near the end of the semester.

Service-learning is an important component of the college course and a willingness to provide a service experience for the students is appreciated. As the students are involved in meeting the goals of the agency, the service supervisor is encouraged to consider the following suggestions:

- Student-learning is enhanced as the students interact with agency personnel. To maximize student learning, provide many opportunities for student-personnel interaction.
- Clearly state your expectations and maintain open communication so that students or agency needs may be addressed as needed.
- Enhance student learning by providing needed feedback or supervision in a timely fashion.

To provide focus and direction for the service experience, it is recommended that the students and the service supervisor establish goals and guidelines for the service experience.

**Service Goals**

Describe the activity/project that the student will engage in to meet the advocacy needs of the human service agency.

**Learning Goals**

What is it that the students would like to learn from the advocacy service experience? List learning goals for the group as a whole; list any individual learning goals as well. Be specific.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

**Specific Agreements**

List specific agreements between the students and the service supervisor that will enhance the performance of the students and help the volunteer experience to be successful for both the students and the agency (e.g., service schedule, dates for starting and ending the service, types of activities to engage in, manner of dress, punctuality, provision of supervision or training, general expectations, etc.).

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Service Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date