

1. Executive Summary

We undertook this project in light of the rapid growth of experiential philanthropy courses nationwide, and the importance of understanding the impact of these courses on the students who take them, particularly in light of the limited research in this area. Given the need for female leaders in philanthropy as well as in the nonprofit field, and the fact that the majority of students who take the courses are female, we chose to study the impact of the courses on young women. We conducted an in-depth qualitative analysis of the impact of these courses on young women's *intellectual* and *personal* growth.

With respect to the theoretical framework of this study, we applied theory and research from developmental psychology to several other relevant fields of study. These included: 1) educational learning theory, 2) outcome research on learning in college students, and 3) the literature from service learning theory and practice. The four total strands of research, when linked together, helped us to better understand how these experiential philanthropy courses could impact *both* the intellectual and personal development of undergraduate women.

Within this framework, we designed our study to look at multiple sources of qualitative data from a small number of female undergraduates (20) enrolled in a full-credit experiential philanthropy courses at one of three New England colleges. We conducted in-depth interviews with individual students before and after the course, conducted classroom observations, and analyzed a large number and variety of written assignments from the students. The qualitative method of finding patterns and trends in these data, based on self-report and observational measures, is best suited to this type of research.

First Finding: Impact of Experiential Philanthropy Courses on Intellectual and Personal Development

Our study demonstrated concrete evidence of the impact of experiential philanthropy courses on young women's intellectual development in three areas of higher order thinking skills: contextual reasoning, knowledge creation, and reflective judgment. Our study did not attempt to document content mastery and information attainment, which is the subject of quantitative research currently in process.

Our study demonstrated clear evidence of students' contextual reasoning in which, according to developmental theory, they moved from rigid to more nuanced thinking. While we saw evidence of this development in many students, it was particularly true of freshmen and sophomores.

We also documented evidence of a second level of intellectual development, knowledge creation, in most of the students. In this higher order thinking skill, students move from being the recipient of facts and information to taking a proactive role in the development of their own knowledge. We documented evidence of how the young women in the courses began to use both the academic content and their experiences as grant makers in the community to develop their own knowledge and internal understandings, particularly about philanthropy.

We saw the greatest amount of evidence of students' reflective judgment. At this level of intellectual development, students begin to recognize that not all knowledge can be determined with certainty and, as a result, they approach learning based on investigating and evaluating multiple claims of authority. The service learning model of these courses provides an effective framework for the development of this type of higher order thinking. The service learning model is based on a systematic and continuous learning cycle of acquiring knowledge, participating in meaningful experiential engagement, and reflecting on both these learning components. Both the written reflection assignments and other opportunities for reflection provide the students with the opportunity to *practice* reflective judgment which stimulates their growth in this area of learning.

Our study also demonstrated that the impact of the experiential philanthropy courses was not restricted just to the students' intellectual development. The courses also impacted young women's personal development in the areas of perspective-taking, values development, and personal efficacy. Again, we found that the experiential nature of the course provided a strong framework for and stimulus of perspective-taking awareness and use. Students, particularly freshmen and sophomores, demonstrated an awareness of their "opening up" to the complexity of philanthropy in both theory and process, as well as the nuanced thinking required in philanthropic decision-making.

The experiential aspect of the course put students "in the shoes of" a funding decision-maker using actual money, giving them the opportunity to practice new perspectives which would have a real outcome in their community. The course readings, guest speakers and direct experiences with nonprofit organizations also provided a multiplicity of perspectives for students to "step into" and consider in their decision-making. The variety of perspectives introduced to students ranged from those in the community whose needs were being served, to the nonprofits doing the work on the ground, to the leaders of the nonprofits who are responsible for fiscal responsibility and accountability as well as measuring impact.

Lastly, our evidence showed impact of the courses on students' values development and personal efficacy. Again, students' role as grant makers, including collaborative decision-making in student grant making groups, provided a rich opportunity for values development and consolidation. Students' self-efficacy, or their self-perception of their ability to create

results, was impacted by their experiences as funding decision makers in these courses. We documented evidence of students' growing self-perceptions as individuals who were able to make a difference in the lives of others.

Ultimately the element of having actual money to award to nonprofit organizations doing real work in the community was the key factor in the students' personal development based on their high engagement in all aspects of the course. Although at the beginning of the course students cited this factor as engendering some level of interest and "intrigue" in signing up for the course, by the end of the course students overwhelmingly cited having actual money for distribution as what led to their intense engagement in the course. Their engagement was the result of having real responsibility to make decisions regarding actual grant funding for organizations dealing with real problems in the community. Our data demonstrated that this high level and quality of engagement created a powerful "incubator" for stimulating growth in the three areas of personal development: perspective taking, personal efficacy, and values development.

Second Finding: Four Steps of Philanthropic Development in Undergraduate Women

A second and unexpected finding was the identification of a sequential progression of four steps in the development of young women's philanthropic attitude and identity. We assume based on developmental theory that this process takes place over a period of many years during "emerging adulthood" and perhaps beyond, and therefore not during a one-semester course. We used our data to identify "snapshots" of these steps in the young women in our study. The first two steps show the *emergence* of a philanthropic mindset through exploration and experimentation. The latter two steps involve a *commitment* to and *consolidation* of philanthropic engagement. These steps are not fixed and rigid markers. Rather they are meant to be fluid descriptions of an ongoing process towards a young woman's philanthropic identity which shapes her philanthropic beliefs and actions. The steps have been identified as follows:

Step One: Fledgling Philanthropic Awareness

"Yearning to Do Good in the World"

A young woman at this step is characterized by her budding philanthropic awareness and nascent desire to "do good." She is responding to or emulating *external* authority, and is in the process of clarifying, exploring, and sorting out her own values.

Step Two: Emerging Philanthropic Identity

"Finding My Voice"

A young woman at this step tests her values out on her peers; this is an intensely-focused *interpersonal* phase. This step is characterized by the emergence of a tentative philanthropic belief system and identity. At this phase a young woman is testing out her philanthropic values through continued exploration of and deeper engagement with nonprofit organizations and activities. She is practicing hearing her own voice and beliefs in the presence of others, especially peers.

Step Three: Maturation of a Philanthropic Attitude and the Forging of Philanthropic Identity

“This Is My Cause”

A young woman at this step conducts an *internal dialogue* which explores and eventually proclaims, “This is me.” This step is characterized by a young woman’s clear commitment to and articulation of her philanthropic belief system. She shows a sustained involvement in targeted philanthropic goals and activities, including one’s coursework, commitment to one’s major and career path (internships, volunteer or paid job experiences). She clearly articulates her belief in the philanthropic endeavor she has chosen and explains her personal rationale for commitment and engagement.

Step Four: Self-authored and Integrated Philanthropic Attitude and Identity

“Values and Conviction in Action Sustained over Time”

A young woman at this last step has largely defined her belief system and internal identity, which integrates a philanthropic attitude and identity. She is committed to being engaged in philanthropic activities in her life for the long haul, whether it be through her career or personal activities, or both. She is confident in her philanthropic identity based on *intrapersonal* introspection and reflection. This step requires extensive time to develop completely, since it reflects the depth of “self-authorship,” described by Robert Kegan (1994) and Marcia Baxter Magolda (2002), as the capacity to define one’s own beliefs and identity internally.

Conclusions and Implications of the Research

1. Experiential philanthropy courses affect the development of undergraduate women across four domains of learning, not only in intellectual growth alone. The impact on personal development (perspective-taking, self-efficacy and values) is significant

because all four elements tap into the growth of the “flourishing person,” which researchers have identified as critical during the college years and the years of emerging adulthood.

2. Experiential philanthropy courses are particularly well-suited as catalysts for personal development, with the combination of intellectual content, reflection, and engagement in giving away actual money to real non-profits in local communities. The decision-making process with actual money leads to a high level of student engagement in the course.
3. An experiential philanthropy course will impact students differentially, according to where each student is in her development of a philanthropic attitude and identity upon entering the course. Educators, by employing a variety of strategies and learning opportunities that target the four domains of learning identified in this study, have the opportunity to help students move along in their ongoing development of philanthropic identity and engagement..