



Implementing Community-Based Service Learning in the Textiles Classroom: Blue Jeans Go Green™ Denim Sustainability Project

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Innovative Approach or Practice that Merits Sharing with Others

Service learning is a community engagement pedagogy in which students take part in a wide range of experiences that benefit others, while also advancing the goals of the classroom curriculum and enhancing student growth (Bandy, 2019; Clevenger-Bright et al., 2012). Effective service learning should be “reciprocal”, meaning both those who provide and receive the service should learn from the experience (Furco, 1996; Sigmon, 1979). Previous research demonstrates that service learning increases undergraduate students’ sense of personal efficacy, awareness of the world, awareness of one’s personal values, and engagement in the classroom experience (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000). Guided by this theory and pedagogical method, the instructor implemented an apparel sustainability service program within an introductory textile science course. Students were provided the opportunity to participate in the Blue Jeans Go Green™ denim drive and given the tools via training to successfully organize and implement the program across campus. Students participated in the following service activities: (1) collection of denim, (2) event planning and marketing, (3) staffing campus and community-based events, (4) interaction with community stakeholders, and (5) preparation of collected denim for processing. Through these activities, students used textile curriculum knowledge of cotton fibers and denim fabrics to communicate the sustainability goals of the service program.

Purpose for Identified Audience

The purpose of disseminating this information through presentation to other educators is to assist instructors who wish to implement service learning projects within the context of the textile and apparel classroom. New instructors or those updating their course curriculum can benefit from the knowledge of someone who has coordinated and overseen the Blue Jeans Go Green™ program at two separate universities for a combined total of eight years. Any educator or advisor wishing to participate in a sustainability focused service project, or the Blue Jeans Go Green™ denim drive specifically, will find this information useful. The presentation will discuss the structure and implementation of the project within the classroom setting, as well as, overview the challenging barriers faced and how they were overcome in order to provide students with a successful service learning experience. Specific student reflection data and feedback will be presented for future improvement of similar programs.

Implementation of Practice Clearly Defined

Sustainability of the textile and apparel industry is part of the introduction to textiles curriculum and the ability to recycle specific fibers and fabrics is discussed. The Blue Jeans Go Green™ denim recycling program began in 2006 to divert textile waste from landfills and help building efforts in communities across the country (Cotton Incorporated, 2019). Any denim item may be

Page 1 of 3

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recycled (i.e. jeans, jacket, skirt, or dress) regardless of its condition, color, or finishing details. The collected denim is shipped to Bonded Logic where it is processed down to the original fiber state and manufactured into UltraTouch™ insulation. The insulation collected as part of the Blue Jeans Go Green™ program is donated to Habitat for Humanity. On average, 500 pairs of jeans will insulate one home.

In order to participate in the denim collection program, the instructor expressed interest via email to Cotton Incorporated. Requirements for participation included: 1) pledging to collect a minimum of 500 pieces of denim, 2) executing two tabling events on campus, 3) planning and hosting a larger community-based event, 4) placing and monitoring bins around campus/in the community, 5) weekly status calls and updates, and 6) working with various media channels to promote the drive. As part of the program, Cotton Incorporated provided on-site training including a meal for the students, a marketing and event supplies budget of \$250, and a \$500 incentive for meeting the required minimum pledge of 500 pieces with a \$250 bonus for exceeding it.

The instructor introduced the service learning project to the class during the lecture on cotton fibers when discussing their sustainability and recycling possibilities. The class expressed interest in participating and a training with Cotton Incorporated was scheduled after a commitment form was signed. A marketing executive with the program visited campus and presented a comprehensive training program that included relevant textiles content knowledge. At the end of the training, lead student coordinators volunteered. A chief student liaison was selected along with two lead assistants for assisting with event planning, public relations, and coordination of collection sites. The class was then responsible for planning two on-campus tabling events. They chose *Market Wednesday*, a weekly event held in a high traffic area of campus and the university's sustainability showcase. A community event was coordinated with a local coffee shop and after the first meeting, the students reached out to multiple retail partners in the same area. It was a huge success and provided the students with a great confidence boost when interacting with community stakeholders. The instructor posted reminders and facilitated participation in class and online via the course's learning management system.

Description of Success of Practice in Fostering Desired Learning Outcomes

A reflection survey was used to evaluate the success of the service learning project. Students were asked to provide feedback on their interest in and value of participating in community service, especially within the classroom. Out of 45 students in the class, 35 completed the reflection survey. All students agreed that participating in community service was important and 77% valued the opportunity to participate within the classroom environment. Transfer students, who make up a large majority of the program's population, expressed it was a great opportunity to get involved on campus and to get to know their peers better. All students found the face-to-face corporate training to be very informative and 100% indicated the service-learning project helped them to better understand the recycling potential of denim fabric and cotton fibers. These

Page 2 of 3

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results support previous findings in which the service experience is enhanced by the academic course material when training is provided prior to service participation (Astin et al., 2000).

Indication of Plans for Continuation, Revisions, or Follow-Up

The overarching response from students through the reflection survey indicated the service learning project was effective and a positive experience for most who were involved. Some students expressed conflicts with work and extracurricular schedules, as well as needing more incentive and freedom to participate. Executing such a project in a fairly large class (45 students) was also a challenge. In the future, the project should be introduced as early in the semester as possible, allowing the students to take on even larger leadership roles. Such an approach should increase the students' investment and therefore, incentive to participate.

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