

WHO TAKES EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING COURSES?

Jeffrey Furlong (Cathleen Zick)

Department of Family And Consumer Studies



The goal of this study is to show how experiential learning outcomes can influence the strategic planning of the College of Social and Behavioral Science (CSBS) at the University of Utah. This study utilizes surveys of current CSBS undergraduates and alumni to ascertain key quantifiable factors that are linked to enrollment in experiential learning courses known as community engaged learning (CEL) classes. Experiential learning is defined as extracurricular opportunities to enhance coursework and provide application of skills, including those opportunities provided in a CEL course. The potential importance of CEL courses is reflected in a survey of 1,098 CSBS alumni, where 80% of respondents reported that real world application/community engagement was somewhat or very important in attracting them to their CSBS major.

Information provided by a sample of 486 undergraduate CSBS majors is used in the statistical analysis. The dependent variable is ever having been enrolled in one or more CEL courses. Independent variables included academic career stage, major, race, gender, age, hours worked per week, and attitudes regarding their undergraduate experiences. Bivariate and tests of significance were done using chi-square statistics.

Among current undergraduate students, the results indicate that younger students, female students, and students working less than 20 hours per week are more likely to enroll in at least one CEL course. Currently, upperclassmen are likelier to have enrolled in CEL courses than are underclassmen. These findings are consistent with reviewed literature and expected observations of undergraduate students. The results of this study provide CSBS with information on whom to potentially target in any expansion of their experiential learning programming. There are several methods available to CSBS to move forward with experiential learning. One suggested approach involves better utilizing advisors in promoting CEL classes at an earlier point in students' academic careers. A second possible approach involves departments making CEL classes an introductory requirement to their majors. A final option would be to encourage students who took a CEL class as underclassmen to do a follow-up internship in their junior year to further strengthen their community expertise.

