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Bridging Civic Engagement to Civic Responsibility Through Short-Term,
International Service-Learning Experiences: A Qualitative Analysis of Student
Reflections

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Abstract

Written reflection is a tool commonly used by faculty to assess student learning in service-learning courses, which are frequently offered as short-term international experiences. This article discusses a qualitative analysis of students' written reflections on a short-term, international service-learning project that was conducted to determine whether undergraduate students bridged their engagement to the development of civic or social responsibility. Results of the analysis revealed that students demonstrated nominal progress toward civic responsibility when not specifically prompted by assignments. Multiple themes emerged from the analysis related to students' goals, challenges, and lessons learned. Based on the findings, the authors recommend that faculty, to encourage students' development of civic responsibility, be prepared to help students set goals and work through challenges, and to play an active role in supporting and guiding students in processing their experiences in a transformational manner.

Keywords: service-learning, civic engagement, civic responsibility, reflection, qualitative, health, education, sociology

Since the 1990s, there has been significant growth in the utilization of service-learning as a vehicle to engage and develop civically responsible students. Globally, colleges and universities have incorporated service-learning into their curricula to respond to the renewed call for education for the public good. As described by Cress (2006), the goal of service-learning is “the development of civically minded students who possess analytical problem solving abilities and self-identify as community change agents as a direct consequence of their community-based learning experiences.”

While students have reported increases in civic-oriented thought and awareness after participating in service-learning courses (Astin, Volgelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Sax, 2004; Wang, 2013), the ability to comprehensively assess a student’s commitment to and understanding of civic responsibility as a result of such courses has been met with mixed results (Brandes & Randall, 2011). Enmeshed in this effort is the use of reflection as a vehicle for both expressing and assessing students’ civic development.

Reflection has long represented the heart of service-learning, the “crucible moment” that bridges experience and theory, bringing to life the foundations of John Dewey’s philosophical thought, that education must engage with and enlarge experience through active and persistent reflection. Interpreting Dewey, Bringle and Hatcher (1999) noted that “experience becomes educative when critical reflective thought creates new meaning and leads to growth and the ability to take informed actions” (p. 180). The use of written reflection, predominantly through journaling, is one of the most frequently used tools in service-learning courses. However, questions remain about the legitimacy of journaling as a vehicle for developing critical thinkers (Dymont & O’Connell, 2011). The question for faculty then becomes one related both to preparing students for reflective writing and to assessment.

Incorporating service-learning into short term study-abroad experiences has presented students with opportunities for acquiring not only new information, but also language, cultural awareness and appreciation, and an appreciation of diversity and difference (Zamastil-Vondrova, 2005). Short-term study-abroad experiences, defined as those that occur over fewer than eight weeks, are most commonly offered by colleges and universities (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). According to the Institute of International Education’s (IIE) 2016 Open Doors report, 63% of all study-abroad students in the 2014-2015 academic year participated in a short-term experience

(IIE, 2016). This type of experience has gained popularity among students due to the reduced financial implications, relative ease of travel during winter and summer breaks, and less threatening nature for students with little to no overseas experience (Tarrant & Lyons, 2012).

Service-Learning Project

Students in this study engaged in a short-term (i.e., two-week) faculty-led service-learning project in collaboration with a community-based nonprofit organization in the Dominican Republic. This organization focuses on local issues related to education, social services, and public health, empowering communities by working collaboratively to address key challenges. During the first week of the project, students immersed themselves in Dominican culture by living with families in a city center, partaking in Spanish-language classes, and attending lectures on relevant health topics and on Dominican culture, family, and community development. Students visited hospitals, local clinics, and nonprofit partners to build their knowledge of the infrastructure of social services. They also spent time with the local staff of the partnering nonprofit who assisted the student with the finalization of their health education workshops, presented during the second week to community members.

In the second week of the project, students changed locations, moving outside the city to a more rural batey community. Batey communities are settlements established by the agricultural workers of sugar cane plantations and often comprise low-income Haitian and Dominican workers; generally, the housing conditions are poor, often lacking running water, electricity, and proper sanitation (Ferguson, 2003). While this particular batey no longer serves the sugar cane industry, community residents remain in poverty, with poor living conditions, limited resources, and limited opportunities for education. During this week, students resided together in a retreat center just outside the batey community to allow for appropriate group accommodations and evening activities. During the day they collaborated on a service activity in the community that centered on delivering health education workshops to community youth leaders and school children. Students also assisted community members with the construction of a community basketball court.

Purpose of Study

This study comprised a qualitative analysis of students' written reflection assignments to assess their ability to bridge civic engagement to civic responsibility. The aim was to extrapolate meaning and themes from student reflections to inform and support service-learning pedagogy.

Methods

Participants

The study participants were undergraduate students from a private, liberal arts college with an enrollment of approximately 3,000 students located in the northeastern United States. Students completed a service-learning course, which included a two-week service project in the Dominican Republic in January 2015. A total of 10 of the 14 students who participated in the course completed all nine requisite written reflection assignments and were included in the study. The students were registered in an interdisciplinary course divided into a two-credit preparation course in the fall of 2014 and a one-credit course in the spring of 2015 that included the January travel time. Of the 10 students included in the research, there were 9 females and 1 male. At the time of the January travel, students ranged in age from 19 to 22 and represented a variety of majors, including physical therapy, physician assistant, health promotion, modern language, and natural science.

Assignments

Pre-service assignment. During the semester prior to the travel, students were required to attend six, 80-minute classes in order to prepare for the immersion experience and the service project. Class time included orientation, fundraising ideas to offset travel costs, and discussions about the collaboration with the international service organization and its role in the community. In addition, students were required to complete one pre-service assignment (analyzed in this study) in which they outlined three goals they wished to achieve during their time in the Dominican Republic. Students also spent this pre-service time developing a health education workshop, to be presented in the Dominican Republic, centering on either nutrition or family planning.

In-service assignments. While in the Dominican Republic, students completed an additional seven reflective writing assignments, each exploring a different topic, including: student-identified challenges during their stay in the Dominican Republic, healthcare system comparison, family life and function in both the city center and batey community, students' experience in the service

project, their experience overall, and a letter to their future self. Students were not given specific prompts to relate their experiences to civic or social responsibility; rather, they were instructed to provide genuine, thoughtful reflections on their experiences. In addition, the faculty advisor and the staff of the nonprofit organization created group activities to help support team dynamics. These included mandatory evening team meetings, which allowed for leadership-building activities and structured discussion to facilitate the processing of the day's activities and experiences. These opportunities for oral reflection were faculty- or staff-led and utilized broad prompts such as, "How was your day today"? or "What did you think of your experience today?" Students were not required to contribute to each discussion, and oral discussions were not recorded and therefore not included in the analysis.

Post-service assignment. The final assignment was a reflection paper due one month after the students returned from the Dominican Republic. Specifically, students were prompted to reflect upon their time in the Dominican Republic by revisiting their goals, recounting their accomplishments and what they learned, and defining their roles in terms of "civic responsibility" and "global citizenship."

Qualitative

Analysis

Student assignments were de-identified and analyzed using NVivo software (version 11) to facilitate the process of inductive content analysis, which is a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 18). The units of analysis included student pre-service, in-service, and post-service reflection papers. We immersed ourselves in the data by reading and re-reading the reflections; the coding process was guided by the assignment topics to assist in identifying student observations and categories from the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) civic engagement VALUE rubric, and identifying student processing. The rubric categories that aligned best with this particular service-learning experience were diversity of communities and cultures, civic identity and commitment, civic communication, and civic action and reflection. The codes were then grouped by theme and subtheme through the process of abstraction. We analyzed the data using the NVivo software, and then the codings were compared for agreement.

The VALUE rubric was selected to guide the coding since it is well-recognized within institutions of higher education as a model for assessing student learning outcomes. AAC&U defines civic engagement as

working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. In addition, civic engagement encompasses actions wherein individuals participate in activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community. (as cited in Ehrlich, 2000)

Results

Analysis of the qualitative data resulted in the identification of four themes based on assignment topics: goals, challenges, identification of differences between the lived experiences of students and the communities in which they were working, and lessons learned. Additionally, four themes with relevant subthemes aligning with the VALUE rubric categories also emerged: diversity of communities and cultures, civic identity and commitment, civic communication, and civic action and reflection. The number of references to these themes and subthemes were reported as the number of times the theme appeared in any student writing and was therefore not necessarily a reflection of the number of students.

Analysis Based on Assignment Topics

Themes and sub-themes.

Goals. In the semester prior to the service immersion (fall of 2014), students were asked to identify three goals they wished to accomplish in the course. Five main goals emerged, the most prevalent being gaining a better understanding of the Dominican culture (seven references) followed by Spanish-language practice or acquisition (six references) and “mak[ing] a difference”/helping people (six references). Five references were made to expanding horizons and pushing boundaries and three to learning about differences. See Table 1.

Table 1

In-Service Written Assignment Theme: Goals

Subtheme	Representative Example	# of References	% of References
Better understanding of Dominican culture	“Learn and understand Dominican culture and compare it to my own in the U.S.”	7	30%
Spanish-language practice or acquisition	“Make significant improvements in my Spanish-speaking abilities”	6	22%
Help others/make a difference	“Gain a greater respect for community service and helping those who are less fortunate than I.”	6	22%
Expand horizons/push boundaries	“I would like to expand my horizons in terms of experiencing things I never have before.”	5	19%
Learn about differences	“I would love to experience the differences between people of different incomes and how their lifestyles vary.”	3	11%

Note. The number of references is reported as the number of times the subtheme appears in any student writing and is not necessarily a reflection of the number of students. Comments may fit into more than one theme/subtheme, so the sum of percentages may exceed 100%.

Challenges. Students reported experiencing numerous challenges shortly after arriving in the Dominican Republic. The challenge most often reported was witnessing poverty firsthand. There were 17 references regarding students’ shock and discomfort with the level of poverty in the rural areas in which they worked. Five of these references were made by a single student, two of which included the term “devastated.” Lack of hot water presented a significant challenge for students, especially early on, and was referenced 13 times. Other personal challenges included language (nine references), hygiene concerns (five references), lack of

Internet access (six references), and food concerns (five references). Students also expressed concern for community members' health regarding to unsafe water consumption in the batey (five references). See Table 2.

Table 2

In-Service Written Assignment Theme: Challenges

Subtheme	Representative Example	# of References	% of References
Viewing poverty	"I've seen pictures of poor communities and people all the time, but I have never actually walked around in an impoverished community and witnessed poverty firsthand."	17	28%
Lack of hot water	"The first challenge I had to overcome throughout the trip was not having warm water."	13	22%
Language barriers	"Not being able to speak Spanish in a Spanish-speaking country is definitely a challenge."	9	15%
Lack of Internet access	"I felt so disconnected to the world because I wasn't connected to the Internet."	6	10%
Food differences	"Their food is very different."	5	8%
Hygiene concerns	"They simply just throw away soiled toilet paper into the garbage. This challenge tests my comfort level a little bit."	5	8%
Water safety concerns	"Many of the batey families do not have clean drinking water."	5	8%

Note. The number of references is reported as the number of times the subtheme appears in any student writing and is not necessarily a reflection of the number of students. Comments may fit into more than one theme/subtheme, so the sum of percentages may exceed 100%.

Identification of differences. Students' written reflections revealed three main subthemes: lack of material belongings and accommodations, family structure, and health practices. The lack of material belongings and other accommodations was difference that students noted most frequently. A total of 44 references were made by all of the students in the course. Further analysis showed that the students made 39% of the observations in this area when they were staying in the city center. The majority of differences noted here revolved around the lack of appliances, furniture, and hot water in homes. The remaining 61% of references in this area were made when the students were serving in the batey. Of these, 17 references pertained to living conditions: homes made of found materials, dirt floors, lack of bathrooms and kitchens, lack of furniture, etc. The remaining 10 references centered on the children, highlighting that most were shoeless, many lacked appropriate clothing, and almost all lacked parental or adult supervision. Twelve references focused on the close-knit nature of Dominican families and the multiple generations that often live in the same household. Most notably, students wrote about the intimate nature of familial relationships, including family members sharing a bedroom and/or a bed with adult children. Regarding health practices, there were six references to the lack of family planning knowledge and practice in the batey. See Table 3.

Table 3

In-Service Written Assignment Theme: Cultural Differences

Subtheme	Representative Example	# of References	% of References
Lack of material belongings and accommodations	"In the Dominican they do not care if they have the most up-to-date items, they just like to have items that will work and get the job done."	44	71%
Family structure	"My home stay family had extended family living underneath one roof."	12	19%
Health practices	"It was interesting to see the similarities and differences between	6	10%

their culture and ours in regards to
being educated about sex and
contraception.”

Note. The number of references is reported as the number of times the subtheme appears in any student writing and is not necessarily a reflection of the number of students. Comments may fit into more than one theme/subtheme, so the sum of percentages may exceed 100%.

Lessons learned. The writing assignments revealed lessons learned as students reflected upon their experiences. The written reflections were coded into 10 different subthemes, the most noted being appreciation and gratitude (20% of all references), signaling the observations they made while in the Dominican Republic and their appreciation for their own life and privilege. While the majority of students did not delve deeper than surface gratitude, a few students drew deeper meaning from the course, reflecting on how gratitude can translate into action. One student stated, “I will definitely take this part of the Dominican culture back with me appreciating all that I do have and not living in so much waste and excess.” Another student wrote that the experience “gave me a new perspective on the opportunities that I am presented with here in the U.S.”

Students referenced three subthemes at least 12 times each. One of these subthemes was the desire to continue serving others. Two thirds of the reflections around this subtheme focused on the students’ desire to either take additional coursework that would incorporate international service opportunities or find their own. One third of the written reflections acknowledged that students may not recognize the need that exists in their own communities. These students expressed their desire to find volunteer opportunities in their local communities upon returning.

The second subtheme was rooted in communication. While the vast majority of students wrote about the necessity to learn and practice Spanish, a few recognized that there are other ways of communicating when language is a barrier. These students reflected on their ability to communicate with hand gestures, sounds, facial expressions, and body language, and expressed surprise at the effectiveness and ease of use of these methods.

The third subtheme related to being “disconnected” while in the Dominican Republic. Cell phone reception and Internet access was unavailable when students were in the batey, and unreliable in the city center. Students commented that they enjoyed “living in the moment” and felt more relaxed. Interspersed throughout their writings were also reflections about living with less and surviving without luxuries like technology and social media, but also without electricity and hot water. One student remarked that they were “definitely going to cut down on my electricity and running/hot water consumption when I get home.” Another student stated, “Don’t live in so much excess; get rid of things you don’t need, and try not to be wasteful.”

Additional subthemes within the lessons learned theme, included learning about Dominican history and culture, gaining confidence and pushing boundaries, becoming more flexible, understanding poverty, and becoming more independent. See Table 4.

Table 4

In-Service Written Assignment Theme: Lessons Learned

Subtheme	Representative Example	# of References	% of References
Appreciation/ Gratitude	“It helped me to appreciate the things I have back home in the U.S. as well as to not take things for granted.”	19	20%
Desire to continue to serve others	“It is important to me that my service for this area doesn’t end with this trip, whether I return or make donations or encourage other people to go.”	12	13%
Communication	“Knowing the language is important but if you do not know it, there are different ways to try to get the message across.”	12	13%
To be disconnected/ survive without luxuries	“I really liked just living in the moment, instead of texting all my friends or taking a picture of everything I was doing.”	12	13%
Learn about the culture and history of the Dominican Republic	“I loved to learn about the history of the DR and their current state of public affairs – we hear so much about the US growing up but never get a world view of many topics.”	11	12%
Gain confidence/push boundaries	“I have gained a confidence to be able to step out of my comfort zone and have new and different experiences without hesitation.”	10	11%
Immersion in a new culture	“I have gained a lot of respect for ways of life other than my own and I feel I	9	10%

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	am a much more accepting and understanding person because of it.”		
Become more independent	“Another thing I learned in the Dominican was how to be more independent.”	3	3%
Better understand poverty	“This trip has opened my eyes to things I have overlooked even in the U.S.”	3	3%
Increase flexibility	“One of the things I learned was how to be more flexible with time and schedules.”	2	2%

Note. The number of references is reported as the number of times the subtheme appears in any student writing and is not necessarily a reflection of the number of students. Comments may fit into more than one theme/subtheme, so the sum of percentages may exceed 100%.

Analysis Based on VALUE Rubric Categories

Diversity of communities and cultures. A total of 66 references were identified within this theme; 44% related to observations, as noted earlier, while the students were in the batey. Comments about the lack of adult supervision of children were made without acknowledgement of differences in family dynamics and community norms. Comments around home construction and design did not acknowledge availability of materials, climate, and needs versus comforts. Again, as noted previously, when students were in the city center, references relative to this theme focused on differences in family living situations (e.g., sharing rooms, etc.) and decisions regarding family budgets and household management (e.g., decisions to purchase a television or designer eyeglasses on a limited budget) without considering family dynamics, making room for homestay students, and cultural differences regarding the need for material belongings.

Some students did demonstrate curiosity and deeper thought about the circumstances surrounding their observations. For instance, comparing families in the city center and the batey, one student wrote that “my family in [the city center] was isolated from their neighbors, and in [the batey], it seemed to be one big community because people were always socializing in the streets.” In contrasting living situations in the city center and in the batey, another student wrote, “it makes me think: What am I not paying attention to at home.”

Two students questioned why their observations were surprising to them and explored how coming from a different culture may have influenced their earlier reactions. One of these students noted that the community members “seemed to have healthy imaginations, confidence, and friendships with each other, something that we can definitely learn from for ourselves and our own children.” Another student commented on the use of music in the classroom and the important role it plays in the cultural identity of Dominicans. Additionally, students indicated that while the homes in the city center were lacking in the amenities they were accustomed to—for example, hot water, small kitchen appliances, washing machines, and/or dryers—this was the norm for Dominican families.

Finally, six students identified the importance of recognizing cultural differences as a learning tool. As one student reflected, for example, “I now have a deep appreciation and respect for cultures other than my own and a curiosity and open-mind to learn even more.”

Civic action and reflection. Thirty-eight references were coded under the theme of civic action and reflection; 71% focused on the good feeling students experienced while providing service. Students remarked that they “felt accomplished” and had “an amazing experience getting to help people that are less fortunate.” The remaining 29% focused more on the lasting impact their service project (i.e., the health education workshops) had on the community. Students wrote about their health education workshops and how “that knowledge can be passed on and spread throughout the community and then built upon.” One student spoke of the ability to “inspire [community members] to take it into their own hands to tackle these problems and make a difference in their own community.”

Civic identity and commitment. Students made 18 references regarding feelings of commitment to further civic engagement; 22% of these were primarily about their engagement as required by the course. These reflections focused on their service in terms of what they accomplished while in the Dominican Republic as part of class expectations. For example, one student said, “This trip was a service learning trip, so we were actually there to help and share our services with another country.”

The remaining 78% of references more clearly demonstrated a commitment to public action. One student wrote, “It is important to me that my service does not end with this trip and I will continue to work towards bettering communities on both local and global scales for the rest of my life.” That same student remarked, “I see myself as a human being who has a duty to help other human beings regardless of the place.” Another student noted, “This experience has taught me to become more civically responsible and become more interested in being a global citizen.” Finally, four students wrote about their desire to find ways to volunteer and give back in their local communities.

Civic communication. Twelve references were coded for civic communication, specifically identifying students’ ability to express, listen, and adapt ideas based on others’ perspectives. For example, one student wrote that the experience taught her/him to “open myself to expand my point of view and taught me some important lessons about humility and gratitude in the end.” Another remarked, “I believe that we also need to realize the differences our cultures all have and embrace those traditions as well.”

Discussion

This study focused on students' abilities to bridge civic engagement to civic responsibility as a result of participation in a short-term, international service-learning course. The findings indicated that while students were able to make observations regarding their engagement, their ability to process its meaning and demonstrate further intentions related to civic responsibility were minimal or underdeveloped.

We found that students, in terms of processing their experiences, were able to identify what they believed to be concerns in the community (e.g., children who were seemingly unsupervised and under-clothed, batey home construction and design, etc.); however, they struggled to move beyond a one-sided view toward a critical examination of these concerns and a deeper acknowledgement of community and cultural norms.

Students' development of civic identity and commitment to public action can be divided into three main areas: personal commitment, environmental commitment, and community commitment. The vast majority of references that students made comprised superficial notions of donating materials they no longer needed (personal commitment) or reducing hot water usage (environmental commitment). Though there were references that demonstrated community commitment, it should be noted that the post-service reflection paper specifically prompted students to address civic responsibility and global citizenship. Regardless of this prompt, some students may still need additional support from faculty in developing intentional future engagement opportunities in their local communities. At institutions where engagement is required, it may be even more critical to help students develop a personal desire for and understanding of civic action and responsibility beyond course expectations.

In consideration of the themes that evolved from assignment topics, it is worth noting that some students were able to reconcile their personal challenges. However, generally, early assistance from faculty during course orientation could engage students in strategies to prepare for and overcome such challenges, thereby allowing them to focus on the collaborative approaches to addressing the community's challenges. An egocentric perspective was apparent in students' reflections on lessons learned. The multiple mentions of gratitude for what they have and a newfound commitment to letting go of what they did not need, highlighted the materialistic nature of their views. While this could be attributed to developmental factors, this ostensible reluctance or inability to move beyond the

self or to explore deeper meanings may have been attributable to shortened exposure and to the timing of the written reflection assignments, which limited the opportunity for processing (immediate or within hours of the experience and without directed prompts to revisit the particular experience in the final paper). Brown (2014) stressed the importance of timing:

Reflection transforms experience into authentic learning. At the time of the experience, the students are “in the moment” and do not have time to fully understand the experience; it is only later, when they have time to write and reflect, that students begin to analyze their feelings, deconstruct their experience, and put it in the perspective of their previous schema. (p. 83)

Timing should also be considered when utilizing both oral and written reflection methods due to the potential influence of group reflection on individual journaling. It is important to recognize that shared experiences can be equally influential in shaping student learning and processing of experiences.

Our findings aligned with the framework set forth by Perry and Martin (2016) in their multi-case analysis of the implementation of authentic reflection practices. This framework outlines three factors that facilitate authentic and effective reflection: timing (as discussed earlier), varied formats and contexts, and advisor (faculty) strategies.

Thus, future research should explore oral, written, and creative formats for reflection that also include group and individual approaches. These should be considered for the pre-service, in-service, and post-service stages of the experience. Faculty should consider strategies around pre-service goal setting, inclusive of both personal as well as community-oriented goals. In addition, faculty should carefully consider factors related to both directed/prompted and unprompted designs for oral discussions and written assignments as they seek to aid students in developing their awareness, recognizing and identifying their own initial responses, and then engaging in deeper, more meaningful reflection. The challenge for faculty members is in balancing the faculty-led, prompted activities (so that students who are struggling to make connections are guided and supported), while also allowing for unprompted student-led learning that allows for the development of more natural reflection and progression. The use of directed prompts and early access to course rubrics can draw attention to particular issues, perspectives, or intended outcomes that, left unrecognized, may hinder the authenticity of students’ writing and lead to

questionable student outcomes. Without an appropriate balance of prompted and unprompted learning activities, and without well-designed pre-service preparation and student goal setting, it is less likely that students will be able to process their experiences in a transformational manner and/or naturally demonstrate intentions toward civic responsibility based merely on a scheduled engagement in a community-based project.

The study was limited by its small sample size. A larger class size would allow for greater generalizability as well as more robust content for analysis. Future research, namely longitudinal studies, are needed to assess the persistence of civic-responsibility activities following short-term, institutionally mandated experiences.

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Author Biographies



Stephanie Malinenko earned a Master of Business Administration degree, specializing in Public Administration from Medaille College. She is an Assistant Professor of Health Promotion at Daemen College and teaches in the areas of community health education, health behavior theory, and social determinants of health. Prior to this, she served as a founder and Executive Director of the Western New York Service Learning Coalition, a consortium of eleven colleges and universities and over 140 community partner organizations focusing on building regional capacity for service-learning at both the institutional and community level. In this role, she consulted with colleges and universities to help establish campus service-learning offices and facilitated trainings for faculty in course conversion to incorporate service-learning in the curriculum.



Justine Tutuska holds a Master of Public Health degree specializing in Health Promotion, from San Diego State University. She is an Associate Professor and the Department Chair of the Health Promotion department at Daemen College and teaches coursework in the areas of health education and promotion, global health and international service learning. Professor Tutuska has coordinated and advised international service-learning projects in the Dominican Republic, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. In addition, she is an International Trainer for the International Association of Infant Massage, headquartered in Sweden, offering professional education in the United States through Infant Massage USA.



Dr. Matthews is a graduate of the West Virginia University Athletic Training program, earned her Master of Science degree at Bradley university, a Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy at the State University of New York at Buffalo and her Doctor of Physical Therapy from Daemen College. Dr. Matthews developed and served as Chair of the Athletic Training program at Daemen College where she presently serves as a full-time Athletic Training faculty member teaching orthopedic evaluation, treatment and rehabilitation.

Dr. Matthews is a fellow of the American Academy of Physical Therapists and is a Maitland Certified Orthopedic Manual Therapist. Dr. Matthews has been working in the outpatient orthopedic setting as an athletic trainer since the early 1980s and has continued to work in this setting as a physical therapist since 2000. Dr. Matthews has served on faculty led service projects to Haiti, Viet Nam, Ghana, Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and Dominican Republic.