Incorporating volunteer work into course assignments

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Class context

• Criminology 3rd year
• Lectures, but interactive with discussions and in-class activities
• Additional platform: On Q (video/audio, grades, PP slides, discussion forum)
• Support: 2-3 teaching assistants
• Class sessions: 2 one hour and 20 minutes lectures per week

Evaluation:

5% Participation: includes short group discussion write-ups and short individual assignments.
20% Midterm test
30% Essay
45% Final exam
Choice between two assignments

**Essay Assignment A**

Design/Refine a Program for the Prevention or Control of Crime

- Your goal is to design a program (or refine an existing one) to prevent and/or reduce crime. The program should pay close attention to gender differences in offending or victimization.

- You are writing the program proposal for one of two agencies (your choice): Correctional Service of Canada or the Toronto Police Service (Your proposal will not be sent to either agency. The agencies are named here to help you consider your audience when writing the program proposal).

- Your double-spaced typed 15 page (maximum) paper is due at the start of class on **Monday 7th November 2016**. Late papers will be penalized 10% per day overdue (out of 100 possible). You may write the paper on your own or in collaboration with a classmate from SOCY389.

**Essay Assignment B**

Volunteer Work Related to SOCY389: Reflect on Your Experiences

- This course offers an opportunity for students participating in volunteer work to connect these experiences to a university-level criminology course.

- A minimum of 15 hours of volunteer work must be completed between May and December 2016.

- For your assignment, you need only write a short summary of your activities and bring course materials to bear on these experiences in some way.

- Your grade is determined by a short (about 10 pages) double-spaced typed paper due at the start of class on **Monday 7th November 2016**. Late papers will be penalized 10% per day overdue (out of 100 possible). Here is a suggested outline for your essay:
Rationale

Essay Assignment B
Volunteer Work Related to SOCY389: Reflect on Your Experiences

• Over the years, I have discovered numerous students enrolled in SOCY389 are engaged in volunteer work related to criminology, policing, social welfare, and corrections. This course offers an opportunity for students participating in volunteer work to connect these experiences to a university-level criminology course.

• Volunteer work closely related to the topics of SOCY389 might include: volunteering in corrections and local community programs, youth diversion, summer camps for disadvantaged and at-risk youths, policing, probation and parole services, victims services, crisis hotlines, shelters for battered women, shelters for the homeless, courts, and literacy programs in prisons.
What’s involved

Distributed Day 1 with syllabus

• A minimum of 15 hours of volunteer work must be completed between May and December 2016. If you are not currently volunteering, but are interested to get involved and to write this assignment, I have provided some links where you can locate opportunities (see below).

• For your assignment, you need only write a short summary of your activities and bring course materials to bear on these experiences in some way. Your grade is determined by a short (about 10 pages) double-spaced typed paper due at the start of class on Monday 7th November 2016. Late papers will be penalized 10% per day overdue (out of 100 possible). Here is a suggested outline for your essay:
Sections in assignment

Volunteer Work Description [1 paragraph]
• Describe what you did, where, when, and how you did it, and with whom.

Organization Goals and Challenges [1 page]
• What is the organization trying to accomplish? Is this formally stated somewhere or something you simply picked up from other workers?
• What barriers or challenges to success does this organization face? Try to cite specific incidents or examples.

Current State of Knowledge [2-3 pages]
• What do we know about the success of similar programs?
• I want at least 5 academic sources (e.g., books and journals). You may also cite government publications, program literature, and personal interviews with academics and practitioners.
• Try to make a critical, unbiased evaluation of existing sources. Don’t “oversell” your approach.
Bring Course Materials to Bear on the Experience [1-2 pages]

- You have some choices here. You may discuss the “working theory” used by the organization (for example, a juvenile probation program may be based on deterrence theory or labeling theory) or its workers.
- You might also comment on how the agency’s practices may be consistent or inconsistencies with social science research on delinquency.
- You might note typical experiences and unexpected or atypical experiences that reveal something useful about how the organization operates.

Evaluation and Conclusion [1 paragraph]

- What did you think of your experience? Would you suggest any changes in how the organization operates?

Bibliography [1 page]

- I would like to see about 5 to 10 decent sources referenced.
- Credit all sources (names, dates, titles, page numbers, etc.) so I can refer to them if necessary.
- Use A.S.A. formatting style.

More sections (and note space specifications)
This was to give structure & also comparability across papers.
I required proof of hours but kept it simple.

Confirmation of Volunteer Hours

• Attach a letter from your supervisor documenting the dates (e.g., 15 September to 5 November 2016) and number of hours of your volunteer work (e.g., 22 hours to date) and briefly describing your volunteer role (e.g., provided one-on-one tutoring as part of the literacy program at Collins Bay institution). This can be 1-2 sentences. Include your supervisor’s contact information. To make the task easier, you can type the note and ask your supervisor to fill in the details and sign.
For those of you seeking volunteer opportunities in the local community, here are a few ideas:

• E. Fry Kingston: 613) 544-1744 and [http://www.efrykingston.ca/get-involved](http://www.efrykingston.ca/get-involved)
• John Howard Society of Kingston: 613) 542-7373 and [http://johnhoward.on.ca/kingston/volunteers/](http://johnhoward.on.ca/kingston/volunteers/)
• Literacy Program Initiative (Queen’s University and Frontier College) – promoting literacy in women’s shelters and prisons: [http://queensstudentsforliteracy.blogspot.ca/](http://queensstudentsforliteracy.blogspot.ca/)
• Sexual Assault Center Kingston: [http://www.sackingston.com/page-857059](http://www.sackingston.com/page-857059)
• City of Kingston: [https://www.cityofkingston.ca/residents/recreation/programs/other/volunteers](https://www.cityofkingston.ca/residents/recreation/programs/other/volunteers)
• Youth Diversion Program Kingston: [http://www.youthdiversion.org/index.cfm/volunteer/](http://www.youthdiversion.org/index.cfm/volunteer/)
• Homeless Services (Several shelters are listed on the website): [https://www.cityofkingston.ca/residents/community-services/housing/homeless](https://www.cityofkingston.ca/residents/community-services/housing/homeless)

I provided a list: Where to find volunteering opportunities
How did it go?

POSITIVES:
• Students appreciated having option to choose between 2 assignments.
• They liked the idea of collaborating (assignment A).
• LOTS of enthusiasm for volunteer assignment B.

COMPLICATIONS:
• Students writing volunteer assignment needed more support
• Lots of questions!
• My impression: ½ the class writing on volunteering assignment.
• Several wanted to use paid work experience (i.e., summer camp counselor, security guard) to substitute for volunteer work.
• Only 3 had past volunteer work experience, most needed to find volunteer opportunities. So I needed to coordinate some of this.
Essay A (Program Proposal)
• 32 individual papers
• 22 collaborative papers

Essay B (Volunteer experience)
• 9 papers

• Total = 85 students wrote (+ 8 extensions)
• 11% of class wrote on volunteer assignment

Statistics:
Mean average: 76.62%
Median: 77%
Min: 55.5%
Max: 91%

1. Grades high: due to structure & enthusiasm.
2. Water theory: opt for least writing effort (Essay A collaborative with 44 students)
What I’d do differently

• Most students started volunteer work that semester (so post volunteer agency listings on Q before start of term & launch students early)

• Provide greater incentive to undertake volunteer-related assignment:
  • Remove option to collaborate on program evaluation paper (alternative)
  • Widen page length difference between assignments (20 pages vs. 10 pages).
  • University of Minnesota offers 50% of assignment grade based on volunteering and there is credit toward degree based on volunteer work.
  • Run tutorials to help students writing volunteering assignment
  • Widen volunteering to include paid work (parole, youth diversion, summer camps, policing, drug treatment program workers, etc.) – so it’s an ‘experiential’ rather than volunteering-based assignment.