

Johnson University's Quality Enhancement Plan

Metacognitive Understanding for Service Engagement: *Helping students recognize the reciprocity between their classroom learning and their service-learning.*

In 2012 Johnson University implemented an ambitious revision of the General Education curriculum (now called the “Arts and Sciences Core”), followed in subsequent years by a revision to the Service and Learning Together (SALT) service-learning program. These revisions sought to enhance student learning by emphasizing the development of critical thinking and bringing the curriculum in line with the University’s new mission statement. Although our initial assessments of these changes have been positive, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has identified an area of concern by noting that a significant number of Johnson University students do not feel challenged to think critically and do not engage in metacognitive activities such as regular review of their study notes.

In consultation with University faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders, we have developed the Metacognitive Understanding for Service Engagement (M.U.S.E.) program, which uses metacognitive strategies to help students make connections between their learning in the core curriculum and their learning in the SALT program. The metacognitive strategies put in place by this program provide a framework for helping students “bridge the gap” identified by the NSSE survey between *what* they encounter in the classroom and *how* they experience and capture that learning. We determined that the correlation between the core curriculum and the service-learning program offers a natural pathway to focus and orient this QEP. The University’s mission statement emphasizes the goal of preparing students for service-oriented vocations, and this QEP engages students in a metacognitive triangle between the core curriculum, the service-learning program, and the University’s mission. The strength of our QEP lies in its potential to develop in our students an “empowered execution” of their own education, whereby they assume responsibility for their learning and for the larger implications of *why* their learning matters both now and after they leave our university.

To meet our goal of helping students recognize the reciprocity between their classroom and service learning, this QEP includes three components. In the first component, the curricular module, five lower division Arts and Sciences core courses were designed to include metacognitive techniques that help students reflect on their learning in the wider context of their field service and the University’s mission. The second component, the service reflection groups, bridge connections between students’ field of study and their service-learning placement by having students meet regularly to reflect on their experience in a small group and complete assignments connected to their service-learning. The third is a new active learning, service-based, field research component that helps students tie together the service learning and core curricula.

Dr. Kirk McClelland, Associate Professor of Service-Learning and Faculty Director of Service Engagement, is directing the quality enhancement plan and can be reached at the following email address: KMcclelland@johnsonu.edu