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Whole-Person Education Through an Integrated Silliman University Nutrition and Dietetics Service- Learning Program

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The education of the whole person is education for total human development. While the BSND curriculum is aligned with the competency-based standards, it is also aligned with the WPE approach of the University. This paper discusses how the SUND S-L program strengthened the students' competence, character, and faith – attributes of Silliman University's Whole-Person Education approach. This qualitative-descriptive design follows the implementation of the S-L program of SUND. Pre S-L activities were conducted, such as an S-L seminar and workshop on journal-writing. Following their exposure in the partner community, guided student reflections were performed, and students' responses were processed. Results of the thematic review of the students' reflections showed that students found the experience to have elevated their learning and appreciated the concepts, principles, and the application of the skills in nutrition and dietetics in real-world situations. The students felt that they were more empathetic and developed a better understanding and ability to recognize the value of social responsibility. Also, the students found that the activities helped them become more humble and caring for others in need. Furthermore, the SUND S-L's integrated approach promoted the enriched learning experience of the students and, therefore, to whole-person education. Based on the students' responses, the S-L program was able to reinforce the WPE attributes of competence, character, and faith. It is recommended that an integrated S-L approach be formally incorporated in the BSND curriculum to nurture the philosophy and practice of whole-person education.

Keywords: WPE, competence, character, faith, nutrition and dietetics

INTRODUCTION

Silliman University (SU), a Christian higher education institution in the Philippines, derives its motto – “Via Veritas Vita” – from John 14:16, which emphasizes Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. In a speech during the opening worship service for the 114th Founding Anniversary of the University, former SU Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Everett L. Mendoza (2015), said that students who study in Silliman become experts in their field of choice and persons of character by teaching the student the way of God. Dr. Mendoza added that Silliman seeks to ensure that its students are armed with God’s Veritas or truth and not be swayed by propaganda disguised as truth. Furthermore, Mendoza (2015) defined Vita as life-in-God, promoting a person’s God-given freedom to serve others. Serving others can be done through the various community activities through SU’s brand of whole-person education.

Whole-person education (WPE) is an educational model focused on complete Christian formation and involves the student’s mental, physical, social, and spiritual attributes (Legg, 2019). In other words, to make the whole-person Christian education possible, it is essential to involve several dimensions founded on transforming the human spirit that conforms to God’s image (Chandler, 2015). The United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia (UBCHEA) sees WPE as a connection with academics and values through developing a person intellectually, spiritually, and ethically (UBCHEA, 2019).

In an interview with the UBCHEA (2016), former SU President, Dr. Ben S. Malayang III, defined SU’s WPE “as an education that builds competence, character, and faith in God.” Dr. Malayang further explained that the essence of WPE at Silliman is “elevating and transforming a person to have a higher ability to learn, a higher capacity to live, a higher ability to serve others, and a higher ability to serve and to see God” (UBCHEA, 2016). Silliman’s approach to WPE is reflected in the University’s Five C’s of education, which includes the classroom, the church, the cultural center, the court, and the community.

The HE-Nutrition and Dietetics Department (SUND), a unit of SU which offers the BS Nutrition and Dietetics (BSND) program, has continuously employed service-learning (S-L) as a pedagogy to achieve WPE. Recently, the SUND formally integrated its service-learning program, entitled “Mitigating

the Burden of Malnutrition through Service-Learning: An Integrated Approach,” into the various professional courses of the BSND curriculum through activities that involved students enrolled across the three areas of the nutrition and dietetics education.

While several studies have been published about how S-L was used in delivering course content for allied health programs (Chabot & Holben, 2003; Gonzales et al., 2020; Holston & O’Neil, 2007; Horning et al., 2020; Merkey & Palombi, 2020; Zinger & Sinclair, 2008), few to none have looked into how an integrated S-L teaches the whole person, especially in the context of BSND education.

This study aims to discuss how SUND’s S-L program strengthened students’ competence, character, and faith – attributes of SU’s WPE approach. It sought to determine whether knowledge acquisition, skills development, empathy, social responsibility, humility, and care for others have manifested in the students’ participation in the various S-L activities of the SUND.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Whole-Person Education

The concept of “teaching the whole person” is a relatively new approach, particularly to higher education. In an article published in the *Christian Higher Education Journal* in 2019, Brian Legg discussed the origins of the concept of whole-person education. This concept can be traced back to Neo-Scholasticism, an updated version of the scholastic method of education in medieval times. It directly conflicted with emerging secular humanist teachings of the nineteenth century. The author further explains that while Neo-Scholasticism attempted to counter the emerging secular philosophies of the time by engaging the student to learn on stretching the mind and intellect as well as using Scripture and doctrine as the basis for educational applications, it eventually failed to teach the whole person because it did not involve other attributes of Christian formation (Legg, 2019).

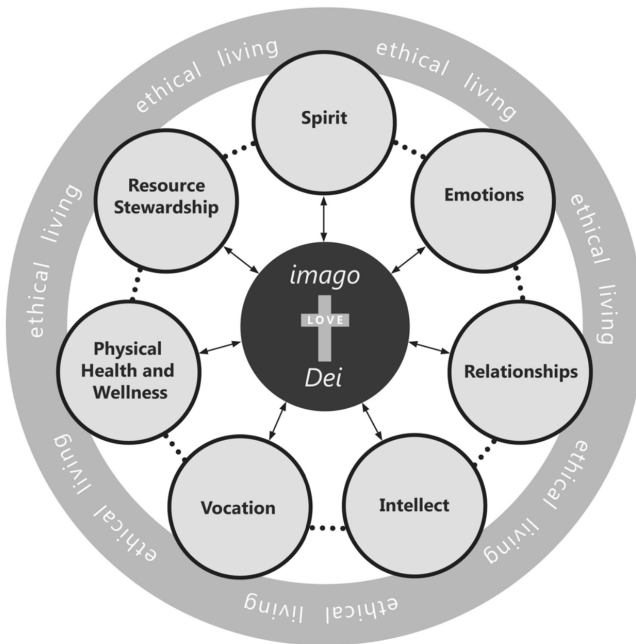
Wolterstorff (2002, cited in Chandler, 2015, p. 318) asserts that “The curriculum for Christian education is for the Christian life.” This requires an integrated and well-rounded approach that provides an intentional opportunity for personal growth and development (Chandler, 2015). Figure 1 illustrates the whole-person Christian formation model, which involves

several dimensions, the foundation of which is the transformation of the human spirit that conforms to the imago Dei or the image of God.

For Christian higher education institutions seeking to educate the whole person, “the Christian Educator is called upon to creatively combine and integrate insights from various disciplines in the thought and practice of education” (Pazmiño, 2008, cited in Chandler, 2015, p. 327). The United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia (UBCHEA), an organization that champions whole-person education among its partner institutions, provides a working definition for whole-person education as “a philosophy and practice of education that seeks to develop the whole-person intellectually, spiritually, and ethically” (UBCHEA, 2019).

Figure 1

The Whole-Person Christian formation model by Chandler (2015).



Service-Learning

For a higher education institution to teach the whole person, it must strive to provide its learners with opportunities for intellectual, spiritual, and ethical growth and development. S-L is one such opportunity where students’

knowledge meets the community's needs (UBCHEA, n.d.).

S-L can be summed up as a pedagogy or learning methodology that allows students or learners to engage or interact with members of the community such that the students can further learn while the community is being served (Gonzales et al., 2020; Horninet et al., 2020). What sets S-L apart from other forms of experiential learning is the prospect of reciprocal relationships between the students, faculty, and the community they serve (Ferillo, 2020). Additionally, S-L is deemed more valuable to students than volunteer service as the latter is not designed to discuss experiences concerning course content (Chabot & Holben, 2003). S-L can also balance service and academic learning in an environment where students apply theoretical knowledge in real-world situations (Rodríguez-Nogueira et al., 2020).

The use of S-L as pedagogy is not uncommon in allied health education programs, including in nutrition and dietetics education (Gonzales et al., 2007; Horning et al., 2020; Merkey & Palombi, 2020; Zinger & Sinclair, 2008). Discussing the merits of S-L in the nutrition and dietetics program, Chabot and Holben (2003) eloquently write:

Integrating service-learning into the dietetics and nutrition curricula can transform learning experiences and give students the opportunity to develop communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills while providing relevant experience and promoting citizenship. While faculty are required to invest resources into the development of these learning experiences that integrate academics with community service, reflective, culturally aware citizens will result and undoubtedly improve outcomes for all involved in the service-learning models. (pp. 189-190)

How S-L Educates the Whole Person in terms of Building Competence, Character, and Faith

On improving knowledge and skills as qualities of competence. In a study by Zinger and Sinclair (2008), which follows an S-L project on community nutrition education, the authors reported success in applying the knowledge and skills that students learned in the classroom in their respective partner communities. In a similar study by Cooke and Goodell (2011), which sought

to determine the students' ability to apply their knowledge and skills from a community nutrition course, the authors concluded that course instructors improved overall student learning outcomes. Several other studies also report improvements in knowledge acquisition and an increase in skills development among students using S-L as a pedagogy in the other allied health education programs (Gonzales et al., 2020; Horning et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Nogueira et al., 2020; Stagg & McCarthy, 2020).

On empathy and social responsibility as qualities of character. While S-L has been shown to increase the knowledge and skills of learners, it has also been shown to increase compassion and self-sacrifice (Dinour & Kuscin, 2020). A systematic review of the literature conducted by Dart et al. (2019), which looked into the conceptualization and defining professionalism for nutrition and dietetics education, found that empathy was the most recurring personal quality of the nutrition and dietetics professional. Empathy is vital in the health context where the individual can comprehend another person and put himself in that individual's place (Rodríguez-Nogueira et al., 2020). An article by Stagg and McCarthy (2020), which discussed the value of integrating S-L as a method of instruction for community health content, explained that the students involved were able to empathize with the participants in the community. Furthermore, students who participated in S-L activities were found to be more socially responsible owing to their increased awareness of the needs of others (Merkey & Palombi, 2020; Zinger & Sinclair, 2008).

On humility and caring for others as qualities of faith. Merkey and Palombi (2020) described how their students have come to realize the value of humility following their participation in an S-L activity. S-L activities and the experiences they bring, particularly for Christian universities, have provided unique opportunities to incorporate and, therefore, build in the students the value of serving with humility (Matthew et al., 2019). Another study, a quasi-experimental design that measured professional values among students who participated in an international S-L activity, found that the more the students interacted with their participants, the more they valued caring for others (Ferillo, 2020). Further still, compassion, as an attribute developed by students who participated in S-L activities, can help the students learn care for others, especially if they are exposed to situations that allow them to understand the difficulties that other people are faced with (Brown, 2013).

METHODS

Considered by Lambert and Lambert (2012) as a design that can provide a concise description of a phenomenon, the qualitative-descriptive method was employed in this study. This design, which is also used in many health-related studies, is characterized to allow for an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and commit participants' viewpoints, among others (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Study participants included Level II, III, and IV students of the Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics program at Silliman University enrolled in the second semester of the school year 2018-2019 and the first semester of the school year 2019-2020.

Prior to the deployment to the partner community, an orientation seminar was conducted to educate the students on the nature and expectations of the S-L activities. This was facilitated by the Director of the Institute for Service-Learning of the University, who also discussed the value of and manner of writing the students' reflective journals.

In addition to the general orientation, several team meetings were held for logistical planning and coordination between the participating groups. These meetings also provided opportunities to further enhance the activities of the S-L program before the actual visits to the community.

The SUND has had a number of S-L programs in the past. However, the first formal program was the "SUND Community Health, Nutrition, and Food Preparation Development: Practical Applications to Challenges in the Environment" in early 2010 and was followed by the "Indigenous Food Security for High-Risk Calamity Areas in Dumaguete City and Tacloban City: Silliman University Nutrition Intervention" in 2015.

However, it was not until recently that the Department formalized its S-L Program to become a more permanent and organized pedagogy. In 2018, the current S-L of SUND, entitled "Mitigating the Burden of Malnutrition through Service-Learning: An Integrated Approach," was formally introduced. The program aimed to institutionalize service learning in the SL-able courses of the BSND curriculum where students can implement activities meant to address a malnutrition problem following UNICEF's Conceptual Framework of the Determinants of Undernutrition (2015). Under this program, the "Nutrition in the First 1,000 Days of Life" was implemented in the second semester of 2018-2019 until the first semester of 2019-2020. The courses and

students involved and the various activities of the plan are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Summary of SUND S-L Activities

Course	Activity Title	Year-Level of Students Involved
Assessment of Nutritional Status	Assessment of Infants and Mothers	IV
Nutritional Assessment	Reassessment of Mothers and Infants (6-12 months)	II
Nutrition Therapy II	Health Issues During Infancy	IV
Nutrition Therapy I	Complementary Nutrition and Food Safety	III
Meal Management	Livelihood Education for Mothers	II
Fundamentals of Food Technology	Complementary Nutrition	II
Nutrition in the Life Stages	Nutrition Education for Lactating Mothers	III
Nutrition in the Life Stages I	Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices	II

At the outset, just before the start of the first activity of the S-L program in the second semester of the school year 2018-2019, orientation meetings were conducted for the students to inform them about the study and that the primary data will come from their journal entries. Only journal entries of students who returned their signed informed consent forms were included in the study. Students' names were removed when entries were used in the paper to ensure anonymity.

All qualitative data were collected during the implementation of the S-L Program, that is, during the second semester of 2018-2019 and the first semester of 2019-2020. At the end of each activity, the students were asked to write their reflective journals following the recommended format and submit them to their respective faculty-in-charge. The students' journals followed the Three-Part Journal format where entries are divided into three separate issues, namely 1) a description of what transpired during S-L activity, which includes accomplishments, events that were puzzling or confusing to students, their interactions with classmates and other people involved in the activity, decisions they made, and plans that were developed,

2) an analysis of how the course content relates to the S-L experience, and 3) a discussion on how the course materials and the S-L experience can be applied to their personal life (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999). The journal entries were then subsequently assembled for analysis.

The participants’ reflective journal entries were subjected to thematic analysis following the suggested procedure by Braun and Clarke (2006, cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 42). Responses were then categorized based on the themes identified. Sample excerpts from the participants’ journals categorized per theme and subtheme are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Sample Excerpts of Students’ Reflections by Theme and Subtheme

Theme	Subtheme	Sample Reflection
Building competence	Learning of concepts and principles	“[S-L] enabled us to share our knowledge and understanding on the nutrient needs of pregnant women.”
	Application of skills	“S-L helped me [to]overcome my stage fright in delivering lectures.”
Building character	Empathy	Through S-L “I learned to appreciate the people around us and to help [them] regardless of their health problems and lifestyle[s].”
	Social responsibility	“...as future health workers, we can use this [S-L] experience as a source of motivation to serve my community.”
Building faith	Humility	S-L activities “made me realize how privileged I am.”
	Care for others	“I felt love and respect towards others, and it motivated me to do more and help more.”

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The collective experience of the students is presented according to the themes of SU’s WPE, namely, Building Competence, Building Character, and Building Faith.

Building Competence

Silliman University aspires to produce graduates who are competent in their fields of study. Ideally, students are developed to become proficient in their chosen profession throughout their undergraduate studies. Becoming professionally skillful and adept can be achieved through training and experience.

Nutrition and Dietetics professionals are expected to be proficient in promoting the role of nutrition and dietetics for human well-being in relation to the needs, resources, and potentials of individuals, groups, and families. Mainly, a student enrolled in a nutrition and dietetics education program is taught to become experts in nutrition and dietetics information and communication and critically apply the knowledge gained in appropriate situations. As one student reflected in the S-L journal, “it is very important to apply food safety, especially for pregnant women.” The concept of food safety cannot be stressed enough in its importance in sustaining life and promoting good health (World Health Organization, n.d.). This generalization is also grasped by another student who wrote that “applying proper sanitation in our homes [is important] to avoid food poisoning.” Indeed, didactic learning on food safety was reinforced through the S-L.

Further reinforcement of knowledge gained in the classroom, numerous research studies have concluded the various roles of nutrients and their specific functions in the human body. Maternal nutrient requirements are more critical than in any other stage of life. A student reflected that the S-L activity “enabled us to share our knowledge and understanding on the nutrient needs of pregnant women.” Another parallel thought expressed is that “nutrient needs are important during pregnancy to reduce the risk of malnutrition.” To fully support optimum fetal growth and development, optimal nutrition status should be maintained from pre-conception throughout pregnancy (Ho et al., 2016). One student stated that “it is better to teach the mothers during the early stages of pregnancy so that they will be aware of the do’s and don’ts of their nutrient needs.” Gaining the knowledge in the classroom and supporting such gains with meaningful experiences shows a direct positive impact of the S-L activity on the students’ level of knowledge in promoting optimal nutrition during pregnancy.

Applying comprehensive nutritional care for the wellness of individuals in a multidisciplinary and multi-cultural setting is an essential outcome of

a BSND graduate. As a pedagogical approach, S-L highlights the critical-thinking skills of would-be nutritionist-dietitians. A student likened the S-L activity to a case study methodology and wrote that they were able to conduct “interviews, assess the patients’ [needs] and make a Nutrition Care [Plan] and give nutrition intervention and counseling.” This systematic approach, known as the Nutrition Care Process, outlines the steps in providing high-quality nutrition care. The framework allows the Registered Nutritionist-Dietitian (RND) to make effective and rational decisions for highly individualized nutritional care (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, n.d.). Because of the experience brought about by S-L, one student reflected on the application of skills in NCP that they were able to “[analyze] the data from others, went through the process of identifying the problems, gave interventions, provided a sample diet plan, and nutrition counseling.”

One of the essential skills in the nutrition and dietetics profession is educating the community on proper nutrition effectively. SUND’s S-L program aims to ensure that students have an opportunity to become effective communicators. This was exemplified by one student reflecting that “through this S-L activity, I have learned to apply my skills and abilities in providing lectures to the community,” which is also felt by other students where one claimed “that I can use this experience to improve on our nutrition education skills” and another who stated that “S-L helped me [to] overcome my stage fright in delivering lectures.” Undoubtedly, S-L provided significant opportunities for the students to build their skills in nutrition education, with one articulating that S-L “taught us many things beyond the four corners of our classroom and applied what we learned to the real world.” Another student concluded that “through the S-L experience, we were able to practice the lessons learned through our previous subjects,” which is, in fact, a [practical] way to enhance and improve a skill through participation in an activity that uses them. Such a method, therefore, builds confidence and professional skills.

In actuality, S-L reinforced the students’ appreciation of the profession they hope to join. One student fondly thought, “through S-L, we are gaining a deeper understanding of our course,” while another believed that “we were able to value our course and future profession more deeply.” As a future RND who will promote nutritional well-being to individuals, groups, and families, it is noteworthy that one student expressed that “the experience strengthened my desire to be in community nutrition in the future.” Supporting students’

personal growth can be done through self-reflection (Stanton, 2014). Indeed, the “S-L experience helped me [to] grow more and love the course I [chose],” another student added.

Building Character

The experience of reaching out to others in a community creates an opportunity for a student’s personal and social transformation, making them more compassionate individuals (Meyers, 2009). Through self-reflection, students were able to gain perspective in practicing empathy, such as putting themselves in the same shoes like those in need. A student reflected that “I learned to appreciate the people around us and to help other people regardless of their health problems and lifestyle[s].” The experience clarified the value of benevolence, which is one of the ethical standards of the nutrition and dietetics profession.

Exposing and involving the students in community engagement influences an active involvement in social responsibility (Chandler et al., 2011). The realization of the value of a sense of community and helping to improve the community’s nutritional problems is an expression of how S-L has made the students more sensitive and responsive to societal needs. A student realized that “public health is a field that would likely fulfill your heart in serving others and contributing to their progress.” The idea of service and the bettering of the lives of others is reflected in how theoretical knowledge can help the community. “As future health workers, we can use this experience as a source of motivation to serve my community,” exclaimed one student.

Building Faith

The use of S-L allowed the students to reflect on their own lives. It is through the process of self-reflection that students grasp the value of gratitude, such as one learner who said that “I should be grateful for what I have in my life from now on.” Statements such as “...[participating in S-L activities] made me realize how privileged I am” and “I am thankful and content with what I have now” show the transformational significance of S-L. The students who have stepped out of their comfort zones and immersed themselves in the community have realized the happiness that one experiences when they help others. S-L also allowed students to share what they had learned with

the community, making them feel blessed and humbled. Similar studies have shown that S-L activities have led students to realize the value of humility borne from the service of others (Matthew et al., 2019; Merkey & Palombi, 2020).

The final category of reflection by the students was the ability of the S-L activity to foster a promise within themselves to care for others. When students are exposed to situations that allow them to see firsthand the difficulties challenging others, they begin to learn to care more for other people (Brown, 2013). A sentiment expressed by a student who said, “I felt love and respect towards others, and it motivated me to do more and help more.” As the students looked back on the S-L activity, the awareness it brought them in caring for others is for a greater good. Their sentiments indicated embracing such roles as serving the community and helping them acquire a healthy lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

Institutions of higher learning, particularly for Christian universities such as Silliman University, must strive to educate the whole person by integrating teaching methodologies that allow learners to become intellectually, ethically, and spiritually aware individuals in their chosen fields. S-L is one such pedagogy that provides students an avenue to engage communities through service-oriented activities aligned to course outcomes.

The SUND’s S-L program, which integrated the various S-L activities from the different courses of the BSND curriculum, was designed to allow students from across multiple year levels to apply theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom to real-life situations in the partner community.

Results of the thematic analysis of the students’ reflective journals indicate that learners have indeed developed in them the qualities of knowledge acquisition, skills development, empathy, social responsibility, humility, and caring for others, which are attributes of Silliman’s WPE approach of building competence, character, and faith.

While the current S-L program integrates the various S-L activities from the different courses, the fact that S-L is not officially embedded in the BSND curriculum means that, as a proven methodology that delivers not just competence but also character and faith, it remains to be less permanent and therefore, subject to arbitrary change. Consequently, it is recommended

that S-L be formally incorporated into the BSND curriculum to nurture the philosophy and practice of whole-person education. Additionally, other non-allied health disciplines are encouraged to employ and integrate S-L into their curricula to promote the education of the whole person.

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