Student Activism Projects: Promoting Academic Learning & Social Responsibility

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The Student Activism Project (SAP): Description

- As a course requirement, undergraduate students select a social issue of concern and take action.
- Projects consistent with PsySR mission goals of:
  - Facilitating positive changes for victims and survivors of personal, community, and civil violence.
  - Advocating for basic human needs—including actions that decrease poverty and ensure ethnic and gender equality.
- Range of issues may be specified depending on the course.
- May be assigned as an individual or group project, depending on course.

Examples of Projects

- Completed in 1 month by 6-Person Groups in a Group Dynamics Course
  - Food drive for an AIDS organization yielding 2065 items.
  - Basic needs drive for a homeless shelter yielding 1494 items.
  - $1837 raised for non-profit agency serving low-income families.
  - $1000 raised for Kabul Children's Center (so that Afghan mothers can attend university)
- Completed in 2 months by individuals and groups in women's studies class.
  - A rape prevention workshop conducted at a fraternity.
  - A "That takes ovaries" celebration of courageous women.
  - 1000 items for a domestic violence shelter.

Examples of SAP Strategies

- Raffles of items or services donated by local business.
- Bake sales of items donated by local bakeries.
- Letter writing to friends and families.
- "Any spare change will help Cause X" requests to classrooms and in public places.
- Provide list of items needed to patrons entering stores where desired items are sold.
- Restaurants events where portion of profits donated to the cause.
- Local band benefit concert.
- "Bag at the door" technique where flyers stapled to bags are left on doorsteps and collected on specified days.
- Small bags of candy (created with donated items) sold for $1.
- Candy cane reindeers made from candy canes and pipe cleaners sold for $1 (many people donate more for the cause).
- Car wash at local gas station.

Goals of the Student Activism Project

- Projects promoting the social good used to underscore academic content.
  - In a group dynamics course, students apply what they have learned about groups in their SAP group. Individual papers analyze the group according to class concepts.
  - In a cross-cultural women's studies course where students learn about women's issues and activism from the local to the global, students participate in the women's movement by creating a SAP. Papers include research on the problem and activist efforts globally and locally.
- Projects promoting the social good used to promote social activism "habit."
  - Many students report intention to engage in similar actions after learning how easy it is to make a difference.

Recommendations for the Successful SAP

- **To keep motivation and commitment high:**
  - Allow students to choose a project that is connected to their personal values.
  - Have students set **specific** goals and monitor progress.
  - For group projects require that individuals submit individual reports on each members' contribution (individual accountability reduces "social loafing").
- **For group projects require that groups:**
  - Engage in team-building/icebreaker/social activities before proceeding (to build cohesion and identify common values).
  - Create a list of norms that will govern their group.
  - Identify member strengths and talents to maximize the group's potential.
  - Use democratic decision-making so that all members are committed.
  - Develop an explicit communication and coordination system
  - Use constructive conflict resolution techniques (provide a model such as Johnson's 6-step model).
- To prevent failure, have students clear project with instructor and with cause agency/organization.

Grading of the SAP Project

- Largest portion of grade based on paper linking the project to academic concepts/research.
- Some portion of grade can be based on:
  - Equality of participation and group functioning.
  - Productivity (taking into account that effort is not always correlated with productivity).
  - Choice of project (ambitiousness/appropriateness of project in relation to course).
  - SAP project presentation to class.
- For group projects avoid basing entire grade on a group paper that may be almost entirely written by one member. If a group paper is done, make sure members *separately* turn in reports on each members' contribution.