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Service-Learning and Cross-Cultural Impact: Preparing Underrepresented Students for an International Service-Learning Trip

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Service-Learning and Cross-Cultural Impact:

Preparing Underrepresented Students for an International Service-Learning Trip

Honors 401 Thesis

Kalene Dean

Indiana State University

Service-Learning and Cross-Cultural Impact:**Preparing Underrepresented Students for an International Service-Learning Trip****The Trip**

Indiana State University and the Irish Heritage School have partnered together for a service-learning opportunity regularly since 2018. Students from ISU travel with faculty members to Birr, Ireland and engage in hands-on cultural and expansive education.

Destinations

Students and faculty travel to Birr, Ireland. They travel from a local airport to Dublin, spend an afternoon exploring the capital, then by bus to Birr. From there, students will do the bulk of their service-learning experience at John's Hall or another Irish Heritage School site. Planned in the group calendar are tours of various historical sights in or around Birr as well as a trip to the Cliffs of Moher. On a free day, students may choose to take a trip to another place in Ireland as long as it is pre-approved by faculty members and there is a duo or group of students attending together.

Who With

Indiana State University students will be attending this trip along with other ISU students and two ISU faculty members; those involved will be meeting with individuals from the Irish Heritage School. Most students attending this service-learning trip are members of historically underserved groups; this might include low-income students or students who are a part of a marginalized racial group.

Activities

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The students partaking in the service-learning trip will work with the Irish Heritage School and assist with whatever they need. This could include but is not limited to: clearing overgrown areas, rebuilding stone walls, planting flowers, creating an outdoor shelter, working in the community garden, creating a learning space for children, cleaning and clearing out space in the various buildings at John's Hall, running to and from various locations in the town for supplies, creating costumes for educational displays, and anything else that the IHS asks of the students and faculty members.

Who Irish Heritage School

As an organization

The Irish Heritage School is an organization that helps to provide various education-seeking groups with partnerships and accredited research and training. Located in Birr, Ireland in Offaly County, the school focuses on outdoor and cultural learning both about Birr and other historical locations in Ireland.

Irish Heritage School was established in 2010 and went by the name Irish Archaeology Field School until 2016 when it branched off separately into creating the Irish Heritage School. In 2018 IHS started working in Birr, Ireland and now works with several groups from the Birr and Offaly County communities.

Mission Statement

On their website, the Irish Heritage School says, "Our mission is to provide university faculties and students with an unrivalled outdoor classroom, coupled with an engaging, welcoming and enriching cultural experience" (Irish Heritage School, 2024). This program brings not only education, but education in a different form than can otherwise be found in a

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more typical setting—such as a physical classroom. The enrichment and cultural education take place in a location generally unfamiliar to Indiana State University students and assists in their learning of things removed from the textbook.

People

Dr. Stephen Mandal MIAI PGEO EURGEOL Geoarchaeology Director Irish Heritage School Irish Archaeology Field School	
Dr. Denis Shine MIAI Sustainable Archaeology and Heritage Director Irish Heritage School Irish Archaeology Field School	
Richard Reid Supervisor	Prof. John Feehan Environmental Science/Landscape Archaeology
Dr. Linda Lynch Bioarcheology/Forensic Anthropology	Dr. Brendan O'Neill Experimental Archaeology

Volunteers

Partnerships with the IHS span several different reasons or programs and a multitude of partnership organizations. IHS works with programs based on Environmental Science, Landscape Archaeology, Community Health, Service-Learning, Theatre, Impact Assessment, and Internships; they partner with organizations such as Institute for Field Research, Fort Hays University, Maywood University, North Dakota University, Indiana State University, and the Irish Archaeology Field School. These partnerships originated within a year or so of the Irish Heritage School establishing itself in Birr—in 2018 or 2019.

Volunteers are needed to assist IHS in curating Birr into becoming an educational and historical site for tourists and locals alike to stop in on their way between coasts. By learning about Irish history, students are able to spread knowledge and awareness of Ireland as a whole but also of Offaly County and Birr. Assisting in creating an educational space for students of

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local primary schools and for those who travel from far away, the volunteers aid in the education of themselves and of those who are visiting Birr not for this trip.

Birr

Birr, Ireland is a central location within the Republic of Ireland. It is located as an easy point of travel from either of the Irish coasts and could be considered a rest stop between Dublin and Galway depending on the way of travel. This location creates easy accessibility as a central location when traveling to other sites for education and work. Birr also has what used to be the largest telescope in the world and the Castle Birr. These sights are additives when finding a location for the Irish Heritage School.

Traveling with ISU

What you Need to Expect

When traveling abroad with ISU, there are several things to consider that are different than traveling abroad with family, friends, or solo. For this service-learning trip, students and faculty stay in homestays as opposed to another sleeping accommodation; additionally, students are doing physical activity and labor as their service with the Irish Heritage School. This is not a vacation, and students should expect to be completing manual labor. Students should also keep in mind that they are not free to roam about without informing their faculty leaders where they are going. On free time, students should be with each other and not be wandering alone.

When traveling with Indiana State University, students will interact with several faculty members—some which are also attending the trip as chaperones and one who will not be attending. Linda Maule and Nancy Rodgers are attending the trip as chaperones while Stefanie Knott completes a plethora of behind-the-scenes tasks before the departure date. When the

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departure date does come, the students are allotted a checked bag, a carry on, and a small personal item. Additionally, students are responsible for getting themselves to and from the airport—whether by bus, train, carpool, or otherwise.

Homestays

Each student is assigned a homestay to be their place of residence while in Birr. Students are divided into homestays and receive information on the family (or individual) they are staying with. There are often small groups of students who are put in a homestay together. Homestay families are required to provide students with three meals or the opportunity for students to make their own meals daily (this varies based on the family's preferences). The homestays have Wi-Fi but may vary on other amenities—such as laundry, size, or number of beds per room, number of people per bathroom, and whether the family allows students to bring others over.

Students are expected to walk to and from (unless otherwise communicated) their homestay location for work and other group activities daily. (This does not include the transportation to their homestay on the first day in Ireland or the transportation from the homestay to John's Hall on the morning ISU leaves Ireland). Students are always expected to show up on time, prepared, and in the correct state to participate in the day's activities.

Working

The service-learning partnership and trip is a very manual-labor heavy undertaking. It includes lifting and moving heavy objects, standing for extended periods of time, working in outside fluctuating weather conditions, use of construction or lawn care tools, and many other types of physical labor. Some jobs will be delegated via skillset, experience, strengths, availability, and a variety of reasons.

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ISU Faculty

Stefanie Knott Executive Assistant VP University Engagement	Dr. Nancy Rodgers VP University Engagement VP University Engagement
Dr. Linda Maule Associate Professor Political Science	

Packing

Each student is allowed to bring one checked bag (up to 50 lbs.), one carry on item, and a small personal bag. The most crucial items for a student to pack are their passport, driver's license (or ID card), medications (in their original packaging), vaccination records, power adapters, and charging cables for phones or other devices. These are items that should never leave the student's side in the airport and should never go in your checked luggage.

Regarding clothing, it is important to dress comfortably for the airport and it's preferable to wear the largest or heaviest pair of shoes while flying. Students should pack clothing that they are able to move around in and are willing to risk getting ruined because of the work required during the service-learning trip. Students should also pack a rain jacket or poncho because of the unpredictability of the weather.

Some other important things to bring when adventuring on the service-learning trip are battery packs, a water bottle, headphones/earbuds, an aux adapter for headphones, packing cubes, motion-sickness medicine, a backpack/rucksack, and a mask. Often times students will be out working or on the bus and will have a dying phone so battery packs are helpful when keeping phone percentage up. Along with the bus, there will be plenty of bus rides where a student might

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want space and can put headphones on to have privacy and motion sickness medicine to combat nausea.

If it's a student's first flight, they might not be familiar with the reason for a headphones adapter—seats with TVs will have a space where those who have their own headphones can plug them into the TV. Because lots of headphones are Bluetooth now, they do not have the jack needed without an aux cord. Another thing to note about Aer Lingus redeye flights are that you are served a meal while on the plane. If you plan on falling asleep right off the bat, you might want to let your seatmate or flight attendant if they would not mind setting one aside for you for when you wake back up if you happen to fall asleep.

First-time travelers might be nervous or apprehensive about this trip. They might be worried about illnesses, homesickness, the type of service being done, or other reasons. Some key things to keep in mind are the importance of letting your bank and phone companies know that you are going abroad and if you're someone who worries about homesickness, it might be worth it to pay for an international plan—at least for May. Without these prior notices, banks might deactivate a card or have an ATM steal it and phone companies will charge you high prices, cut off access to your mobile device, or both. Finally, a mask would be a great consideration to bring because although COVID-19 is not as prevalent in 2024 as it was in 2020, it's much better to be safe than sorry.

Get Yourself to and from Airport

Students from Indiana State University are responsible for finding transportation to and from the domestic airport of departure (Chicago or Indianapolis). If a student does not arrive on time to board the plane, no faculty member will stay behind and miss their own flight.

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Transportation from the Dublin airport and group travel throughout the trip will be different than transportation domestically.

Once arriving back in the United States airport designated at the “drop-off” and “pick-up” point, faculty members relinquish their responsibilities as a trip faculty member at the baggage claim carousel. From there, transportation is up to the student to have a way to get themselves home (from the Chicago or Indianapolis airport).

Service-Learning’s Impact on Underserved Individuals

When discussing service-learning, it’s important to consider the individuals completing the service as well as those receiving the service. In most instances, service-learning is just as impactful—if not more impactful—for students who are members of historically underserved, underrepresented, and marginalized groups than it is for their counterparts. In this paper I will be comparing literature on this topic and on the impacts service-learning and other experience-based learning has on historically underrepresented groups.

Such examples of the expectations of service-learning held by underserved students and how it compares to the findings of service-learning outcomes have been charted in several literature documents.

For educators, oftentimes they are not taught what they should have a focus on when leading service-learning trips. For example, “it is not uncommon for novices to think of their teaching as distinct from rather than in constant relation to the learner, focusing initially on their own teaching practices while paying little attention to student learning until they have been in the field for an extended period of time (Kagan, 1992; Nuthall, 2004; Wilson, Floden, & Ferinni-Mundy, 2001)” (Lawrence & Butler, 2010). Because professors or other educators might assume

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their work and teaching is influential and groundbreaking, they oftentimes will start their educational experience by focusing on spitting out information as opposed to teaching their students. Additionally, “Traditional models of outreach, where experts from higher education go to the community to solve its problems, raise questions (Bridger & Alter, 2006). Particularly concerning is the efficacy of traditional outreach programs in improving academic and civic outcomes (Billig et al., 2005; Fleck et al., 2017; Ngai et al., 2018)” (Duarte, et al., 2023).

Service-learning can only be informative and educational when those teaching it are focused on providing new experiences and information to their students on the level their students are ready to undertake.

When preparing educators to take students on these types of experiences, “scholars have suggested that quality learning experiences should: (1) include "direct and ample" opportunities for preservice teachers to interact with students (Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1992); (2) integrate fieldwork and university coursework in order to connect and allow preservice teachers to better negotiate theory and practice (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, & others, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001); and (3) provide opportunities to engage in structured reflective tasks where cognitive dissonance can be articulated in a supportive environment (Jones & Vesilind, 1996; Kagan, 1992).” (Lawrence & Butler, 2010). Through these scholar’s works, we can determine that it is important for the beforehand and leading up to the experience, communication and explanation with the students is important for their learning opportunity. “As such, scholars have begun emphasizing the importance of addressing preservice teachers' preconceptions during preparation programs” (Lawrence & Butler, 2010). This also demonstrates a similar conception that the leading up to the service and learning beforehand, is as important as the service itself. Secondly, providing text and textual sources to compare and hold dialogue with

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the educational trip or service is a priority. Finally, when the experience is happening, that students are supported and provided with consistent verbiage on the topic to ensure that they take away an educational experience. Another example of this explains that, “These learning experiences can benefit all parties involved, rather than aligning only with the needs of our teacher candidates, making it more likely for long term relationships and collaborations to develop.” (Lawrence & Butler, *Becoming Aware of the Challenges of Helping Students Learn: An Examination of the Nature of Learning During a Service-Learning Experience*, 2010). Lawrence and Butler’s take on this displays ideologies that prove not only the educator should have a say in what is taught and that not only those receiving the service are experiencing the impact of the completed service. Service-learning, although helpful for the under-served students themselves, also lends itself to the community that is being served, the physical location, the educational faculty or staff coordinating the service, and the student’s own personal community and immediate circle.

When put into practice, there are various findings all with relatively positive outcomes for underserved individuals taught via a service-learning method. “This study uncovered that: 1) Family and Community, Previous Civic Engagement, and Class and Privilege influences participants orientations toward service-learning, 2) the pedagogical practices employed in the service-learning program mediated participants’ understanding of global citizenship and were deeply contextualized within an ethos of SUA [Soka University of America], and 3) participants continued to maintain strong orientations towards value-creative global citizenship up to six years after program completion.” (Nagashima, 2020). A service-learning education has been known to have a lasting effect on those taught with it. It assists in shaping students into who they become as adults and adds context to subjects they might not have previously been educated on.

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In addition to this, the service impacts the communities in which the service took place. It can positively impact the neighborhoods and other communities impacted by service-learning education.

When regarding preparation for taking underserved students on experiential learning situations, it's important to consider a student's knowledge before, during, and after the experiential learning. When this was considered, "The Merrill program assumed that students needed to prepare themselves, in terms of both knowledge and skills, before undertaking cross-cultural field studies." (Stanton, Giles, Jr., & Cruz, 1999). In this circumstance, Royal helped to "pioneer" the connection between international learning and service-learning. His program displays the impact and importance that service-learning can have on those individuals who would not normally have the opportunity to go abroad for education, work, or leisure. Royal also relates this opportunity to the responsibility of someone who should be actively involved in their own life. He says, "One of the things I would tell students was that you have to be an actor. You can't sit back. You can go into a big biology class and snooze, but in the field you have to be actively involved. It doesn't always work out well, but you get through it, and it gives you a great sense of achievement." (Stanton, Giles, Jr., & Cruz, 1999).

It was crucial for Nick Royal to help students prepare themselves and both create and hone the skillset that would be needed to make cross-cultural decisions later on in their professional life. Royal encouraged students to document their time spent on service-learning projects. Students documented this via letters and journals. Along with returned letters, the students' journals were useful for creating and reflecting when it came time to write the papers. Royal also noted that all the papers and experiences students created were different and unique to the individual. Because of the documentation students kept for Royal, they were able to track

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their knowledge and expansive education throughout their experience with a cross-cultural learning environment.

Another example of a service-learning situation is depicted in Duarte's work. "For underrepresented students, college can be an opportunity to learn things that will help them change the world and improve their life conditions and those of their communities (Manning, 2000). However, they do not always find or see the connection between their college experience and the real-life issues and problems they and their communities face (Karp, 1986)" (Duarte, et al., 2023). This is a synonymous explanation and example of how Indiana State University faces their service-learning trip with the Irish Heritage School. ISU's faculty on this trip acknowledge that underserved students have most likely not been offered this type of opportunity before and therefore have little understanding of how the experience will go. The university also hopes that by providing this opportunity for their students, they can assist in a hands-on learning environment that will cultivate service henceforth. They are hoping that students will bring their knowledge back to ISU and each student's individual future and can curate a better opportunity for themselves because of what they learned from their educational service-learning opportunity with ISU and IHS.

Additionally, Duarte's work describes a comparison between this type of learning on students who were categorized as underrepresented and their counterparts. "Mean GPA scores for underrepresented students were greater for the treatment group in the 2013 cohort (.36 difference), the 2014 cohort (.43 difference), the 2015 cohort (.42 difference), and the 2016 cohort (.18 difference). Mean credits earned by underrepresented students in the treatment group were greater than those of the matched comparison group in the 2013 cohort (6 credits), the 2014 cohort (14 credits), the 2015 cohort (6.8 credits), and the 2016 cohort (4.5 credits)." (Duarte, et

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al., 2023) To be considered with this, they also discussed one's persistence and its relationship. "When considering only underrepresented students (Table 13), we found that their involvement in SL/CE activities also had a positive impact on their persistence as measured by GPA and credits earned with mixed results on graduation rates. The effects of SL/CE on persistence and graduation showed that for underrepresented students, trends were similar to those of the overall student population. These findings are important because they add evidence to a body of literature that addresses the critical role of SL/CE for underrepresented students (Kinzie et al., 2008; Maruyama et al., 2018; Song et al., 2017; York, 2016) and indicates that these experiences not only help them improve their academic performance, but also help them find larger meaning in their college education by connecting it with their social change aspirations." (Duarte, et al., 2023). These circumstances provide education and data to connect to the outcomes of the opportunities. Specifically, service-learning's impact on persistence and graduation rates of those who are considered underrepresented students. There was an increase in the persistence of these individuals and an increase in their grade point averages which can have a positive impact on their graduation rates.

When implementing a service-learning trip or similar experience—especially one which involves cross-cultural circumstances, it is important to take value in the aspects of influence that it will have on each student or other participant. For example, "All learning communities, however, represent and intentional restructuring of student time and space to foster connections among courses and collaborative work with fellow students and faculty." (Oates & Leavitt, 2003). There are different types of learning communities and each has a different path to go about creating the experience—linked course, freshman seminar, cluster course offering, and coordinated study.

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In addition to this, each individual will take different experiences back with them from an education strategy based on this. “By working on community problems, students begin to appreciate the various external and complex environmental influences, such as family values, religion, and community norms that affect social outcomes.” (Oates & Leavitt, 2003). This describes how underserved students can experience various community-specific situations dependent on their civic characteristics. For example, staying at a homestay in Birr, Ireland, one might experience a different family dynamic for two weeks than they typically would experience in the circumstances they experienced growing up. One might live with a family who has married parents, food readily available, and siblings or foreign exchange students when at their family’s home they might only have one parent or parents that have split up, might not know when or where their next meal is from, and not have the same sibling experience. Because of each student’s individual background, no one will have the exact same education when taking part in a cross-cultural service-learning experience.

Oates and Leavitt also describe how to originate a service-learning experience. “Service-learning, as one of several experiential education pedagogies, has a philosophy rooted in cognitive learning research, in which meaning is created out of a concern for social, cultural, or environmental needs.” (Oates & Leavitt, 2003). Through this it is apparent that meaning drawn from and associated with externally recognized factors. These service opportunities consist of, but aren’t limited to viewable social impact needs, cultural impact needs, relationships with each other (such as childcare), environmental needs, physical help (such as rebuilding structures, serving as unpaid employees, cleaning, planting trees, and other), and any other recognized meaning. All of these are different ways that service learning can make an impact on those receiving the direct service benefit.

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In the discussion of service as a desired commodity, there's a line to cross that distinguishes between service of quality and service that is not of quality; additionally, there is an important sector that relates to the innovation found within a service performed. "Because services are produced, consumed, and cocreated in real time and often involve interaction between and among employees and customers, it is critical that innovation and new service development processes involve both employees and customers." (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2013). When making decisions based on anything service related, in this situation service-learning, education grows from innovation and likewise innovation derives itself from education. When looking to find new ways for a service-learning project to expand, ask both the person providing service and the person receiving service what they feel needs improved upon.

A direct example of this in the Ireland Service-Learning opportunity would be that ISU students and faculty might assume that coming to "help" by hosting the same idea or redoing the same type of service would be useful for the Irish Heritage School. If ISU were to ask around, the Irish Heritage School might explain that they need service on another site and do not want to split the volunteers they have. Contrastingly, ISU volunteers might want to have a celebration at the end that is not the typical garden party or to complete another type of service because they have not seen the benefit of the service they provide. Without discussion, IHS might assume that ISU loves this celebration activity. A lack of communication would lead to both groups of the service missing something important that would improve service on both ends and increase the education and impact on underserved students volunteering from ISU.

The best way to provide a service-learning opportunity for students and communities alike is to consider self-examination and consider what underrepresentation really means and its impact on students compared to their peers. "Self-examination is the practice of inner-dialogue,

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in knowing oneself and polishing one's values, beliefs, and ethics. It is the humility to keep one's perceptions under scrutiny and to trace the origins and implications of one's assumptions."

(Nagashima, *Fostering Value-Creative Global Citizens: Experiences of Students of Color in Service-Learning*, 2020). Nagashima writes about the impact student-learning has on students of color. These students are historically underrepresented and underserved compared to their white peers. When describing what types of individuals in the United States of America are categorized as underserved, "These groups may include people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged; people with limited English proficiency; geographically isolated or educationally disenfranchised people; people of color as well as those of ethnic and national origin minorities; women and children; individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs; and seniors." (Glossary, 2023). Because of this list, it's apparent that the United States of America categorizes people of color as historically underserved. Often times those individuals who find themselves underserved fit into more than one of the communities, identities, or other groups found on the list of historically underserved individuals. Service-learning can help transition these individuals into a stronger place and they will all have different experiences with it because of their unique lived experiences.

Closing

Service-learning opportunities provide underserved and underrepresented students and their communities with a new education-based system. These opportunities provide new experiences and knowledge not only to those experiencing the service but also to those enacting the service.

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Indiana State University takes students to Birr, Ireland on a two week long service-learning trip to work with the Irish Heritage School where both ISU students and those in the Offaly county community are impacted by the manual labor and education provided in this partnership.

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