

Fusing Global Learning and Community-Based Learning

Kara A. Fulton

University of North Texas

Diana Diaz

University Area Community Development Corporation Inc.

ABSTRACT

The University of South Florida, a public research university, and the University Area Community Development Corporation Inc., a nonprofit organization, collaboratively developed a community-based global learning experience for undergraduate students. We present the results of a study exploring the impact of the experience on students who participated across two semesters. Results suggest that student learning was enhanced across all intended student learning outcomes, though some outcomes were developed more than others.

Keywords: high-impact practice, student learning outcomes, interdisciplinary, service-learning

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the summer of 2017, the University of South Florida (USF) Global Citizens Project (GCP) and the University Area Community Development Corporation Inc. (UACDC) partnered to offer a community-based global learning experience to undergraduate USF students. This program fused an interdisciplinary course with a community development initiative and was conducted during fall 2017 and spring 2018. Here we describe the details of this program, provide results from a pilot study of student learning, and reflect on student impact and aspects of successful community-campus partnerships.

The University of South Florida (USF)

USF is a public research university located in Tampa, Florida. Founded in 1956, USF is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and offers over 180

undergraduate degrees across 14 colleges and three campuses. USF serves more than 50,000 students, consisting of undergraduates, graduates, and non-degree-seeking students. During the 2017-2018 academic year, 41% of students were African American, Black, Asian American, Hispanic, Native American or multiracial and 10% were international students (representing 145 countries). USF has approximately 15,380 faculty and staff employees and ranks in the top 30 nationally for research expenditures among public universities, according to the National Science Foundation. In 2018, the Florida Board of Governors designated USF as a Preeminent State Research University, placing USF in the most elite category among the state's 12 public universities and solidifying USF's position as the only urban Preeminent institution in Florida (University of South Florida, 2018).

Global Learning at USF

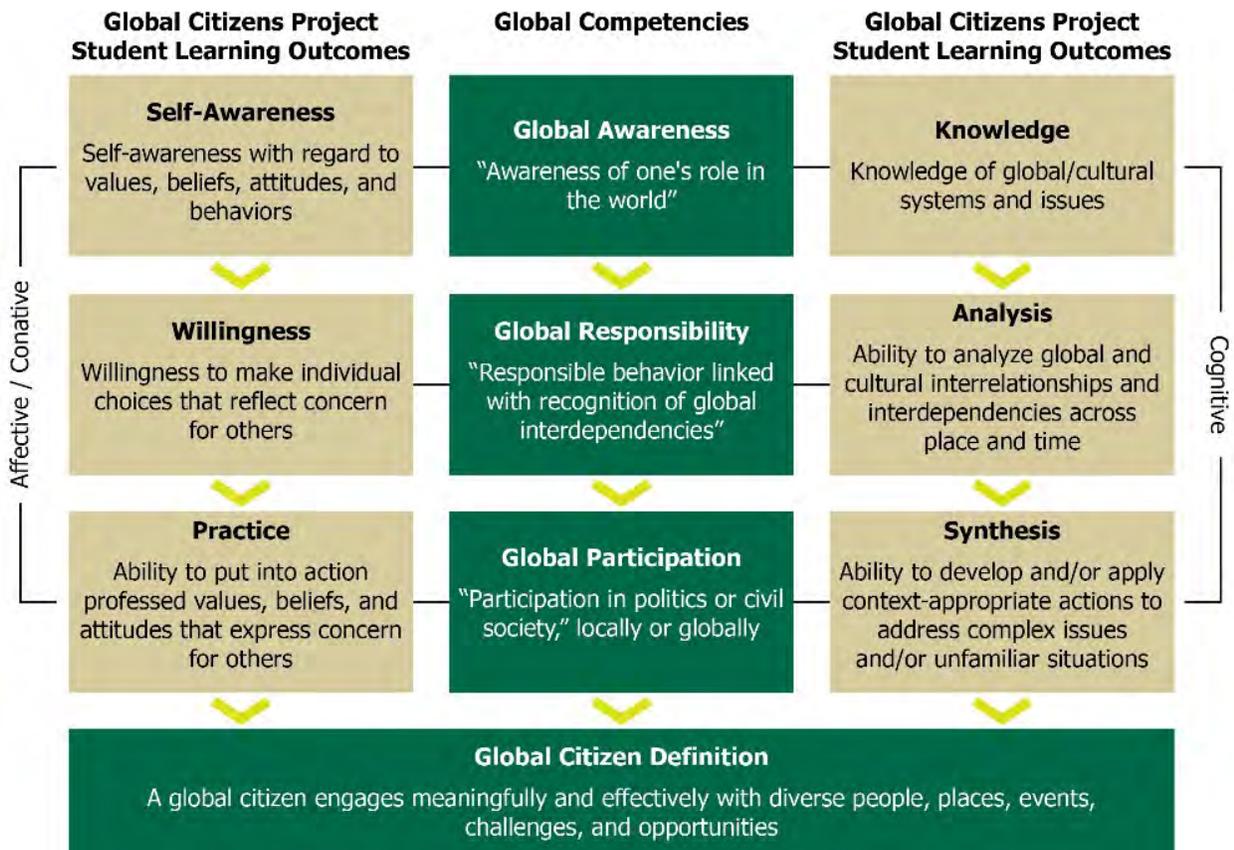
USF is dedicated to student success and has infused global learning throughout the undergraduate curriculum. Kuh defines global

learning as “courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own” (Kuh, 2008, p. 10). To support the university-wide global learning initiative, a department was developed in 2015, the Global Citizens Project (GCP), dedicated to enhancing undergraduate students’ global competencies through curricular and co-curricular experiences. The GCP collaborates with faculty, staff, and students across disciplines to certify courses, degree programs, and on-campus events as aligning with USF’s goals for global learning as well as offering an award program to encourage students’ global engagement.

Through the development of the GCP, USF has adopted a shared set of global student learning outcomes, based on Schattle’s (2008)

model of global citizenship. Schattle argues that global citizenship is comprised of three primary concepts: awareness, responsibility, and participation. “These three concepts can be viewed as a trajectory in which progressions of global citizenship emerge in the lives of individuals, with awareness of one’s role in the world instilling a sense of responsibility that in turn inspires participation in politics or civil society” (Schattle, 2008, p. 26). USF has linked Schattle’s theory to key aspects of cognitive, conative, and affective development in order to develop six student learning outcomes for global learning (Figure 1). Although international experiences can be impactful and are encouraged, the GCP emphasizes that students need not travel across national borders to be globally engaged. Local engagement with global issues can

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for global learning at USF.



contribute to the development of global competencies as much as international experiences (Sobania, 2015).

The GCP uses the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework to guide students in contextualizing global issues as they link these issues to their lives and learn how to participate in society as global citizens. The SDGs make up the development agenda adopted by the United Nations' General Assembly in 2015 and encompass 17 goals with 169 targets. The range of goals addressed by the SDGs provides a comprehensive view of issues including social justice, economic growth, environmental concerns, and political action. Students at USF expressly connect each of their globally engaged experiences to the SDGs in a local, national, or international context.

Community-Based Learning at USF

Designated as a "Community Engaged" institution by the *Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*, USF is dedicated to community-based learning. The "Community Engaged" national designation is an elective classification that recognizes colleges and universities with an institutional focus on community engagement. The Carnegie Foundation defines community engagement as a "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Swearer Center, 2018). USF is one of 49 public research universities nationwide classified as both a Doctoral University with "Highest Research Activity" and as a "Community Engaged" institution by the Carnegie Foundation (University of South Florida, 2015). The Office of Community Engagement and Partnerships (OCEP) was developed at USF in 2009 to expand and strengthen university-community engagement. OCEP helps faculty and community

organizations connect with each other in addition to providing services and resources for both parties.

Kuh (2008) considers both global learning and community-based learning as forms of high-impact practices, or educational practices that produce "substantial educational benefits... to students" including "increase[d] rates of student retention and student engagement" (Kuh, 2008, p. 1, 9). Research demonstrates that high-impact practices are beneficial to college students from many different backgrounds (e.g., Bransford et al., 2000; Cross, 1999; King and Mayhew 2004; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Further, Kuh's definition of community-based learning complements the Carnegie Foundation's definition for community engagement:

[community-based learning is] field-based "experiential learning" with community partners... The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life. (Kuh, 2008, p. 11)

Research supports the transformative effect that community-based learning can have on college students (Kiely, 2005). Additionally, studies suggest that students enrolled in community-based learning courses perform better than their non-community-based learning counterparts (Batchelder and Root 1994; Elyer et al. 1997; Strage, 2000).

Global Issues, Challenges, and Perspectives

Global Issues, Challenges, and Perspectives is a globally certified undergraduate course developed by the GCP to provide an interdisciplinary space for students to explore global issues, challenges, and perspectives within the framework of the SDGs. Open to all majors, students are asked throughout the semester to draw connections between the SDGs and their individual disciplines and experiences. The course structure allows for students to expand their knowledge and skills through an exploration of the topics that are most relevant to them. Additionally, each section of this course explicitly includes a high-impact practice, as defined by Kuh (2008). In terms of the conceptual framework of the GCP, this course was designed to expand students' self-awareness, practice, knowledge, and analysis skills. Student learning outcomes for this course (across all sections) include: 1) define personal values and beliefs by critically reflecting on a high-impact practice experience, 2) develop relationships with others from different cultural backgrounds by working collaboratively in groups, 3) identify and describe major global issues through exploration of the SDGs, and 4) compare and contrast how global issues and systems are experienced at different scales by exploring how the SDGs are approached in domestic and international contexts. The GCP determined that one section of *Global Issues, Challenges, and Perspectives* should include community-based learning. To this end and with the assistance of OCEP, the GCP built a partnership with the UACDC.

The University Area Community Development Corporation Inc. (UACDC)

The UACDC is a 501(c) (3) public/private partnership whose mission is children and family development, crime prevention, and commerce growth. Its primary

focus is the redevelopment and sustainability of the at-risk areas surrounding the Tampa campus of USF, where high crime, poverty and a lack of basic resources has plagued the area for decades. For nearly 20 years, the UACDC has championed positive change in the economic, educational, and social levels of the community through youth programs, adult education, and resource assistance. Funds provided through grants, private contributions, and public appropriations allow residents to participate in most programs free of charge.

The University Area is identified as "economically disadvantaged" (2013 Census) and has some of the worst health outcomes and crime rates in Hillsborough County and the state of Florida. Of the 7,000 families in the area, 96% are classified as "extremely low income" by the Housing Authority of Tampa-Hillsborough County. Many are members of the "working poor" families whose annual gross income is \$10,000. Approximately 98% of children qualify for free or reduced lunch, and at least 8% of elementary students are reported homeless (Mort Elementary School, 2015). The racial composition of the community is 33.6% Non-Hispanic White, 32.8% Black, and 29.1% Hispanic or Latino.

Operating out of a 50,000 square foot, state-of-the-art Community Center Complex, the UACDC focuses on collaborative impact to set the standard for a new way to help a community overcome poverty and affect positive transformation. The UACDC is acting as a change agent fostering collaborations with community partners to address the needs of residents, families, and businesses so they can take back the streets of the University Area community where they can safely grow and prosper.

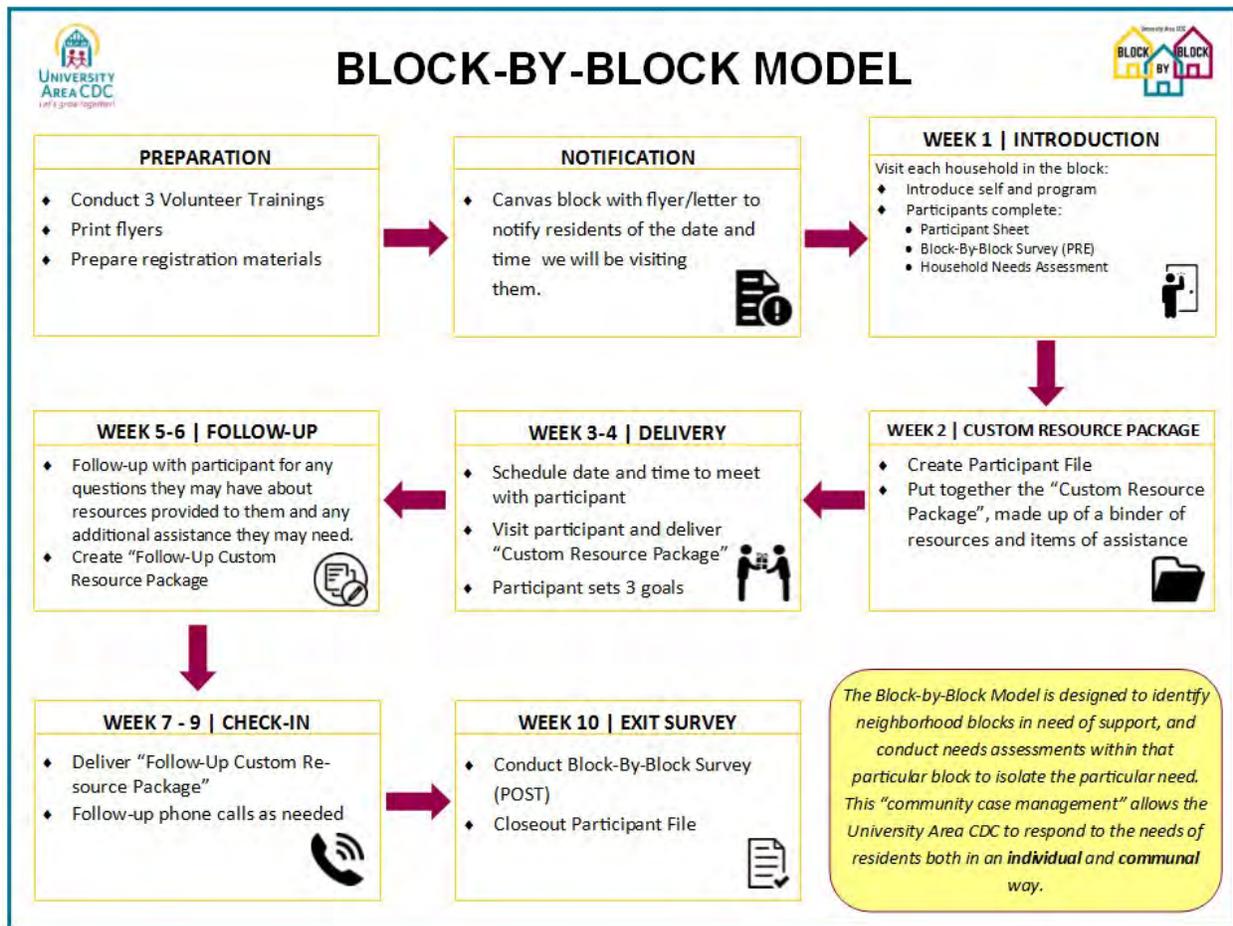
Block-By-Block

In 2017, as part of its Community Development & Engagement Plan, the UACDC developed Block-By-Block, a program with the intent to further the organization's reach into the University Area

community, build meaningful relationships with residents, and assist residents in improving their lives. Block-By-Block is designed to identify neighborhood segments in need of support, conduct needs assessments within that particular block, and allocate resources to address the particular need at both the individual and community level. At the

individual level, participating residents are connected to resources and items of assistance related to their immediate needs, practice goal setting and follow-through, and, most importantly, gain the sense that someone in the community cares about them. At the community level, Block-By-Block allows the UACDC to gain an understanding about where

Figure 2. Structure of the Block-By-Block program.



residents and their families are with respect to all pieces of family wellness, identify community level issues and concerns, and advocate for the community by leveraging stakeholder relationships. Often, neighbors have similar challenges regarding community infrastructure, high crime, lack of transportation, lack of clean water, and other

issues. Through Block-By-Block, these challenges can be responded to in a real and holistic way that supports the prosperity of an entire block of residents rather than just a few.

Block-By-Block is implemented as a 10-week program, during which volunteers, called "Connectors," work one-on-one with participating households to identify their

needs and connect them with resources and items of assistance. In order to ensure proper program implementation, Connectors are trained through a guided volunteer experience, meeting a total of 8 times throughout the program. Prior to going into the community to register participants, Connectors take part in three trainings where they learn about the mission and purpose of the UACDC and Block-By-Block, learn strategies for community engagement, and practice interacting with and registering residents for the program.

Connectors place flyers notifying residents of the date and time they will be visiting the homes to register participants for the program, allowing residents to be prepared for the interaction. Registration takes place on both a Saturday morning and Monday evening in order to ensure all households have the opportunity to choose to participate in the program. During that first interaction, Connectors register participants in the program, utilizing the Block-By-Block Survey and the Household Needs Assessment to identify their needs. Domains discussed in the interview stage include: housing, education, childcare, transportation, and school supplies, among many others.

For the next 10 weeks, Connectors work with the families to connect them with community resources and items of assistance. Each family is allocated \$300 to be used by the Connectors to create their Custom Resource Package, made up of a resource binder and items specific to the needs participants identified during registration. Items purchased include: bus passes, work boots, water filters, gift cards for food, diapers, air mattresses, cookware, and much more. In addition, Connectors work with the participants to identify three goals they want to achieve related to the resources that are provided to them. Goals could include anything from attending a group fitness class at the community center, to signing up for Meals on Wheels, to visiting the Harvest Hope Community Garden. This component is included as a way to allow the participant to

practice goal setting and accountability. Connectors continue to follow up with participants weekly until the end of the 10 weeks, documenting each interaction, and, ultimately, providing a summary of the participant's progress throughout the program.

Student Impact

During fall 2017 and spring 2018, the GCP-UACDC community-based global learning partnership was conducted as a non-credit-bearing experience. Students served as Connectors for the Block-By-Block program while linking their community engagement with global issues discussed during class meetings. Over two semesters, 20 undergraduate students from 13 different majors completed the experience. Of these students, 13 completed written reflections detailing their learning. We analyzed these student reflections to gauge student impact and also to look for opportunities for improvement. Demographics of the sample group are presented in [Table 1](#). The written reflection consisted of a combination of rating scale, selected-response, and constructed-response questions. The goals of these questions were to 1) report self-perceived learning gains, and 2) encourage students to critically reflect on their experiences in the community. This question set culminated the ongoing reflective activities throughout the semester. For the purposes of the community-based global learning experience, students were not graded on their responses. This research was reviewed and approved by USF's Institutional Review Board (IRB). [Table 2](#) displays the questions and associated answer options that were considered for analysis.

For question 1, which aimed to assess student learning generally, all students selected "4- I learned greatly from this experience." Questions 2-3 aimed to assess student learning more specifically in regard to GCP student learning outcomes. For question 2, students selected a variety of outcomes. From highest to lowest count, students

selected practice (9), self-awareness (7), willingness (5), knowledge (5), synthesis (1), and, finally, analysis (0). These results are also presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency counts for outcomes selected in question 2. The highest two counts are in bold.

| Outcome | n |
|----------------|----------|
| Self-Awareness | 7 |
| Willingness | 5 |
| Practice | 9 |
| Knowledge | 5 |
| Analysis | 0 |
| Synthesis | 1 |

It is important to note that although the question asked students to select two outcomes, one student only selected one outcome, and one student selected four outcomes. For question 3, students reported that the experience enhanced their learning for all outcomes, but practice and knowledge were rated the highest. Table 4 presents a summary of the results from question 3.

Table 4. Minimum rating, maximum rating, and mean for learning enhancement in regard to each outcome (question 3). The highest two means are in bold.

| Outcome | min | max | mean |
|----------------|-----|-----|-------------|
| Self-Awareness | 2 | 4 | 3.62 |
| Willingness | 3 | 4 | 3.67 |
| Practice | 3 | 4 | 3.92 |
| Knowledge | 2 | 4 | 3.75 |
| Analysis | 2 | 4 | 3.33 |
| Synthesis | 2 | 4 | 3.25 |

The results suggest that all students felt their learning was enhanced from this community-based global learning experience.

Quotes from the constructed responses that support a high level of general student learning include:

- “This experience challenged me in terms of my pre-judgements and my own limited experience.”
- “By learning what it takes to build relationships with strangers under a common goal, I can better do so in other leadership opportunities.”
- “I realized that [if] everybody could do that extra action, little or big to help someone else we would live in a better world.”

The student learning outcomes for this experience were connected to the GCP outcomes of self-awareness, practice, knowledge, and analysis. The results from questions 2 and 3 suggest that this experience was successful in developing students’ self-awareness, practice, and knowledge skills but less successful in developing their analysis skills. Constructed responses from questions 4-7 support these conclusions. Figure 3 displays a word cloud to visually represent common words students used in their responses to Questions 4-7 (average word count = 297). Table 5 provides quotes from student reflections that represent the development of their self-awareness, practice, and knowledge skills. Although these are pilot study results, the responses suggest that student learning was enhanced across all intended student learning outcomes. However, some outcomes appear to have been developed more than others. The exploration of these data will help to plan future semesters of this community-based global learning experience.

CONCLUSION

GCP and UACDC successfully fused an interdisciplinary course with a community development initiative to provide a community-based global learning experience for undergraduate USF students. Results from a pilot study suggest that student learning was enhanced across all intended student learning outcomes, though some outcomes were developed more than others. Additionally, this

partnership was effective, in part, because it was mutually beneficial and aligned with each partner’s individual goals. For the GCP, this experience allowed students to connect global issues encompassed by the SDGs to a real-world context. For UACDC, Block-By-Block was able to grow with volunteer support from students. The GCP and UACDC look forward to continuing and enhancing this partnership while making a positive impact on both students and the community.

Figure 3. Word cloud with common words from student reflections.



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Kara A. Fulton, Ph.D., is a Clinical Assistant Professor in Applied Arts and Sciences, an interdisciplinary undergraduate program at the University of North Texas. As an applied anthropologist, she has conducted research on community identity and practices in the past and present. Dr. Fulton previously served as a Professional Development Specialist with the Global Citizens Project at the University of South Florida, where the research for this paper took place.

Address: University of North Texas, 1155 Union Circle, #305009, Denton, TX 76203, USA

Email: kara.fulton@unt.edu

Diana Diaz, MPH, is a Community Engagement Manager for the University Area Community Development Corporation Inc. (UACDC). With an interest in public health and education, she has developed and managed several UACDC programs focused on children, family, and community development since 2015.

Address: University Area Community Development Corporation Inc., 14013 N 22ndSt, Tampa, FL 33613 USA

Email: ddiaz@uacdc.org

Table 1. Demographics of sample group (n = 13). [\[Return to text\]](#)

| Major | n | % |
|-----------------------------------|---|-----|
| Africana Studies | 1 | 8% |
| Biomedical Sciences | 1 | 8% |
| Economics | 2 | 15% |
| English | 1 | 8% |
| Environmental Science & Policy | 1 | 8% |
| Global Business | 2 | 15% |
| Health Sciences | 1 | 8% |
| Interdisciplinary Social Sciences | 1 | 8% |
| Political Science | 1 | 8% |
| Public Health | 2 | 15% |

| | |
|---------------------|------|
| Average GPA: | 3.48 |
|---------------------|------|

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| Average Age: | 21 |
|---------------------|----|

| Ethnicity | n | % |
|---------------------------|---|-----|
| Asian | 1 | 8% |
| Black or African American | 4 | 31% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 3 | 23% |
| White | 3 | 23% |
| Other | 2 | 15% |

| Gender | n | % |
|--------|----|-----|
| Male | 1 | 8% |
| Female | 12 | 92% |

| First-Generation | n | % |
|------------------|----|-----|
| Yes | 10 | 77% |
| No | 3 | 23% |

| Student Type | n | % |
|-----------------------|----|-----|
| First Time in College | 10 | 77% |
| Transfer | 3 | 23% |

Table 2. Questions and associated answer options that were considered for analysis. [\[Return to text\]](#)

| Question |
|--|
| <i>Answer Options</i> |
| 1. Overall, how would you rate your learning from engaging in these experiences? <i>1- I did not learn anything from this experience.</i> <i>2- I learned minimally from this experience.</i> <i>3- I learned somewhat from this experience.</i> <i>4- I learned greatly from this experience.</i> |
| 2. Please select the two (2) Global Citizens Project Outcomes you believe the majority of your community service experiences helped you develop the most. <i>Self-Awareness</i> <i>Willingness</i> <i>Practice</i> <i>Knowledge</i> <i>Analysis</i> <i>Synthesis</i> |
| 3. On a scale of 1-4, please indicate to what extent you feel engaging in these experiences enhanced your learning with regard to each of the six Global Citizens Project Outcomes. <i>1- Did not enhance</i> <i>2- Minimally enhanced</i> <i>3- Somewhat enhanced</i> <i>4- Greatly enhanced</i> |
| 4. What attracted you to pursue these specific experiences and why? <i>(constructed-response)</i> |
| 5. What perspective(s) related to the UN Sustainable Development Goal you identified in your pre-approval assignment did you encounter while engaged in these experiences and which perspectives or counterpoints were not addressed by the experiences? <i>(constructed-response)</i> |
| 6. Describe a shocking, meaningful, or "aha" moment you experienced while engaged in these experiences. <i>(constructed-response)</i> |
| 7. How did these experiences challenge or support the way you view and/or understand the world, your own country and culture, or the way you think you should navigate the world? <i>(constructed-response)</i> |

Table 5. Quotes from student reflections demonstrating development of self-awareness, practice, and knowledge outcomes. [\[Return to text.\]](#)

| Student Quote | Outcome Represented |
|---|---|
| A shocking moment during my experience was realizing that these families faced issues that I would never imagine having to think about such as not having access to clean water... It has allowed me to be more aware of the issues going on within the community I live in. | self-awareness: define personal values and beliefs by critically reflecting on a high-impact practice experience |
| A meaningful moment I experienced was when my partner and I were able to form a more personal bond with our [Block-By-Block] participant by hearing about the family's personal experience and issues... It really broke down any biases [we] had beforehand, and we were further able to eliminate any stereotypes harbored as well. | practice: develop relationships with others from different cultural backgrounds by working collaboratively in groups |
| I encountered individuals who did not have access to clean water or transportation [SDG 6 and 11]. This made it difficult for them to work or seek healthcare [SDG 8 and 3]. Because of this issue, some of these people are stuck in a cycle of poverty due to their inability to work [SDG 1]. | knowledge: identify and describe major global issues through exploration of the UN Sustainable Development Goals |