The Power of Service Learning: Practical Examples

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The Kinesiology Department at Cal Poly joins forces with three community agencies Special Olympics, CCATC & The Central Coast Low Vision Council to organize three Adapted Physical Activity programs. The alliance has built a strong bridge between Cal Poly and the community of people with disabilities in and around San Luis Obispo, but Cal Poly reaps great reward in that it’s students learn invaluable lessons from their experience.

The Adapted Paddling Program
This program is designed for people with mobility impairments. Our participants have found the freedom of an aquatic environment can be very empowering!

EyeCycle
This program takes people who are blind or visually impaired on bicycle rides using tandems. Students take the “captain’s” position while participants sit in the “stoker” position.

Friday Club
The Friday Club is a Special Olympics program that brings people with developmental disability to the Cal Poly campus to learn sports skills. We teach Soccer in the Fall, Basketball in the Winter and Track and Field in the Spring. The Friday club teaches sports skills with a fun at all costs philosophy.

In Kine 307 Adapted Physical Activity” students embrace Cal Poly’s motto “learn by doing!” The class is required for all Kinesiology majors and in the lab portion, students participate in programs designed to provide adapted physical activity experiences for people with various disabilities. The Adapted Physical Activity programs were each started by Kinesiology professor Kevin Taylor who now serves as Director of the programs.

By appointing graduate students as Program Coordinators for each of the programs, Dr. Taylor is able to sustain all three programs in addition to his other university commitments.

Non Profit Status
Working in collaboration with the University’s foundation Dr. Taylor and his students have written grants to help fund the programs using the foundation’s 501(c)3 status. The programs have also benefited from philanthropic donations from individuals and corporations. The non profit status aligns perfectly with the mission & philosophy of the programs.

The Adapted Paddling Program has received two grants from the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation. All three programs have benefited through the generous donations local individuals.

Program Goals
In collaboration with their community partners each of the programs seeks to achieve the following goals:

1. Community Connection – we capitalize on the fact that both students and participants report feeling an increased sense of community. Community partners are involved in decision-making with respect to the growth, development and management of each program. All three programs are offered free of charge to the local community.

2. Breaking stereotypes of people with disabilities - Society & culture does a good job of convincing people with disabilities that they are incapable, we try to convince everyone participants and students, that this could not be further from the truth!

3. Opening doors and creating opportunities - We open doors for the students and the participants, students often become very much more open minded, and participants gain an opportunity to participate in physical activity.

4. Capacity Building – We seek to help everyone achieve more by developing individuals in a broad spectrum of ways. By using physical activity to build self-confidence, self-esteem, and body image in the participants. By making Cal Poly students more aware of the diversity within society and more appreciative of the contribution that people with disabilities have to make. Cal Poly students learn to look past the disability and see the human being!