

**SEASONING THE HEART OF STUDENTS THROUGH THE
DEPARTMENT OF SERVICE LEARNING (OUTREACH)
AT LOYOLA COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), CHENNAI – A CASE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

The Service Learning (Outreach) at Loyola College, Chennai is an eye-opener for the students to find many harsh realities which still exist in Indian society. It really motivates students to be human. Exposure to the urban realities in the slums of Chennai city makes every student of Loyola College understand the lives of the poor and low strata of society. Exposure to rural villages makes the students to understand the stark naked realities of the rural folk. Intellectual development is constantly taking place through formal learning and teaching in the classroom by their respective teachers, but then classroom teaching could not provide seasoning the heart of students. Therefore, this need is addressed by the Department of Service Learning (Outreach) through its various activities and programmes.

KEYWORDS: Service Learning (Outreach), Human, Exposure, Intellectual Development, Seasoning the Heart of Students

INTRODUCTION

Every human being has a purpose in life. Therefore, the purpose of a human being is to be good and to attain ultimate happiness. Loyola College through Service Learning (Outreach) helps the students in reaching out to the marginalized sections of the society in the informal settlements, first to understand their problems and then do something for the benefit of those people. In the same way, rural visits expose the students to learn from the people about harsh realities at the grassroots level and develop critical consciousness.

The students of today studying in various colleges and universities will be leaders of the nation tomorrow. The role of higher education in developing students' character has to be affirmed by every colleges and universities in India. Loyola College through the Department of Service Learning (Outreach) emphasizes the development of people and a 'learning society' as central to the aims of higher educational institutions run by Jesuits. University Grants Commission greatly appreciates Loyola for invoking the terminology of 'character' or 'morals' in higher education. Loyola College pays special attention in its higher education on the aspects of student development as students' values and attitudes, personal and social responsibility, civic responsibility, holistic student development, responsible judgment, wisdom, moral formation and service learning.

Why do we Need Service Learning?

- To get an inner urge for service.

- To reorient the value system.
- To motivate students to plan the development of the nation
- To enable students to perceive the harsh realities of life faced by many in our country.
- To enable students to influence policy makers and planners for taking up suitable and need-based plans and decision making.
- To facilitate students to devise appropriate methodologies for addressing the issues and problems of the poor people and empower them with need-based development

Basic Components of Service Learning

Recognition, Responsibility, Remorse, Restitution and Repetition are the basic components of outreach.

Context of Service Learning at Loyola College

Service Learning (Outreach) is to reach out to the underprivileged and the downtrodden. It is to love, care and empathize. It is the outcome of the thirst for service. It is a part and parcel of academic activities in Loyola College.

Holistic student development is the core aspect of Jesuit higher education and therefore Department of Service Learning (Outreach) takes this opportunity for the students to create meaningful lives that integrate interests of the head with passions of the heart. Loyola College through Service Learning (Outreach) offers integrative education that helps students 'become more fully developed human beings'. If the education 'puts the mind in touch with the heart, and the heart in touch with the mind, every student would definitely acquire heartfelt minds, and mindful hearts'.

Service Learning (Outreach) provides a learning environment in which students are encouraged to cultivate both critical thinking and compassion; mind and heart. Service Learning (Outreach) education help students learn to "think the world together" rather than "think it apart" in educational settings. Outreach at Loyola College help students learn who they are, to search for a larger purpose for their lives, and to leave college as better human beings.

Service Learning (Outreach) education is an integrative education at Loyola College, because it incorporates the all-round intellectual thinking, emotional maturity, socially concerned, rational human beings and so forth.

Making a Difference

"Whoever is generous to the poor lends to lord and he will repay him for his deeds." Outreach programme at Loyola College is designed in such a way that the students get an opportunity to be exposed to rural and urban parts of the state. Service Learning (Outreach) helps to inspire, motivate & educate students so that they take something away and pursue their goals with an open mind.

Service Learning (Outreach) helps students giving them the chance to apply what they've learned in the classroom in the real world with human satisfaction as a goal. Students who do participate in outreach work learn that they can actually make a difference with what they do. This helps students better understand their own competence, leading to more self-confidence and a can-do attitude that can spread to their work and academic pursuits.

It helps diffident individuals gain a sense of worth and leadership capabilities.

As students work as a team in the community, they learn that they can be responsible for making great things happen. This helps to build a sense of responsibility in students, and a sense of pride when they see what they've done is actually helping others. Participating in outreach allows students to build upon their existing skill sets. As students work in a real-life setting, they can use volunteering projects to explore and improve upon existing skills. Outreach helps in making a difference and it's an eye opener and helps student realize that that doing even small things can have a big impact on others.

“If one person can make a difference, everyone should try” is the mantra outreach teaches to all students who enter the portals of Loyola College. The students of Loyola, in one way or the other way, are making a difference in the life of the urban poor and rural people through our outreach program. “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others” which reminds of Outreach services done by students to the needy and poor.

Loyola Outreach: Making of Men and Women

In addition to influencing students' knowledge base, thinking abilities and skills, higher education in Loyola College, Chennai offers the golden opportunity to promote other aspects of students' growth as people who could think about the need of others to address, devising possible ways of planning and developing the nation and contributing to society. It is true that higher education has an important role in shaping our future society because today's college / university students will be tomorrow's leaders at various level as teachers, policy makers, planners, doctors, engineers, business managers, faith leaders, politicians, citizens, activists, parents and neighbours. While they need to be able to demonstrate key skills and knowledge to enact those roles effectively, they must also demonstrate personal and social responsibility in carrying them out. A focus on holistic student development addresses the current challenges the sector and society faces.

Overall / Holistic Student Development

The notion of holistic student development encompasses not only learning academic knowledge and skills, such as problem-solving and analysis, but also other aspects of students as people who are growing and maturing affectively (emotionally) and morally. Apart from classroom learning, the Department of Service Learning (Outreach) provides a platform for the students to develop themselves for the society in the following ways.

The purpose of Service Learning (Outreach) exposure and its education goes beyond knowledge and skills to include other aspects of being a person in society (such as emotion, spirituality, moral judgment, and embodiment).

Service Learning (Outreach) is an integrative view of learning and development that emphasizes the connections and relationships between thinking, feeling and actions, rather than separating cognitive dimensions of education from affective or moral dimensions.

Service Learning (Outreach) education clearly emphasize going beyond knowledge and skills to include other aspects of being a person in society. As the most educationists and development thinkers espouse an integrative view, emphasizing the connections and relationships between thinking, feeling and action, rather than separating cognitive dimensions of education from affective or moral dimensions. They all emphasize moral dimensions of higher learning; every academy has to have an obligation to guide students in developing a sense of personal and social responsibility.

How Outreach Experience Influences Students' Holistic Development?

There is a rich tradition of research at Loyola College in student development through higher education. Impact of Loyola College education always focuses on making of men and women for each other and with others. The syllabi which is framed in Loyola College for all disciplines is concentrated to form students' attitudes and values change in many ways, including greater cultural, aesthetic and intellectual sophistication; greater openness and 'other-person' orientation; greater humanitarian and altruistic values; greater likelihood of civic involvement and more positive attitudes toward equality and tolerance; greater understanding of other cultures and more egalitarian sex-roles. Students also make significant gains during their college days in their level of principled moral reasoning.

The Service Learning (Outreach) activities help students to develop their values, sense of self, identity and purpose.

Interaction of fellow classmates with people from all grades, in the slum and rural areas expose students to new experiences and perspectives and provides opportunities to reflect on those in dialogue with others offer powerful learning experiences that shape people's development

Service Learning (Outreach) helps students to increase awareness among students about the status of the poor in the city of Chennai and rural pockets of Tamil Nadu state.

Service Learning (Outreach) enables students to contribute their skills, energy and resources for the empowerment of the lives of the needy and those who are not as blessed.

Service Learning (Outreach) is one of the most important programmes at Loyola and this helps the poor to get help from students in various ways.

It gifts students the opportunity to serve those from downtrodden sections of society and aid in their upliftment

Service Learning (Outreach) stands a great model for the student community to provide a better future and basic necessities that the needy would find as a challenge to obtain. India's future depends on the generation Y (Youth) to put forward the present condition which will enable them to provide a better future and basic necessities and equal rights.

Hallmark of Higher Education

The need for holistic student development is the hallmark of higher education. Therefore, graduates of higher education are tomorrow's leaders and the troubled world needs 'leaders for good'. Higher education is a time of transition and change for all its students. Developmentally, young adulthood is a time of change, in which students are grappling with identity and intimacy and shifting from relying on others to self-authorship. Students in higher education confront new ideas and ways of thinking as they interact with students from other backgrounds. Mature students may be at a different developmental stage, but they are still in a turbulent transition period in which existing views are challenged and identities are re-made. So students are in a time of change, in which they must not only deconstruct old meanings and ways of making meaning, but reconstruct a sense of purpose in their own life that integrates expanded perspectives and worldviews. All these are clearly addressed by Outreach exposure to students while they are in the formation of learning.

Service Learning (Outreach): Change Within

I quote the words of Amala Deepika (09-PEL-012) who studied English Literature revealed about outreach thus. "Ignorance is the root cause for all evil". To wipe out our ignorance on the reality of today's India and to enlighten us with social consciousness was the chief goal of outreach programme. The program started with orientation wherein our

assumption on outreach was mended. This laid a strong foundation for the indented purpose. i.e. ‘out- reach’- ‘a learning process’, ‘to teach’. This camp gave me a different sort of exposure- no mobiles, no cozy cot, no hot water bath, to get up early, stand in queue, to do manual work, walk a long distance, to speak with strangers with a smile, to care, share and so on. Outreach experience has disturbed me. It gave birth to different questions in me.

- Do I owe my country? If so what?
- Who is a good leader? Is there an ideal leader?
- What is my part?
- What can I do now?
- Should I stoop to the status quo?
- Is theory practical?
- Is change possible?

I learnt to care, to adjust, cope with situation, to be conscious of time, to feel sociable and I was also made, aware of the reality-other side of the coin - India. I leave the camp with a ‘disturbed mind’ and with lots of hopes. I finally felt; *change within, is the first step to the change outside*. Thanks to Loyola and department of outreach.

I quote the **words of oliviesu (09-PZO-21)** who studied Zoology remarked about outreach thus“When Loyola College said ‘outreach’...my first reaction was ‘how boring’!! I was so confident that it would turn out to be a disaster for me or in other words, I knew I won’t enjoy, like it but the outcome was totally opposite...I actually loved it!! The whole outreach camp turned out to be completely new experience for me. I have been on camp before this but this time it was different. I got to know many people and learnt how to adjust and also made new friends. Besides all these, visiting villages and interacting with the villagers was a good learning experience for me. Though I agree there was a communication problem since I am not from this state and unfortunately I am not at all linguistic so it was quite hard for me to interact with people there yet I now realize how people can live happily with minimum facilities. Besides, my teammates helped me understand them and their problems better. I was made more aware about the rural lives about which I was naïve. When we entered the village, I was quite taken aback when I saw the villagers. Though they knew nothing about us yet they welcomed us with their open arm which was really touching. I also had a wonderful time visiting old age home. I enjoyed sharing quality moments with old people, laughing signing and talking with them. I would love to say the outreach trip was a blessing in disguise for me. College is doing a great job by organizing outreach camp which made the students more realistic as well as mature”.

Outcome of Service Learning (Outreach)

- Outreach is a program which aims at bringing awareness among student fraternity and facilitates students’ efforts and creativity in reaching out to the underprivileged.
- It is an urge to make a difference in looking at life in a very constructive ways.
- Outreach provides an opportunity for the students to learn the maximum life skill education.
- Outreach is a platform by which students get to know about problems of the fellow poor citizens.

- The learnings derived from outreach are the lessons that help students to lead a meaningful life.
- Outreach program helps students to journey within and without so as to be able to contribute their share in the promotion of justice and humanly values.
- Outreach provides ample opportunities to students to interact with people and walk in their shoes.
- Outreach is a time when students venture out to informal settlement of urban areas and rural areas, trying to understand the bitter lament and suffering of the most marginalized and underprivileged people and to empathize with them.

Indirect Impact of Outreach Programme

- Development of positive attitude among student community and exhibits proactive role in nation building.
- Skill development in the areas of leadership, communication, relationship, social analysis, community organisation, planning, execution, reporting, evaluation, documentation, public speaking and so on.
- Value formation in terms of transparency, accountability, answerability, identifying with the poor, marginalized and other vulnerable sections of the society.
- Becoming a role model as men and women for others with Jesuit charism.

Rural Camp

The six-day long rural exposure through the Department of Service Learning (Outreach) of Loyola College helps in addressing the various issues faced by the villagers. But the greatest outcome of it all is the awareness created in the students of the life lived by the people that makes up seventy percent of the country's population. The motivational speeches to students before start of the outreach programme and also during the year on various occasions help students to understand their role in the society better. The experience of creating a model of an ideal village enables them to bridge their learning and the reality outside.

Feedback of the Students Regarding Rural Exposure Camp

- Students could experience the difference in terms of hospitality that exists between the city people and the villagers.
- The outreach program conducted by Loyola College helped students to know about the life of the villagers.
- Outreach helps students to mould their attitudes and shape their personalities.
- The outreach experience instills confidence in students that they can accommodate to any kind of situation.
- Outreach experience makes the students to realize the needs of the poor people and this drives them to spend their own money for the poor people who are struggling for their basic needs.
- Students are made to think that what they could do for Loyola and the society is to be men and women for others, when they attain a good position in their lives.
- Students do experience acceptance and sharing among themselves about what best they could do for the nation.

- Outreach is a key for students on how to understand life.
- Rural exposure camp is not just visiting the villages and interacting with the villagers, but it provides students a good opportunity to develop their soft skills as well as how to deal with different people in different situations.
- The camp teaches the unity which is the most powerful weapon to make anything possible in the nation.
- Rural camp is the ample opportunity for students to understand the real life situations of the rural people and the real face of Tamil Nadu villages.
- Students are made to realize that they have social responsibility.
- Though the students from other states cannot understand the language what the rural people spoke, they could speak with them heart to heart.
- The love and affection of the rural people touch students a lot and it enkindles them to love and serve the rural people back in future.
- Outreach enables facilitates students to reach into the people so that they can reach out to the needs and sufferings of rural people.
- Students learn to love, adjust, co-ordinate, take up responsibility, be patient, listen to others and work with others to make a difference.
- The village visits help students to realize their duty and the responsibility to the society.

Students' Personal Changes

- Students encountered love and care of the people in the village.
- Students learnt to be happy with what they have.
- Students understood the happiness and advantages of joint family system.
- Students learnt how to behave in society.
- Students understood and knew the importance of nature and agriculture.
- Students realized to decide not to encourage caste and not to practice caste discrimination at any circumstances.
- In whatever position, students might be in future, they have to respect their fellow beings.
- Students learnt to adjust themselves in different situations.
- Students could feel the true love and affection of the village people, which they share, which has to be taken into the so called modern civilized society.
- The education facilities available in the village made students to feel that how blessed college students are.
- Students have learned to live and to lead a happy life with limited facilities available in the villages.
- Students learnt that if they have to achieve anything, they need to work hard like villagers. "As you sow, So you reap".

- Students have realized the importance of agriculture.
- Students enjoy so many things in their life but they forget from where it comes or who makes it. “The village people are much more humane than us. And they are contented with what they have and behave as cultured people”. This made students realize the greatness and goodness in them.
- The village visit made students to ponder how they are going away from the nature and spoil it.
- “Villagers are not scared of tomorrow and ready to face any challenges in their life”. This should be the attitude towards life.

Learning and Impact of Rural Camp

- Deep realization of the fact that food should not be wasted and a conscious effort to implement the same in our lives.
- Water, being a scarce yet precious resource needs to be consumed so as to maintain sustainable development.
- Water saved now will be a treasure for generations to come.
- Careful yet efficient usage of electricity usually taken for granted is to be realized as an irreplaceable source of energy for all.
- The average expenditure on junk food for once a day is equivalent to the daily wage of the farmers. Better understandings of the value of each penny spent and instill in us a higher level of value that students attach to the money they spend without even thinking twice.
- Working with new and different people coming from different diverse backgrounds is always a challenge. Adjusting with and accommodating each other’s viewpoints and respecting their individualities is something that all students have learnt gradually within a week’s time of the rural camp. “It is not who is saying something that counts, It is what is being said that does”
- Having been seated next to villagers and understanding the heartfelt narration of hardships and fights for social justice and their very own human rights has moved students to the core.

Things to Take Back Home from the Rural Camp: Feedback Given By Students

- It was a chance to experience the pollution-free village life.
- Refreshing experience to be away from city life.
- It was an opportunity to enhance Self-confidence, Leadership qualities and Effective management of events.
- Able to gain information on the villages in India during the camp.
- It kindled in us a spirit to help the less privileged in whatever way possible after our education.
- Most of us, city-bred children are spoilt with too much love at home. This outreach has made us self-dependent.
- We learnt handling kinds of people, to stay calm and stable during critical situations and manage them wisely.

- It was an eye-opener for us, not to waste resources that we are fortunate enough to be provided with. We have promised ourselves not to be negligent of these graces and to use them optimally.
- After completing a task the satisfaction that we experienced was beyond explanation.
- Villagers teach us the real meaning of hospitality. In cities we don't even know our neighbor's name but it was a new experience to see such bonding in the villages. Even complete strangers are welcomed warmly in the villages.
- We had the privilege of meeting Mr. Palani Kumar, IAS, Collector of Thiruvallur district. We were taken aback by his simplicity and dedication. He immediately took all our suggestions with a positive attitude and fulfilled his promise by sending the Thasildhar that very night to collect our petitions. He also brought home the point that the public and the politicians are hand in glove in spoiling our country. He insisted that the youth should be inquisitive and should demand for their rights. This really helped us to realize our duty as a citizen and put an end to the "blame game".
- Most of all, the outreach program has given us an opportunity to make good friends crossing the barriers of departments, language and the like. Some of them will definitely be "friends for life".
- The outreach has taught us to be critically conscious and strive for the development of the "backbone of our country-villages" so that Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's dream of 2020 does not remain a dream but a reality.

CONCLUSIONS

Every institution should have a compelling call for change and renewal in higher education. Even after 13 years of Service Learning (Outreach) activities at Loyola call for a renewal and commitment to inspiring deeper thinking and educating the whole person. As the saying goes, "Tiny drops of water make the mighty ocean", the Loyola students through Service Learning (Outreach) resemble the drops of water. Therefore if all the colleges adopt this programme, it will help to bring a huge change in the society. Make a difference while you live and touch the lives of poor and make them smile when you can' is the simple message outreach passes to every student while they are studying.

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