

PRACTICE NOTE

Teaching student philanthropy—Possibilities for practice within the UK higher education sector

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Email: a.m.body@kent.ac.uk**Abstract**

This practice paper reflects on lessons learnt from an undergraduate philanthropy module introduced across different programmes within the division for the Study of Law, Society, and Social Justice at the University of Kent, United Kingdom. The module applies service-learning and experiential learning pedagogy to ensure students critically engage with community and societal issues; recognise themselves as philanthropists; and engage in a responsible decision-making process with their cohort. As one of the first UK Higher Education student philanthropy modules, lessons learnt provide important general reflections for student philanthropy modules internationally, alongside offering a potential ‘blueprint’ within the UK context. Aligning with others (such as McDougle’s study) and drawing on critical reflections from students and partners, suggests that experiential learning pedagogy is most successful when carried out in a diverse and multidisciplinary learning space where students reflect on their own moral position alongside others to build consensus.

KEYWORDS

civic university, education philanthropy, experiential learning, student philanthropy

Practitioner Points**What is currently known about the subject matter**

- Student philanthropy, also referred to as experiential philanthropy, is defined as a ‘teaching and learning approach that integrates charitable giving with academic study, to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities’.
- A review of programmes across the United States, identified the following shared student learning goals: Enhanced awareness of social problems and non-profits in the community; challenging attitudes, behaviours, interests, and intentions related to social responsibility and civic engagement; increased knowledge of philanthropic processes such as grant-seeking and grant-making; enhanced understanding through integrating theory and practice, and improved critical thinking, leadership, communication, and work-life skills.
- Student philanthropy has not yet infiltrated UK universities, despite the UK’s Higher Education sector increasingly seeking to promote more civic experiences for students.

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What your paper adds to this

- Critical evaluation of the pilot delivery of one of the first student philanthropy modules delivered in a UK context.
- Experiential learning in student philanthropy modules can provide disruptive learning spaces where students must critically examine their own value systems, priorities and judgements.
- Actively considering philanthropy in the widest terms possible, as an act of civic participation, rather than simply limited to one off acts of financial giving supports meaningful engagement in the learning opportunity.
- Allowing students to ground their initial understanding of philanthropy within their own lived experience and different cultural contexts facilitates valuable debate and discussion upon which learning can be built.

The implications of your study findings for practitioners

- To ensure that students recognise their own role as philanthropic citizens moving forward and gain an understanding into the diversity of philanthropic activities, it is important to embed pre and post activities, and reflection into the learning process to capture the journey travelled.
- Ensure the discussion space allows time to deliberate, debate and explore the process at every stage, from the first discussions of defining philanthropy, to decision-making, to reflection to support a democratisation of philanthropy, engagement of diverse voices and learning about different perspectives.
- Hearing from a wide range of practitioner voices from charity and non-profit practitioners to donors, including practitioners experience of fundraising and commissioning helps students develop a sense of understanding about the non-profit and philanthropic landscape, creating that bridge between theory and practice.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Student philanthropy is defined as a ‘teaching and learning approach that integrates charitable giving with academic study, to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities’ (Olberding, 2009, p. 465). Also referred to as experiential philanthropy, this approach to teaching philanthropy is almost exclusively found in the US where programme evaluations show multiple short and long-term positive outcomes for students, communities, and universities alike. Indeed, Olberding’s (2009) review of programmes across the United States, identified the following shared student learning goals: ‘Enhanced awareness of social problems and non-profits in the community; challenging attitudes, behaviours, interests, and intentions related to social responsibility and civic engagement; increased knowledge of philanthropic processes such as grant-seeking and grant-making; enhanced understanding through integrating theory and practice, and improved critical thinking, leadership, communication, and work-life skills.’ (2009, p. 465). Nonetheless, student philanthropy has not yet infiltrated UK universities (Keidan et al., 2014), despite the UK’s Higher Education sector increasingly seeking to promote more civic experiences for students (Goddard et al., 2016).

In this practice paper we reflect on the pilot delivery of one of the first student philanthropy modules delivered in a UK context. After a brief review of literature, we detail how this module was structured as a partnership between the university and local community foundation. Next, we briefly outline findings from a reflective evaluation. Finally, we conclude with key learning for practitioners

and educators seeking to provide experiential philanthropy modules and the opportunities for this within the UK Higher Education sector.

2 | STUDENT PHILANTHROPY

Literature consistently highlights the benefits of student philanthropy programmes (e.g., Ahmed & Olberding, 2007; McDonald et al., 2017; McDougale, 2022; Olberding, 2009, 2012). Whilst most of the outcomes focus on US students, emerging evidence suggests that such programmes are transferable, as similar outcomes are experienced by students in China (Li et al., 2020). However, in the US certain students benefit more than others. Students who are female, older than the average student, in ‘helping’ professions (McDougale et al., 2017), ethnic minorities (Kahne & Spote, 2008), and/or studying humanities (Ahmed & Olberding, 2007) are likely to report increased benefits from engaging in student philanthropy programmes, than the average, typical student. A small number of studies have also shown the longer-term effects on students who have participated in student philanthropy programmes (e.g., Ahmed & Olberding, 2007; Olberding, 2012). In the most recent of these studies, Olberding (2012), in revisiting student philanthropy participants from one university 10 years later, suggested that these alumni students ‘volunteer for non-profits at about one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half times the rate of the general population’ (p. 82) and ‘serve on boards at three times the rate of the general population’ (p. 82).

Consistent across literature is a dominant pedagogy associated with service learning (e.g., Ahmed & Olberding, 2007; Campbell, 2014; Dale et al., 2020; Hatcher & Studer, 2015; McDougle et al., 2017; Olberding, 2012, etc.). Based on an assumption that the undergraduate years are critical in the development of civic learning, service learning is based upon a premise that active engagement in local communities helps improve students' civic outcomes (Body & Hogg, 2019; Lau & Body, 2020). Civic outcomes include a development of a range of skills, knowledge, and behaviours, including collective decision making, listening to diverse perspectives, awareness of social issues, and getting involved in social action to address social issues (Hatcher & Studer, 2015). Civically engaged individuals 'work with others to solve problems and build thriving communities in ways that enhance democratic capacity' (Boyte & Fretz, 2010, p. 67). However, service-learning pedagogies have also come under some criticism in contexts outside student philanthropy. Associated with participatory citizenship, concern has been expressed that expressly focusing on service learning fails to challenge the status quo and does not adopt a critical social justice lens upon the topic in question (Body et al., 2020; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). It is in the connection between this reflective critical thinking and direct action, where we and others argue transformational learning happens and the space within which experiential learning extends beyond these traditional forms of service learning (Lau & Body, 2020; McDougle, 2022).

3 | ABOUT THE MODULE

With an emphasis on meaningful engagement with acts of giving whilst adopting a critical lens on philanthropy and non-profit studies (Coule et al., 2022) and drawing from learning elsewhere (e.g., see Campbell, 2014; Dale et al., 2020; McDougle et al., 2022) the module facilitated a local focused, direct giving approach, where 15 students explored local social issues and worked in partnership with the local community foundation. The module concluded with students making practical, real-life giving decisions, distributing a funding pot of £1500, to local community organisations. The philanthropic funding was secured from a local philanthropist which the teaching team had a relationship with and the 'ask' was based upon evidencing the benefits student philanthropy modules can bring to individual students, the university, and local communities. On a practical level the module was co-delivered with the local community foundation, Kent Community Foundation, the grant making process was managed in the following steps:

1. Students decide on the fund criteria (i.e., size of organisations which can apply for grant, cause area etc.).
2. Community foundation advertise fund.
3. Community organisations apply for fund.
4. Community foundation carries out due diligence checks on applications.
5. Students review applications.
6. Students award funding.
7. Community foundation distributes funding and manages ongoing relationship.

8. Impact and evaluation of funding is fed into next year's module as a learning point.

Fund criteria was set based on an activity that reflected on a needs analysis of the local area (Week 2, Table 1). Given the fund was small, students limited the fund to grassroots, micro and small organisations (under £50,000 annual turnover) and were as specific as possible with the fund criteria, limiting to geographical area and helping particularly vulnerable populations (youth and isolated elderly) to ensure that only a small number of organisations submitted applications. It was deemed unethical to be too wide in the funding call for applications and potentially 'waste charities time, if chances of success were too small' (student reflection). To further ensure the application process was not too demanding on organisational resources, the funding application was a total of 600 words, using three simple questions; what will you do with the funding; why is it needed; and how will this help?

The module design sought to recognise the importance of the investment of student's time to engage and critically reflect both with each other and with non-profit leaders and community organisations, underpinned by critical giving academic theory and philanthropic literature (Dale et al., 2020). Lectures were pre-recorded and available online to students prior to the workshops, to act as provocations for debate. Each week a 2-h workshop explored the topic of the week through dedicated exercises and contained a practice link, this was either exploring part of the grant making process, or a discussion and debate with non-profit leaders, grant makers and/or philanthropists. Here in Table 1, we outline an example of module structure:

4 | CRITICAL REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Fifteen students took the module, and this practice paper is based on their ongoing module evaluation and reflective journals (noted as Student Reflections) as well as four in-depth semi-structured interviews noted as (Participants A, B, C, and D) carried out with students who participated in the programme between January and July 2022. The community foundation was also asked for their reflections. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Kent ethics committee, and students consented to sharing pre and post reflective notes with the module lead. To minimise power dynamics, the researcher who collected interview data was not known to the students or connected to the module. Critical reflection and evaluation were built in throughout the module, both formally through the assessment processes and informally in pre, during and post module discussions, as shown here in Table 2.

5 | OBSERVATIONS

A thematic analysis of the pre and post reflective data and interview transcription revealed three dominant themes of discussion in relation to the key learning experiences described by the students.

TABLE 1 Example of module structure.

Wk	Lecture (pre-recorded)	Workshop/Seminar exercises (inspired by literature [e.g., Dale et al., 2020])	Practice link
1	What is philanthropy?	<i>Establishing the rules for democratic discussion and decisions making in the classroom.</i> The giving game: £10,000 and 10 charities—who gets what and why?	Needs Analysis + Community Foundation talk
2	Philanthropy in society	Critical engagement with needs analysis, data and pertaining to local area.	<i>Design funding call—Released</i> + charity talk
3	Who gives and why?	Students construct their own philanthropic storyline to date	Philanthropist talk
4	Ways of giving	Critical exploration of different giving practices in different communities (religious, cultural, etc.)	Charity talk (previous grantee)
5	Who gets and why?	Students evaluate how giving and volunteering supports specific charity	Charity talk (previous grantee)
6	Choosing causes	Debate—what is philanthropy for, and who/ what should it benefit	<i>Applications In</i> + charity talk
7	Ethical dilemmas	Students find news articles to illustrate dynamics of giving (debate)	Charity talk
8	Defining impact	Students examine, discuss and debate how different foundations define impact	Grant Foundation talk
9	The role of the philanthropist	Students deliver group presentations about causes	<i>Applications Reviewed</i>
10	Becoming a philanthropist	After a week of reflection, students deliberate and debate—deciding who which applicants get funding	<i>Funding Allocated—Feedback provided for all applicant organisations</i>
11	Evaluating philanthropy	Revisiting and reflecting on the process, plus what next	<i>Reflections with community Foundation</i>

TABLE 2 Critical evaluation framework (adapted from Lau & body, 2020).

	Before module	During module	After module
Reflecting on an individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-project self-assessment survey (based on McDougale et al., 2017) Pre-project positioning statement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflective journal Community needs assessment and organisation analysis (assessed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-project self-assessment survey (based on McDougale et al., 2017) Reflective essay (assessed)
Reflecting with peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploration of expectations with peers and course leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussions, informal feedback, debate, consideration emerging thoughts Group presentation to peers and reflection on results (assessed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus group evaluation on process
Reflecting with community partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaged in teaching planning (inc. Community Foundation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing reflection and grant giving advice—feedback on assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal presentation of grant to community organisation(s) Reflections with Community Foundation

5.1 | Recognising personal and community philanthropy

In both reflective notes and through the interview data, students reflected on the way the module had surprised them by highlighting their own moral inclinations, and both their personal and community philanthropy. Students' philanthropic priorities and intentions were discussed side-by-side with others in the group and they were asked to think about their own philanthropic actions within their families and communities. This reflection became a disruptive

learning process where they had to examine their own value systems to understand why they were responding to different causes in particular ways:

I really wanted to support immigrants because my mother was an immigrant... But hearing other people's stories and opinions, I diverted completely in a different direction. Because of that discussion. My moral compass was spinning... as a learning experience it's really challenging. (Participant B)

This recognition of the diversity in priorities and values was also developed by reflecting on the meaning of philanthropy and applying that definition to their own philanthropic behaviours they had seen but not necessarily recognised as philanthropy in the communities they grew up in. Indeed, with the module, students were actively encouraged to consider philanthropy in the widest terms possible, as an act of civic participation (Bernholz, 2021), rather than simply limited to one off acts of financial giving:

In the pandemic she [my Mum] was creating these like large food packages for different families [victims of domestic abuse]. She would buy it with her own money. And then she would package them, and then we'll take it to their houses. So, in that way I didn't even realize that she, my mum was a philanthropist... (Participant C)

McDougle (2022) argues that philanthropy is a personal endeavour, however that we often fail to teach it in that way, which can mean that philanthropy within diverse communities can go unseen and uncelebrated. This early focus for students asking them to reflect and share their own philanthropy and morals in decision-making ensured the diversity within acts of philanthropy were recognised, as participant A commented: 'We weren't just treated like students, we were treated like donors' and as a comment from the student reflections notes:

This module has been excellent at delving into understanding our actions as citizens, what counts as philanthropy... It has made me think about charitable giving in a whole new way and will probably influence the decisions I make for the rest of my life. (Student Reflection)

5.2 | A multidisciplinary classroom

Students taking the Student Philanthropy module were from a range of different disciplines and undergraduate courses within the division of Law, Society, and Social Justice at the University of Kent. As a result, building consensus about the type of organisation they would like to support as a cohort led to discussions which drew upon different theoretical understandings and perspectives, as discussed by Participant B:

I noticed that in the first class where we were, you know, giving like our own applications of the word [philanthropy] and everything, and hearing different perspectives of people that study different things because I think I brought a very sociological approach to it. Whereas other people, someone that did Environmental Politics, they brought an amazing perspective on it because they obviously saw it from a different

view, and I realized that my idea of it was way too general...

This was also enhanced by the international students within the group. Twenty-seven percentage of the student population come from overseas and make up a significant part of each student cohort. In this extract from their interview, a student discusses East and West perspectives.

When I see campaigns like from Europeans like from the West, and then from the East, it's different approaches. Of what gets tackled, you know what kind of issues in society get talked about and what are not talked about... because we were a very international class, hearing people's different interests based on their personal backgrounds was so interesting and informative. (Participant B)

McDougle (2022) suggests allowing students to ground their understanding of philanthropy within their own lived experience and lived experiences of different cultural contexts. As the above quote shows these experiences are valuable for offering that debate and discussion about causes, and the way they are supported across the world. Therefore, these diverse understandings were actively brought into the classroom and debated in workshops.

5.3 | Recognising the place for institutional processes

One of the most important features of the module commented on by all student participating in interviews and within student reflections was making the connections between theoretical and contextual understandings of philanthropy and the place of the institutions and practices that sit behind giving. In all the pre and post evaluations understanding the formal 'practices' of philanthropic and community organisations was considered important learning by the students, for example:

We were sent all of the different documents that everyone [organisations applying to the grant] has to write, and I think that was probably the most interesting because it's like there's a lot of paperwork that goes behind this and to even understand that so many that there's deadlines as well for them to write it. So, it was interesting to kind of do the admin work a bit as well. (Participant C)

While it is important to learn about the diverse and personal ways, we are all involved in philanthropy, introducing students to the practices of philanthropy and the different institutions was important for building understanding but also trust and transparency.

The ability to learn about philanthropy whilst actively being involved in the grant giving process meant I was able to better understand what charities have to go through to get funding and the benefits and restraints of the current system. (Student Reflection)

The discussions around the ways trusts, grant-makers and foundations make their decisions mirrored the complex decision-making the students were engaged in and allowed them a space to reflect on the need for processes and wider thinking, but also some of the challenges and problematic elements of giving, for example, the power-dynamics at play:

This module has particularly challenged my critical thinking skills regarding the selection of organisations best for the grant but also the wider implications of decision making and power imbalances within the charity sector. (Student Reflection)

The following section links each of these observation themes to important learning points.

6 | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

6.1 | Pre- and post-value of reflection ‘journey travelled’

To ensure that students recognise their own role as philanthropic citizens moving forward and gain an understanding into the diversity of philanthropic activities it is important to embed pre and post activities, and reflection into the learning process. Students revealed a depth of understanding by exploring their pre and post perspectives and enjoyed this reflective process, which ran through the final sessions and the assignment task (see Table 2). These reflections demonstrate some of the journey travelled, for example:

It wasn't like this scenario was a made-up or hypothetical situation. We were actually going to influence someone's actual life. (Participant C)

The module both challenged student's understanding of philanthropy, and by repositioning philanthropy within a framework of civic participation (Bernholz, 2021) also led to increased trust in the idea of philanthropy.

I thought philanthropy was something that people that are like, well off or very rich do, especially celebrities, because you do see a lot of them saying that they want to give back and they want to kind of give these generous donations... I wouldn't have thought that a regular person could have been a philanthropist. (Participant C)

Furthermore, adopting a critical philanthropy and civic participation lens in the module demonstrates how student's understandings of themselves as philanthropic citizens developed and encouraged wider thinking about the diverse ways in which philanthropy can manifest, including the everyday actions of communities.

And I feel now what counts as philanthropy is things like protesting and advocacy and that counts right. (Participant D)

Ensuring reflection was part of the assignment process challenged students in new ways.

Towards the end, the self-reflecting essay that we had to write was amazing. Like just looking back and drawing a timeline on paper. You know what happened in the beginning and then how I changed my way of thinking and how I drew conclusions. (Participant B)

Thus, the critical reflection processes (see Table 2) both formal and informal were key to enabling this reflection on the journey travelled.

6.2 | Protecting the discussion space

One of the key learning points is to ensure the discussion space allows time to deliberate, debate and explore the process at every stage, from the first discussions of defining philanthropy, to decision-making, to reflection. Drawing on inspiration of giving circles (see Eikenberry, 2009) this discussion space provided vital opportunities for agenda setting, decision-making and face-to-face deliberative discourse, supporting a democratisation of philanthropy, engagement of diverse voices and learning about different perspectives. Indeed, all students positively reported on ‘the value and importance of the discussion space’ (Participant A), for example:

So, we were applying the theory and thinking about the way other people interpreted it. I think interpretation is a huge thing in this module and hearing out other people. And I really think it pushes boundaries ... when things are not going your way, you know and having to hear about other people and then actually being like, ‘oh, maybe they are right’. You know, so it's a lot of give and take in the module. (Participant B)

This discussion space was enhanced by multidisciplinary and international students, nonetheless this required pro-active managing first and formerly by the students themselves. At times, for example, some discussions were heated, fuelled by individual passions, the week 1 exercise (see Table 1) of establishing the rules for democratic and civic discussion and decisions making was important, as students were able to return this, hold one another to account if they broke

their agreements and reconsider how they may engage pro-actively in the debate.

6.3 | Bringing multiple voices into the learning process

The final learning point is about expanding the voices from practice that the students engage with. Students reported the value of hearing from a wide range of practitioner voices from charity practitioners to donors, including the voices of the module convenors who both had a practitioner background, experience of fundraising and commissioning:

Hearing also the donor was there because I feel like it was at that moment. I realized how transparent the module is. OK, I was like OK from A-Z. We know everything at this point. I think the biggest thing in the modules were the sessions with the experienced people. (Participant B)

Developing a sense of understanding the landscape featured in student reflections as it made them feel that they understood the practical processes and reasoning as well as the theories and perspectives. Creating that bridge between theory and practice also played a part of the learning process and the confidence students had when making their decision. Such impact was also recognised by the community foundation:

Kent Community Foundation's partnership with the University of Kent on their student philanthropy module has been really valuable. Kent Community Foundation strives to be an innovative and creative grant-maker – and this collaboration was a great opportunity to put that into practice. Building from a positive and engaged relationship with the key lecturer, the idea for the project developed organically, quickly and pretty simply. The team were clear what they wanted her students to learn from the experience, and for students to lead the experience, and I suggested how it could most effectively work. It was really refreshing to give the decision-making power to the students – there's no better way to learn about the frictions within grant-making than to actually do it. (Director of Grants and Impact, Kent Community Foundation)

7 | CONCLUSION—A UK PERSPECTIVE

Student philanthropy modules are rare in the UK and across Europe. Indeed, Keidan et al. (2014) concluded that 'student philanthropy courses would be welcomed in Europe as an innovative approach to teaching, but there is scepticism about their fundability' (p. 5). Therefore, in addressing this, the relationship between the teaching team and the philanthropist who supports the module, alongside Kent

Community Foundation who facilitated the grant making process was vital to the success of this module; both in terms of the diversity of discussion facilitated and the practical realities of managing the module and grant funding process.

The module also contributes to the growing recognition of the civic university's agenda (Goddard et al., 2016), which invites new ways to understand the student experience in Higher Education. The focus on civic life and active citizenship encourages us to innovate and critically reflect on the civic culture embedded within our universities. Identifying students as civic partners, extending their reach beyond the campus on which they study is core to achieving this. Student philanthropy modules offer great potential in achieving some of this aim, facilitating students to have real world impact in a critically engaged way, as one student reflected:

I really enjoyed the learning experience this module provided. Working with University of Kent was a great experience, critically considering the applications and where our funds could 'do the most good' and the end result of giving money to two extremely worthy causes is a great thing to have been able to do as a student. (Student Reflection)

Whilst this paper presents a relatively rosy picture of delivering student philanthropy modules within a UK context, the challenges and limitations should not be understated, including the need for high quality, robust assessment which embraces the modules philosophies and fits in with the modules pedagogy; the time required to establishing and maintaining relationships, including with local organisations, the philanthropist and community foundation to ensure module continuity and sustainability; alongside maintaining a democratic and critical discussion space for students. Nonetheless in the paper by sharing our experience, using examples, and bringing forth students lived experiences, we hope that first, we highlight some of the benefits of such a module in HE settings within the United Kingdom. Second, we hope this practice paper offers some form of a workable starting point or blueprint for other philanthropy educators wishing to develop similar type programmes. We argue that by bringing together as many voices from practice including those who engage with philanthropy within all institutions and organisations within civil society, students will receive a rich and rewarding understanding of the different ways philanthropy can be practiced enhancing both themselves as philanthropic citizens and philanthropic communities more widely.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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