TRIPS Assessment Report for Campus Ministry

2010-2011

This year we had a great TRIPS year! We had the opportunity to implement some of the changes suggested in last year’s Assessment Report. The most significant addition was implementing additional meetings for the Reflection Coordinators for each trip so that they could better address spiritual topics. We believe these sessions were beneficial to the coordinators as well as made a positive impact on the spiritual growth of students on the TRIPS.

This year, we attempted to gain as much information as possible about the spiritual impact of our trips through two methods. We compiled data from two SurveyMonkey questions and analyzed personal essays from each trip participant. We will now look at the results we acquired from each of the methods.

The most difficult part of using SurveyMonkey is figuring out which questions will inspire the kind of answers that will most help us gauge spiritual growth. Over the years we have tried many different, varying questions. Last year, we felt we crafted questions that prompted the results we could best analyze and use for assessment purposes. We re-used those two questions. The two questions we asked are:

1. In what ways did this trip experience impact your spirituality, your religious views, or your understanding of the role of religion in addressing social issues?

2. In what ways will you apply what you’ve learned about faith or spirituality?

Out of the 156 trip participants, 72% completed the survey. Of those 60% indicated one or more ways that their spirituality, religious views, or understanding of the role of religion in addressing social issues was enhanced due to their TRIPS experience.

The surveys suggest three of our trips yielded the deepest spiritual impact: Nicaragua, Memphis, and the M3C trip to Chicago. This is very different than what we found while looking at the personal essay questions, however.

In addition to the SurveyMonkey questionnaire each TRIPS participant had to write a brief essay in response to these prompts:

1. Recall Dr. Pyne’s activity where you were to look deeply at someone whom you did not know. You linked hands with this person and blessed this person, and while it may not have been a large impact on this person, it may have been memorable to them.
2. **Think** about one person on your trip. Maybe it was someone you met while on the trip; maybe it was someone in your group that you didn’t know well when you left. Perhaps you were able to look at them deeply, beneath the surface?

3. **Write:** Because of this experience, what do you see now that you didn’t before? How is it good that this person exists?

4. **Conclude** with what you have learned from this experience. What can you take away from this experience and bring back to St. Norbert? What can you share with others to create this change in them?

Based on responses from last year’s SurveyMonkey results we created “criteria” for the personal essays, or more specifically a list of themes/lessons that we will refer to as “Central Spiritual Themes” that we hoped to see students learn or encounter on their trip:

1. Deeper understanding and appreciation for the resilience and importance of faith for those facing difficult situations (4.1)
2. Inspired by others’ faith (2.1,3.2,4.1)
3. Openness to other religious perspectives (2.1,2.2,2.4,3.2,4.1)
4. Demonstrated how people are connected
5. Desire to share faith (2.1,2.3)
6. Commitment to growth in religious practice (2.1,2.2,2.4,3.2)
7. Desire to grow in faith and learn more about their own religious tradition (2.1,2.2,3.2)
8. Growth in relationship with God/the Divine (2.1,2.4,3.2)
9. Open mindedness

After examining the personal reflections, we saw that 82% of the participants did touch on one of these 9 Central Spiritual Themes in their responses. In addition, however, we noticed a few other “Broad Spiritual Themes” were mentioned by 18% of the trips participants:

1. Realize the reality of poverty, homelessness, starvation, etc. (4.1)
2. Coming to appreciate what they have
3. Learning to look beyond stereotypes (3.1)
4. A desire to create a change and confidence they can succeed in doing so
5. Responsibility for the common good

The result is that all essays spoke to one or more of the Central or Broad Spiritual Themes. We find these results to be remarkable in that these essays were much more in-depth. The essays were written immediately after each trip was completed. The participants were still in the mindset of the trip and were probably still experiencing the plethora of powerful thoughts and emotions that resulted from their experience. The essays suggest three of our trips yielded the deepest spiritual impact: Localitas, Mississippi, and Washington DC.
We are very pleased with our results this year. We plan to continue the extended reflection leader training next year. We also are going to track by themes and trip the numbers of students that are focusing on the “Central Spiritual Themes” and “Broad Spiritual Themes” in their reflections. We hope this will show us which TRIPS yield the clearest focus on spiritual themes, as well as which of the 14 total themes (Broad and Central) are most often mentioned. We will also continue to perfect our method of gathering assessment information to demonstrate participant learning. Finally, we want to place a greater emphasis on Reorientation in order to keep the experiences of these students alive beyond their week long excursions.