# Correspondence

# At your 'online' service! A continuous service-learning program for college students during the COVID-19 pandemic

**ABSTRACT**

School health protocols in conducting face-to-face classes must be planned carefully to ensure that students will be safe from the effects of COVID-19. This is what the authors emphasized in a recent correspondence, which we re-echo in this paper in case the situation permits. However, a greater consideration must be given to colleges and universities where the aspect of community/social engagement of the students is already part of the curriculum. There is still a greater risk for students to go to the communities for service and social interaction. With this, we suggest that the service program can still continue through an enhanced electronic service-learning, which maximizes the human resources' capacity and highlights students' creativity with equally useful projects.

**Keywords** community engagement, COVID-19, digital communication, electronic service-learning, health protocols

## To the editor

In a recent correspondence published in this journal, the authors concluded that school health protocols in conducting face-to-face classes must be planned carefully following national and international guidelines to ensure that students will be safe or at least mitigate the effects of COVID-19.[1] This is indeed a hopeful move to prepare the realm of education slowly going back to normal. However, we must also consider that most schools today, especially that of the college level, have already incorporated in their respective curriculum the aspect of service-learning. Service-learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.[2] Students therefore need to go the assigned community for social interaction and service which is too risky for their safety, given the pandemic. With this, we suggest that the service-learning program can still continue through an enhanced electronic service-learning (E-SL).

Technology implementation is very important in providing up-to-date information to meet students' needs. Internet has enabled universities to shift in its approach to serve students in much better and more creative manners.[3] Moreover, one of the affected pedagogies in the strict implementation of guidelines is social engagement activities during face-to-face classes. The E-SL can be equally effective if planned carefully. First, the human resource must be fully maximized through capacitating them. Human resource is composed of the faculty, program facilitator and community leaders. These people should undergo a comprehensive training on the various digital platforms such as Canvas, Zoom, Viber, Google Classroom, Facebook Workplace and many other resources. Having mastered the technology is a must in implementing smoothly the online process. Teacher's motivation plays a vital role in providing the best strategies for students, whether online or traditional classrooms. Enhancing electronic services is a way to minimize physical contact most especially for those colleges and universities that aimed to continue student social engagement.[4] Second, in lieu of the face-to-face projects of the students, the human resource can suggest online outputs that would still be helpful to the assigned community, such as digital learning materials like posters, brochures, leaflets, modules and social media educational sites. The pandemic is indeed a great threat to the implementation of E-SL, but a well-planned program can undoubtedly produce a positive result for the students and to the entire educational institution in general.

## References

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