

Public Mind: University Engagement and Community Relations for Sustainable Quality of Life Development and Strong Communities

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to 1) survey issues in the communities and organize ten community projects to resolve the issues, 2) integrate the bodies of knowledge, concepts, theories of Public Administration with students volunteering and 3) respond to the four missions of university engagement. This study is part of the classroom action research, the project evaluation course and the management innovation course. The subjects in the project were 150 students majoring in Public Administration from Suratthani Rajabhat University and Prince of Songkla University, Surat Thani Campus. The project operated during 2017-2019 beginning with the study of problems in the community covering Makham Tia Sub-district and Khun Thalaie Sub-district, Muang District, Surat Thani Province. Then it was developed into a project to solve problems with the community, with groups of 10-15 students. Then the students proceeded to create a project, evaluate it and bring what they learned from various projects to take lesson learned together. The findings revealed that the student volunteers had positive conscience towards participating in designing and arranging the project as well as other activities that support the communities. Furthermore, these activities provided the students more opportunities to grow the spirit of volunteering and apply the practical knowledge to outside education. Each community had different problems, most of which were fundamental problems such as waste, environment, well-being and diseases. For another objective of the study, it was found that PDCA, POCCC, and system theory along were popular techniques used in the students' volunteering projects. For the last objective, the study found that organizing these projects created the process of participation for stakeholders in both public and private sectors. In addition to practising various skills to nurture the I-WISE identity, the students could achieve the university engagement on community relations for the development of the quality of life and sustainably strong community that conforms to the determination of His Royal Highness Prince Mahidol of Songkla, "The benefit of fellow humans is the first activity".

Keywords: Public Mind, University Engagement, Quality of Life Development, Strong Communities