



# Supporting the Childbearing Family: An Interdisciplinary Service-Learning Course

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*A doula is a trained professional who provides continuous physical, emotional and informational support to clients during and shortly after childbirth to help them achieve the healthiest, most satisfying experience possible. <sup>2</sup>*

## RESULTS

- Course has been taught 6 times and included 91 students
- Evaluation methods include course evaluation surveys (rating scale and narrative comments)
- Quantitative course evaluation surveys were positive (mean=4.87 out of 5.00, n=65)
- Narrative comments revealed four major student themes:
  - Transformative experience
  - Tools for the future
  - Development of perspective
  - Value of class community

## CONCLUSION

- This course was effective for understanding the role of the doula and the significance of a supportive presence during labor and birth.
- Students also gained important experience and perspective while working in interdisciplinary teams.
- Further opportunities for nursing students to practice non-clinical skills related to patient and family support as well as collaboration with non-nursing students should be explored in nursing curricula.



## BACKGROUND

- Service-learning is a course-based educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and furthers their learning of course content.
- Previous authors have described the integration of service-learning courses into curricula preparing nursing students for professional practice.<sup>1</sup>
- However, studies have not reported on interdisciplinary service-learning in a course preparing students as doulas.

## PURPOSE

- The purpose of this study was to design and evaluate a service-learning experience for interdisciplinary students in a hospital-based volunteer doula program.

## METHODS

- Students received professional doula training and volunteered as doulas within a hospital-based volunteer doula program at an academic health center.
- Student experiences included:
  - Seminar-style course with weekly face-to-face sessions
  - Collaboration within interdisciplinary teams to provide prenatal and birth doula support to a diverse client population
  - Mentorship from experienced doulas
  - Service as on-call doulas on a labor and delivery unit

## STUDENT REFLECTION ON SERVICE-LEARNING

- “This is the best class I have ever taken at the university. It should be required! It inspires passion and curiosity.” “This experience has been life-changing for me! I learned so much and became extremely passionate about the subject matter.”
- “The service component and focus on REAL useable skills and developing ourselves is such a great contrast to other courses I have taken in college.” “This course taught me a lot about the huge difference that non-pharmacologic interventions can make, not just in labor outcomes, but in any situation. I will continue to use the skills I learned throughout my nursing career.”
- “The interdisciplinary aspect of the course is extremely beneficial in that it allows us to work with students with varying backgrounds, gaining experience in thinking about patient care from different perspectives and involving all members on a team.”
- “The class community and our discussions were so valuable. We learned a lot from each other.” “It was a privilege to be part of such an incredible group. I am sad that our time together is over.”

## REFERENCES

1. Taylor, S.L. & Leffers, J.M. (2016). Integrative review of service-learning assessment in nursing education. *Nursing Education Perspectives*. 37(4). 194-200.
2. DONA International. What is a doula? DONA International website. <https://www.dona.org/what-is-a-doula/>.