



**MARIS STELLA COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS),
VIJAYAWADA
A College with Potential for Excellence
NAAC Accredited and ISO 21001:2018 Certified**

BEST PRACTICES - ACADEMIC YEAR: 2023-24

1. Towards Transformed and Emancipated Communities through 'Whole Person Education': From Pedagogy to Praxis

The college's vision is to empower students, enrich their lives, and help them excel and transform into leaders who contribute to a just and equitable society through quality education. This is achieved by fostering academic excellence, instilling sound values, and promoting social responsibility. The college's mission is to provide a holistic education that nurtures intellectual, spiritual, and ethical growth. Students are encouraged to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, innovation, and lifelong learning skills. They are also guided to cultivate spiritual development, ethical decision-making, and a sense of responsibility towards the community.

Service learning is a key component of the college's mission, integrating academic learning with community service to address real-world challenges. This approach enables students to apply their knowledge and skills to benefit society, fostering a sense of responsibility and commitment to the common good. Through hands-on experiences, students bridge the gap between theory and action, embodying compassion, empathy, and dedication to societal progress. This transformative educational approach aligns with the college's core values, leading to the development of the individuals who are prepared to drive positive change in the world.

Learning Objectives

1. To formulate and implement a service learning -based curriculum.
2. To enhance life skills such as leadership abilities, self-confidence, critical thinking, Problem-solving, and conflict resolution among students through service learning pedagogy.
3. To prepare the students to become whole persons – intellectually, spiritually, and ethically, endowed with the skills to become lifelong contributors to society.

The Context

Nidamanuru, situated near Vijayawada in the N T R district of Andhra Pradesh, India, likely harbors rural people, encompassing various castes and communities. People engage in agricultural activities constituting the village's primary economic ventures. Educational accessibility varies, with a government-run school offering primary and secondary education.

Infrastructure like roads, electricity, and water supply exists, albeit unevenly distributed. Healthcare is provided by a primary health center and small clinics. Traditional norms and the Gram Panchayat system govern social dynamics and local administration, notwithstanding challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and inadequate services, warranting development strategies for growth within and its surrounding areas.

Curricular articulation: The integration of 15 service learning courses into the curriculum marks a significant advancement in fostering holistic development and community engagement. These courses transcend academic boundaries, nurturing intellectual growth, emotional intelligence, social awareness, and ethical responsibility. Embedded within the curriculum, titled "Towards Transformed and Emancipated Communities through 'Whole Person Education'," it bridges theory with practice. It recognizes the importance of empathy, compassion, and civic duty in true empowerment. Students engage with societal challenges, gaining insights and developing solutions through hands-on experiences. It prioritizes holistic development, empowering both students and the communities they serve, fostering a more just and inclusive society.

Actions with the community: In Nidamanur village, a series of service-learning activities focused on children, youth, and women, addressing health and hygiene, government schemes for small businesses, consumer rights, and online business opportunities. Topics included public health, online shopping, diabetes diet, oil consumption, and community nutrition. Menstrual hygiene was also emphasized, aiming for holistic empowerment and well-being.

The activities involved 25 faculty members and 350 students, who applied their knowledge and developed skills like leadership and teamwork. Around 700 community members participated, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration for sustainable change.

The project tackled social and economic issues such as the challenges faced by migrant women workers, the need for better health education on communicable diseases and nutrition, digital literacy to prevent online scams, awareness of human rights, and addressing social stigmas around menstruation. It also aimed to improve email usage among the working community, promoting better communication skills.

Economic Issues

The focus on business skills, online resources, and consumer rights suggests a need for knowledge and support for entrepreneurship, particularly for youth and women.

The focus on life insurance, health insurance, children's endowment policies, loan facilities, and consumer rights suggests a lack of financial literacy among villagers.

Courses on business strategies, loan facilities, schemes, and consumer rights for unorganized retailers suggest a need for support in this sector.

By equipping villagers with knowledge, skills, and resources, the project sought to improve their livelihoods and promote a healthier and more sustainable future.

The Practice

Orientation sessions and workshops were organized to educate staff and students about service-learning opportunities. Fifty quotes on 'Service Learning' were strategically displayed across the campus to enhance visibility, reaching beyond the students directly involved in the project to inform the entire college community about service learning initiatives. Utilized social media platforms, faculty informed students about success stories and upcoming events related to service learning.

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The '**Open House**' celebration at the conclusion of the project prompted students to creatively set up stalls, where they shared their experiences, learning outcomes, and first hand accounts of how the project positively impacted various groups, such as school children, women's health and hygiene, vendors, and people from unorganized sectors. The students confidently shared their experiences, demonstrating their leadership skills, and expressing satisfaction in contributing to society. This event enabled the entire staff and student body to learn about the outcomes of the service learning project.

Evidence of Success

Faculty

Faculty gained the knowledge and skills to design and implement effective Service-Learning courses that benefit both students and the community. This involved learning about different S-L models, assessment methods, and best practices for integrating service experiences into the curriculum.

Faculty learnt to integrate community-centered learning into their teaching, including building partnerships with community organizations and fostering critical reflection on social issues.

Students

Through S-L programs, students developed problem analysis, problem-solving, critical thinking, and cognitive development skills.

The service learning programs aimed to instill a lifelong commitment to social responsibility in students. They learnt to identify and address community needs and develop the skills to be effective leaders who can make a positive impact.

Students gained experience collaborating with NGOs and other community partners, which helped them develop valuable networking skills.

They learnt to document and assess academic learning outcomes related to service-learning experiences.

The project aimed to contribute to the development of educational modules that promote "Whole Person Education," which focused on spiritual, intellectual, personal, and social development.

By participating, both faculty and students gained valuable knowledge and skills that can benefit them throughout their lives and careers.

Problems Encountered

Implementing the S-L activities faced a few challenges, notably affecting the scheduling of other college programs, staff availability, and occasional issues with community

engagement. To overcome these obstacles, we implemented various strategies: We overcame the challenge of conflicting schedules by fostering open communication among faculty. Collaboratively, we identified suitable time slots for service learning activities, minimizing disruption to other programs while ensuring students could fully engage in both academic and service learning activities.

To address staff's added responsibilities, committees were formed to oversee service learning, ensuring support for students and faculty. Their duties were prioritized based on guiding and mentoring students. Class schedules were adjusted to allow time for service-learning activities. Through multiple visits and the establishment of trust and rapport within the community. We successfully alleviated challenges related to availability and enhance the sustainability of our service learning efforts.

Resources Required

The United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, located in New York, funded the Two-year Service-Learning Project titled "Towards Transformed and Emancipated Communities through 'Whole Person Education': From Pedagogy to Praxis" from January 2022 to December 2023 with 10000 US dollars.

Two percentage of the institution's budget is allocated to service-learning on the campus. This includes allocation for coordinator's salary, program administration, community partnerships, transportation, and other related expenses. Specific expenses directly related to service-learning activities, such as faculty training, curriculum development, student engagement, community outreach, research by the faculty, and program evaluation are identified and utilize the amount. In addition to direct expenses, indirect costs associated with supporting service-learning, such as administrative overhead and facility maintenance, are also be considered.

Institutional Plan

Short-term goals include enhancing service learning across disciplines, expanding community partnerships, and securing additional funding. Long-term goals aim to institutionalize service learning, establish a dedicated center, expand international opportunities, and foster a culture of community engagement.

Social entrepreneurship through service learning benefits the institution, students, and the community, aligning with the mission, enhancing learning, fostering innovation, building partnerships, promoting sustainability, and preparing socially responsible leaders.

2. Organic Farming

The institution's unwavering commitment is beyond the classroom where one of the best practices like "Organic farming and Production" is encouraged and empowers the students with the skills and opportunities they need to embark on a successful career. Organic Farming is an agricultural method that emphasizes the use of natural processes and inputs rather than synthetic chemicals. Institutional best practices in organic farming encompass a range of strategies and methodologies that institutions adopt to ensure compliance with organic standards while maximizing productivity and sustainability by providing a favourable environment for the students to get engaged in organic practices and challenging them to build a chemical-free agriculture.

Objectives of the practice:

- **Enhance Soil Fertility:** Maintain and improve soil health through natural methods such as crop rotation, composting, and the use of organic fertilizers in the fields of Maris Stella College.
- **Conserve Biodiversity:** Promote a diverse ecosystem by encouraging the growth of a variety of plants and protecting natural habitats. And also preserving the extinct varieties like Kujipataliya and Chittimuthyalu in this institution.
- **Ensure Food Safety:** Use of natural farming practices that reduce the risk of harmful residues and contaminants in food products.
- **Support Farmers:** Production of field crops such as rice including black rice (kala) has been successfully done in this institution and distributed to the thotlavalluru village farmers as a part of an extension activity.

The context of the practice:

- Increasing awareness and education about the benefits of organic farming is desperate in this era of convenient farming and production.
- Organic farming is rooted in principles of sustainability, aiming to preserve natural resources, maintain biodiversity, and enhance soil health.
- Organic farming is associated with producing healthier food, free from synthetic chemicals, which appeals to health-conscious consumers.
- Ongoing research is crucial for developing new organic farming techniques and improving existing ones, ensuring that organic farming remains productive and resilient.

This institution focuses on identifying common practices, challenges, and innovative solutions adopted by institutions in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

The Practice:

This institution educates the students to build a career in organic agriculture and reduce the conventional agricultural practice.

This institution reduces water usage and maximize crop growth, utilizing effective irrigation techniques like controlled floods. To encourage rice growth, Students keep the field's water levels stable by preventing waterlogging.

This institution manages to control weeds by applying techniques including mulching and thorough field preparation. Mechanical/hand weed eaters are used to get rid of weeds without the use of chemical pesticides.

This institution encourages crop rotation as one method of managing nutrients. Students learn how to fix nitrogen organically by crop rotation. Green manure crops are used to increase soil fertility. Organic fertilizers like compost manure, organic amendments are used to the paddy crops in order to provide nutrition.

The major important practice this institution follows in Organic Farming is “Vermicomposting” which is practiced regularly after the land preparation and prior to sowing.

A mixture of decomposing vegetable/food waste are used to prepare the vermicompost. In poly house various organic vegetables like spinach, bitter gourd, Amaranthas, Coriander, Mint Leaves, Methi, etc. are grown. Maize, Baby Corn, Bottle Gourd, Ridged Gourd, Beans, Mash Mellon, Water Mellon, Sun Flower are grown in the institution through organic cultivation.

This institution forges and maintains partnership with the organizations like Natural Organic Farmers Association (NOFA) and Rythu Nestham Foundation (RNF) where the students take short-term internships to get practically experience in Organic Farming and learn the preparation procedures of plant boosters viz., Jeevamrutham, beej amrutham, agniashtra, neem asthra etc., a low cost organic manures which helps to improve soil fertility.

Evidence of Success:

1. Organic rice farming at Maris Stella College reduces chemical inputs, minimizes soil and water pollution, and promotes biodiversity conservation through natural farming practices.

2. The college engages students and local farmers through educational programs, field demonstrations on organic farming techniques and Agri-Expo fostering awareness and promoting sustainable agriculture practices.
3. In this institution, the yield of organic farming is satisfactory as we are able to get more yield compared to conventional farming which is harvested and sold in the college premises by the students enthusiastically. The yield is purchased by lecturers and students of the institution because of the increasing demand and health benefits of Organic produce.

Challenges and Solutions

- Moving from conventional to organic farming can be financially and logistically challenging. The Institution often provides support through grants, technical assistance, and mentorship programs.
- Ensuring stable market access and fair pricing for organic produce remains a hurdle. The Institution collaborate with organic associations NOFA and RNF and advocate for policies that support organic agriculture.
- Scaling up organic farming operations while maintaining organic integrity requires careful planning and investment in infrastructure and human resources.

Resources Required:

- Continued research and development in organic farming techniques.
- Enhance policy support for organic agriculture at local, national, and international levels.
- Partnerships and knowledge-sharing among institutions, farmers, and consumers to promote organic farming practices.

Organic farming institutions play a pivotal role in shaping the future of agriculture towards sustainability and resilience. By embracing these best practices, they pave the way for a healthier planet and thriving communities is the ultimate aim of this institution.

Hands-On Learning Opportunities:

- Students participate in all stages of organic paddy cultivation, from seed selection and preparation to harvesting and post-harvest handling.
- Students gain practical skills in soil management, water conservation, and pest control techniques using organic methods.
- Students learn to manage organic nurseries where they propagate seedlings using organic practices.
- Maris Stella College encourages students to participate in community outreach programs where they educate local farmers and community members about organic farming practices.

Career Readiness:

- Students explore opportunities in organic farming entrepreneurship, learning about market trends and value-added products.
- They gain insights into organic certification processes and marketing strategies for organic produce.
- Practical experiences in organic agriculture enhance students' resumes and prepare them for careers in agricultural science, environmental consultancy, or sustainable development.
- They acquire critical thinking and problem-solving skills through hands-on agricultural research and experimentation.

Conclusion:

Organic agriculture practices at Maris Stella College provide students with comprehensive learning experiences that extend beyond the classroom. By engaging in sustainable farming methods, students not only acquire practical skills and knowledge but also develop a strong commitment to environmental stewardship and community service. These educational initiatives prepare students to become future leaders in sustainable agriculture and advocates for global food security.