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NUTRITION STUDENT'S PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL SERVICE AS AN EDUCATIVE EXPERIENCE



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ABSTRACT

The social service in the current educational model of the Veracruz University is no longer a completion of requirements for the certificate, and has become into an educational experience; hereby it implies an authentic scene of learning with certain credit value. The aim of the study was to assess the social service as an educational experience self-perceived by nutrition students. An observational study was carried out, with students of social service of three different school periods.



The students assessed were from the three different scholar terms of social service. Instruments were designed for data collection. The areas where the students did the social service were clinical (60 %), public health (24 %), and research, academic and sports (15 %). The 60 % of the students identified the society, 34 % the institution, and 6 % to himself as the first beneficiary of the social service. At the ending of the social service 78 % answered to have acquired new knowledge, 91 % acquired new skills and 89 % developed their values ($p=0.0010$). As a conclusion, the student's perceptions were congruent with the intentions of the educational model of the university. But some conditions expressed as insufficient support might influence in order that the student was not perceived himself as the main beneficiary of the social service.

KEYWORDS : *social service, health, nutrition.*

INTRODUCTION:

In the Mexican universities what is known as "social university service" adopts diverse names in different places of the world, such as "communal university work", "pre-professional community practice" in Latin America, and "learning solidary service" in Spain, and in any of these conceptions, the key of its origin take root in the interrelationship of two ideas: learning curricular and service to the community (Martínez et al, 2013).

In Mexico, in the health area, the social service was incorporated into the university based on the social reality, to answer in awkward and professional way to the population most needed for the country.

Besides linking to the educational program with the community, currently it is one of the processes that are assessed as part of Accreditation of the Latin-American Universities. And, in higher education, accreditation is a process of external quality review, and educational programs for quality assurance and quality improvement. Thus, it means the quality guarantee in the human trained resources and in trials that take place in an educational institution.

Though the social service is a fundamental and a commendable process of being evaluated, in the area of health a major disposition of publications are observed in medical students (Vázquez, 2010, Barrientos *et al.*, 2011, Ramírez *et al.*, 2012, Nigenda, 2013).

At the beginnings of the social service in Mexico, this one was created to give response to the technical needs. Specifically, in the health area, it initiated by the students of medicine with the aim to attend to the underserved communities in medical services. In the review of the literature, there has been reported that the social service in students of medicine has offered limited opportunities of learning, by favoring the needs of coverage of health services and to locate them in first level attention units where the supervision are generally insufficient. Though the clinical supervised practice exercises a pedagogic important role in the training of the future doctors, by giving them the opportunity to face actual problems, the Health Secretariat itself, recognized a limited or void supervision of the work performed by the assistants, especially in the rural centers, a situation that affects the medical attention and puts at risk the health of the population (Barrientos *et al.* 2011). Another inconvenient condition that has been observed is that the pre-grade medical assistants who performed the social service are not full workers of the public health institutions because they have no contractual relationship in which a salary of agreement is assigned to them according with a tabulator, and where there are translating the rights and obligations established by the Mexican legislation and by the general conditions of work, nevertheless, their scholars' quality does not exempt them from the obligations and responsibilities that as general doctors have in the centers of health to provide medical assistance in the first level of attention (Ramírez *et al.* 2012). Faced with this context Nigenda *et al.* (2013) suggested the need on the part of the health system to contract doctors, with which the student works as a collaborator of a supervised way. This way, the social service would turn into the last educational experience before the graduation and not like it used to be at present, in the first labor experience in inadequate conditions. In the Faculty of Nutrition, the student in social service is involved in clinical fields and the public health attention centers from the Health Sector, in university brigades and in Institutions with which before an agreement of collaboration has been established. The experience of the social service is important, because when it is effective, it strengthens the feeling responsibility, highlights the value of the solidarity and allows a respectful and disinterested professional practice that propitiates the learning.

In agreement with Vallaes (2008) the social responsibility is understood as a policy of constant improvement of the University towards the effective fulfillment of its social mission by means of four processes: ethical and environmental management of the institution; training of responsible citizens with a sense of solidarity; production and diffusion of socially pertinent knowledge; social participation in promotion of a more humane and sustainable development. The comprehension of this definition is important because the social service must be realized in conformity with the sense of social university responsibility.

The academic program of degree in the nutrition of the Veracruz University corresponds to

the Health Sciences Academic Area, that in terms of legacy the social service subjects itself to the Federal applicable Legislation, acquiring this way a social character on having contributed to the solution of specific problems derived from the marginalization, simultaneously that has an academic character, by contributing to the integral education of the student and complement his vocational training through the application of the knowledge acquired in the classroom. At Institutional level, it is regulated by the school control guidelines and the students statute, developing as an activity of temporary character, for the benefit of the community and without direct cost for this one, of obligatory character and, for its nature, it is not capable of being accredited by means of equivalence, renewal or examination of competence.

In the Faculty of Nutrition Campus Veracruz from Veracruz University is performed the Educational Integral and Flexible Model who takes the training of the student as a backbone in the intellectual, professional, social and human plane. Since its implementation, it eliminated the concept, of course, as the pedagogic basic unit, and in its place they joined in the curricular plan, it means educational experiences with credit value, incorporating other authentic scenes of learning (Beltrán, 2005). This way, the social service stopped being required of expenditure, to become an educational experience of the terminal area of the study plan of the Degree in Nutrition. Therefore, this study proposed to assess the perception of the bachelor's degree in nutrition students that they developed the social service as an educational experience.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

An observational study was carried out, with students of social service of three different school periods, August 2011-July 2012, February 2012 - July 2012, and February 2012-January 2013. There were a total of 58 students for the three periods, of which there were answered the 80 %, that is to say about 46 students. Also, it was assessed the Institutions where the students developed the social service, nevertheless only six (22 %) answered from a total of 27 institutions. This one was the main study constraint.

Instruments were designed for collection of information using a nominal scale with dichotomous and polytomous responses. A questionnaire with eight response factors to the beginning of the service, and another one with twelve questions at the end of the service were for the students. A survey with nine questions related to the supports granted to the student during his social service, the activities, and the student performance, were applied to the institutions.

The categorical variables appear in the distribution in percentages and a statistical analysis was developed using chi squared, by means of the software R and R Commander version 1.8-3. And a confidence level of 95 % was applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The major percentage of entities in which the degree in nutrition student did the social service, was the clinical area (52 % of institutions, and 60 % of students), followed by the area of public health, (33 % of institutions, and 24 % of students). Next, research, academic and sports areas constituted among all, 15 % with 15 % of students.

At the beginning, 64 % of the students knew the entry requirements for social service of the University ($p=0.0050$), upon admission the 59 % got a scholarship by the institution ($p=0.2500$) principally those who were in the areas clinical and community. Though the scholarship seems a positive part of the social service, according to Ramirez et al. (2012) in medical students it does not correspond with the salary of a worker, but it does not also exempt them from the obligations and

responsibilities, situation that coincides with the students of nutrition in the institutions of the sector health. On the other hand, 86 % of the students had a timely registration procedure ($p=0.0010$), 80 % had space to work ($p=0.0050$), 70 % had the necessary materials ($p=0.0010$). And 80 %, 79 % and 98 % ($p=0.0010$), had knowledge about their functions, responsibilities and their supervisor, respectively.

About the choice of the Institution place to social service by the student, for 39 %, the most important thing was to choose an entity in the one that could apply their knowledge, for the 30 % that one which allows them to acquire major skills, for 26 % the decisive criterion was its location, and for 4 % the schedule to keep.

At the ending of the social service 78 % of the students answered to have performed beneath a friendly atmosphere, 89 % maintained a cordial relation with their supervisor, 87 % fulfilled the assist control, 78 % acquired new knowledge, 91 % acquired new skills, 89 % developed their values and 78 % were very comfortable about the activities carried out, all these percentages were significant $p=0.0010$. The response data were congruent with the intentions of the educational model of the university, in the knowledge appropriation or the theoretical axis, the performance of skills or the heuristic axis, and the application of values or axiological axis.

The 65 % received training by the institution ($p=0.0500$), and 48 % thought that this one was a suitable trainee ($p=0.6500$).

Though the institution where the student do the social service, does not offer training directly, it can grant economic support in order to facilitate student attendance at the diverse events of update in the discipline. In this respect, 42 % answered not to have received any facility of this type, while 35 % received resources to take part in courses, 15 % in workshops and 9 % in seminars.

The 60 % of the students identified the society, 34 % the institution, and 6 % to himself as the first beneficiary of the social service.

Conceptually the social service can deal be like useful, that is to say to do something in favor of other persons, be useful in social terms, in this respect it turns out consistently that the most of students recognized to the society as the first beneficiary. As a consequence of the learning developed in the student during the service to the community would be logic that the student was also one of the main beneficiaries, though it was not shown as perception of the study group.

As an approximation to the appraisal that the institutions have of this educational experience, only 29 % indicated to give a scholarship for the students ($p=0.3000$). Nevertheless, they all answered to have provided materials and intellectual supports to the students during their activities. As well as have given periods of rest and a respectful deal to all of the students. To the 43 % of the institutions, the students in social service were not enough, showing that the activities of nutrition need of major coverage. This need coincides with the main problem of nutrition, since the no communicable diseases dominate the health profile of the country currently, and the malnutrition is still present in the communities with greater marginalization (Gómez *et al*, 2011). In Mexico there are still more than 30 million persons without social protection in health, which attends their health care needs, in the services of the Secretariat of Health (SSA), the State Services of Health (SESA) and in the program of the Mexican Institute of the Insurance Social IMSS Opportunities (IMSS - OR) (Gómez *et al*, 2011). Which explains why these dependencies should be the main host of the students in social service of health sciences, and therefore they have received the most of the student population of this study in clinical fields and in Institutions of public health. The need of students in social service, previously reported in medical students (Barrientos *et al*, 2011, Ramirez *et al*, 2012, Nigenda *et al*, 2013), was also observed in the study group, in the career of nutrition. The global qualification that the evaluated institutions assigned to the performance of the students in social service was excellent for 57 % and well for 43 %.

None qualified the service of the students as regularly or badly.

Table 1. Dichotomous responses about the perceptions of social service as an educative experience

Questions	Responses		
	Yes %	No %	p
Students at the beginning of social service			
Did you know the requirements to enter into the social service?	64	36	0.0500
Did you appear opportunely in the institution?	86	14	0.0010
Did you possess scholarship for the accomplishment of the social service?	59	41	0.2500
Did you possess specific space to realize the corresponding activities?	80	20	0.0010
Did you possess necessary material to make the corresponding activities?	70	30	0.0050
Did you know the person to whom you would report the performed activities?	98	2	0.0010
Did you know the functions that you would accomplish?	80	20	0.0010
Did you know the responsibilities that would correspond with you?	79	21	0.0010
Students at the ending of social service			
Did you perform in an agreeable environment?	78	22	0.0010
Did you keep a respectful and cordial relationship with your supervisor?	89	11	0.0010
Did you receive training?	65	35	0.0500
In your opinion, did it seem to you that the training was suitable?	48	46	0.6500
Did you accomplish with a control of assistance?	87	13	0.0010
Did you acquire new knowledge?	78	22	0.0010
Did you acquire new skills?	91	9	0.0010
Did you develop some of your values?	89	11	0.0010
Did you feel comfortable with the performed activities?	78	22	0.0010
Answers from Institutions			
Did you grant a scholarship for the development of the social service?	29	71	0.3000
Did you grant material, equipment and infrastructure for the programmed activities?	100	0	0.0100
Did you offer advising for the accomplishment of the activities?	100	0	0.0100
Did you grant the student rest days and vacations?	100	0	0.0100
Did you offer a respectful deal in the assignment schedule and academic permissions?	100	0	0.0100
In your opinion, was the number of students suffices?	57	43	0.7500
Was a control of assistance carried out?	100	0	0.0100
Did students fulfill in an efficient way the assigned schedule?	86	14	0.1000

Significance level: $p < 0.0500$

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the student's perceptions were congruent with the intentions of the educational model of the university. Furthermore, the few hired workers in the area of nutrition shown in the need of more students in social service, could be a factor that contributes to the saturation of activities and functions in themselves and in the students during this educational experience. Which, when compared with the answers of the students were equally noted in the lack of economic resources, and shown as less support, to update, and even as the shortage of essential tools in some of the surveyed. Though in a priority way the social service is performed in isolated spaces and of major need, it is important that the institution provides the necessary materials for the total of the students. In such a way the above mentioned conditions, they might influence in order that the student was not perceived as the main beneficiary of the social service. There was an obvious need to continue the social service assessment, that's because it's close relation with the substantive functions of the University, like the teaching, the linkage and the research, what will allow sustaining proposals and strategies for its continuous improvement.

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