

Online Research Class Helps Fight Poverty in West Dallas



Written by Sally Waller



and connects them to Christian coaches who mentor them. The analysis tested the effectiveness of the program in the areas of spiritual growth and school engagement.

The findings of the class research were that the majority of the boys in the basketball program made better grades, had more respect for their teachers, and had higher aspirations for college than before they began the program. The survey also found that, for boys whose faith was important to them, they were now more likely to pray and see God as involved with their lives than before attending the program.

Voice of Hope reported that the research results encouraged them to continue the mentoring aspect of the basketball program. The ministry said that they will continue with the survey as a means to evaluate the program in the future.



The purpose of service-learning in professor Coker's class is for a student to learn how to conduct research by analyzing a "real life" problem and to serve the community by gathering research that helps improve an agency's ability to effectively minister to its clients. "The most important outcome for the DBU students is to see that research is relevant and to recognize that research can be a meaningful way to help others," Coker explained.

Less than 10 miles from the Dallas Baptist University campus lies the community of West Dallas—the 11th poorest area in the nation, where 66% of adults living there lack a high school diploma. In the midst of this community, the Voice of Hope ministry shares the hope of Christ and works to end the cycle of poverty. Voice of Hope also provides sports ministries, literacy programs, fresh fruits and vegetables to families, and Bible studies for senior adults and widows.

Students from DBU partnered with Voice of Hope to provide vital research on one of Voice of Hope's programs. DBU adjunct professor Stephanie Coker teaches the service-learning social science course, Research Methods. It is a course designed to help students understand how to conduct social science research. The students learn how to develop research questions, a hypothesis, methods of testing that hypothesis, and then assess the outcomes. Professor Coker directs her students to apply what they have learned to a local, non-profit agency. Collaborating with the selected agency to formulate a research question and survey, the students choose a topic that will have practical application for the organization.

The students used the knowledge gained in the class to analyze the Friday Night Gym Lights basketball program run by Voice of Hope. This ministry specifically reaches out to young men in the West Dallas area by giving them a safe and fun alternative on Friday nights