

Bridging the Gap

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Background

- Nonprofits have collaborated with Florida State University students to achieve success for both the charitable cause involved as well as personal and professional student development.
- The stakeholders involved include the Florida State University students involved in nonprofit partnerships, the nonprofits themselves, FSU staff and faculty, student organizations, Florida State University decision makers, and the broader Tallahassee community.
- A look at FSU's institutional assets has revealed that effective collaborations are possible, but gathering more information in order to use student abilities strategically can benefit these partnerships.
- My research question is: *How does strategic and effective collaboration between Florida State University faculty and staff and local nonprofits utilize student capacity towards learning outcomes?*
- The research specifically examines whether these relationships are strong or fragmented.
- The literature analyzes why students are doing research and how the structure of nonprofits affects the ability to have an effective collaboration.
- The research team aims to bridge the gap in knowledge regarding what problems can and should be addressed within student-nonprofit partnerships, primarily those that are administered with an FSU staff/faculty member's assistance.

Methodology

Analyses

- The methodology for this research includes an extensive literature review and annotated bibliography.
- The literature studied included physical books, online journal articles, and reports. Some of these were supplemented with videos explaining community-driven measures currently being taken in Tallahassee.
- The researcher attended workshops and community events to gain perspective on the Tallahassee community and current standings of relationships between students and nonprofits. These included a Qualtrics Survey Workshop, a Community Engagement Workshop, "Community Voices in Research: A Panel on Engagement and Partnership" and Thematic Analysis Training.
- The workshops and events allowed the research team to gain the necessary knowledge to survey the community while interacting with Tallahassee's constituents.
- The form of research used in this project is participatory research.

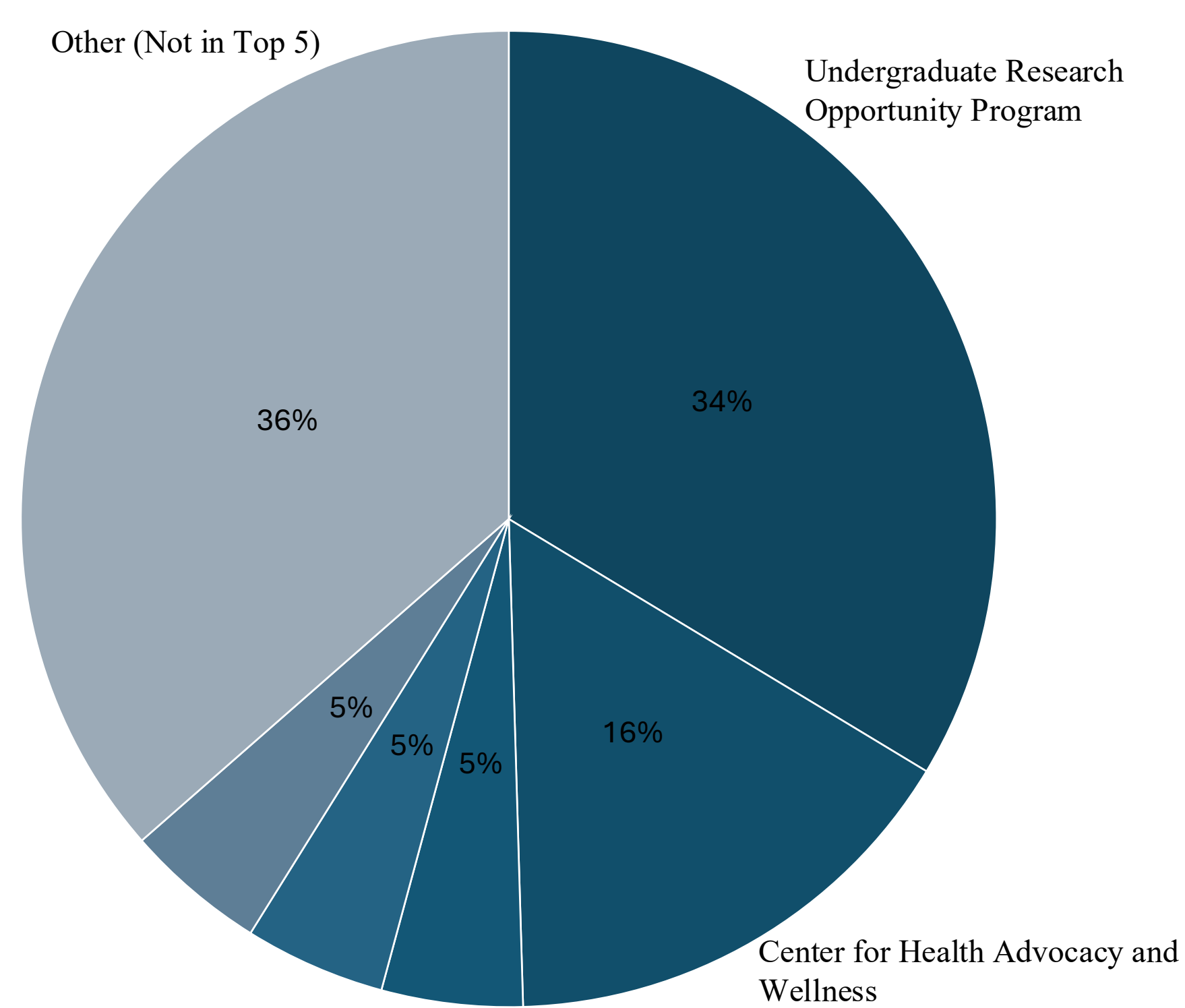
Data

- The results shown are primarily derived from ServScript data of 2024 and 2025 FSU student partnerships facilitated by the aid of an FSU faculty/staff member. These were accompanied by courses that students enrolled in which required them to connect in a nonprofit partnership.
- The project included two surveys developed through Qualtrics. One survey was sent to the students involved in nonprofit partnerships, while the other was sent to the FSU faculty/staff.
- The surveys were intended to gauge what the current dynamic is between students and the nonprofits they work with, primarily those facilitated through an FSU staff/faculty member.
- This allows the students to develop in academia while also gaining the skills that will permit them to enact effective work within the nonprofits.
- The surveys are being used to gauge how effectively these learning objectives were met.
- Following data collection, thematic analysis will be utilized to identify patterns within the data.
- A theoretical approach was implemented rather than an inductive approach due to the extensive literature review prior to any data collection.
- Team and one-on-one meetings allowed for this research to be viewed from the broad spectrum of nonprofits, charities, and volunteer work, as well as the specific impact happening right in the Tallahassee community.



Results

- While extremely intricate, community partnerships can be highly beneficial to all those involved. "Personal, social, and lifestyle transitions" (Hussey and Smith 2010) occur within an undergraduate student's transition to college.
- Thus, as students acclimate, community partnerships can be more successful if student skills are leveraged based on what goals students have for themselves. A variety of aspects are a part of students' process of "becoming" (Maunder et al. 2013).
- Additionally, survey data was pulled from ServScript, which revealed that in Spring 2025, FSU students engaged in a variety of programs, accompanied by different courses. These include the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program, Presidential Scholars, Directed Individual Study, and the Florida State Experience. Through these courses, students in the College of Arts and Sciences were connected with agencies including FSU's Center for Health Advocacy and Wellness (CHAW), the FSU Food Pantry, the FSU Psychology Department, Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare, The BIG Event, PeaceJam, and more.
- These students logged service hours for the semester ranging from one to one hundred sixty. They addressed various community needs with some of the major categories including crisis/counseling, health services, and homelessness/hunger.
- The students recorded lots of positive feedback regarding these partnerships, with the majority ranking their communication positively.
- ServScript data revealed that some students experienced miscommunication and disorganization. They also noted that expectations were not always clear.
- Some students made recommendations for how to combat these issues, including taking initiative and being prepared to ask for one's needs throughout the partnership.
- Another recommendation made by a student was to have yearly check ins with advisors from each agency to address potential negative communication and/or comments.
- The chart shows a breakdown of which agencies students work with in the College of Arts and Sciences Spring 2025 Survey.
- The total 107 students reported working across disciplines, many involved in partnerships not designated within the College of Arts and Sciences.
- The Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program had a significant lead with its number of students, comprising 36 of the 107 total. This was followed by the Center for Health Advocacy and Wellness, with 17 students. 39 students did not fall into one of the top 5 agencies with the most students, depicting a diverse range of agencies within the remainder outside of UROP and CHAW.
- This graphic displays a student desire to work with large organizations, which may have more established student partnership programs. It also displays a range of smaller organizations in the "other" category.



Conclusion

- Strategic and effective collaborations between Florida State University faculty and staff and local nonprofits utilize student capacity towards learning outcomes through intentional learning goals and clear and consistent communication.
- By means of a partnership among three stakeholders, these collaborations have proved to be beneficial for the students and the nonprofits.
- While various issues were noted, most of them centered around communication and could be grouped with a lack of upfront transparency regarding responsibilities from the inception of these partnerships.
- Data from within the last two years revealed that a learning outcome in the domain of appreciating others was mostly achieved.

Future Considerations

- As research in the field of nonprofits continues, further means to understand the actual achievement of the learning outcomes can be implemented. This could include non-FSU affiliated observers in a classroom discussion when the courses are formatted as a colloquium.
- Initiatives should aim to receive unfiltered feedback to address barriers to the utmost success in these partnerships. Some remaining questions include: Which student capabilities are not being utilized in these partnerships? What is the best way to foster honest and kind communication between the students and nonprofits? Is there a better and less biased way to measure the fulfillment of learning outcomes?
- As the research team's surveys continue gathering information, the results will become more significant while aiming to obtain additional suggestions from both the faculty and students.

Resources



Surveys

- FSU Staff/Faculty Survey:



- FSU Student Survey:



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