Service Learning Course Has Purdue Students Design Curricula to Teach Indiana Elementary Students About Food Waste

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The Nature of Service Learning Course offered through the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources by Dr. Rod Williams in spring 2016 provided an excellent opportunity for Purdue students to develop and deliver lesson plans published on the Purdue Nature of Teaching website. Students worked in groups of 4 to develop lesson plans themed around food waste that incorporated hands-on activities, while meeting Indiana academic standards. Students pilot tested their lessons with the rest of the service learning class, then delivered their lessons to Mayflower Mill Elementary School students. Upon delivering each lesson, Purdue students wrote reflections on their time spent in the classroom. Participating Mayflower Mill teachers also provided valuable feedback to the Purdue students on their instruction. Purdue students responded favorably to this course, many referencing it in their resumes to obtain jobs post-graduation. School teachers responded favorably to the experience as well, stating that they would continue to incorporate the food waste lesson plans in their curriculum once they were made publicly available.

My master’s thesis will involve using the lesson plans designed by students in this course, as well as lessons that I’ve developed, to evaluate the effectiveness of education at improving student knowledge, attitudes, and behavior regarding food waste. I will measure these changes by administering a survey to students before and after the lessons are presented. I will also interview students, and physically measure the food wasted in my study schools’ cafeterias before and after the education is delivered.