

# Service Learning: Cultivating Student Engagement and Learning Retention

## Eve Brunson-Pitt, MS, MBA, MT(ASCP)SBB, CQA, CMQ/OE(ASQ)



### INTRODUCTION

An option the Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT) faculty at Howard Community College used to ignite the desire for students to become ambassadors for laboratory sciences profession, involved confrontation of need within the community. That need was at the heart of their curriculum within Clinical Hematology and Immunohematology courses.. Faculty created a service learning project that connected these courses with the objective to: (1) identify common barriers that prevent individuals from participating in hematopoietic stem cell screening and donation; and, (2) develop and implement a strategy to recruit stem cell / bone marrow donor by placing them on the registry.

### PROJECT DESIGN

Beginning in 2017, MLT cohorts of twelve to sixteen students were responsible for participating in the recruitment of stem cell donors on behalf of Be The Match®(BTM), operated by the National Marrow Donor Program®(NMDP). This project was a component of Clinical Hematology or Clinical Immunohematology coursework and comprised ten percent of a student’s overall course grade. The span of the project lasted ten weeks and included ample time for students to plan a donor recruitment strategy, build stakeholder relationships, strategy implementation, and reporting of their findings in order to analyze their effort relative to the project goals.

The entire cohort participated as one complete team which allowed students to assign tasks and build subcommittees within the team. Faculty created the goal for student teams to recruit 100 new stem cell donors into the NMDP; with at least fifty percent of the donors identifying as non-white or people of color. This goal was strategic for several reasons: (1) students were currently learning about hematologic diseases that affected non-white patients disproportionately than white patients such as sickle cell and Fanconi’s anemia; (2) research has shown that African-American patients have less than a thirty percent chance of finding a compatible match within the NMDP, compared to Caucasians (73%), Asians (50%) and Hispanics. In fact, BTM provided stories of children diagnosed with these diseases to assist with raising awareness and donor recruitment.

### PROJECT EVALUATION

Students were encouraged to get creative and to use all available resources including social media, local businesses and venues to create memorable interactions with potential donors. Fifty percent of the project is derived from submission of two team deliverables: (1) recruitment plan and (2) project outcome assessment. The remaining fifty percent of the student’s grade is a compilation of assignments that evaluate a student’s individual effort over the course of the project that supports the team’s overall effort in achieving the goal. These assignments include: reflection journal, team participation survey and donor drive event participation.

### STUDENT DELIVERABLES

BTM Video:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AumReJWF8oMKRbe6rDLzQyyaUQFFyaq-/view>



### PROGRAM OUTCOMES

As a result of this activity students were able to demonstrate the following: (1) ability to explain stem cell collection procedures and describe the physiologic purpose of pluripotent stem cells; (2) describe the role of MLT/MLS in the collection, preservation and transfusion of stem cells; (3) identify diseases in which stem cell therapy is a curative therapy; (4) explain the need of a diverse donor pool for blood component therapies; (5) understand the historical narrative pertaining to communities of color when discussing medical therapies and addressing these concerns while raising awareness of the need for adequate representation especially among African Americans in the donor pool.

### PROJECT OUTCOMES

Since 2017, MLT students successfully enrolled 376 new stem cell donors with over sixty-five percent of these individuals identifying as people of color into the National Marrow Donor Program. This has resulting in seven successful stem cell transplants directly from the donors recruited. Two of the thirty-five students participating also served as stem cell donors, in addition to two Howard Community College employees as a result of the stem cell awareness campaign.

### ARE YOU READY TO SAVE A LIFE?

There is still time! You can enroll as a stem cell donor to continue helping those in desperate need of a stem cell transplant. If you are between 18 and 44 years of age, please take a few minutes to see if you are eligible to join Be The Match®. The questionnaire takes less than 5 minutes to complete and if you are eligible, you will receive a swab in the mail within a week after completing the survey. Enrolling is easy! Just hover your smartphone camera over this QR code and follow the instructions the link:

