



Delivering the Promise

The Impact of Service Learning

Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation

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Executive Summary

Service-learning is a program that has the promise to foster the development of behaviors and attitudes that promote community engagement. Unfortunately, that promise is not being met. Based on this research, few teenagers are in service-learning programs that contain the components for maximizing the chances to achieve the desired changes. This research report shows that it is possible to operationally define high-quality service learning, and that such high-quality service-learning programs do work, but that relatively few teenagers are exposed to high-quality service-learning programs.

High-quality service-learning programs have three components: they last at least one semester; they involve the students in project planning; and, students participate in reflecting on their projects. When these three components are part and parcel of the service-learning experience, students appear to show gains not seen in students who participate in other types of service-learning programs. The good news is that high-quality programs have been identified. The bad news is that only about 10% of all service-learning students are in such high-quality programs. The data suggest that not only is there room for improvement, there are also compelling reasons why service-learning programs should be improved.

Students from high-quality programs are more likely to be volunteers in general, and more likely to be regular volunteers when compared to students from other types of service-learning programs. They are more likely to have met with the volunteer agency, to have received training from the agency, and to have a program that recognizes their contributions. They are more likely to adopt attitudes of civic engagement, expressing a higher interest in politics and current events, and they are more likely to believe they can make a difference. They are more likely to view volunteering as something important to someone they admire, and as a way to act on their spiritual beliefs. They are more likely to see the personal benefits of volunteering, including gaining experience and meeting new people. And, they are more likely to rate their volunteering experiences as excellent.

Further, and disturbingly, the data suggest that low-quality programs have very little impact. That is, programs that are less than one semester in length and do not involve students in planning and reflection, show little in the way of outcomes. The data suggest that low-quality programs are, for the most part, no better than no program at all. These programs have very little effect on teen's attitudes and behaviors. Unfortunately, nearly twice as many service-learning teenagers, more than 20%, are in low-quality programs than in high-quality ones. For these teenagers, the promise of service-learning is not being realized.

For service-learning to be effective, program planners need to increase efforts to maximize the chances for success. The necessary components are known: duration, planning, and reflection. The impacts are clear: positive changes in behaviors and attitudes.

Service-Learning

Service-learning is “an educational activity, program, or curriculum that seeks to promote students’ learning through experiences associated with volunteerism or community service.”¹ . It is a “teaching and learning method that connects meaningful community service experience with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility.”² . Service-learning is both old and new. It builds on traditions such as experiential learning, project-based learning, and hands-on learning, and it incorporates the new concept of linking community service with other desirable educational outcomes.³

Service-learning is a national education goal to prepare students for good citizenship and community service. Through service-learning, youth become contributing members of their schools and communities. “They can express their concern for others... [and] provide needed services to their communities and society. These acts also benefit teens themselves, helping them grow psychologically, socially, and intellectually.”⁴ Service allows youth to discover their potential as people that contribute to society, and helps them gain a sense of action and responsibility.⁵

Research on the impact of service-learning supports the belief that service-learning has positive impacts on youth, schools, and communities. A research brief prepared by Billig for Learning in Deed, shows the many ways that service-learning can make a difference.⁶ Note that the author does not claim all students participating in service-learning achieve all these results, but she does identify the enormous potential of service-learning:

- Service-learning has a positive impact on the personal development of public school youth;
- Students who participate in service-learning are less likely to engage in “risk” behaviors;
- Service-learning has a positive effect on students’ interpersonal development and the ability to relate to culturally diverse groups;
- Service-learning helps to develop students’ sense of civic and social responsibility and their citizenship skills;

¹ Sheckley, B. G., & Keeton, M. T. (1997). *Service Learning: A Theoretical Model*. In J. Schine (Ed.), *Service learning. Ninety-sixth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, 32. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

² Mintz, Suzanne, and Goodwin Liu. (1994). *Service Learning: An Overview*. Washington, DC: Corporation for National and Community Service, 12.

³ Fiske, Edward B. (2002). *Learning in Deed: The Power of Service-Learning for American Schools*. Retrieved, from http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/0d/fa/18.pdf, 6.

⁴ Zaff, Jonathan and Michelsen, Erik. (2002). *Encouraging Civic Engagement: How Teens Are (or Are Not) Becoming Responsible Citizens*. Retrieved, from <http://www.childtrends.org/files/K6Brief.pdf>, 1.

⁵ Youniss, James. (1999). *Civic Development and Community Service Creating Citizenship: Youth Development for Free and Democratic Society*. Presented at the June 18, 1999 U.S. Panel. Abstract retrieved, from <http://www.stanford.edu/group/adolescent.ctr/Conference/1999/Panel/youniss.html>

⁶ Billig, Shelley. (n.d.) *The Impacts of Service-Learning on Youth, Schools and Communities: Research on K-12 School-Based Service-Learning, 1990–1999*. Retrieved, from <http://www.learningindeed.org/research/slresearch/slrsrchsy.html>.

- Service-learning provides opportunities for students to become active, positive contributors to society;
- Service-learning helps students acquire academic skills and knowledge;
- Students who participate in service-learning are more engaged in their studies and more motivated to learn;
- Service-learning is associated with increased student attendance; and,
- Service-learning helps students to become more knowledgeable and realistic about their careers.

Historical evidence from service-learning research suggests “mixed” student outcomes, with “a positive relationship between participating in school service activities and various forms of civic engagement and political efficacy having the least support from research.”⁷ For instance, in a brief for the National Youth Leadership Council synthesizing service-learning research, Shumer summarized Conrad and Hedin’s findings that “studies of the impact of community service on increasing political efficacy and later involvement were divided. Some showed positive results, others showed no effect.”⁸ Further, studies reviewed by Vanderbilt University researchers show mixed outcomes on service-learning participant course grades/GPA and moral development.⁹

This weak link between student outcomes and service-learning is often attributed to limitations in research, which diminish the researchers’ ability to make causal statements about program impacts. For example, Billig cites lack of control groups, focus on short-term impacts, reliance on pre- and post-tests and self reported data, and few hypothesis tests as factors limiting service-learning research.¹⁰ Similarly, Raskoff and Sundeen echo notions of inadequate research designs and small sample sizes that plague past studies.¹¹ However, these limitations are not unique to the service-learning literature, but all service-related research, as Perry and Imperial note when describing the service sector’s weak “research infrastructure.”¹²

One of the most prevalent limitations in service-learning research relates to the definition of service-learning, its components, and how service-learning is implemented. In separate literature reviews, Billig and Raskoff and Sundeen note that studies frequently leave treatment differences unaddressed. The latter pair of authors, citing Wade and Saxe, note,

⁷ Raskoff, Sally and Sundeen Richard, citing Youniss and Yates, 1997; Conrad and Hedin, 1991; Kraft, 1996; Root, 1997; Sahuymer and Belbas, 1996; Wade and Saxe, n.d. (1999). *Community Service Programs in High Schools*. Cited Law and Contemporary Problems, (62),73. Retrieved, from Duke University Law Journals, <http://www.law.duke.edu/journals/lcp/articles/lcp62dAutumn1999p73.htm>, 80.

⁸ Shumer, Robert. (2005). *Service-Learning Research: What Have We Learned from the Past* [Excerpted from *Growing to Greatness 2005*]. Retrieved, from http://www.nylc.org/rc_downloadfile.cfm?emoid=14:137&property=download&mode=download, 49.

⁹ Eyler, Janet and Giles, Dwight and Stenson, Christine and Gray, Charlene. (2001). *At A Glance: What We Know about The Effects of Service-Learning on College Students, Faculty, Institutions and Communities, 1993-2000: Third Edition*. Retrieved, from <http://www.compact.org/resource/aag.pdf>

¹⁰ Billig, Shelley. (2001). *Research on K-12 School-Based Service Learning: The Evidence Builds*. Phi Delta Kappan, 81(9), 658-664. Retrieved, from Research Library Core database. (Document ID: 53590785).

¹¹ Ibid. *Community Service Programs in High Schools*

¹² Perry, James and Imperial, Mark. (1999). *A Decade of Service-Related Research: A Map of the Field*. Retrieved, from <http://nvs.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/30/3/462>

“there is inconsistency in virtually all outcome areas [which] can be explained in part by the [presence or absence] of a reflection component and [the amount of] time spent on service, [the quality of the program studies], and differences in student characteristics.”¹³ Simply stated, studies often bundle together programs that vary greatly in content, quality, and intensity under the auspices of “service-learning,” potentially canceling out positive effects with negative or constant ones.

Thus, more recent research, including this study, underscores the role of moderating the confounding variables in understanding the impact of service-learning on student outcomes by controlling for quality variables (e.g., planning, reflection, and duration). In a CIRCLE study, for instance, researchers considered “presence, amount, frequency, duration” of overall program, service activities, and reflection activities and found various quality elements related to planning, reflection, and duration have strong linkages to civic outcomes.¹⁴ Likewise, Eyler found that “continuous reflection promotes development of the knowledge, skills, and cognitive capacities necessary for students to deal effectively with the complex social issues that challenge citizens”¹⁵ and quality of community placement and integration of service into learning also play a role.¹⁶ Lastly, Shumer summarizes the “most important/influential studies that shaped the history of service-learning research” by noting that:

That service-learning has an impact is beyond doubt. How often and how significant that impact depends mainly on issues of quality: of people; of intensity and duration of the program; of program design; of the service experiences; of preparation, process, and evaluation of the experiences; and of the integration into the curriculum.¹⁷

The research herein cited suffers from some of these same limitations. Reviewers of drafts of this report include Mark Hager of the University of Texas San Antonio and Jeff Brudney of the University of Georgia. They rightly point out that the data collection methodology, and hence the data collected, does not measure characteristics of students prior to their service-learning experience. Therefore, there may have been differences in these students that caused them to self-select into different types of programs. As an example, consider two students, one who comes from a volunteering family and who has a propensity to involvement (a motivated student), and one who is not so inclined (an unmotivated student). Assume further that they have the option of two different programs, one a demanding high quality program and one a not-so-demanding low

¹³ Ibid. *Community Service Programs in High Schools*, 82

¹⁴ Billig, Shelley and Root, Sue, and Jesse, Dan. (2005). *The Impact of Participation in on High School Student's Civic Engagement: CIRCLE Working Paper 33*. RMC Research for CIRCLE. Retrieved, from <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP33Billig.pdf>

¹⁵ Eyler, Janet. (2002). *Reflection: Linking Service and Learning – Linking Students and Communities [Abstract Only]*. The Journal of Social Issues, 58(3), 517. Retrieved, from Research Library Core database. (Document ID: 154412941).

¹⁶ Purdue ad hoc Task Force on Citizenship Education. (2002). *Universities as Citizens – Purdue University: A Newsletter about Service Learning and Campus-Community Collaboration* (4)6. Retrieved, from http://www.mgmt.purdue.edu/centers/citizen_ed/Newsletters/TFCENwsltr24B.doc

¹⁷ Ibid. *Service-Learning Research: What Have We Learned from the Past* [Excerpted from *Growing to Greatness 2005*], 48

quality program. The motivated student might select the high quality program because it allows him/her to act on his/her existing motivations; the unmotivated student might select the low quality program for other motivations, for example, because it is a good way to avoid, say, algebra. Before the service-learning experience, the motivated student volunteers more than does the unmotivated student. The same is true after the service-learning: the motivated one volunteers more. The difference in their volunteering, and all others like them, is not a function of the service-learning experience but rather of the qualities they brought into that experience.

They are correct that the study design is not a classic research design that would allow for more precise measurement of changes associated with service-learning. However, the usefulness of the available data for drawing inferences about the impact of service-learning is supported by the following:

- Most students have little choice in the content and design of their service-learning program. That is, the student gets what the teacher, school, and/or school system has decided to provide. The quality of the program is independent of students' backgrounds.
- We assume that the other traits of students that influence their propensity to volunteer are evenly distributed among participants. This is a common approach used in medical research. For example, it can be demonstrated that people on a low fat diet are less likely to suffer a heart attack. The medical research community is comfortable in assuming that all other factors that influence heart attacks are randomly and evenly distributed among study participants.
- The intended impacts of service-learning include increased levels of civic engagement, so finding that it has this impact is expected if the program is successful. This gives some face validity to the claim of impact proposed in this paper.
- The literature supports the basic concept used in this paper, that the quality of the service-learning experience is a factor in service-learning achieving its objectives.

Given the above, it appears appropriate to use these data to study differences in students in different types of service-learning programs. However, the reviewers are correct in suggesting that deeper and more rigorous studies need to be done to more fully uncover the impact service-learning has on students. The findings presented in this study are suggestive of impact, but causality cannot be established without taking the additional recommended steps.

The focus of this research is to specifically examine the effect of service-learning exposure on teen volunteering behavior. Further, this study examines the differential impact of service-learning quality, exploring how quality service-learning is associated with increased commitments to volunteering.

Quality Service Learning

One of the main research hypotheses of the current research is that service-learning programs can be of higher or lower quality based on the inclusion or exclusion of specific components. At the most basic level, youth were asked if they were or had been in a class in which community service was required. This led to the basic division of youth into the exposed and not exposed groups. For those exposed to service learning, a series of questions were asked that allowed a quality scale to be developed. These questions, developed by the staff of the Office of Research and Policy Development at the Corporation for National and Community Service, were intended to assess the quality of the service-learning experience. The author worked with the CNCS staff in creating the quality scale used in this report. Each factor in this quality scale is examined below.

Planning

When youth are asked to participate in service-learning, “they are being entrusted with important work with the expectation that they have the ability to perform it. Building that trust is essential to the success of the effort. That is why it is critical to involve young people at the very beginning of the work” (Standards of Quality, 1995). Respondents who indicated they were or had been involved in service-learning were asked if they helped plan the service-learning project.

Reflection

Reflection is a process that occurs during project planning and implementation as well as at its conclusion. “Reflection is the framework in which students/youth process and synthesizes the information and ideas they have gained through their entire service experience (school and community-based) and in the classroom (school-based). Through the process of reflection, students/youth analyze concepts, evaluate experiences, and form opinions – all in the context of the school curricula or the pre-determined learning goals of the community-based organization. Engaging in structured reflection also assists young people to gain a greater sense of themselves” (Standards of Quality, 1995). Youth who were or had been involved in service-learning were asked if their project involved reflection.

Duration

Service-learning programs can be offered in a variety of ways, from short programs lasting less than a month to ones lasting an entire school year. According to a recent study, longer service-learning programs had the greatest civic impacts (Billig, 2005). Therefore, for this study, programs lasting one semester or more were considered to be of higher quality than were others lasting less than one semester.

High-Quality Service-Learning

For this study, then, high-quality service-learning involved all three components: a program that lasted at least one semester that involved students in both planning and reflection. A program that had at least one of the components, but not all three, was designated a medium quality program, while a program that lacked any of the three

measures was designated a low-quality program. These concepts are examined in more detail below.

Research Methodology

The Survey

The results presented in this report are based on analysis of a survey of 3,178 teenagers between the ages of 12 and 18, conducted for the Corporation for National and Community Service (Corporation) and Independent Sector (IS) by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The survey was conducted in the spring of 2005, asking these youth about their volunteering experiences during calendar year 2004. The sample of teenagers was drawn from a retired Current Population Survey (CPS) household sample in which there was reasonable expectation of finding at least one child of the right age. Because the intended respondents were teenagers under the age of consent, parental permission was first sought for interviewing their child. Not all households had a child of the right age, and not all parents gave their permission. These non-response patterns may have caused an unknown and unknowable measurement error. A full description of the methodology and weighting can be found in the larger formal report from this study prepared and released by the Corporation and IS.

Operational Definitions

This report is based on analyses that use consistent item definitions. The key items are defined and operationalized below. It is especially important to note that the survey participants were teenagers between the ages of 12 and 18, not teachers, and the survey did not allow for teacher verifications of respondent opinions. Further, and most importantly, the survey did not capture any indication of the quality of the items being probed. For example, while more than half of teenagers reported that their service-learning experiences involved reflection, it is not known to what extent these reflection activities were of different quality, intensity, or depth.

Service Learning: 37.6% of All Teenagers

Survey Question: Have you ever performed any community service as part of a school activity or requirement?

Service learning is defined as a binary (Y-N) variable. Those who answered yes to the above were classified as having been involved in service-learning. All others were classified as not having been involved in service learning.

Duration: 39.8% of Service-Learning Participants

Survey Question: For how long did you regularly participate in this community service?

- (1) It was a one time activity
- (2) One month or less
- (3) More than a month but less than three months
- (4) One semester

- (5) The entire school year
- (6) Other

Students who indicated they had been involved in service-learning were asked the duration of that program. Duration of the service-learning program is a binary variable, with a “yes” identifying students in service-learning programs that lasted one semester or more.

Planning: 36.1% of Service-Learning Participants

Survey Question: Did you help plan the service project?

Service-learning students were asked if they were involved in planning their service-learning project. The planning binary variable identifies those who said they were involved in planning. The quality, intensity, or depth of these planning activities was not assessed.

Reflection: 51.3% of Service-Learning Participants

Survey Question: Were you required to write about or reflect on your service experience for the class?

This binary variable was defined as those who indicated that their service-learning experienced involved reflection. Again, the quality, intensity, or depth of this reflection was not assessed.

The Three Analysis Groups (plus non-involved)

The above service-learning binary variables combine in eight (8) different ways. One of those combinations (Y-Y-Y in binary terms) indicates a high quality service-learning program: a program lasting at least one semester that involves students in both project planning and reflection. Another of those combinations indicates a low quality program (N-N-N in binary terms): programs that are less than one semester in duration and do not involve students in either program planning or reflection. The remaining six possible combinations were defined as medium quality programs: they have at least one of the aspects of a high quality program, but not all three. The division of service-learning participants into one of these three quality groups (high, medium, and low) based on duration, planning, and reflection, forms the basic analytical framework for this report. For some analyses, a fourth group of teenagers is discussed, those who were not involved in service-learning. Table 1 shows the flow of service learning students through the quality steps.

Defining a Volunteer: 66.9% of All Teenagers Volunteer

The focus of this survey was teenage volunteering. Respondents were asked two separate sets of questions about their volunteering. One set of two questions was taken verbatim from the CPS volunteering supplement, thereby using the standard volunteering methodology used by the federal government to estimate the scope of volunteering in

adults. A second set of four behavioral questions was also used, testing an alternative way of asking about volunteering. This behavioral set of questions asked about specific respondent behaviors, whether or not those behaviors fit into what any one person considered volunteering.

Any respondent who answered “yes” to any of the volunteering prompts, using either the CPS or behavioral questions, was asked a series of questions about where he/she volunteered, how many weeks per year he/she volunteered, and how many hours per week. It is interesting to note that these teenagers were, for the most part, able to tell where they volunteered no matter which particular question got them into the detailed questions. That is, people who said “no” to both CPS questions but “yes” to one of the behavioral questions were able to tell us where they volunteered and how much they volunteered in spite of the fact that they said they didn’t volunteer based just on the CPS questions.

Volunteering Prompts

The standard CPS questions on volunteering were:

1. Since January 1, 2004, have you done any volunteer activities through or for an organization?
2. Sometimes people don't think of activities they do infrequently or activities they do for schools or youth organizations as volunteer activities. Since January 1, 2004, have you done any of these types of volunteer activities?

The behavioral questions were built from questions used by Independent Sector in their original studies of volunteering in which interviews were conducted face-to-face and respondents were given a card to read that listed a series of volunteering behaviors from which to select. The experimental questions used in this survey were:

1. Over the last year, have you done any volunteer work for a religious organization, such as aiding the clergy, participating in the choir, teaching Sunday school, or other general support work?
2. Over the last year, have you served or assisted as a mentor, tutor, coach, counselor, or some other activity that benefited youth?
3. Over the last year, have you done any volunteer work that helped people in places like hospitals, nursing homes, crisis centers, shelters, food or blood banks, or other such human service organizations?
4. Over the last year, have you done any community improvement work, such as volunteering at a museum or theater, supporting an environmental, animal welfare, or public safety organization, or serving at another organization that provides for community needs?

As these behavioral questions were experimental, no attempt was made to make them comprehensive. For example, consider the second question. How would a person respond if they had served as a volunteer working in adult literacy or adult recreation? Likewise, how would a person respond if their volunteering were for an international relief organization? Areas such as these were not covered in these experimental questions.

Comparison of the two different methodologies revealed that individually they resulted in different estimates of the teenage volunteering rate, 55% for the CPS questions and 61% for the behavioral questions. About 25% of those who answered 'no' to the two CPS questions answered 'yes' to one or more of the behavioral questions. Most frequently, they mentioned volunteering with a religious organization as the place they volunteered, followed closely by volunteering with a youth service and human service organizations. However, the reverse is also true. There were respondents who said 'no' to all four behavioral questions who said 'yes' to at least one of the CPS questions. This is likely because the behavioral questions were not exhaustive of volunteering behaviors, as mentioned above.

For purposes of this report, those who answered 'yes' to any one of the six prompts, the two CPS questions or the four behavioral questions, was classified as a volunteer. This leads to an overall estimate of 66.9% of all teenagers being classified as volunteers. Table 1 shows the basic division of teenagers used in this report.

Intensity of Volunteering

Volunteer commitment is conceptually defined as a measure of the dedication a volunteer shows toward a volunteering opportunity. It is operationally defined as the number of hours per year that a volunteer gives to an organization. Three levels of commitment were defined such that about one-third of all volunteers fall into each of the three levels of commitment. Hours per year were defined as the number of weeks that the individual gave to their top two organizations multiplied by the number of hours given per week. *Episodic volunteers* were defined as those giving 16 or fewer hours per year (two or fewer days per year) to their top two organizations. *Occasional volunteers* were defined as those who gave between 17 and 56 hours per year (two to seven days). *Regular volunteers* were defined as those who gave more than 56 hours per year (more than seven days). As will be seen in the reports flowing out of this research, this division of volunteers by levels of commitment is useful and informative. For example, the one-third of teenage volunteers who are regular volunteers give about 85% of all annual volunteer hours given by teenagers. Table 1 illustrates this concept.

Table 1
Levels of Volunteer Commitment

| | Volunteers | | | | Non-Volunteers |
|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Group | Percent Volunteering | Percent Episodic 1- 16 Hours/Year | Percent Occasional 17-56 Hours/Year | Percent Regular 57 or More Hours/Year | Percent Not Volunteering |
| All Teenagers | 66.9 % | 26.4 % | 19.5 % | 20.9 % | 33.1 % |
| Volunteers | 100.0% | 39.5 % | 29.2 % | 31.3 % | -- |

Student and School Characteristics

There are some differences in both service-learning participation and volunteering based on student and school characteristics. Females are more likely than males to be involved in service-learning and are also more likely than males to volunteer. By race and ethnicity, there are no measurable differences in the service-learning participation rates, but non-Hispanic whites are more likely than others to volunteer. Students who attend religious private schools are more likely to both have been involved in service-learning and to volunteer than are students from public or secular private schools. Service-learning participation is higher for older teens than younger ones, and older youth are slightly more likely to volunteer. Finally, grade point average is strongly associated with both service-learning and volunteering: as GPA decreases, so do both service-learning participation and volunteering rates. Table 2 summarizes these findings.

Table 2
Service-Learning and Volunteering Rates by Student and School Characteristics

| Gender | | Percent in Service-Learning | Volunteering Rate |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| | Male | 32.8 | 62.8 |
| | Female | 42.6 | 71.0 |
| | | | |
| Race-Ethnicity | | | |
| | Non-Hispanic White | 38.4 | 70.9 |
| | Non-Hispanic Black | 34.1 | 57.6 |
| | Hispanics of any Race | 35.4 | 57.3 |
| | | | |
| School Type | | | |
| | Public | 36.1 | 65.0 |
| | Private/Home School | | |
| | Church-related | 59.2 | 87.7 |
| | Secular | 47.0 | 69.5 |
| | | | |
| Age | | | |
| | 12 – 15 | 34.8 | 65.6 |
| | 16 – 18 | 41.6 | 68.6 |
| | | | |
| GPA | | | |
| | A | 42.1 | 81.1 |
| | B | 40.6 | 65.8 |
| | C or Lower | 24.7 | 54.3 |

Findings

Finding 1: A relatively low percentage of students are enrolled in high quality service learning programs, 10.6% of all service-learning students. This is about half as many as are enrolled in low quality programs, 22.9%. There is considerable room for improvement in the quality of service-learning programs.

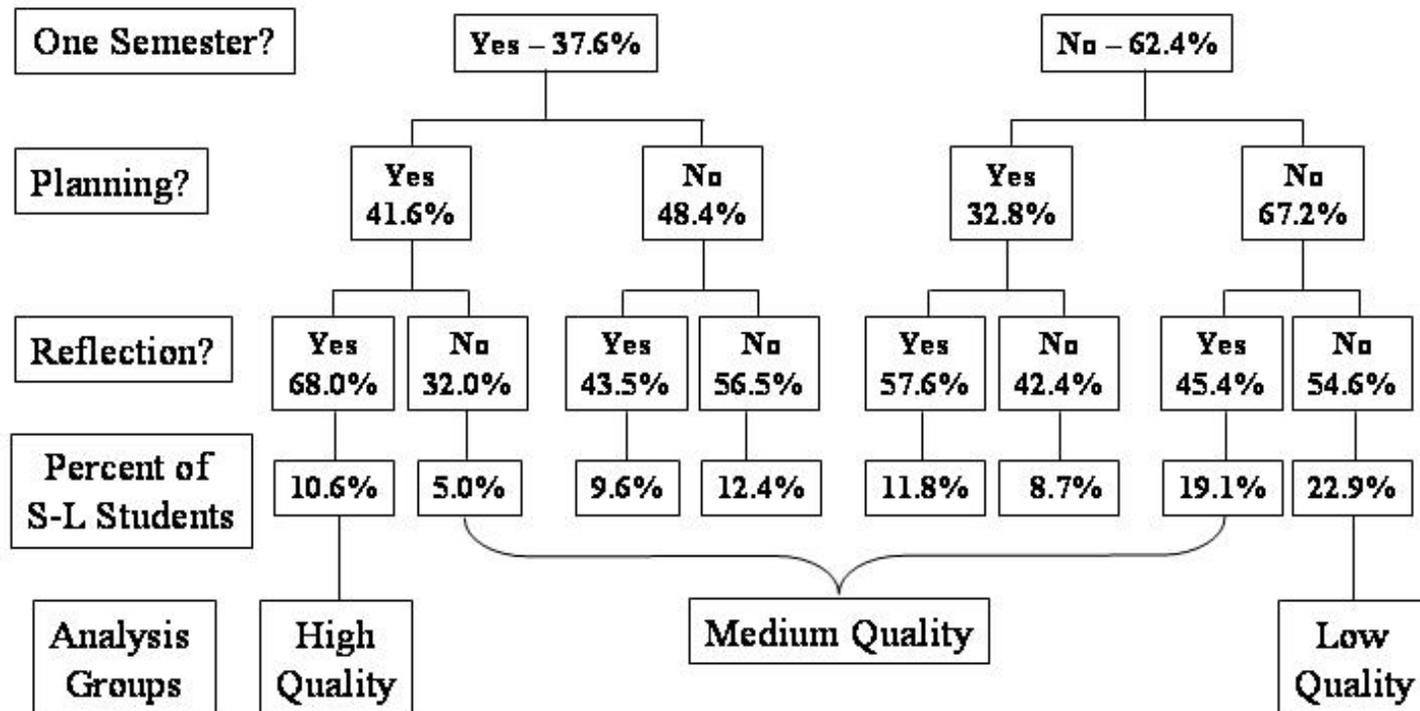
The combination of program characteristics – duration, planning, and reflection – gradually eliminates students from being in high quality programs. To start, only 37.6% are in programs that last at least one semester. Of these students, less than half, 41.6%, are involved in planning their service-learning program. Therefore, only 15.6% of service-learning students have programs that meet these two criteria. Of these students, it is encouraging to note that more than two-thirds, 68.0%, are in programs that involve reflection. However, this leads to the final tally, that only 10.6% of all service-learning students are involved in high quality programs as defined by this study.

At the other end of the scale are students in low quality programs. Most service-learning students are in programs that last less than one semester, 62.4%, and about two-thirds of them are in programs in which they are not involved in program planning. Therefore, 41.9% of service-learning students are in programs that last less than one semester and involve no student engagement in the planning process. Likewise, more than half of these students (54.6%) are also in programs that do not involve reflection. This leads to the finding that 22.9% of all service-learning students are in low quality programs that last less than one semester and involve neither planning nor reflection. The rate of student involvement in low quality programs (22.9%) is double the rate of student engagement in high quality programs (10.7%).

The remaining service-learning students are in medium quality programs. These are programs that involve one or more of the basic program characteristics, but not all three. The most common type of medium quality program is found to be a short program that involves student reflection but not planning (19.1% of service-learning students), while the least common is a long program that involves student planning but not reflection (5.0% of all service learning students).

The distribution of service-learning students through this framework is shown in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1
Quality Groups of Service-Learning Students



Finding 2: Youth who were involved in service-learning (excluding those currently enrolled) have a higher volunteering rate, 74.9%, than those who have not been involved in service-learning, 59.4%. This is the first indication that service-learning has a lasting impact on youth. Students who were engaged in service-learning have a higher level of engagement after their service-learning experience than do those who were not exposed to community service through service-learning.

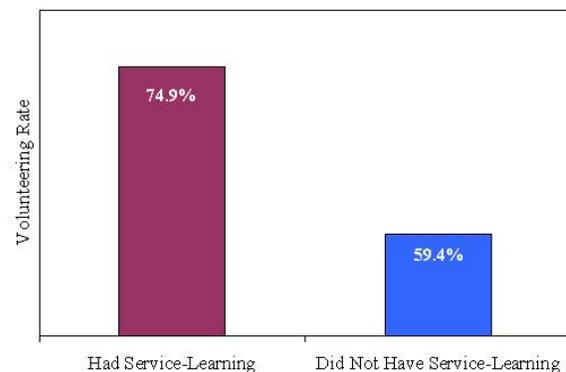
One of the anticipated outcomes of service-learning is the increased civic engagement of those who participate in the activity. This study examined the volunteering habits of youth. Volunteering is one of the two ways that civic engagement is formally measured, the other being voting. Voting is a relatively rare event, occurring every two years for the most part and a large number of those included in the survey were not of voting age. Volunteering is something that can occur pretty much any time. Therefore, measures of the frequency and intensity of volunteering are the most commonly used formal measures of civic engagement among teens.

For this study, volunteering is formal volunteering that occurs either for, through, or in conjunction with an organization. It does not include informal volunteering or things people do on their own without the planning, coordination or management of an organization such as a religious body, a school, or a traditional nonprofit organization.

To examine link between service-learning and volunteering, those who were currently enrolled in service-learning were not included in the analysis. This was done so that the comparison was between those who had experience with service-learning against those who had not. That is, since those enrolled in service-learning are more likely to currently be volunteers, including them in the analysis would unfairly skew the results.

The findings are clear and compelling: those with service-learning experience are more likely to be volunteers than those without such experience. The overall volunteering rate for all youth is 66.9%. Those with service-learning have a much higher volunteering rate, 74.9%, while those without service-learning experience have a much lower rate, 59.4%. This leads to the conclusion that service-learning increases the overall volunteering rate by about 8 percentage points over what would have been observed if youth had no service-learning experience. Chart 2 displays these results.

Chart 2
Service-Learning and Volunteering



Excludes those currently taking a service-learning class.

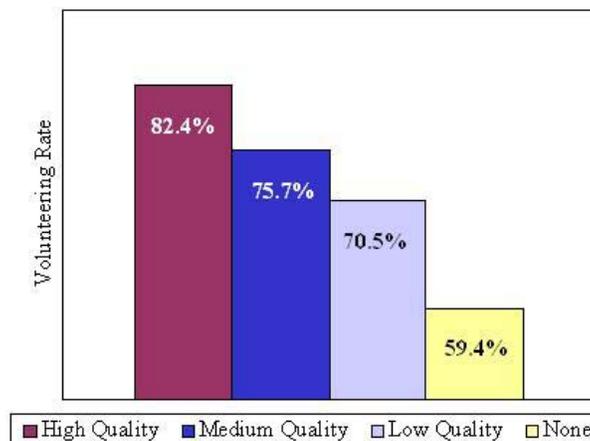
Finding 3: The quality of the service-learning experience has a differential impact on future volunteering behavior: The higher the quality of the service-learning, the higher the volunteering rate. Service-learning affects volunteering, and high quality service-learning affects it most.

Is there a difference in the outcomes of service-learning based on the quality of the service-learning program? When the outcome is measured by volunteering, the answer is clearly yes. Those who reported having been in high quality service learning programs – ones that last at least one semester and that engage students in both service planning and reflection – volunteer at a higher rate than those in other types of service-learning programs, or those who have not participated in service-learning.

Participants in high quality service-learning programs show a volunteering rate of 82.4%. The second highest volunteering rate is seen in those students who had participated in medium quality service-learning programs, 75.7%, while those from low quality programs showed a volunteering rate of 70.5%. However, even though the volunteering rate is lowest for those from low quality service-learning programs, their volunteering rate is still above those seen in youth who had never participated in service-learning, 59.4%. Chart 3 shows these findings.

Since this analysis excludes those currently taking a service-learning class, this is strong evidence that the higher the quality of the service-learning experience, the greater the impact. That is, the only difference in the groups is the quality of the service-learning in which they had participated. This finding agrees with the findings and theories of others, as previously cited.

Chart 3
Volunteering Rate by Quality of Service-Learning Experience



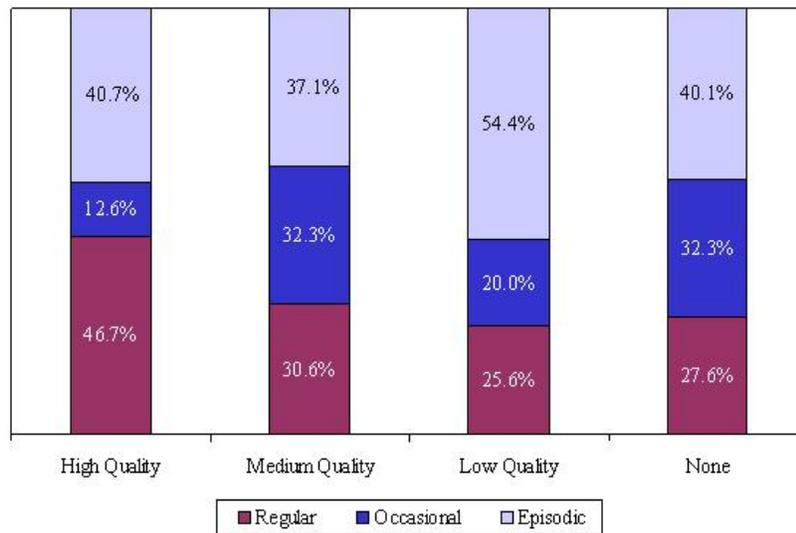
Excludes those currently taking a service-learning class.

Finding 4: The level of commitment former service-learning students make to volunteering differs by the quality of their service-learning experience: the higher the quality of the service-learning program, the more committed youth are to volunteering.

The impact of the quality of service-learning is seen in the increased intensity with which former participants volunteer. Likewise, there is evidence that participants in low-quality service-learning programs have become more jaded in their acceptance of a personal role in community service.

Nearly half, 46.7%, of youth with high quality service-learning experience show an unusually strong commitment to volunteering by becoming regular volunteers (this does not include students currently enrolled). Students from high quality programs who volunteer give a median of 69 hours per year. By comparison, 30.6% of students from medium quality programs are regular volunteers, with these medium quality service-learning youth giving a median of 30 hours per year. For youth from low quality programs, the percentage who are regular volunteers drops to 25.6%, about the same as that seen in students who were not exposed to service-learning. However, because those from low quality programs are also less likely to be occasional volunteers, their annual median hours-of-service is lower than that seen in non-participants, 15 to 24.

Chart 4
Service-Learning and Volunteer Intensity



Volunteers only, Excludes those currently taking a service-learning class.

There are several important findings from these data. First, there is a difference in the impact of service-learning programs in terms of their ability to help develop a lasting

commitment to service. When service-learning programs last at least one semester and involve students in both planning and reflection, the programs are successful in fostering an attitude of further civic engagement and responsibility. To achieve the goal of helping youth become engaged, then, the quality of the program is of paramount importance.

Second, service-learning by itself is not enough, because the evidence suggests that a low quality program fosters an attitude of cynicism toward service, exactly the opposite of the intent. The data suggest that no program is better than a low quality one in terms of its lasting impact on commitment to community service. As Shelley Billig said in a private communication with the author, “With a less than appealing experience, students do not feel engaged or efficacious, and don't necessarily want to do this anymore.” This may be why many prior evaluations of service-learning have shown little measurable impact of the overall program: they did not take into account the quality of the service-learning experience. Quality matters, and it matters a lot.

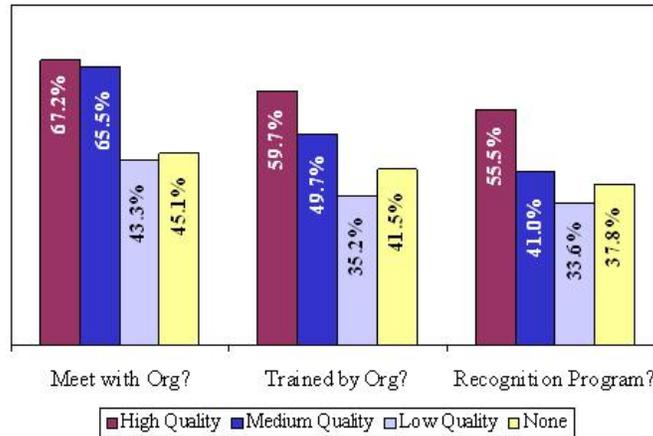
Finding 5: High quality service-learning programs have other characteristics that distinguish them from other types of programs: participants are more likely to have discussed their interests and skills prior to starting their volunteer work and are more likely to have received training from the partner nonprofit organization. Further, high quality programs are more likely to include a recognition program for the participants.

There are other aspects of high quality service learning programs that distinguish them from other types of service-learning and volunteering in general. These include meeting with agency representatives to discuss interests and skills prior to starting volunteering; receiving training from the organization, and the organization (as opposed to the school) holding recognition activities, like award ceremonies.

Meeting with agency representatives prior to starting volunteering is one activity that fosters increased interest in and commitment to the project. It is important for organizations to convey to potential volunteers that they are valuable resources, and that volunteering can be an exciting, rewarding, satisfying, and meaningful experience. By meeting with the potential volunteers prior to the start of a project, the organization shows a commitment to matching volunteers' abilities, interests, and skills with volunteer work activities. This maximizes the chances that the volunteer will enjoy his/her work and that he/she feels in a unique position to contribute. This activity is experienced by three-fourths (67.2%) of youth from high quality service-learning programs, but less than half (43.3%) of students from low quality ones.

Training involves both matching students to the tasks, providing them with the necessary details that are required for success, and orienting them when they begin. There is a particular intent to these activities, taking care to ensure that the students feel good about what they are doing. In some ways, this formal introduction to the organization serves as a hand-off of the teaching responsibility from the school to the agency, with the agency acknowledging its obligation to care for students' growth and development. More than half (54.4%) of students from high quality service-learning programs received training from their agencies, compared to about one-third (35.2%) from low quality ones. Chart 5 shows these findings.

Chart 5
Management Issues



Excludes those currently taking a service-learning class.

Some organizations have formal recognition programs to thank volunteers for their time, efforts, and contributions. Celebration and recognition are important to the closure of service projects. It can bring a sense of completion to the volunteers. It can also provide visibility for the service project or program, which helps build positive group identity. Recognition activities can range from formal events at which awards are handed-out to positive mentions in a newsletter. In most cases, recognition activities are designed into a project, not added on as an after thought. More than half of the students (55.5%) in high quality service-learning programs were recognized for their contributions, something that occurred with lower frequency (less than 40%) in other types of service-learning.

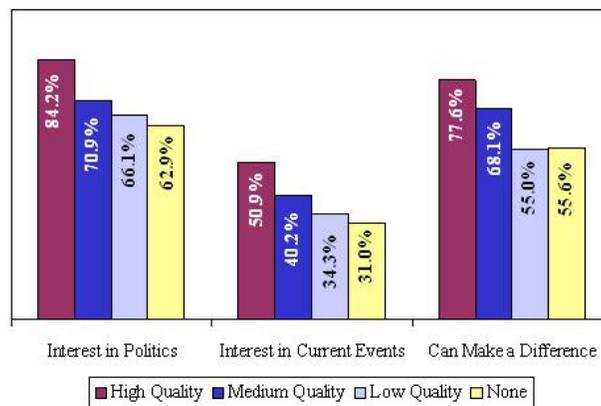
Finding 6: Students in high quality service-learning programs are more likely than others to be interested in politics and current events, and are more likely to believe they can make a difference.

If service learning is successful, there should be measurable differences in the attitudes that students gain from the service-learning experience. There is an expectation that involvement in this type of programming, or in other words, the exposure to the ideas and precepts of engagement, will have a positive effect on the beliefs and attitudes of its participants.

More than 80% of students from high-quality service learning programs show an interest in politics, compared to 71% among those from medium quality programs, and about 66% of those from low quality programs. A similar pattern is seen when interest in current events was examined, with those in high-quality programs more likely to hold the desired attitude. More than half of students from high-quality programs have a good deal of interest in current events, compared to 4 in 10 for medium-quality programs, and about one-third in low quality programs. Likewise, those from high-quality service-learning programs are more likely to believe that they can make a difference, with nearly 77% holding such an attitude. This compares to 64% for those from medium-quality programs and 53% for those in low-quality programs. The quality of the service-learning experience, then, does influence the adoption of these important attitudes.

As with other measures already reported, it is important to note the minimum effect of low-quality programs compared to those who did not participate in service-learning at all. Low-quality programs have very little impact, if any. The differences in attitudes between those who participated in low-quality programs and non-participants were not measurable. Chart 6 summarizes these findings.

Chart 6
Service-Learning and Attitudes



Excludes those currently taking a service-learning class.

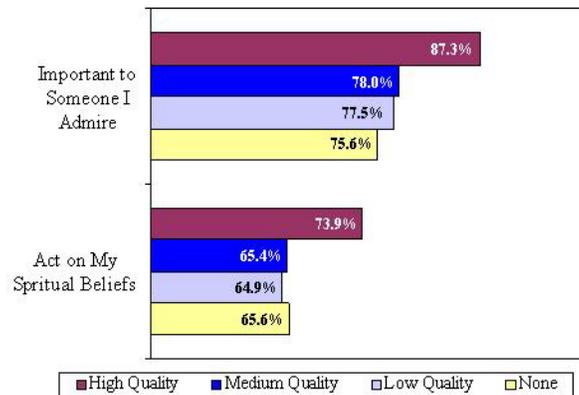
Finding 7: Those in high-quality service-learning programs are more likely than others to have a role model to whom volunteering is important, and are more likely to see volunteering as a way to act on their spiritual beliefs. These attitudes are a byproduct of the service-learning experience, with only those from high-quality programs showing change over those not involved in service-learning.

Teachers who take the time and make the effort to deliver a high-quality service-learning program can serve as a role model to their students. By action and attitude, such teachers can instill in their students the importance of volunteering, community service, and civic engagement. Teachers who own up to the promise of service-learning by agreeing to deliver the program over a full semester, who make the effort to involve the students in planning, and who structure reflective activities do more than other teachers who opt for a less intensive program. By example, they are role models, displaying a commitment to service and to making the service-learning experience as rich as possible.

Their success can be measured in many ways, as this paper shows. But it is not just the volunteering patterns or attitudes that change in students in such high-quality programs. These students are also more likely to view volunteering as something important to someone they admire. Since it is safe to assume that the levels of parental or family engagement in volunteering are evenly distributed across all students, it is also safe to assume that the teacher in a high-quality program is the one adult that is different with respect to the service-learning experience. That is, the quality of the program is reflective of the quality of the teacher, providing students with a role model. It is only students in high-quality programs who show an increase in the attitude that volunteering is important to someone they admire. This leads to the conclusion that a high-quality program is more likely to have a teacher in whom students find a source of inspiration.

Students from high-quality programs are also more likely than all others to see volunteering as a way they can act on their spiritual beliefs. Since religious duty is usually not part of the service-learning curriculum (except perhaps for programs in church-related private schools), this connection is likely one the students make on their own. What is interesting is that this connection is only made for those in high-quality programs. Those in other types of programs do not hold this belief any more than do students who have never been in service-learning. Chart 7 displays these findings.

Chart 7
Service-Learning and Volunteering Motivations



Volunteers only, Excludes those currently taking a service-learning class.

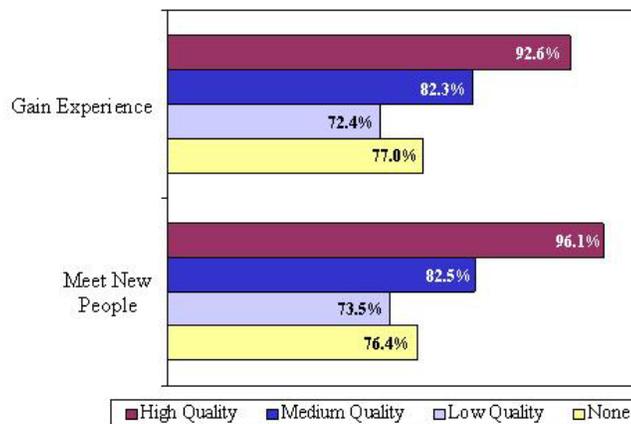
Finding 8: There are differences in the personal benefits teenagers see in volunteering, important if the service-learning experiences are to lead to more engagement in later life. Some service-learning students are more likely to understand that volunteering is a good way to gain experience. And some students are more likely to see volunteering as a way to meet new people. Which students? Those from high-quality programs.

It has become common for colleges and universities to use community service engagement as a filter for admissions. Likewise, many first-time employers favor students with experience over others when making hiring decisions, even for summer or part-time jobs. Volunteering is also a way for students to meet new people. They can be other students, potential mentors, job contacts, or people of different circumstances. For students, these outcomes are personal payoffs for engagement, a return on the investment of time. But not all service-learning students benefit equally.

Students in high-quality programs are most likely to grasp the benefits of volunteering in these two ways, gaining experience and meeting new people. About 93% of students from high-quality service-learning programs understand that volunteering is a way to gain experience, compared to about 82% for those from medium-quality programs. Students from low-quality programs, on the other hand, are no more likely to understand this benefit than are students who had not been involved in service-learning at all, about 72% each.

Likewise, more than 96% of students from high-quality programs understand that volunteering is a good way to meet new people, compared to 80% for those from medium quality programs. Again, students from low-quality programs fare no better than students who have not been in service-learning, with about 75% of each group understanding that volunteering is a good way to meet new people. Chart 8 shows these results.

Chart 8
Service-Learning and Volunteering Motivations



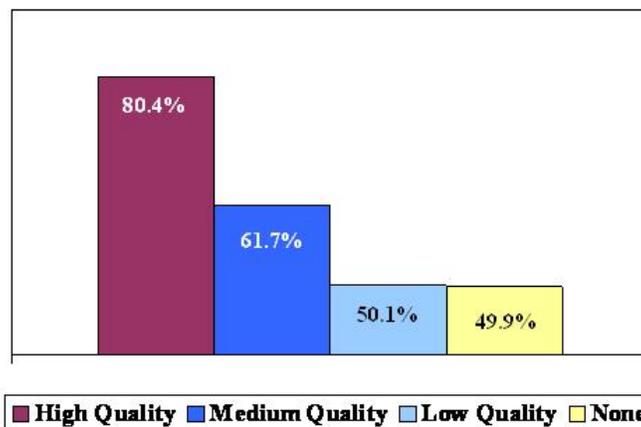
Volunteers Only; Excludes those currently taking a service-learning class.

Finding 9: There is a direct and powerful relationship between the quality of teenagers' service-learning experience and how they view their service learning experience.

Not all volunteering is created equal. The quality of the volunteering experience is an important factor in building an ethic of service. Those who have good experiences are more likely to return to volunteering than are those whose volunteering experience is not as good. If service-learning is to meet one of its overall goals of helping instill a commitment to community engagement, then the quality of the volunteering experience is of prime importance.

When a service-learning program involves the students in planning and reflection, and when the program lasts at least one semester, the definition of high-quality service-learning, they are more likely to rate their volunteering experiences as excellent. More than 80% of all such students rate their volunteering this way. When they are in a program that has at least one but not all three of those components, defined as medium-quality service-learning, the percentage rating their volunteering as excellent declines to about 60%. When similar students are in service-learning projects that contain none of the quality measures – the program lasts less than one semester and does not involve the students in planning and reflection – the percentage rating their volunteering as excellent declines to about 50%. As Chart 9 shows, students from low-quality service-learning programs fare no better than students who volunteered but not through service-learning, who also showed about 50% rating their volunteering experience as excellent.

Chart 9
Volunteering Experience “Excellent”



Volunteers only; Excludes those currently taking a service-learning class.

Conclusions

There are different ways service-learning programs are designed and implemented. Some take these tasks seriously, others not so. When planning a program, teachers and school officials are faced with decisions about how best to implement a program that will meet the service-learning objectives. Among other things, they need to decide how long the program will last and what components will be included. The data herein presented make a strong argument that there are major and significant differences in the impact of service-learning programs based on what components are included or excluded. This research confirms the opinions of other researchers that there are three components that, when included in service-learning programs, maximize the chances for achieving the desired outcomes: duration of at least one semester; including the students in project planning; and involving the students in reflection about their service. When these three components are part and parcel of the service-learning experience, students show gains in civic engagement not seen in students in other types of service-learning programs.

This research suggests that many other studies of service-learning have failed to show the same depth of impact as this study because they did not take into account the quality of the programs they studied. However, this study was focused on one outcome area, volunteering, and on changes in attitudes that are thought to influence volunteering. Other studies of other outcomes should examine whether the quality of the service-learning experience also had a differential impact on those other outcomes.

This research also suggests a guideline for those in planning and implementing service-learning projects, that there are critical components that should be included in their programs. The data suggest that the most impact is seen in programs that last at least one semester and that involved students in both planning and reflection. Additionally, successful programs work closely with their service partners to match student interests and skills with the service projects, and include a formal program of recognition. By building a program that involves these components, teachers, schools, and school systems will be in a position to more fully meet the goals of service-learning, and help create a generation of engaged people.

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