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# JSLHE Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education

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## JSLHE Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education

*The Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education is an online, international, peer-reviewed journal for the dissemination of original research regarding effective institutional-community partnerships. Our primary emphasis is to provide an outlet for sharing the methodologies and pedagogical approaches that lead to effective community-identified outcomes. The Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education is a subscription-free journal with a review board made up of various academic disciplines of the member institutions of the University of Louisiana System as well as other nationally and internationally accredited colleges and universities and affiliated organizations.*

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# Foreword

David Yarbrough, JSLHE Executive Editor

I remember my first service activity. It was almost 40 years ago and I was part of a church-based youth group traveling to Appalachia to work with a new program called the Appalachian Service Project. If there were any church leaders or ministers in the group, I don't remember them. As a matter of fact, I remember very little about the group, the trip, the town where we lived, or how many days we were on site. But here I am, 37 years later, and I can tell you everything about the houses and the work that I did to repair them, and the families who lived there. Two years after that I began my first year in college and took my first service-learning course. At the time, it was called something else. I do not remember the name of the course

instructor. However, I do remember everything about the work that I did, the reflection activities, the questions that it raised about my major, my ideas of the world, and my role as a student. That course instructor never knew what that course meant to me – because before the term was over, I left school for a year in order to use what I learned in that class to work, to think, and to identify who I really might be as an adult. Now, 35 years and a collection of degrees later, I am still watching, and learning, and talking about civic engagement and service-learning in higher education. And beyond that, I am still amazed and overwhelmed at how much is left to learn and accomplish when we work with our minds, our hands, and each other.

I am pleased to introduce you to the inaugural edition of the *Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education*. As stated on our home page, our emphasis is to provide an outlet for sharing the methodologies and pedagogical approaches that lead from the classroom to effective community-identified outcomes. Getting this off the ground has been a labor of love for everyone identified on our masthead with the University of Louisiana System office and for those at each of our nine member institutions. Included in all who have worked so hard to get this first edition to you are a sizeable number of active review board members from across the South and reviewers of manuscripts from across the country. Announcement of the journal and the initial call for manuscripts brought submissions from across the United States and abroad. Our reviewers and editors worked thoughtfully to bring you this first edition with manuscripts that cut a wide path across many of the challenges and successes associated with service-learning.



A primary challenge facing many of us is how to provide quality experiential learning experiences in a time of ever-increasing demands on both faculty and our students. Reed-Bouley et al., look specifically at providing quality instruction with students who face the additional demands of having to work beyond their efforts to succeed in the classroom. They point to the dilemma faced by many course-instructors who know that the “high-impact” strategies associated with service-learning are also an additional strain on time for their students.

Van Meter et al. take a look back to the discourse of early modern urban planning and effectively tie it to the development and implementation of relevant service course design for the students, faculty, and communities of today. There is no doubt that the relevance of overlap of society, economy and environment are of current interest and concern. In a recent talk that I gave about higher education and effective service, I found myself referring to one of their observations of the effectiveness of involving students in civic engagement.

Many professional and paraprofessional academic disciplines have employed service-learning and experiential models for decades in order to effectively integrate theory to practice. Maccio and Voorhies look specifically at social work field education and the students’ perceptions of service beyond the narrower expressed context of their fieldwork. Their qualitative approach brings a personal voice to both the successes and challenges of in-course service targeting graduate disciplines firmly grounded in community engagement.

It is interesting that there is little examination regarding service, locus of control, and one of our most prized groups – the undergraduate honors student. In *Undergraduate Honors Service-Learning and Effects on Locus of Control*, Stewart takes on the challenge of opening the discourse about service and academic success with that identified subgroup. In an age where external assessments guide much of our planning and design, Stewart reminds us that in an educational full-circle, it is important to consider how program design impacts students’ evaluation of self-efficacy.

Wrapping up our service journey, Lima provides a narrative account of personal and shared service that takes us on both a dispassionate and emotional ride through the shared elements that motivate and define much of why we do what we do in service and education. As an academic and citizen in Louisiana, it is a personal story that many of us share and continues to define much of who we are.

Beyond Louisiana and the South, this collection of academic service in action, represents much of what is best about what we do and who we are. My most heartfelt thanks to all of our authors, our reviewers, our readers, and to everyone involved with service-learning in higher education.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Lima', is centered on the page.

## ABSTRACT

*Community service-learning is a “high impact” teaching strategy that responds to contemporary challenges facing higher education. Some faculty, however, remain reluctant to use service-learning in their courses because they believe it does not fit into busy student schedules, given increases in the percentage of employed students and increases in their average number of hours worked per week. This study was undertaken to determine if students’ views of the learning they derived from community service-learning were affected by their employment. Students (N = 173) from two universities completed a survey at the end of their service-learning courses, where they reported both the number of hours they work on average per week and their perceptions of service-learning. The main findings were: a) students’ perceptions of service-learning were not adversely affected by their employment; b) the overwhelming majority of students reported very positive perceptions of service-learning; and c) although first-generation students of color (but not first-generation white students) worked significantly more than non-first-generation students, they reported positive perceptions of service-learning consistent with the overall sample. These findings support service-learning as a valuable teaching-learning strategy in college courses for all students, including those who work significant numbers of hours per week.*

# ***Student Employment and Perceptions of Service-Learning***

*Jennifer Reed-Bouley,  
Molly A. Wernli, and Paul Sather*

U.S. higher education faces significant challenges in accomplishing its goals of preparing graduates for success in the civic, professional, and personal dimensions of life (Geary Schneider, 2011). A growing number of leaders in higher education (e.g., Humphreys & Carnevale, 2010; Pusser, 2010) insist that, while critical, preparation for professional life cannot be the sole purpose of higher education in a democracy. American higher education must also build an educated and involved citizenry. These leaders contend, against the rise of online and accelerated degree formats focused almost exclusively on preparation for specific jobs, that liberal education, civic education, and education for labor success constitute interrelated goals that are mistakenly separated from one another, to higher education’s and democracy’s peril (Sullivan, 2005; Chickering, 2008). Service-learning has been widely researched as a teaching-learning method that instructs students in academic disciplines at the same time as it educates students for civic, professional, and personal success (e.g., Zlotkowski, 1998; Kuh, 2008; Brownell & Swaner, 2010).

Academic excellence in U.S. higher education has increasingly come to be understood as involving inclusion of historically underrepresented or underserved students (Kuh, Kinzie, Cruce, Shoup, & Gonyea, 2007), designations which are variously defined but usually include some or all of the following groups: low-income students, first-generation students,

and students of color (Merisotis, 2008; Brownell & Swaner, 2010). U.S. higher education aspires to include historically underrepresented groups at the same time as it strives to improve the quality of student learning and timely completion of degrees with a credential reflective of authentic learning for all students (Geary Schneider, 2011). Unfortunately, recent large-scale research by leaders in higher education, as well as overwhelming evidence from employers, policymakers, government officials, national comparisons, and other sources and constituents (e.g., Bok, 2006; Arum & Roksa, 2011; Manning, 2011; Adelman, Ewell, Gaston, & Geary Schneider, 2011), contest the claims to excellence in learning that most universities tout, and raise critical questions about the definition, nature, and value of a college degree. Furthermore, the disappointing record of degree completion rates for all students and even worse completion rates for historically underrepresented students (Kuh et al., 2007) present more questions about the effectiveness of U.S. higher education. This criticism from multiple sources comes at a time when there is a demonstrated need for increased numbers of college-educated employees who are better prepared and qualified to catalyze and lead rapid transitions in dynamic and global political, cultural, and economic spheres as well as in technology and other emerging systems (Humphreys & Carnevale, 2010; Lumina Foundation, 2011). The multiple challenges to U.S. higher education's success prompt inquiry into teaching-learning strategies that effectively respond to the contemporary situation.

### **Service-Learning: A "High-Impact" Educational Practice**

Service-learning has gained prominence in U.S. higher education, based upon a growing body of evidence demonstrating that it can contribute to students' readiness to assume their roles in civic, professional and personal aspects of life. (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Bringle, Philips, & Hudson, 2004; Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001; Munter, 2002). Extensive research on service-learning has determined that service-learning is not only an effective educational practice, but that it constitutes one of a small number of demonstrated "high-impact" educational practices, particularly for historically underrepresented student populations for whom higher education has been (and, unfortunately, continues to be) disproportionately inaccessible and/or unsuccessful (Kuh, 2008).

George D. Kuh defines a "high-impact" educational practice as an especially effective method of focusing students' attention, facilitating deep learning, and achieving personal and practical gains (Kuh, 2008) by combining proven teaching-learning methods (Kuh, 2010). High-impact practices typically include the following characteristics: demand substantial time and effort from students; require students to interact over a period of time with faculty and peers about significant issues and topics; facilitate work with diverse populations; include more frequent faculty feedback (than other strategies) about students' performance; require students to connect their learning to other settings and disciplines; and allow students to experience immediately the relevance of their learning through real-world applications (Kuh, 2008).

In addition to service-learning, investigations of other high-impact educational practices, such as first-year seminars, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, undergraduate research, and others (Brownell & Swaner, 2010) have yielded noteworthy results: These discrete practices gain even more potency by being combined (for example, for a student who takes a service-learning course as part of a learning community) and for historically underrepresented groups and those underprepared for college-level education. Kuh (2008) recommends that the most important investment colleges and universities can make "to

enhance student engagement and increase student success” is to “make it possible for every student to participate in *at least two high-impact activities* during his or her undergraduate program, one in the first year, and one taken later in relation to the major field” (p. 19). High impact teaching-learning strategies such as service-learning hold promise for addressing the significant challenges facing U.S. higher education: educating students for citizenship as well as personal and professional success; effectively educating historically underrepresented students; and promoting quality academic programs and timely degree completion.

## Student Employment

Nevertheless, a barrier to use of high-impact practices such as service-learning is that, by definition, they require that students devote substantial time and effort to them. Most faculty believe that student employment over fifteen hours per week detracts from academic success (Perna, 2010), so faculty may be reluctant to assign a service-learning assignment that may not fit into students’ busy schedules. The present research study examined if employment affects students’ perceptions of service-learning as a high-impact practice.

In light of the concerns increased student employment raise, the research base regarding the relationship between employment and college learning has burgeoned. Extensive research data document the prevalence and intensity of contemporary college students’ employment (Sax, 2000 as cited in Schmidt, 2004), which could conflict with students’ ability to devote substantial time to their studies. In the introduction to her 2010 book, *Understanding the Working College Student*, Perna provides a concise overview of the prevalence and intensity of work among U.S. undergraduates, noting that more than three-fourths of undergraduates worked in 2003-2004, and that nearly half of full-time students under 25 years of age worked in 2006 (Perna, 2010). Given the changed landscape for students’ allocation of limited time, studies have investigated how much work, location of work (on- or off- campus), and what kind of work (related to major or any work) augments or detracts from learning for undergraduates in U.S. colleges and universities (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; King, 2003; Stern & Nakata, 1991). Others have investigated why student employment is so prevalent and how it affects college students’ academic and social development, including college persistence and time to attain a degree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Still others investigate the focus of students’ work (e.g., McKechnie et al., 2010). Employed students face multiple challenges to academic success and overall well-being. A qualitative study of working students found that “heavy, highly structured daily and weekly schedules” were prevalent, and that students engaged in careful, often stressful strategies to meet multiple demands of employers, school, families, and others (Ziskin, Torres, Hossler, & Gross, 2010, p. 76).

From their analysis of literature on student employment and college success, McCormick, Moore, and Kuh (2010) judge that methodological factors constitute a likely reason for the existing literature’s mixed findings regarding effects of work on GPA, persistence, time to degree, and other factors influencing student success. In their 2010 analysis of National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data, McCormick et al. found that 46% of full-time first-year students and 75% of full-time seniors, as well as 76% of part-time first-year students and 84% of part-time seniors, were employed. They analyzed relationships between student employment and the five NSSE benchmarks of effective educational practice: academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. For full-time first year students and seniors, work on campus is positively related to the five NSSE benchmarks of effective educational practice, with the



strongest effect for students working 20 or more hours per week on campus (though McCormick et al. acknowledge that results do not indicate if some of that on-campus work time is spent studying or engaging in other educational activities). Regarding off-campus work, the study found a modest effect between off-campus employment (regardless of number of hours worked) and most benchmarks. Comparing students reporting both on- and off-campus jobs with students reporting no work showed that work was positively related to three of the benchmarks. McCormick et al. found that working up to 10 hours per week on-campus was related to a slight increase in GPA, but that decreases in GPA were related to working both more than 20 hours per week on-campus and more than 10 hours per week off-campus. These results indicate that, contrary to many faculty's perception that work detracts from student learning and success, some work either on- or off-campus may actually be associated (though no causal relationship has been proven) with college success (McCormick et al., 2010).

### **Student Employment and Service-Learning**

A large and growing body of research documents that curricular service-learning positively affects students' learning and sense of responsibility to engage in further community service, but most studies focus on issues other than the impact of college students' employment on their experiences of service-learning (e.g., McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Eyer and Giles, 1999). Existing studies on service-learning and employment found the following: Hawkins, Smith, Hawkins, & Grant (2005) note that 35% of employed social work majors at two large southwestern universities perceive their employment as interfering with study time. These students reported lower grade point averages than did other students, when controlling for other factors such as parental status, race, and age. Most existing studies examine one or a small number of courses regarding the impact of students' employment on their experiences of service-learning. Karasik's (2005) study of an introductory gerontology course found that when given the option of engaging in a 20-hour service-learning project or writing a research paper for a course, 36% of students chose the research option. Of these students, 97% reported lack of time as the major barrier to choosing service-learning and 17% cited work commitments as the reason they lacked time to engage in service. Of the students who chose the research option, 97% reported that they would consider service-learning in the future if they had the time to devote to it. Students cited the following commitments as time barriers: other academics, work, transportation and commuting, and family. These results indicate that the students in this course valued service-learning, but perception of lack of discretionary time prevented some from choosing the service-learning option (Karasik, 2005). However, the study did not report if students who chose the research option actually worked more hours than the students who chose the service-learning option. In their evaluation of the Health Professions Schools in Service to the Nation service-learning demonstration program at 19 institutions, Gelmon, Holland, Shinnamon, and Morris (1998) report that the majority of students who chose to engage in optional service-learning expressed support for optional rather than required service-learning because they were concerned quality would suffer if a course required reluctant students to serve the community. On the other hand, the majority of students in courses that required service-learning expressed support for service-learning as a required component of the curriculum because of its educational value. In their exploration of the use of service-learning in higher education for adults, Holland and Robinson (2008) address the common notion among higher education leaders that working students lack the requisite time to engage in service-learning. Contrary to this assumption, they cite higher

levels of participation in service-learning courses by employed students taking courses at a large university system (California State University System) and at a small college (Occidental College).

On a broader scale, an evaluation of 1995-1997 Corporation for National Service-funded service-learning programs found that community partners and community sites reported students' lack of time and flexibility in scheduling time to be their greatest weaknesses in providing valuable service to nonprofit organizations. This study found that 65% of students who took service-learning courses and 63% of those who did not take service-learning courses were employed part- or full-time. Service-learning courses demanded more time and writing from students than did comparison courses, which is consistent with Kuh's (2008) elaboration of the time characteristic of high-impact educational practices. Despite the increased time required by service-learning courses, over two-thirds of students in service-learning courses and 56% of those in non-service-learning courses assigned the course a rating of "above average" or better with no differences in expected or received course grades (Gray, Ondaatje, Fricker, & Geschwind, 2000).

Given perceived time barriers to students' participation in service-learning, researchers propose strategies for educators to consider in order to ensure that working and nonworking students both benefit from high-quality service-learning courses. Marienau and Reed (2008) propose that faculty planning service-learning courses for working adults should design flexible ways students can accomplish the service amidst their other responsibilities. Several authors propose that, given the prevalence and intensity of employment among students, leaders in higher education design ways that employment itself can be converted into a high-impact activity for college students (Kuh, 2008; McCormick et al., 2010) or that employment be re-conceptualized altogether in the context of higher education (Pusser, 2010). Brownell and Swaner's (2010) survey of the literature on low-income and first-generation college students in relation to service-learning found that these students participated less frequently in service-learning courses than other students, presumably due in part to their work commitments. U.S. higher education's aspiration to make college success possible for more students, combined with students' increased employment, demand further research on service-learning as a high-impact teaching-learning practice that facilitates learning for time-pressed students.

### **Service-Learning: An Effective Educational Practice for Working Students**

The unrealized potential of American higher education, demonstrated effectiveness of service-learning as a high-impact practice, and increase in the percentage of college students who work many hours on- and off-campus combine to beg the question of how working college students perceive service-learning as a way to gain knowledge, skills and values. The authors' previous research comparing perceptions of service-learning held by students ( $n = 690$ ) who worked more and less than 30 hours per week during Spring 2007, Fall 2007, and Spring 2008 semesters found that all student groups held a positive view of the academic value of service-learning. Students who worked more than 30 hours per week (19% of the sample) agreed more than others that service-learning enhanced their communication in real world settings and made them more marketable in their chosen profession. Students who were employed more hours also reported devoting more effort to the service-learning courses. However, students who worked less than 30 hours per week agreed more than those working more than 30 hours that combining community work with courses should be offered more frequently in academic settings. In addition to being influenced by these findings (Reed-Bouley, Poell, and Sather,

2009), we wanted to test the accuracy of the practical concern raised by some faculty at our institutions that they do not include service-learning in their courses because they do not want to overburden students who work long hours in addition to their schoolwork, given that “time is finite” (Perna, 2010, p. xvi).

The overall purpose of the present study was to measure if the average number of hours students are employed per week is related to students’ perceptions of the educational value of service-learning. Thus our first hypothesis is:

H1: The number of hours students are employed will not be related to their perceptions of service-learning. Further, due to the limited research on historically underrepresented students’ employment in relation to perceptions of service-learning (Brownell & Swaner, 2010), the researchers were interested in possible effects of student characteristics such as race and ethnicity on number of hours employed. For our purposes, historically underrepresented students include both students of color and first-generation students. Because historically underrepresented students by definition have faced more significant financial barriers to college participation than do other students (Merisotis, 2008), we posit the following two hypotheses: H2: More historically underrepresented students will be employed than white students who are not first-generation.

H3: Historically underrepresented students will report working more hours per week than white students who are not first-generation.

The limited existing research on historically underrepresented students indicates that this group finds service-learning valuable (Kuh, 2008) because many service-learning projects assist people with whom they identify (e.g., Marienau & Reed, 2008), and that service-learning can be a successful strategy for improving persistence among low-income, first-generation students (Yeh, 2010). Thus, we propose a fourth hypothesis:

H4: Historically underrepresented students will value service-learning more than do historically represented students.

## Method

### Participants

The sample included 173 students enrolled in service-learning courses at two metropolitan universities in the Midwest. University A is a public, co-educational university with 15,000 students, with a Carnegie classification of Doctoral/Research University and an elective classification in the category of Curricular Engagement and Outreach and Partnerships. University B is a small, private, all-female university with 1,000 students with a Carnegie classification of Basic Master’s S: Master’s Colleges and Universities (smaller programs). Eighty percent of students at University A and over 75% of students at University B are commuter (nonresidential) students, and the campuses offer institutionalized programs responsive to commuting students’ particular assets and needs. (For characteristics of a campus culture that supports working students, see Perna, 2010, p. 297). Of the students in the sample, 78.61% were from University A and 21.39% were from University B. The age of the students ranged from 19- to 54-years of age ( $M = 24.10$ ,  $SD = 5.77$ ), with 71.10% of the students under the age of 25. Approximately 69% were undergraduate, upper-division students. Almost 17% were graduate students. Most students (95%) were enrolled full-time and about 80% of the sample were female. The majority of the students, 81.50%, were white/non-Hispanic. The sample also included 5.78% Hispanic, 3.47% Asian-American/Pacific Islander, and 1.73% African American students, with 4.05% reporting their race/ethnicity as “Other”, and 2.31% gave no response.

Approximately 17% of the sample ( $n = 29$ ) reported being the first person in the family to go to college. The students in the sample were enrolled in the following courses: education, information systems and quantitative analysis, journalism, marketing, public administration, social work, and special education. A possible limitation of the sample, which could be tested in future research, is that it includes mainly pre-professional courses and no courses in the liberal arts and sciences.

Both universities host programs dedicated to offering strong support for service-learning, including initial faculty training and ongoing assistance for faculty and students throughout the semester. The service-learning culture at both universities may be a limitation of the research in that our results would not necessarily be replicated at universities where service-learning does not enjoy strong institutional support or rewards for faculty. A possible limitation is that our institutions, unlike campuses with different institutional cultures, may attract students who expect that service-learning constitutes an integral part of the curriculum (Kasworm, 2010). Furthermore, both institutions actively develop faculty in service-learning, so our faculty may be better prepared to offer high-quality service-learning courses than faculty at other universities.

## Materials

Students' employment information and perceptions of service-learning were assessed using a revised version of a survey developed by University A (See Henderson, Fair, Sether, and Dewey, 2008 for information on development of the original survey). The original survey included items on demographics, general student information (e.g., work hours, religious and political views, and past service-learning), and items on perceptions of what students learned from their service-learning. Most of the survey items utilized Likert-type response scales (agree/disagree and frequency ratings). The survey also included space at the end for students to add qualitative comments about their courses.

## Procedure

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Boards at both universities, faculty teaching service-learning courses were invited to be involved in the study. Both universities regularly inform students in advance of registration if service-learning is a required component of the course. At University A, students in most majors can select a comparable course that does not include service-learning, but the small size of University B precludes this choice. The authors did not include their own students in the study. Ten instructors gave permission to survey their classes. Because the faculty self-selected their participation in the study, it is possible that they represent highly confident and proficient service-learning instructors. A researcher administered the questionnaire at a class meeting during the final weeks of the semester. The timing of the survey eliminated students who may have withdrawn from the course. The researcher provided a brief description of the purpose of the study and reminded the students that the information would be confidential and that their participation was voluntary. Next, the students were invited to read and sign informed consent forms. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The students did not receive compensation for participating, and the researcher thanked the students upon completion of the survey.

## Results

### General Perceptions of Service-Learning (H1)

To examine students' general perceptions of their service-learning courses, we first examined students' ratings of how challenged they were by the course material and their ratings of how much effort they exerted during the course compared to their other courses (1 = "*much less than other classes*" and 9 = "*much more than other classes*"). The students in our sample rated their courses involving service-learning as being moderately challenging ( $M = 5.97$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ) compared to other courses and indicated that they exerted more effort in their service learning course ( $M = 7.15$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ) than in other courses. As would be expected, students' challenge and effort ratings were significantly correlated [ $r(165) = .46$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. That is, students who reported they were more challenged by the material in the service-learning course compared to their other courses tended to report that they put forth more effort.

Interestingly, the correlation between average number of hours worked per week and the challenge rating, and the correlation between number of hours worked per week and the effort rating described earlier, were not significant ( $p$ 's  $> .05$ ). Therefore, students' ratings of the courses as challenging or requiring more effort were not related to the number of hours they worked outside of school. These results support the hypothesis that the number of hours worked per week will not be related to perceptions of service-learning (H1).

Table 1  
*Mean Hours Worked Per Week and Students' Perceptions of Service-Learning*

Item	Agreed		Disagreed	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Enhanced my expertise in my chosen field of study	150	19.72 (12.15)	12	19.13 (9.00)
Helped me understand specific public issues	136	19.29 (12.45)	18	23.97 (8.50)
Enhanced my ability to communicate in a "real world" setting	150	19.64 (12.32)	10	22.00 (10.76)
Helped me develop my problem solving skills	142	19.83 (12.44)	20	20.00 (10.29)
Made me more marketable in my chosen profession after I graduate	148	19.99 (12.54)	13	16.23 (7.58)
Prepared me for work in a culturally diverse world	143	19.14 (12.25)	17	22.85 (9.65)
The community participation aspect of this course helped me to see how the subject matter I learned could be used in everyday life	144	19.70 (12.45)	17	21.18 (9.15)
The community work I did helped me to better understand the lectures in this course	119	19.26 (12.40)	35	22.37 (9.54)
The community work was an important opportunity to expand my professional skills	142	19.56 (12.39)	16	21.41 (10.75)
The community work was not related to the materials in the course	29	20.98 (10.70)	132	19.68 (12.32)
The objectives of this course related to the community work	137	19.24 (12.19)	18	21.72 (9.64)

To further test H1, we examined students' ratings of 11 items (see Table 1) that assessed perceptions of the value of their service-learning experiences in the course (e.g., enhances my expertise in my chosen field of study; helped me develop my problem solving skills). Students answered each item using the following options: strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. We then combined their answers into two categories: agree (*i.e.*, "agree" and "strongly agree") and disagree (*i.e.*, "disagree" and "strongly disagree"). We chose this coding because we did not want to treat the Likert scale as an interval scale given that the distances between the response options are not actually known. Typically, we would retain all response categories. Due to the low number of negative responses given for these 11 items, grouping the ratings into agree and disagree shows the overall findings more clearly and concisely. Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to test whether or not the means for average hours working per week differed between those students who agreed and those who disagreed with the 11 items. All *t*-tests were non-significant ( $p$ 's > .05). Table 1 shows the mean hours worked for those students who agreed and those who disagreed with each item. The data in Table 1 illustrate two main findings. First, the overwhelming majority of the students reported positive perceptions of service-learning. Second, the data provide support for the notion that the number of hours worked per week does not seem to be related to students' perceptions of service-learning. If working were an obstacle to service-learning, then we would expect that those who perceived the service-learning negatively would report working more hours per week than those who reported positive perceptions of service-learning. In the present study, those students who had positive perceptions and those who had negative perceptions worked a similar average number of hours per week.

Another item on the survey allowed us to further examine the relationship between work and perceptions of service-learning, namely scheduling challenges. Perhaps students' perceptions of service-learning are not related specifically to the number of hours worked, but to general difficulty in scheduling around all of their obligations. Students in the present study rated the difficulty of accommodating the community work into their schedules. Approximately 42% of students agreed with the item "the community work was difficult to accommodate into my schedule", and approximately 52% disagreed with the item. An independent samples *t*-test showed that there was not a significant difference in the mean number of hours worked each week between those who agreed ( $M = 21.20$ ;  $SD = 12.95$ ) and those who disagreed ( $M = 18.36$ ,  $SD = 11.30$ ) with that item,  $t(156) = 1.47$ ,  $p > .05$ . Our finding that about half of the students did not find it difficult to fit the service-learning into their schedules provides indirect support for our hypothesis that hours worked would not be related to students' perceptions of service-learning. However, almost half of the students did agree that scheduling challenges exist.

### Students' Work (H2 & H3)

When asked the average number of hours worked at a job per week, students reported a mean of 19.74 hours ( $SD = 12.08$ ). We assumed that average number of hours worked per week at the time of the survey was consistent with average hours worked per week throughout the semester. Figure 1 represents the intensity of students' work per week. Approximately 74% of the sample reported working 11+ hours per week, with almost 40% of the sample working an average of over 20 hours per week.

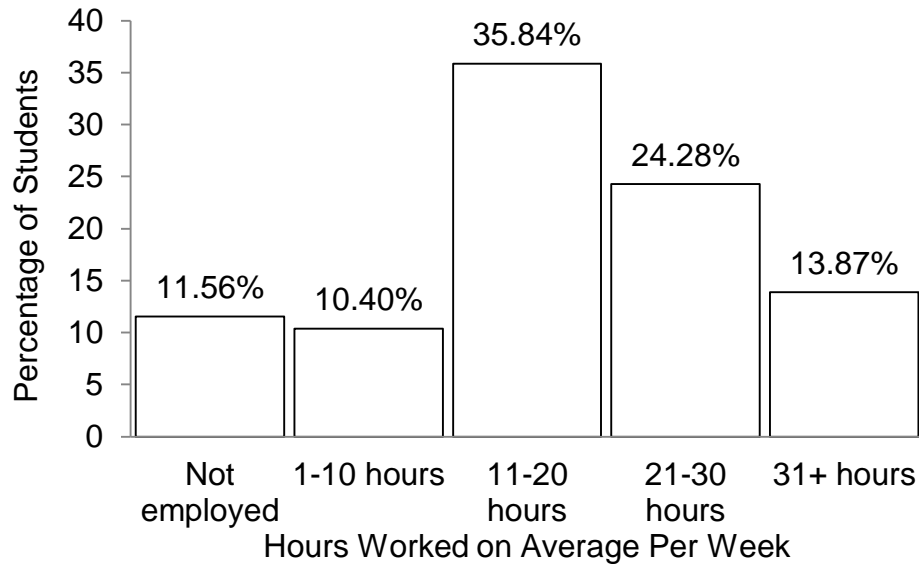


Figure 1. Intensity of students' work.  
Note: 4.05% did not provide a response.

Age was not correlated with the average number of hours working per week [ $r(165) = .12, p > .05$ ] and there was not a significant difference between the mean hours working per week for females ( $M = 20.93, SD = 1.07$ ) and for males ( $M = 19.42, SD = 12.37$ ), [ $t(162) = .61, p > .05$ ].

We defined "historically underrepresented" students as all non-white students, as well as first-generation white students. We defined "historically represented" students as white, non-first-generation students. Based on these definitions, 27.17% of the students ( $n = 47$ ) in our sample were historically underrepresented; 70.52% of the students ( $n = 122$ ) were historically represented. Table 2 shows the employment data broken down by subgroups in our sample. As can be seen in Table 2, the percent of students who reported being employed appears similar for each subgroup, with more than 75% of each subgroup reporting employment. H2, that more historically underrepresented students would work than other students, was not supported.



Table 2

*Employment Data by Subgroup*

Subgroup	<i>N</i>	Subgroup who work <i>% of students</i>	Hours worked per week <i>M (SD)</i>
Historically represented	122	86.89%	20.54 (1.13)
Historically underrepresented	47	76.60%	17.90 (14.50)
White students	141	88.89%	19.90 (11.32)
Students of color	28	81.48%	19.33 (16.07)
First-generation students	29	85.71%	20.20 (13.13)
Non-first generation students	142	88.24%	19.61 (11.95)

To test the hypothesis that historically underrepresented students will report working more hours per week than historically represented students (H3), an independent samples *t*-test was run. The *t*-test revealed that although the mean hours employed per week was higher for the historically represented group than for the historically underrepresented group, the difference was not significant,  $t(64.94) = 1.10, p > .05$ . Therefore, H3 was not supported.

We also ran a 2 (white students vs. students of color) x 2 (first-generation vs. non-first-generation) analysis of variance (ANOVA) with number of hours worked per week as the dependent variable, to see if there were significant main effects of race/ethnicity and/or first-generation student status. There were no significant main effects of race/ethnicity or first-generation student status ( $p$ 's  $> .05$ ). That is, there was not a significant difference in the mean number of hours worked between white students and students of color, and there was not a significant difference in the mean number of hours worked between first-generation students and non-first-generation students. Interestingly though, there was a significant cross-over interaction of race/ethnicity and first-generation student status,  $F(1, 156) = 11.24, p = .001$  (see Figure 2). Analyses of simple main effects revealed that for white students, there was not a significant difference in the number of hours worked by non-first-generation students and first-generation students [ $F(1, 156) = 2.50, p > .05$ ]. However, for students of color, first-generation students worked significantly more hours per week than did non-first-generation students [ $F(1, 156) = 8.81, p < .004$ ].

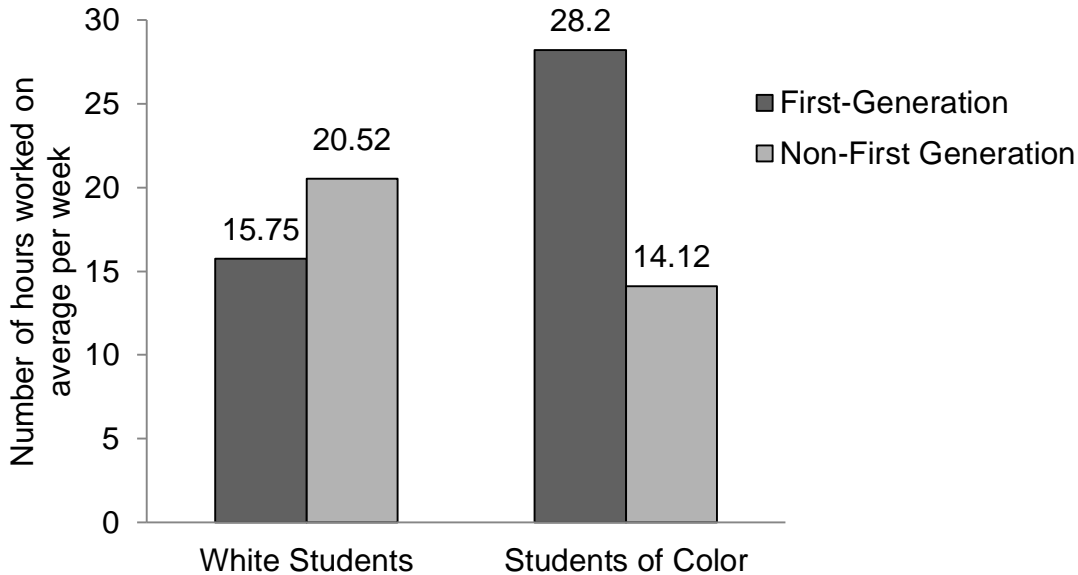


Figure 2. Mean number of hours worked per week as a function of race/ethnicity and first-generation student status.

### Underrepresented Students' Perceptions (H4)

We hypothesized that historically underrepresented students would value service-learning more than other students (H4). As can be seen in Table 3, historically underrepresented students reported more positive perceptions of service-learning than the represented students on 7 of the 11 items.

Table 3  
*Historically Underrepresented and Represented Students' Agreement with Statements Indicating the Value of Service-Learning*

Item	Underrepresented students	Represented students
	% agreed (n)	% agreed(n)
Enhanced my expertise in my chosen field of study	89.36 (42)	90.98 (111)
Helped me understand specific public issues	85.11 (40)	79.51 (97)
Enhanced my ability to communicate in a "real world" setting	89.36 (42)	90.98 (111)
Helped me develop my problem solving skills	7.23 (41)	84.26 (103)
Made me more marketable in my chosen profession after I graduate	91.49 (43)	87.71 (107)
Prepared me for work in a culturally diverse world	91.49 (43)	84.26 (103)
The community participation aspect of this course helped me to see how the subject matter I learned could be used in everyday life	95.74 (45)	82.79 (101)
The community work I did helped me to better understand the lectures in this course	76.60 (36)	69.67 (85)
The community work was an important opportunity to expand my professional skills	85.11 (40)	85.25 (104)
The community work was not related to the materials in the course	21.28 (10)	14.75 (18)
The objectives of this course related to the community work	89.36 (42)	80.33 (98)

To test statistically whether agreement/disagreement with each of these 11 items is, in fact, dependent on underrepresented/represented status, Fisher Exact Tests were performed for all 11 items. (Fisher Exact Tests were used rather than Pearson's chi-square because many of the cells had expected counts of less than 5.) All tests were non-significant ( $p$ 's  $>.05$ ), which indicates that perceptions of service-learning and being historically underrepresented/represented are independent of one another. These findings do not support our hypothesis that historically underrepresented students would value service-learning more than other students (H4). As can be seen in Table 3, the vast majority of both groups of students held very positive perceptions of service-learning, and the groups were similar in their agreement with the items.

Three items on the survey asked students to reflect on the value of service-learning. Of the entire sample, 87.86% of students agreed (strongly agree + agree) with the statement that the course helped them to take responsibility for their own learning; 54.91% agreed with the statement that students should be required to provide a certain number of community service hours in order to graduate; and 93.64% agreed with the statement that they could "make a difference in my community." Those students who agreed with the last statement may have felt that way prior to taking the course. However, it is noteworthy that such a high percentage of students believe that they can make a difference.

Nine students provided qualitative comments (some positive and some negative) at the end of the survey. Because of the small number of comments, we did not conduct a content analysis. The comments are listed in the Appendix.

## Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine if students' employment is related to their perceptions of service-learning, including analysis of historically underrepresented students' perceptions. Students in our sample worked, on average, about 20 hours per week. Our hypothesis that number of hours worked would not be related to students' perceptions of service-learning (H1) was supported. Although the students in our sample were very busy, at the end of the courses most students, regardless of the number of hours worked, reported that their time spent in service-learning was valuable to their education. Failing to find a significant relationship between students' work and perceptions of service-learning provides support for the notion that instructors should feel comfortable using high-impact practices, such as service-learning, that require students to invest more time outside of class meetings than do some other teaching-learning strategies. However, we cannot ignore Karasik's (2005) finding that when students have an option within a course, some select a traditional research paper over service-learning because they perceive that employment and other responsibilities conflict with the service-learning project. Although students' actual work hours may not be related to how they perceive service-learning at the end of the course, students' judgments that they do not have time for service-learning may lead them to avoid enrolling in service-learning courses. This would be a missed opportunity for high-impact learning. Because service-learning was required in courses we surveyed, we do not know if our students would have chosen an alternative to service-learning if given the opportunity. Our data on student employment confirmed the finding that students perceive service-learning positively, regardless of how much they work. Nevertheless, we found that number of hours worked was not related to students' perceptions of the effort they put forth compared to other classes, which contradicts research that students who worked more hours reported devoting more effort to their courses than did students who worked

fewer hours. One possible reason for the conflicting findings is that previous research compared students who worked over 30 hours with those who worked under 30 hours. To obtain a more detailed picture of students' work experiences, the researchers in the present study asked students to report the average number of hours they worked per week and used that continuous variable in the analyses rather than treating hours worked as a categorical variable (i.e., over or under 30 hours). It should be noted that in our study students' perceptions of service-learning were overwhelmingly positive. The relationship between student employment and perceptions might be different if we had a dataset with more variability in the perceptions students held (i.e., more negative perceptions).

Our hypotheses that more historically underrepresented students would be employed than other students (H2), would report working more hours per week than other students (H3), and would view service-learning more positively than other students (H4) were not supported. Overall, historically underrepresented students did not work more hours per week than other students. Their perceptions of service-learning, while very positive, were similar to the perceptions of other students. However, the analyses showed a more complex pattern with respect to the relationship between hours worked and historically underrepresented student status. We found that for students of color, first-generation students worked significantly more hours per week than non-first-generation students did, which was not expected and was not found for white students. We attribute findings for students of color to two factors. The first is methodological: We did not study some factors that may influence the findings, such as why students work (for meaning or because of financial need), wages for each hour of work, expected family contribution to college, and students' debt loads, grants, or scholarships that may impact their financial situations. Perhaps income and employment dynamics regarding financing students' educations operate differently for white families and families of color. The second, related reason is the financial need to work. Many studies document that people of color generally generate lower incomes and accumulate significantly less wealth than whites (e.g., Oliver & Shapiro, 1995). Research shows that first-generation students of color may have more financial need to work (and may earn lower wages per hour, thus increasing the number of hours they need to work) than non-first-generation students of color (e.g., Flowers, 2010). Social networks of family and friends contribute significantly to people's abilities to secure well-paid employment. Through networks of family and friends, students of color who are non-first-generation may have access to better networks to higher-wage jobs than first-generation students of color (Wilson, 2006). The present study did not collect wage data. More research is needed on students' access to educationally meaningful and well-paid employment in order to explain the findings.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The present study is not without limitations. Our study included data from two universities in the same city. Future research should include a diverse sample of universities and colleges to test further whether or not work and other obligations are related to students' perceptions of service-learning and to their actual learning through service-learning courses. Our courses were primarily pre-professional in discipline, so results cannot be generalized to all disciplines. It is possible that a sample of students in liberal arts and sciences courses would perceive service-learning differently in relation to their employment. Future research could investigate if our results hold across a variety of disciplines. We did not investigate students'

reports of strategies they use to manage the multiple demands on their time, information which could be helpful for planning future service-learning courses.

Few students in our study reported negative perceptions of service-learning. Future studies could include a larger sample of students, which would yield more negative perceptions. Investigating the small percentage of negative perceptions could provide insights into improving all students' service-learning experiences.

Little research exists on working students who commute to college (Ziskin, Torres, Hossler, & Gross, 2010). Though the majority of our sample likely lives off-campus (given overall demographics of the two universities), it should be noted that we did not identify whether students lived on- or off-campus or whether they worked on- or off-campus. Ender, Martin, Kowalewski, Cotter, and Defiore (2000) found that off-campus students who worked were less likely than any other group to choose service-learning courses. Residential students who do not work, or those students who work part-time on campus, might be more likely to select service-learning when it is optional (Ender et al., 2000). Future studies could also investigate if there are differences in students' perceptions of service-learning depending upon if students work on-campus, off-campus, or both; intersections could possibly exist between the factors above and if students live on-campus or off-campus. For example, does a student who lives off-campus and works off-campus view service-learning differently than a student who lives off-campus but works on-campus?

Another limitation of the present study was that we collected data at the end of 16-week (one semester) courses; it is possible that students' perceptions (either positive or negative) would be different if measured at the beginning or middle of the service-learning project, as well as after a period of some weeks after the courses end. Future studies should investigate changes in perceptions across time.

In *Understanding the Working College Student*, Perna (2010) suggests future directions for research on the impact of employment on various aspects of students' college outcomes and experiences. Many of these suggestions apply to the impact of employment on service-learning experiences and outcomes in particular. For example, future research could compare our results with results of a similar survey at universities located in geographic areas with higher and lower unemployment rates than the metropolitan area where the two universities are located, which features a relatively low unemployment rate. Students did not report on the survey their pre-collegiate work experiences, if they were financially dependent or independent at the time of the survey, the kinds of work in which they are engaged, and the reasons that they work. We cannot hypothesize regarding how these factors might influence students' views of service-learning, but future studies could explore these issues.

## Conclusions

Our study shows that students value service-learning as a teaching-learning strategy with high impact on their education. Despite findings of intense student employment, service-learning is a demonstrated and effective educational practice for students regardless of employment status, hours worked, and historical representation. The study suggests that, even for working students, service-learning can be one high-impact practice that prepares students for success in the civic, professional and personal dimensions of life.

## Notes

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## Appendix

### Qualitative Comments

- College students have enough things to worry about than adding this into it also. If you still want to force this, at least let students choose their own place to volunteer, that will actually benefit them.
- Ability to choose our own location to benefit my major.
- I understand why it is important to be involved in the community, but there were times when I felt in the way. The place wasn't prepared or organized for us.
- I think that classes that involve working in the community should be worth more than three credit hours.
- This class was very different than any other class I have taken. I really enjoyed it. It was a challenge at times to find the time but what part of life is not a little bit of a struggle!
- The hours were excessive and I don't think she knew how many hours would be involved. Not helpful, but interesting.
- I enjoyed our service learning project but do not think course content was taught to reinforce and help with the service learning project.
- I think some community learning is good if it is blended into class time. Outside of class time is very hard to accomplish.
- This has been my favorite service project so far. Class discussions really helped me enhance my experience and the teacher helped me fit hours into my schedule.

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# *An Introduction to Sustainability Service-Learning Course for the Creation of Sustainable Citizens to Engage Wicked Problems*

*Kimberly Van Meter, Melanie Reichwald, Erica Blair, Alexandra Swift, Carolyn Colvin, and Craig Just*

## **Introduction**

In an op-ed piece that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* (April 11, 2011), Gregory Rodriguez cited a poll indicating that 69 percent of Americans think fellow Americans are becoming “more rude and less civilized.” Another poll reported the vast majority of respondents as believing the overall level of civility in the country is a problem. Interestingly, Rodriguez seems to blame democracy itself for this apparent lack of civility. “Democratic culture is part of the problem,” he writes. In other words, if our democratic society is predicated on a glorification of individual rights, there is little time to think about the common good or shared values. Rodriguez cites Yale law professor Stephen Carter, who has argued that Americans have lost a sense of common purpose. “There are no bounds because there are no fellow passengers whose lives or needs or hopes we must respect.”

Rodriguez’s characterization of democracy is cynical. We may live in a country or culture that emphasizes individual rights, but we also live in a country ruled by law, with these laws serving to protect

## ABSTRACT

*The current era of American discourse and dialogue is increasingly characterized as becoming less civilized. This lack of civility, whether real or perceived, negatively impacts our ability as a society to address our most wicked problems. The vast majority of students pursuing undergraduate degrees today seem blissfully unaware of the problems that surround them on their campuses and in their communities. For this study, an introductory sustainability service-learning course was developed that exposed students to community dialogues while simultaneously teaching effective dialoguing skills. Desired course outcomes include increasing student awareness of wicked problems and better equipping students to engage in conversations centered on the problems.*

*The introductory sustainability service-learning course viewed dialoguing as a community need that can be effectively met by all undergraduate students even if they are new to the community. We explored the notion of democracy as an “organized” partner suitable for service-learning courses with enrollments of approximately 75 students. Examples of community dialogues and student academic work relating to these dialogues to a deeper understanding of course content are presented and discussed. A framework for evaluating and assessing the course is outlined and community contribution metrics and reciprocity indicators are discussed.*

and provide some rules of engagement, similar to the structure provided in a constructive classroom dialogue. It may be true that the partisan conversations that dominate the airwaves and the bulk of our public discourse are far from the controlled engagement envisioned by those who have developed the formal approach to democratic dialogue. And the irony is that for real problems to be solved, whether they be problems of rapid population growth and alarming natural resource depletion, or simpler problems, such as what kind of playground should my service learning group help build for the local community, it is crucial for a real and civil dialogue to occur.

The term “wicked problems” was first posited by Horst Rittel, a professor of urban planning at the University of California, Berkeley (Rittel & Webber, 1973). He used the term to refer to problems that can't be solved in a linear manner and for which there are no clear solutions. In fact, each solution offered up to solve a wicked problem often simply creates a new set of problems to be solved. And there is no clear point at which the problem has actually been solved. Eventually you will run out of time or money or other resources, throw up your hands and say, "I just can't work on this anymore." But this doesn't mean the problem has been solved, only that you have reached your own endpoint. Another feature of wicked problems is that there are no clear solutions, as the rightness or wrongness will always be judged from a variety of perspectives from the multiplicity of stakeholders involved in the problem.

### **Service-Learning and Wicked Problems**

Service-learning in the context of community dialogues is one way for students to experience the multiplicity inherent to the “real-world” wicked problems. The practice of service-learning in higher education can vary in approach and depth from the perspective of the institutions and from the vantage of faculty that facilitate courses utilizing service-learning pedagogy (Hepburn, 2000; Westheimer & Kahne, 2000). We take the view of Bringle and Hatcher (2009, p.38) who state that:

“service-learning is a credit-bearing experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect upon the service activity in such a way as to gain fundamental understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.”

We highlight the key words *organized*, *community need* and *course content* in the definition as we make a case for our approach to service-learning instruction in a medium enrollment introductory sustainability service-learning course (75 students) at a large public university.

Our approach embraces the concepts presented by Ernest Boyer in his work entitled “Creating the New American College” (Boyer, 1997), where he extols the value of educating students for a life of responsible citizenship in addition to any preparation for successful careers that may occur. We must continue to value the tradition of engagement citizenship at the highest levels of all institutions in both the public and private sectors.

### **Dialoguing as a Community Need**

Many of us enjoy sharing our opinions, whether about the best ice cream place in town or the best sports team, our favorite books, movies and music or the fastest way to get to the park

during peak traffic hours. These topics are what we might consider “low-stakes” issues; few, if any, friendships have ended because of a disagreement over music choice. However, glancing at any media source quickly reveals contentious issues that divide America.

Our love of self-expression is one basic reason to try democratic dialogues, but a more compelling reason relates to our role as citizens.

“However one defines it, dialogue is a democratic method aimed at resolving problems through mutual understanding and concessions, rather than through the unilateral imposition of one side's views and interests. For its part, democracy as a system of government is a framework for organized and continuous dialogue.” (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, p.XIII)

In a nation as diverse as the United States, varied opinions routinely fly out of people’s mouths and out of all media sources. We have the right to ignore the dialogues around us, but some argue that our freedoms are inseparable from our duties as citizens. Political journalist Norman Cousins once noted (Jordan, 1999, p.63):

“In a democracy, the individual enjoys not only the ultimate power but carries the ultimate responsibility.”

Cousins kept “ultimate responsibility” pretty vague, but one possible meaning is active engagement in our democracy. For many of us, engagement involves responsibly sharing our opinions no matter the size arena in which we share them.

Given this need for responsible opinion sharing, we view it to be critical that students in higher education, especially those in interdisciplinary introductory courses, be systematically immersed in the ongoing dialogues on their campuses and surrounding communities. We intend the dialogues to help students that are new to the community understand that truly meaningful service rarely occurs by simply stepping out and saying, “I’m here to help.”

In fact, the first step toward meaningful service for a student new to the community may actually be to *do nothing*. It may be to take a step backward, to look, to listen and to try to understand on a deeper level what, if anything, it is that *needs* to be done. It requires understanding that communities are complex organic systems, and that any change made, may not be sustainable in the case of this particular community and the multifaceted needs and perspectives of its citizens. In other words, a willingness to help must be positioned within a framework of sustainability and a slow, considered approach to understanding the needs of a community, what Donella Meadows calls *getting the beat of the system* (Meadows, 2008).



## The Introduction to Sustainability Service-Learning Course

To address the need for increased community dialoguing in the context of sustainability and in support of fostering more meaningful community service, we've developed an Introduction to Sustainability service-learning course that emphasizes sustainability knowledge, skills and habits as means to shape one vision of a sustainable citizen. The course promotes the basic skills of literacy, applied math and finding information as students are challenged to increase their abilities toward democratic dialoguing and with attention to increasing larger system sizes. The traditional sustainability knowledge areas of society, economy and environment are explored before moving toward more intersecting themes, such as informed consumerism, eco-economies and livable environments (Figure 1).

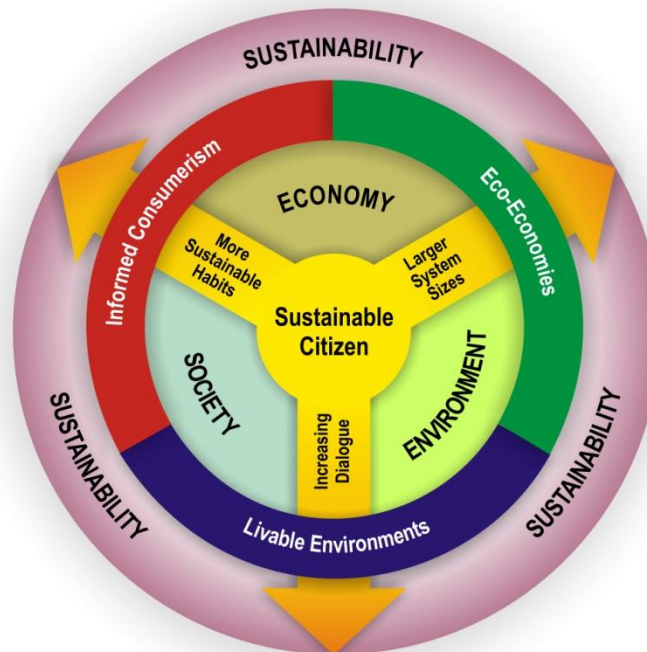


Figure 1: The Introduction to Sustainability service-learning course model depicting the citizen-centric emphasis, the skills of dialoguing and systems thinking and the various knowledge themes.

The first four weeks of the course focused on the development of the basic skills we believed were essential to becoming a more sustainable citizen. Literacy, applied math and finding information, democratic dialoguing and systems thinking are core attributes. To expand literacy, we explored several essays from *The Handbook of Sustainability Literacy: Skills for a Changing World* (Edited by Arran Stibbe, Green Books, 2010) and associated in- and out-of-class activities. Applied math training comes mainly in the form of dimensional analysis meant to instruct students to convert from abstract units of measure, like “carbon footprint” to more concrete terms, such as “dollars saved.” Finding information involves the location of useful facts and figures from informational graphics or charts, which are so critical in our media-rich society.

Democratic dialoguing is facilitated through a variety of activities in a classroom with round tables instead of theater seating. Students were divided into table teams that remained for

the entire semester. Students were asked to share semi-personal results from a “Strengths Finder” online survey as a means to build respect and openness among the team. This activity, coupled with constant reassurance that all dialogues are not to leave the classroom, helped to instill trust as the degree of dialoguing difficulty and required sensitivity increases.

Systems thinking is promoted via the course text *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* by Donella Meadows (Meadows, 2008). Students were taught to think in terms of stocks, flows of natural resources and capital in ways that emphasized the complexity and connectedness of the natural and human systems. Students learned to embrace diversity and transparency as key attributes of healthy systems.

With these skills in place, course content related to society, economy and environment is explored but not through the traditional method of lectures by experts. Content was explored by dialogue and critical thinking among peers with guidance on the side by course facilitators. The course culminates in a rich learning experience facilitated by custom sustainability dilemmas curriculum that accompany *National Geographic Magazine* articles on “Population 7 Billion,” (Kunzig, 2011) “The Acid Sea” (Kolbert, 2011) and “The Real Price of Gold” (Larmer, 2009).

### **Democracy as an “Organized” Service-Learning Partner**

We think the Introduction to a Sustainability service-learning course is integral to developing a sense of what it means to be a “sustainable citizen” in a representative democracy. Taking a lesson from the sustainability framework, we have developed a very broad definition of the term “service,” using it, within the context of the course, to describe engagement in representative democracy. Students are allowed to choose to attend a variety of public events or meetings, from city council meetings to protests in the park, and then asked to document this civic engagement through a series of reflections, placing the content of their encounter with public process within the context of sustainability. This definition of service developed and explored within the course allows us to consider “community,” or even democracy itself, as our service partner.

In our civic engagement as service paradigm, however, we do advocate going to the traffic committee meeting “just” to learn. We advocate, as a first step toward civic engagement and an ethic of community service and involvement, allowing oneself to be a polite, invited guest in public life. Recent public discourse has suggested that young people are disengaging from public life and civic involvement. Studies have shown that many young people think that they cannot make a real difference, can’t solve the problems in their communities and do not have a way of making a meaningful impact on politics or government. It is our belief that making any kind of difference, particularly within a sustainability framework, one must begin with listening, and more importantly, with engagement. To make a difference in the broader community requires acknowledgment of person as citizen of community.

## Reinforcing Course Content through Community Dialoguing

In our course, students are asked to go to a meeting or protest or whatever other public-minded event seems ripe for engagement; to first engage within a framework of listening, and then of reflecting. It is the reflection that constitutes the written part of the project, allowing students to translate a personal response to what they have observed into a true learning experience. The written reflection is divided into three different parts, with each part asking the students to respond to what they have observed at a different level. In Part I, students are essentially asked to place themselves in the role of reporter or objective observer. They must give a factual, detailed description of where they went and what they saw. They are to include details, such as the date, time and location of the meeting, what was on the agenda and who spoke. Students are advised that they will be graded in this section based on both the level of appropriate details included and the degree of objectivity with which they describe their chosen bit of public process.

In Part II, students are asked to take off their objectivity hats and explore their own personal responses to what they have experienced. By attempting to separate their objective responses from their personal responses, it is hoped that students will increase their level of awareness regarding ways in which their own personal responses might ordinarily come between them and the actual reality of what they have observed. Students are asked to describe feelings that they may have had walking into their meetings, any judgments or assumptions that they may have made about the event that they brought into the room with them, and they are then encouraged to use these reflections as a way to analyze their own responses. They are asked to be particularly aware of discoveries they might make about themselves regarding attitudes toward other people they may encounter in community based work.

In this section, students are advised that grading will be based on not just their ability to describe what they think and feel, but their willingness to engage in self-analysis and work toward a demonstrated self-awareness. We want students not just to describe how they have felt or reacted, but also to evaluate these feelings and reactions and to speculate as to what they might learn from them.

In Part III of the reflection, students are asked to move from self-analysis to analysis of the actual meeting or event. In this section, students are no longer asked to provide a narrative description or subjective response. Instead, they are asked to make connections between their community-based experiences and classroom concerns, specifically the questions of sustainability, dialogue, systems thinking and citizenship that we explore throughout the semester.

As an additional framework for exploration of service-learning, we ask students to carry out a SWOT analysis. The SWOT method (Morrison, 2006) is a technique originally developed by Albert Humphrey at Stanford University and frequently used in the business world as part of the corporate strategic planning process. It provides a roadmap for evaluating the strengths, weaknesses/limitations, opportunities and threats related to a project or venture. The analysis must begin with stating a desirable objective or outcome. The identified strengths and weaknesses are considered to be internal factors, inherent to the system being considered, whereas the identified opportunities and threats are considered to be external elements, outside possibilities for improving performance or that may cause trouble in the system. These external factors, as is befitting of this kind of analysis within our larger framework of sustainability and systems thinking, can include anything from trouble in the local community, such as a plant

shutdown or budget cuts in the school district leading to teacher layoffs, to much broader forces. That plant closing in the community may be local, but what larger forces (technological change, global markets) may have led to that change?

### **Community Dialogues**

Students who have participated in our service as engagement with democracy project have had a variety of interesting experiences and revelations. They have gone to meetings or other events that have taken them out of their comfort zones and have allowed them an opportunity to take the beat of the system, and in so doing, to understand their own places in that system a little bit better. It is in this first attempt at engagement with the system that, according to Meadows, there is the opportunity to see the workings of the system as they really are, rather than as you have assumed them to be or as others have described them to be. It is the time to do away with misconceptions, and this is just what students have reported as happening as part of their experiences.

### **City Council and Student Government**

One student attended a speech given by a candidate for city council and expressed great surprise that the candidate was wearing jeans and sporting a ponytail, and that the speech was given at a small, dark indie music venue. He had expected a large, bland meeting room filled with men in suits. Instead, he found someone he described as “open and honest” with an apparently real desire to strengthen the community.

Another student, who attended a city council meeting, described a variety of initial expectations, including that he would be bored. And although some of the meeting was reportedly boring, the student also expressed what seems to be a major revelation. Although he assumed that the meeting room would be filled with affluent individuals wanting merely to propagate their own agendas, out of touch with the real needs of the community, he ended up encountering something quite different. These council members were more “in touch” than he expected; in contrast, there was a disturbing lack of citizen involvement at the meeting. The student therefore concluded that it is not the city council that is out of touch with the community, but the community that is out of touch with its leaders.

Another important step in system engagement described by Meadows is to identify what is important, not just what is quantifiable. One of our sustainability students did an excellent job of trying to negotiate this quality/quantity disconnect in a meeting she attended for a student organization with the mission of increasing awareness of sustainability issues on campus. Within the previous few weeks, the university had terminated its long-term contract with a local recycling company and established a new agreement with a non-local business that would also result in a campus-wide switch from a multi-stream to a single-stream recycling system. Although there were likely numerous quantifiable reasons for the university’s change in contract, she emphasized the less quantifiable feeling of loss about the change. She commented that the “relationship” the group had with the previous contractor was probably not taken into account when decisions were made, and that there was a lot of emotion involved in this change for students who had had long-term involvement with recycling efforts on campus. The student’s willingness to explore the unquantifiable in this case made her an astute observer of system dynamics, willing to acknowledge that it is not only costs or convenience that leads to the success of a program, but also relationships between stakeholders.

## The “Occupy” Movement

One of the more interesting student responses came in a reflection regarding attendance at a general assembly meeting for the local “Occupy” movement, part of a broader protest movement against economic and social inequality. This particular meeting was held to discuss a renewable 30-day city permit that would allow protestors to continue the 24-hour occupation of a local park. One of the preconceived notions that the student had going into the meeting was that it would be unorganized and unproductive, when in fact he found group members were dedicated to making the movement function in an organized fashion. This dedication was particularly apparent in the amount of time spent laying out the ground rules for communication, and the adherence to these ground rules as the meeting proceeded. As the student described, the rules for communication were based on a series of hand signals. A finger in the air would place you in the “stack,” the group of people waiting to speak. Agreement with a speaker could be expressed by placing “spirit fingers” in the air and disagreement by a peace sign, while a feeling that a speaker was wavering off track was indicated by forming a triangle in the air with your hands—a “point of purpose” sign. All of these gestures were to be used to ensure the principle of “equal voice.” According to the student, everyone who wanted to speak was allowed to, and every opinion was taken seriously. The group included not just members of the Occupy movement, but also two city officials, and the student reported that even though there was no apparent leadership structure for the meeting or for the group, and that a small minority of people present felt the need to “question everything,” everyone was indeed allowed a voice and dialogue with the city officials, which potentially could have become quite strained, proceeded with respect.

### *Student Three Part Reflection and SWOT Analysis for an “Occupy” Meeting*

To more fully illustrate the depth of learning provided to students through service-learning through community dialoguing, we share a SWOT analysis and Three Part Reflection assignment completed by a student from the Introduction to Sustainability service-learning course.

*Reflection Part I:* At 7:00 pm on Wednesday, October 19, I attended the General Assembly meeting for Occupy Iowa City, held in College Green Park. It was dark outside and cold. The meeting was held beside the gazebo, which was wrapped with a tarp to keep out wind. Lawn chairs were set out; some people sat while others stood. About thirty people were present. The meeting was videotaped, and the agenda was written on a white board.

Two people facilitated the meeting. Before starting, the facilitators explained the rules of the meeting that had been previously established. The majority of these rules dealt with communication because the meeting was held outside in the dark, and to avoid people speaking all at once, a system of hand gestures was adopted (for instance, if a person’s tone was too harsh, audience members could hold up peace signs; if the audience thought someone was digressing, a triangle could be formed with the hands; a hooked index finger signified a request for clarification; “jazz hands” showed agreement; and so forth). Because there was no audio amplification, the meeting used a “mic check” system: if a person spoke softly, another attendee with a louder voice would amplify their words phrase-by-phrase. Explanation of the rules took approximately five minutes.

Proposal updates were first on the agenda, though there were none. Next came committee updates. The Education Board talked about an upcoming event with David Osterberg, who will give a lecture about getting financial information regarding the top one percent of Americans. The Culture Committee described upcoming events including an acoustic guitar performance at the park and a dance party, a Halloween party, and a public reading of scary stories to kids. The Security Committee had no updates. The spokesman for the Food and Water Committee said that water is a necessity, and he reminded people to avoid eating sugar, as that reduces body temperature. The Action Committee talked about handing out buttons and stickers at the upcoming Homecoming parade. They wanted to create a Welcome banner for Occupy Iowa City, and talked about making the park a welcoming atmosphere for the High School band, which will visit the park before and after the parade. The Outreach Committee discussed the happenings of other Occupy movements in other cities, and talked about the Occupy convention that will happen on July 4, 2012.

Next was the General Assembly Proposal. After speaking once, an attendee must wait to speak again until all others who wish to speak have done so. The purpose of this proposal was to keep people from dominating the floor. Everyone approved of this measure, except for one individual who "blocked" it, forcing everyone to reconsider and re-discuss the proposal and find a solution that worked for everyone. This took about twenty minutes, and by the end, the opposer said he would try it out for a few days to see if it worked or not.

Then came the discussion of the Parks and Recreation permit. Two representatives from the Parks and Recreation Department came to the meeting. They said they approved of the way the occupiers were treating the park, and that there was no reason at the moment to ask them to leave. Meeting attendees asked questions about fire pits, about building temporary structures/shelters for the wintertime, about what actions would be restricted, about liability issues, and about what would happen if a permit was not signed. I stayed at the meeting for a little over an hour.

*Reflection Part II:* I am strongly in favor of the Occupy Wall Street movement, and even marched and protested on October 15, so I was very eager to attend this meeting. My political ideologies are very much in line with many of the people occupying College Green, though I had never been to one of their meetings—which I learned, later, are held every single night.

I was a little put off, though, by some aspects of the meeting. I appreciate the objective of fairness in their meetings—i.e. giving everyone a chance to speak—but it seemed too forced, and not very organic, like a normal discussion where thoughts and opinions move in and out fluidly. People had to essentially wait in line to speak, and it was an incredibly long process. It was clear that keeping the meeting organized and on track was a tremendous effort. So much time was spent just on deciding the logistical rules of the meeting, and in the end, nothing was really accomplished.

The gentlemen from Parks and Recreation who spoke at the meeting were very respectful and considerate, and multiple times said they were in favor of what Occupy

Iowa City was trying to do. The speaker said it was not his duty to judge the demonstrators based on their political ideologies—only on how they treated the park property (which apparently he was completely fine with). However, some meeting attendees seemed very defensive and apparently tried to provoke conflict between the demonstrators and Parks and Recreation over trivial issues. It was a kind of "stand up against The Man" mentality—"Us against the Authority." That seemed really pathetic to me.

*Reflection Part III:* Based on my reactions to this meeting, I realize that there will *always* be people out there that I disagree with, who hunger for conflict, even if they share the same political ideologies as me. I'm not exactly sure how I can deal with that inevitable situation, other than remaining patient and trying to keep discussions focused on the real issue at hand. In terms of the organization of the meeting, I also realize that I prefer meetings that are not so structured and rigid.

The meeting strongly relates the Democratic Dialoguing. The fact that people could hold up peace signs to remind others to keep the tone of the conversation friendly and welcoming is an excellent example of how these people try to make their dialogues fair and open to everyone involved. Also, because the opportunity to speak was so highly stressed, democratic dialoguing was actually one of the main points of the entire meeting.

People in this movement are against the notion of "Too Big To Fail." They're against corporations and businesses getting so large that their failure would be detrimental to the entire economy. The movement is against corporate greed, against corporations that care only for their monetary gain, and nothing for society. These people protest the power that lobbyists have over the government. They protest the economic inequality between the top one percent of Americans and everyone else.

This directly relates to sustainability in terms of economic and social pillars. In class, we talked about Milton Friedman's notion that it is actually detrimental for a corporation to consider social responsibilities over fiscal responsibilities. The protesters are against this idea. In the world today, nations are in debt, and big corporations have tremendous political power. Fiscal irresponsibility and greed have proven detrimental to society, with so many people out of work and so many foreclosures.

The protesters are calling for a change in the system that promotes social and economic sustainability, where corporations do not hold the kind of power that they do today, and where big banks will be regulated so that they don't have to be bailed out by the government.

*Strengths:* The meeting attendees were clearly unified and committed in a single and powerful cause of bringing about a change in the nation (as exemplified by their continued occupation of College Green Park even with temperatures in the low thirties). There was an enormous effort to make sure everyone's voice was heard (literally), and that everyone had a chance to speak. Because of the conditions of the meeting (dark and no audio amplification), the meeting used a system of hand signs/gestures to aid the communication (taken from methods already established by anarchist and feminist

movements). Facilitators also helped the flow of the meeting. Occupy Iowa City started roughly twenty days ago and still appears to be strong and organized. There was cooperation between the Occupy Iowa City members and the Parks and Recreation Department. The occupiers of the park have been reportedly very responsible and peaceful and have taken good care of the park.

*Weaknesses:* With its effort to make sure the meeting is not dominated by a handful of participants is important, the system under which the General Assembly currently operates seems to impede on the progress and fluidity of the meeting. In place is a complex system of talking rules, which essentially makes people "wait in line" for their turn to talk. This means that sometimes the meeting was stalled in order for six or seven people to voice their opinions. It also led to several digressions. This evening, a proposal was made to limit people from talking more than once until everyone in the meeting had already been given the chance to speak. Only one attendee vehemently opposed the suggestion, and a long debate ensued with no strong conclusion. The primary purpose of the meeting was to discuss a park permit, but that was delayed for a long time due to this disagreement about the proposal.

*Opportunities:* The Occupy Wall Street/Iowa City movement has the opportunity to become much more politicized than it already is with more rallies, conventions, fundraising and community events in the future. During Homecoming this Friday, Occupy Iowa City will be handing out buttons and stickers to promote the movement and inform the public. They also have the opportunity to stay in the park longer.

*Threats:* The sustainability of the movement is under threat. It potentially could "fizzle out," and people could lose interest in the cause, they could lose hope, or they might become frustrated by ineffective procedures or differing opinions/political ideologies. Communication seems to be an issue, so in order for the meetings to accomplish anything, this needs to improve. The threat of being kicked out of the park was also of concern during the meeting, but the representative of the Parks and Recreation Department said this was unlikely. There is threat of opposition from the community or political leaders wanting to shut down the occupation.

In Part I of this reflection, the student reported the date, time and location of the public event and provided descriptive detail pertaining to the physical environment, key participants and event content. In Part II, the student quickly reveals her personal position with respect to the Occupy Wall Street movement and goes on to describe in what ways the particular event met expectations or fell short. The student concluded this section with a very personal statement lamenting the possibility that he\she might not find agreement, or even be able to have a constructive dialogue, with certain people encountered at protest gatherings despite his/her strong desire for such.

In Part III of the reflection, the student adeptly relates the experience to specific course content elements and provides a good level of analysis relating to her behavior and the behaviors of other protestors in relation to course content. In the SWOT analysis, the student discusses many of the same points covered in the three-part reflection. But, as is the case with the majority of students, processing the same service-learning experience within a complementary analysis framework often reveals new student learning. In this instance, the



student highlighted threats of “movement fizzle” and occupier disbandment by city authorities as additional insight into her learning that was not discussed in the three-part reflection.

## **Course and Community Outcomes**

Embedded within the Introduction to Sustainability service-learning course is a series of assessment and evaluation surveys that solicit student input at various times throughout the semester for the purpose of course improvement. Since the data is treated systematically and can contribute to generalizable information and relies upon information from living individuals, the public dissemination of specific results is subject to internal review board approval. Here, we share what we found to be key assessment and evaluation elements, in the absence of any response data, as a means for others to improve outcomes for similarly structured courses.

## **Assessment and Evaluation of Course Outcomes**

At the beginning of the Introduction to Sustainability service-learning course, students were asked if they viewed themselves as “beginning”, “developing”, or “strong” sustainable citizens with this subjective determination being left to the individual. Most students considered themselves to be developing sustainable citizens. We found it interesting that although the Introduction to Sustainability service-learning course is open to all majors, and given our presumption that many enrollees are “sustainability inclined,” no student self-identified as a “strong” sustainable citizen. It could be that predisposed students are pursuing personal sustainability behaviors, but that they don’t believe they do enough as a “citizen” to be drawn to the sustainable-citizen descriptor. It could also be students presume they have to be taught what it means to be a sustainable citizen, and the course is the primary setting for training in this area of perceived need.

We also asked how strong the role students believe dialogue plays in sustainability. Although a few said that dialogue plays “little” role, a strong majority said that it plays a “strong” or at least “somewhat strong” role. Additionally, when asked what traits are most valuable to having a productive conversation, the most frequently selected responses included an ability to listen, collaboration, prior knowledge, researching information and an ability to compromise. Interestingly, even before there has been a formal introduction to the concepts of democratic dialogue, which emphasizes problem-solving through “mutual understanding and concessions rather than through the unilateral imposition of one side’s views and interests,” students rate listening, collaboration, and compromise as of much greater importance than debating skills or the ability to persuade.

## **Course Outcomes for Attitude, Skill and Behavioral Instruction**

An independent evaluator conducted a survey of students who participated in the Fall 2011 offering of Introduction to Sustainability service-learning. The evaluator collaborated with the course facilitators to develop the survey that assessed changes in students’ attitudes and behaviors as a result of the course. The survey also gauged students’ opinions of course themes and activities. The students took the survey during class time allotted at the end of the semester. All responses were anonymous and collected online via Qualtrics, a secure web-based survey program.

Students were asked to indicate the strength of their agreement or disagreement with statements about themselves, learning about sustainability, activities related to sustainability that they were involved in at their university and ways in which sustainability may be part of their

chosen careers. To determine to what extent, if any, the class impacted participants' responses, they were asked to rate their perceptions of their abilities and attitudes, both before and after the course. A retrospective post-test design was used to gauge participants' responses at the end of the semester. The survey presented 28 statements regarding the participants' perception of their abilities and attitudes, and participants rated their perceptions on a scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Means for all statements, both before and after, were calculated. We report the statements here (Table 1) and provide some comments on the utility of the responses for administrative evaluation and subsequent improvement of course outcomes.

Table 1: Students were asked to indicate the strength of their agreement or disagreement with these statements to assess shifts in perceived skills and attitudes.

Statements
I recognize that human population, carrying capacity and the fate of resources held-in-common are key elements to understanding sustainability.
I participate in service-learning projects at my university.
In my career, I will know how to make decisions that facilitate sustainability.
Companies that are sustainable are more likely to be profitable over the long term.
I am confident that I have the knowledge and skills to facilitate a sustainable workplace.
I can influence people around me toward a sustainability mindset.
I am able to identify sustainability opportunities and threats in my community and the planet.
I know how to find reliable information to analyze key concepts of sustainability.
I can take part in a democratic dialogue with people whose views or values are different than mine.
I encourage the people around me to use energy wisely.
Collaborative decision-making is important in promoting sustainability.
I have the required literary skills to articulate my views about sustainability.
I have the necessary applied math skills to aid my understanding of sustainability.
It is possible to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities while adhering to sustainability principles.
Economic development, social development and environmental protection are all necessary for sustainable development.
I plan to choose a workplace that values sustainability.
In the United States, people living in poverty are more affected by environmental problems than people living in more affluent conditions.
My own actions have an impact on the environment.
I recycle as much as possible.
Poverty alleviation is important for sustainability.
The balance of nature is very delicate and easily disrupted.
I work well in collaboration with others.
I vote in campus elections.
I volunteer in my community.
My residence hall community is a good example of sustainability in action.
I am innovative.
I volunteer on campus.
I vote in municipal elections.

The student responses to the statements in Table 1 enabled us to improve our delivery of course content in the areas of applied math and information gathering. We improved student instruction toward distinguishing “volunteering” from “service-learning,” and we recognized that our “citizen-centric” course model was performing as intended. Some statements were determined to be seasonal in nature (e.g. voting inclinations) and were, therefore, less useful than anticipated.

## Course Outcomes for Interest in Sustainability and Service-Learning

Students were asked to rate their level of agreement with six statements related to their interest in sustainability and service-learning after participating in the course. The scale ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The questions are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Students were asked to rate their level of agreement with these statements to assess changes in student interest in sustainability and service-learning after participating in the course.

Statements
Made me feel more connected to my university.
Increased my interest in sustainable living.
Increased my interest in living in a sustainable living learning community in the future.
Increased my interest in service-learning at my university.
Increased my interest in service-learning in my community.
Increased my interest in promoting sustainable practices at my university.

The responses to this series of statements were useful as they helped to distinguish how students viewed sustainability and service-learning from the personal, campus and community perspectives. Additionally, the responses enabled us to better discern how the “sustainable citizen” course focus was, or was not, being made actionable by students in increasingly larger system sizes (i.e. personal, campus, then community systems) as a key, desirable course outcome.

## Course Outcomes for Interest and Usefulness of Topics

Students were asked to think about the weekly topics as listed in the syllabus for the Introduction to Sustainability service-learning course and reflect upon how interesting and useful those topics were to them. Students were also asked to rate the usefulness of each weekly topic on a scale ranging from not at all useful to me to very useful to me. If students had no opinion they could select no opinion (Table 3).

Table 3: Students were asked to rate how interesting and useful the course topics were to them. The topics are listed in chronological order as presented during the semester.

Introduction and Terminology	Mid-term Exams
Democratic Dialogues	Eco-economies
Systems Thinking	Informed Consumerism
Applied Math and Finding Information	Livable Environments
Economy	National Geographic Modules
Society	Final Project Work
Environment	

One outcome we desire is that the first week of the course be “interesting” due to the introductory and multi-disciplinary nature of the subject matter, but also because the course is an elective for all majors. Our goal to place hundreds of students on the path to sustainable citizenship will not be met if we fail to retain those students at risk of dropping the course if first impressions do not meet their expectations. The level of first-week student interest was below our expectation, which has triggered a series of adjustments.

It was also evident that our emphasis on skill development (e.g. dialoguing, systems thinking and applied math) in the first four weeks dampened interest levels somewhat compared to those expressed toward eco-economies, informed consumerism, livable environments and the National Geographic content modules. But, this also provided evidence that enthusiasm levels grew as the course unfolded which is a desired outcome. Student survey responses indicated a waning interest during the final preparation of their creative projects which was expected due to the rigor involved and given that many late semester assignments and projects are simultaneously due across all courses in which students are enrolled.

### **Community Contributions to the Course and Reciprocity Indicators**

The Introduction to Sustainability service-learning students attended public meetings organized by student, city and county governments; student and community service groups; advocacy groups; local businesses and individual residents. Students participated in more than 60 unique meetings, events, activities and lectures totaling an estimated 400 hours of community-provided contact time.

A note of gratitude was sent to several of the local organizations and individuals responsible for creating these public forums. An alumnus of our university and former leader of a prominent student group that provided 35 contact hours of service-learning engagement for the course said the following in response to our words of thanks:

*“That is great news. Thanks for including me on the message. It is very encouraging and reaffirms my confidence in [the student group’s] growing excellence.*

*Congratulations, [student group], and specifically [current leaders]. I recently visited [the university] and was a happy participant in [the student group’s] camaraderie. [A former professor] discussed with me once the importance of leaders, like you all, simply inviting younger students to activities and events, functioning as a gateway for involvement and community, and it looks like a lot of this is coming true. You all certainly have the capacity for it!*

*[Professor], in regard to the Certificate in Sustainability, I connect with your emphases on "basic skills of literacy, applied math, and finding information." I regularly use your "pursuit of sustainability" language and, now, will consider how those basic skill areas can play a part in our Sustainability Leadership Certificate, currently in development.*

*We are developing a tiered framework for our Sustainability Leadership Certificate, which offers achievement levels based on behaviors—defined by our Green Certification Program—leadership and education. Leadership and education may be combined, but the idea is that we offer higher levels of achievement for each year that the student participates. Next time I'm in [your university town], it would be nice to meet and learn more about your work.*

*I appreciate your vision and communication, so please keep me informed when great things or new ideas come around.”*

### **Public Dissemination**

As final course products, the Introduction to Sustainability service-learning students prepared two “creative works.” One “essay or opinion” and one “multimedia” project were required and students picked a topic within the realm of “sustainable citizenship” to create a

written piece to reflect their understanding of this topic. The students also were asked to share how the exploration of these sustainability topics “transformed” them and/or made them more or less inclined to modify personal behaviors in the context of sustainability. They were asked if the course convinced them to change their actions at the community or national scale and why or why not. To foster creativity and to mimic life in the public realm, the “problem statements” or “guidelines” that were provided were intentionally open ended.

The “multimedia” instructions for the final project also were open ended. Students were instructed that they could produce a PowerPoint presentation, a poem, a sculpture, a poster or some other interesting work. Again, the work had to reflect student understanding of sustainability and the desire to “expand the movement” of sustainability by extending dialogue to skeptics or other unsuspecting fellow citizens. Everything created for the final assignment was displayed publicly via a website, gallery or other means. These projects had to be capable of display beyond the lifetime of the course in an electronic format regardless of the media used for the actual project.

With the public viewing of final projects from this community partnership, the final component of the service-learning continuum of *engagement, reflection, reciprocity and public dissemination* was effectively implemented in the Introduction to Sustainability service-learning course.

## Conclusions

The *construct* and *content* of the Introduction to Sustainability service-learning course performed as intended in the context of the main course goal of students becoming more knowledgeable and sustainable citizens capable of dialoguing about wicked problems. The course design allowed for the seamless inclusion of a major social movement, Occupy Wall Street, as a relevant and timely service-learning opportunity. The course effectively identified dialoguing as a campus and community need and allowed students to productively contribute to community dialogues regardless of their experience level with the community prior to the course.

Three-part reflections and SWOT analyses were an effective means to assess enhanced understanding of course content as facilitated through service. The course can be improved by:

- Making the kick-off class sessions more interesting
- A more creative exploration of course content related to applied math, finding information and systems thinking;
- Inclusion of more National Geographic content modules;
- More even distribution of course project preparation and public dissemination over the span of the semester.

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Beginning in the fall of 2012, curricular materials, how-to-guides, and assessment tools related to this publication will be available at <http://www.sustainablecitizen.org>. We wish to acknowledge Webspec Design for the creation of the Sustainable Citizen website

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## ABSTRACT

*Service-learning has been covered extensively in the literature and, to a lesser extent, in social work curricula. What is missing from the discourse is a discussion of students' perceptions of service-learning, particularly as it is situated within a human diversity course and occurs at their field education site. Based on the qualitative reports of 43 social work students, the findings highlight the strengths and weaknesses of such an effort and provide insights into students' perceptions of service-learning. These insights serve as a useful resource for educators, researchers, and administrators. Lessons learned, recommendations, and implications for education are presented.*

# ***Social Work Students' Perceptions of Service-Learning***

*Elaine M. Maccio and Roxanne A. Voorhies*

Field education is one way for social work students to practice the skills they learn in the classroom. Indeed, field education is required by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2010b), the accrediting body for schools of social work. Since the essential nature of social work is to serve individuals in need, it is crucial that social work students gain as much experience outside the classroom, in actual helping situations, in order to become astute, prepared helping professionals. Although field education serves this purpose, it is a one-way experience that primarily serves the student in meeting his or her educational goals. Service-learning, on the other hand, is a two-way experience that serves both student and community partner, providing a particularly meaningful educational experience for the student that is not always realized in either the classroom or in the internship.

Although both are geared toward providing hands-on experience for students, field education and service-learning provide learning opportunities distinct from each other. Internships provide students with an opportunity to apply social work practice skills in a prescribed manner to real-world situations defined by the field setting, for example, a human services agency. Service-learning offers students a chance to be creative in their service, while meeting needs that are defined by the group or population to be served. Both offer opportunities for students to learn and to serve others with whom they work. However, the

definition of needs and creativity in meeting those needs vary by delivery method.

Because field education and service-learning are so distinct, it is possible to embed one inside the other for a unique, intensive learning experience. Indeed, CSWE encourages innovative teaching methods as a means of meeting the educational standards it is charged with defining and regulating (CSWE, 2010a). Service-learning is such a delivery method, an approach to teaching and learning that promotes civic engagement through community service and meaningful reflection. With its commitment to social justice, service-learning seems a perfect fit for social work curricula and for a course on human diversity and oppression. This article reports on students' perceptions of service-learning, particularly as it was implemented in a social work course on diversity and situated within their field education.

## Literature Review

### Service-Learning

Bringle and Hatcher (1995) define service-learning as a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

(p. 112)

Service-learning pairs students with community members in a reciprocal relationship, meaning that the student and the community member are both teacher and learner. Ideally, the service occurs in balanced proportion to the learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999), which, for the students, comes primarily from critical reflection (Jacoby, 1996). It is this reflection that differentiates service-learning from volunteerism, community service, and other forms of experiential learning, such as cooperative education and internships.

**Differentiating service-learning from field education.** Although service-learning and field education share some similarities, such as in situ exposure and hands-on experience, there are a number of distinct differences. Furco (2003) reduces these to focus and beneficiary. First, CSWE (2010b) describes classroom and field education as interrelated yet separate elements of the social work curriculum. In service-learning the community element is an inseparable component of the classroom experience. Second, internships exist to benefit students (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996), whereas service-learning exists to benefit both students and communities (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Although communities may indirectly benefit from students' field education, it is not the intent. In addition to Furco's conceptualization of focus and beneficiary is the idea of purpose. CSWE identifies field education as the profession's signature pedagogy, whose purpose is to socialize students "to perform the role of practitioner" (p. 8). In contrast, the purpose of service-learning is to promote lifelong civic engagement (Gray, Ondaatje, Fricker, & Geschwind, 2000; Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, Donahue, & Weimholt, 2007).

**Service-learning in diversity courses.** Service-learning has been incorporated into courses on human diversity in several academic disciplines. Psychology (GreyWolf, 1998; Hagan, 2004), human development (Blieszner & Artale, 2001), human service education (McClam, Diambra, Burton, Fuss, & Fudge, 2008), family and consumer science (Toews & Cerny, 2005), counselor education (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004), and teacher education (Hones, 1997) are just a few that have benefited from service-learning being introduced into courses specific to human or family diversity. Regarding her Cross-Cultural Psychology course, for example, GreyWolf (1998) explained, "Psychology in many aspects became alive for

students through the combination of working with people from other cultures and reflecting on the applicability of theoretical concepts” (p. 176). Like psychology, social work helps others, with a particular emphasis on those from vulnerable populations, typically minority cultures.

Multicultural understanding is often cited as a learning goal or by-product of service-learning. In the recent literature alone, several articles describe the ability of service-learning to enhance cultural competence (Bentley & Ellison, 2007; Hunt & Swiggum, 2007; Larson, Ott, & Miles, 2010), broaden students’ understanding of diversity (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Bell, Horn, & Roxas, 2007; Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, Donahue, & Weimholt, 2008), promote cultural sensitivity (Sensenig, 2007), and change perceptions (Conner, 2010; Hamner, Wilder, & Byrd, 2007; Hunt, 2007), which, coincidentally, are all ambitions of social work education. This strengthens the argument for situating service-learning in a course on human diversity.

### **Service-Learning in Social Work**

Service-learning pedagogy has already been put to use across the social work education spectrum. Several authors have documented service-learning in social work curricula. Social welfare policy (Anderson, 2006), macro practice (Sather, Weitz, & Carlson, 2007), research methods (Knee, 2002), human behavior in the social environment (Ames & Diepstra, 2006), statistics (Wells, 2006), group work (Bye, 2005), and specific topics, such as gerontology (Cohen, Hatchett, & Eastridge, 2006), disability rights (Hayashi & Favuzzi, 2001), and working with burn-injured children (Williams & Reeves, 2004) are just some of the many areas covered using a service-learning framework. Lemieux and Allen (2007) present a systematic review of eight studies on service-learning in social work. These works were published between 1994 and 2004, and reflected primarily indirect contact between students and their service-learning partners. Attitudes, perceptions, satisfaction, and benefits were just some of the variables that were assessed using qualitative focus groups and pretest/posttest and posttest-only designs.

Although there is no shortage of social work courses incorporating service-learning as a means of curriculum delivery, there is a dearth of literature on service-learning in social work diversity courses in particular. Bliss and Meehan (2008) describe how 20 students from several social work courses, one of which was a cultural diversity course, in a majority White school of social work, chose a Hurricane Katrina disaster response service-learning project, while other students in the courses chose a traditional assignment. In a follow-up survey, students commented how diversity course content helped them recognize the roots of the negative stereotypes they had about the Hurricane Katrina evacuees, as most of the people they were helping were Black and living in poverty. In this scenario, service-learning helped make real the issues of racism and poverty and served as a vehicle for tying the issues back to classroom learning. Blundo (2010) also reports on a shared service-learning experience, this time interdisciplinary, with communication studies. The author describes the course only as a social justice course and one in which students chose one of three video documentary projects focusing on African Americans’ and Native Americans’ experiences during desegregation of the 1950s. Blundo (2010) summarized students’ experiences of learning history first-hand from those who lived it and the nuances—the details, the emotions, and the personal stories—that were absent from the students’ grade-school textbooks.

These two examples demonstrate the utility of pairing service-learning with social work’s diversity curricula. However, neither provides a clear picture of students’ own perceptions of service-learning in social work in general or in a diversity course in particular. The present article seeks to fill a gap in the knowledge base by providing insight into the service-learning

experience from social work students' perspective. Thus the objectives of this examination are to present social work students' a) likes and dislikes about service-learning, b) thoughts about service-learning's place in the curriculum, c) time spent on their service-learning projects, and d) comments and suggestions.

## Method

### Participants

This study relied on a convenience sample of 45 graduate social work students in two sections of a diversity and oppression course taught using a service-learning framework. These students, nearly half (47%) of the full-time foundation-year cohort, were invited to voluntarily complete the end-of-semester survey. The University's Institutional Review Board approved this study.

Two surveys were excluded because of the students' failure to consent to have their responses included in the study; thus, 43 participants, or 95.6% of the original sample pool, were included in the final sample. Participants' signatures were not obtained, as no identifying information was collected; instead, students were provided with a written informed consent script. Demographic data were obtained later in aggregate form from a department administrator. Omitting demographic data items from the survey protected students' anonymity, but in turn, item responses cannot be analyzed with regard to personal characteristics and patterns of nonresponse cannot be gleaned, making the failure to collect such data a limitation of this study. The final sample was 93.4% female, 73.7% White, and an average age of 23.9 years ( $SD = 3.41$ ). This primarily young, White, female demographic is common in graduate social work education (CSWE, 2011) and should be addressed (McPhail & Sidvah, 2008), but it limits the discussion and interpretation of their service-learning experiences as relevant only to others who are young, White, and female. This narrow demographic also poses several pedagogical factors that must be considered. For example, a classroom discussion of race and racism, typical in a course on human diversity and oppression, is not complete without one also on White privilege, regardless of the racial makeup of the instructor and students. Instructors must carefully facilitate the conversation so that students are challenged yet remain engaged. Service-learning can be not only a conduit for such a discussion, but also a context for "doing diversity" that challenges preconceived notions and promotes social justice for both students and instructors (Baldwin et al., 2007).

### Measures

The survey was designed by the first author, also the course instructor, and consisted of nine items: a "yes/no" checkbox for participants to indicate their consent to have their responses included in the research and eight qualitative questions pertaining to service-learning in the course. These last eight items are presented in their entirety below. Briefly, the items asked the students to comment on the positive and negative aspects of the service-learning component, the placement of service-learning in the curriculum, and the amount of time they spent on their service-learning projects, and to provide suggestions and comments.

## Procedures

Survey sampling relied on students enrolled in two course sections taught by the first author (also referred to henceforth as the instructor). The survey was administered at the beginning of the last class meeting of the fall 2006 semester and was one of five questionnaires, among them course and service-learning evaluations. All questionnaires were voluntary and could be completed in any order. Students were to read the survey study's consent and instructions and were allowed as much time as they needed to complete all questionnaires. The instructor left the room once the forms had been distributed.

The course, Human Diversity and Oppression, is a requirement for foundation-year graduate social work students. The objectives of the course are to provide students with a historical overview of prejudice and discrimination and to place human experience in a contemporary social, political, and economic context. Three of the more salient course objectives outlined in the syllabus are to train students to fight discrimination and promote social justice, apply course learning to their field and professional experiences, and engage in ethical, culturally competent practice.

The service-learning activities for the two fall 2006 sections of this course were to take place at students' internship sites. Students were required to identify, with their field supervisors, a gap in the agency's or organization's service to its clients or constituents from vulnerable populations. The service-learning project itself was to design a remedy to fill that gap. Projects that students decided on ranged from intervention activities for children and elderly clients to information brochures regarding sexual assault and end-of-life care to resource directories of child grief counselors, cancer services, and addiction treatment.

Service-learning assignments composed 70% of students' course grade. The remaining 30% was composed of class participation (10%), and four 1–3-page experiential labs (5% each). Assignments included three 1–2-page journals (5% each), one 5–8-page paper (20%), one class presentation (15%), and engaging in the project itself (i.e., designing a remedy to fill a service gap; 20%). Students were graded on the project by submitting to the instructor a one-page summary of their project or, if the project was a one-page product, such as a pamphlet, directory, or resource list, then the product itself. At the end of the semester, these one-page documents were compiled into a spiral-bound brochure, and a copy was given to each of the field supervisors overseeing the students.

## Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional design to gather and analyze qualitative data, which, through the depth that qualitative data provide, will help establish the groundwork for future studies regarding the outcomes of diversity content delivery via service-learning.

## Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis, in which data are coded according to emergent themes. The first author began the coding process by aggregating by item number the responses from all surveys. Data were then coded according to theme by both authors working independently. This inductive approach allowed themes in the data to emerge (Patton, 2002). Next, the first author compared the two sets of themes for agreement and consistency. Themes that were similar in title and focus were combined, along with their individual participant responses, to form one new overarching theme. The authors reviewed 35 responses on which

the two disagreed with regard to the original themes, with the purpose of recategorizing these responses within the newly created themes.

Missing data are defined as those items for which the respondent marked a line through the answer space or left it blank. Responses of “NA,” “Nothing,” “None,” and the like were treated as valid responses and included in the analysis. Most items achieved a greater than 88% response rate.

## Results and Discussion

Survey item response rates ranged from 48.8% (item 7) to 100% (item 5b); however, seven of the eight items had rates above 80%. Survey items appear in italics and are numbered as they were on the survey, and their responses follow. Each item’s themes are reported in order of their prominence; themes with the most student endorsement appear first under each item.

Miscellaneous categories, which contained responses that did not fit into a theme, and minor categories, those that fewer than 15% of students endorsed, have been omitted.

### ***2. What did you like about service-learning? What worked well? What would you like to see continued?***

In their comments on what they liked most, students touched on several service-learning norms: serving others, applying classroom knowledge, learning experientially, and working creatively (see, e.g., Eyer & Giles, 1999). Lohman and Aitken (2002) found similar patterns among their students, who included helping others and developing skills as the most positive of their service-learning experiences.

**Serving others.** Students most liked service-learning for its focus on serving others. Given that the course was composed of graduate students of social work, a profession dedicated to serving, this finding is not surprising. Subthemes include making a difference, serving oppressed populations, benefiting others, learning while serving, and serving several stakeholders simultaneously. Students were able to see outside themselves and appreciate that their efforts helped others; similarly, they were able to see the bigger picture and recognize the contributions they were making not only at the personal level but also at the organizational and community levels. As one student stated, “I liked service learning because I felt like I was contributing to both my community and my agency.” True to their future professions’ calling, students also recognized the attention that service-learning and their efforts paid to oppressed populations in particular.

**Applying classroom knowledge.** Students’ second most common theme was the knowledge they gained from the service-learning experience and their ability to apply that knowledge. Students cited targeted learning, local issues, and current and future application as recurring subthemes. Service-learning provided a context for students to gain in-depth knowledge about their internship agency, their clients, and available and needed resources. “I feel that it does enhance the learning experience,” remarked one of the students, a sentiment echoed by freshmen service-learning students who partnered with inner-city children and at-risk adolescents (Stavrianopoulos, 2008). Two students in the present study spoke to the background research they needed to do for their projects, which is exactly what other students have found beneficial (Amtmann, 2004). Service-learning also gave them an outlet for applying course content in a real-world setting, which McClam and her colleagues (2008) found is valued

by service-learning students. As one student explained, “I liked how the project gave me an awareness of community needs and how to apply class learning into the community.”

**Working creatively.** Creativity and flexibility, another common theme, refers to the latitude that service-learning and this particular project provided with regard to autonomy and diversity of ideas. Graduate education, more so than undergraduate, encourages and promotes independent thinking and creativity. Additionally, service-learning encourages creativity and improves problem solving (McCarthy & Tucker, 1999) in which students and community partners must engage in order to meet the community’s identified needs. Students identified this as “thinking outside the box” and “cultivating our own ideas on issues that needed to be addressed.” This creativity also benefits community partners, whose needs cannot always be met through conventional means.

**Learning experientially.** Tied for third most-common like was the hands-on, alternative learning experience that service-learning offers. Although fewer students cited the experiential nature of service-learning as their favorite aspect of the experience, several used the term “hands-on” to express their liking, which Hagenbuch (2006) also found. Service-learning as an experiential teaching and learning method, though, may be somewhat lost on graduate social work students who are perpetually immersed in field education internships. More students may have cited this aspect as their favorite had they not already been involved in experiential learning.

### ***3. What didn’t you like about service-learning? What didn’t work well? What would you like to see changed?***

Three main themes tied for the top spot: time commitment/workload, internship/interpersonal issues, and assignment requirements.

**Time commitment/workload.** First was the time commitment/workload issue. Students commented that service-learning, or perhaps this particular project, was taking them away from other responsibilities at their internships, explaining that it “took up a lot of time” and was “not realistic due to full-time [student] status.” At least one student commented that “asking students of social work to volunteer was extra work in addition to internships and the heavy workload.” The same difficulty among students has been reported elsewhere (Bordelon & Phillips, 2006; Hagenbuch, 2006; Weglarz, 2004). Taking students away from their internship responsibilities was an unintended consequence of the project and one that could have been avoided with better planning on the instructor’s part. However, service-learning as extra work and requiring extra time was perhaps students’ misinterpretation of the course requirements. That is, service-learning assignments actually replaced, rather than added to, traditional coursework such as papers, exams, and other assignments. Although course assignments included three journals, a paper, and a presentation, the work was derived from the service-learning experience, and it was quantitatively less than the traditional workload in order to accommodate the time students would need to spend on their projects. This perhaps was not adequately explained to the students at the start of the semester.

**Internship/interpersonal issues.** The second most-common theme was related to internship/interpersonal issues. Most complaints centered on a lack of involvement by students’ field supervisors and other agency staff whose help they needed. One student lamented, “I feel that most supervisors did not have the time to help the students.” In a previous study, students cited “lack of cooperation” as the number one factor discouraging service-learning participation (McCarthy & Tucker, 1999, p. 562). In the present study, this may have resulted from the instructor’s not having reached out to the supervisors with more than a letter introducing the



supervisor to service-learning, the project, and his or her role in the process. With such a project in the future, the instructor should personally connect with each field supervisor, either by phone or agency visit. Two students disliked service-learning being linked with their internships. This number, however, is outweighed by the number of students who liked service-learning at their internship sites. Interpersonal issues arose primarily among those students who did not at the time have an internship and were therefore required to work with a peer who did.

**Assignment requirements.** The last of the top three dislikes was the theme of assignment requirements. Students explained that they would have preferred working in groups on a “bigger finished product” and that they disliked some of the assignments. Complaints varied from one student feeling as though he or she was “doing busy work for my agency,” to one student each disliking the one-page summary, the journals, the paper, and the presentation.

#### ***4a. How do you feel about service-learning being linked with a graduate social work course on human diversity and oppression?***

Responses were coded simply as good idea, mixed feelings, or bad idea.

**Good idea.** The overwhelming majority of students felt that incorporating service-learning into a graduate social work course on diversity and oppression was a good idea. Students cited the obvious fit between a course on diversity and oppression and serving clients from oppressed groups through service-learning. “It helps link social-work students to diverse and oppressed groups who we will be working with in the future.” They also felt that the pairing “gives us exposure to many aspects of our internship, diversity, and oppression” and “makes one more aware,” perhaps with regard to real-life social problems. Eighty-six percent of Weglarz’s (2004) student sample also felt that service-learning increased their “awareness of community needs” (p. 128).

**Mixed.** Some students had mixed feelings, believing either that service-learning would be a better fit with a different course or that service-learning is appropriate in spite of the perceived additional workload, such as, “It was a lot of extra work, but it was also a good learning experience.” Again, this latter problem could be overcome with a more thorough explanation early in the semester of the work that is required in service-learning and how it is comparable to that of the workload in a non-service-learning course. Others gave qualified approval, for example, “Very good idea as long as it doesn’t overload the student.”

**Bad idea.** Most students who perceived the link to be a bad idea considered service-learning to be what they were already doing at their internships and therefore unnecessary. Another student viewed service-learning as more appropriate for undergraduate education than graduate. “I think it’s a good idea [with] undergrad courses because you don’t get much hands-on experience but in grad school I think it’s redundant.” Here again, students are voting against “too much of a good thing,” seeing that their internships give them all the hands-on experience they need. This raises the point that instructors of social work and other related helping professions, especially those that require internships or practica, must take extra care to differentiate for their students formal field education from service-learning. Internships and practica, for example, focus on professional skills and primarily benefit the student (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Service-learning, on the other hand, promotes critical reflection (Jacoby, 1996) and civic responsibility (Lee et al., 2007) and benefits students and community partners alike (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Both experiential methods provide students with equally valuable opportunities for academic, personal, and frequently professional growth, and one method need not be excluded in the presence of the other.

**4b. Should a different course be considered in addition to or instead of this course?**

Students had several suggestions for incorporating service-learning. Some considered service-learning appropriate for other courses, particularly a foundation-year practice course, in addition to or instead of the diversity course, while other students suggested making changes to the existing service-learning/diversity course pairing. Some students were unclear in their answer whether they were referring to adding to or replacing human diversity as a service-learning course. Therefore, responses are grouped by a general yes/no theme.

**Yes, in addition to/instead of.** Most of the students suggested keeping service-learning in the social work curriculum, but they differed on where to include it. Students felt strongly about pairing service-learning with a foundation-year practice course either instead of or in addition to a course on diversity and oppression. A few others suggested research methods, human behavior and the social environment, and grant writing courses for service-learning. The pool of possibilities as viewed by these students is a relatively shallow one given their status as first-semester, first-year graduate students. Asking this question of second-semester, second-year students in the same program may have yielded a broader, more informed cadre of appropriate courses. To his or her credit, one student did assert, "All of our courses could incorporate service-learning into their curriculum." This bodes well for community partners who have the advantage of various inter- and intradisciplinary options to match their constituents' needs.

**No.** Most students who did not feel a need to switch or add service-learning courses simply said "no." Only two students elaborated, one of whom advocated for the removal of service-learning altogether: "Social work is already a helping profession—offer [service-learning projects] to schools who traditionally are not service oriented."

**5a. How many hours do you believe you spent working on your service-learning project (not including the time you spent on your journals, final paper, and presentation)?**

Responses varied, as students were not provided with options from which to choose, nor were they asked to report in a certain manner, for example, providing a single number, not a range. This made quantifying their responses difficult, one of the study's limitations. To do so, range responses were averaged (e.g., "10–15 hours" equals 12.5 hours). Three students provided nonspecific responses that could not be quantified.

Time spent on the projects ranged from 0–5 hours to 60 hours. Of 33 students who responded, most (78.8%) spent between 5 and 25 hours working on their projects, with an estimated average of 17.23 hours ( $SD = 11.85$ ), and an estimated median of 12.5 hours. This is in line with the amount of time typically put in by service-learning students (Bennett, Henson, & Drane, 2003; Brunick & Kennedy, 2007; Segrist, 2004; Toews & Cerny, 2005). Weglarz (2004) found that the more time that was spent, the greater the satisfaction with service-learning. In the current study, students were not required to devote a certain amount of time but were instead required to simply fulfill the service-learning project requirements of designing and developing a product that fills a gap in existing services to persons from vulnerable populations. This is one example of autonomy afforded by the project, that students could determine for themselves how much time and effort they wanted to devote, knowing they were going to be graded on their one-page product or summary. However, autonomy may not be necessary for success or for students to perceive service-learning as valuable (Lester, Tomkovick, Wells, Flunker, & Kickul, 2005).

**5b. Do you believe that the final product was worth the time spent? If no, why not?**

Having just reflected on the hours they put into their service-learning, students were asked if they thought their final product was worth the time spent. Major emergent themes are simply yes and mixed/qualified.

**Yes.** Virtually all of the students who responded to this item felt that, yes, the time they spent working on their project was worth it. Several spoke to the benefits they, their agencies, and the clients had realized or will realize because of their efforts. "It was definitely worth the time spent due to the many benefits I personally received [and] the benefits my agency [and] clients received." Others simply were pleased with the outcome. "Even if no one ever utilizes my project, I still worked hard on the idea and I liked the outcome." McCarthy and Tucker (1999) found that, among students, the most important factor that encourages service-learning is getting results.

**Mixed/qualified.** A few students had mixed feelings about the worth of the end product in light of the time they spent on it. Others had positive feelings, which they qualified with their concerns. Although responses varied, the majority wondered whether their hard work would ever reach the clients. "I feel the project turned out okay, but I have doubts as to whether the agency will use it." Other students felt that they did more work on it than was necessary. This may have been due to the grading being applied to the one-page summary and not the project itself, the time the project took away from their internship, and the lack of clarity within the assignment. These pitfalls could easily be avoided in the future by the instructor addressing each point carefully. For example, grading could be applied to the entire project, time could be allocated away from the internship to work on the project, and the assignment instructions could be restated clearly and in greater detail.

**6. What suggestions do you have for future service-learning projects?**

Several themes emerged from the students' responses, but one in particular stood out among the rest. The majority of suggestions revolved around the service-learning needing more clarity and structure. Other, less common themes included different assignments/project, different grading, and different field involvement.

**More clarity/structure.** Students by far wanted to see the assignment instructions improved. They requested more "direction," "guidelines," "structure," and "clarity," specifically more detail with regard to the assignment instructions, the type of project, and the instructor's expectations. No fewer than four students used the word "specific." One rather astute student articulated his or her desires in some detail. "Make instructions a little more understandable as to what is expected of the students and how it relates to the course." Lohman and Aitken (2002) similarly had students who suggested that better organization was needed and that students in organized sites had positive perceptions of service-learning. The lesson learned here is to provide students with enough detail to convey the purpose, required elements, and expected outcome of the assignment. Carefully reviewing the assignment with the students at the start of the semester and again later as needed may help to lessen students' anxiety created by unclear or vague instructions.

**Different assignments/project.** Students recommended changes to the service-learning assignments. Rather than each student working individually on his or her own project, two students suggested that "the entire class work on a big project." For those who would have preferred working collaboratively and not individually, future students could be given the option to work alone on their own project or with others on a joint project. Conceivably half of the class could work individually, while the other half worked together on one project, or perhaps small

groups of students could work on several projects. One third of the students suggested a more hands-on project, “as opposed to creating a resource list,” for example.

Other students questioned the value and utility of writing journals and papers. At the time, students were asked to journal about any topic related to their service-learning experience. Since then, the instructor has supplied service-learning students with journal topics, which has resulted in more favorable evaluations by students of journal assignments. The paper serves a similar reflection purpose, but also helps students tie the various aspects of the service-learning experience together. This purpose may not have been adequately conveyed by the instructor.

**Different grading.** The third most common suggestion addressed grading. Students again expressed concern a) that the project was not graded, and b) that the project or perhaps the service-learning itself carried substantial weight towards the final grade.

Regarding the former point, two students rightly pointed out, “I worked very hard and I would like [the project] to be graded,” “NOT just a 1 pg. summary of our product.” The instructor’s original intent was not to grade the project, essentially the students’ efforts towards producing their product. The instructor would have no idea how much time and effort the students actually devoted to their projects, so the instructor determined it unfair to attempt to grade them. Instead the instructor chose to grade the one-page summary (or, if the product itself was a one-page document, then to grade the product), since the document could itself be seen and evaluated. The document was evaluated for originality, creativity, and product utility. In the future, it will be necessary to develop a plan for evaluating students’ projects, not just the summary.

Regarding the latter point about the weight of the service-learning grades, it is unclear whether the students considered the project grade, worth 20% of the final grade, or the entire service-learning component, worth 70%, as too much weight. This uncertainty is evidenced by one student who suggested “not to make it worth the majority of our grade in the class.” What may remedy either scenario, the project or the service-learning as a whole, is to provide a thorough introduction to service-learning, including an explanation that service-learning is an approach to teaching and learning, not an add-on to the course. Service-learning offers alternative means for students to acquire knowledge, not only through written and oral communication, such as papers and presentations, respectively, but through hands-on learning, as well. If weighted evenly, in this case four assignments worth 15%–20% each, service-learning affords students with varying learning styles a fair chance of academic success.

**Different field involvement.** Another third-place theme spoke to the need for greater communication among all involved, especially “[between the] teacher [and] field supervisors.” At the start of the semester, the instructor provided supervisors with nothing more than a letter introducing herself and inviting supervisors to participate, along with a brief explanation of service-learning and the proposed structure (i.e., supervisors and students identifying a gap in service to clients from vulnerable populations). Field supervisors would have benefitted from, and indeed deserved, a more thorough introduction to service-learning, clearer guidelines on how to support their students, and a collaborative effort to fit the service-learning into the existing internship. A student recommended that the instructor “[c]onsult with supervisors and make sure all agree and are willing to ‘somewhat’ participate.” A personal visit to the agency by the instructor, or at least a phone call, would have better met these objectives.

### ***7. What else would you like us to know about your service-learning experience?***

Few students added any final thoughts to their service-learning evaluation. Of the eight students who did, six commented on the benefits of service-learning, and two reiterated the lack

of clarity in the assignments. Benefit themes are arranged into benefits realized by the student and those realized by others.

**Helpful/beneficial for me.** Students who spoke of benefits viewed their service-learning experience as valuable to their education. “It was challenging but a valuable learning experience,” remarked one student. “Whether or not it is used, I learned a lot [of] various treatments,” reasoned another.

**Helpful/beneficial for others.** The experience was seen as beneficial to others, as well. Two students commented, “I was glad to help these parents with the handout. It [gave] me such a great feeling of accomplishment,” and “It was a great tool to become involved at my internship and to help empower those I work with of low [socioeconomic status].”

**Clarification.** Students again articulated the need for clarity regarding service-learning project assignments. “Need more specific direction [with] paper and presentation.” “It was confusing at first to figure out what kind of service to provide, and what kind of service was expected.”

## Conclusions

This exploratory study sought to elicit students’ attitudes toward service-learning in a course on human diversity and oppression in the context of a service-learning project undertaken at their internship sites. Overall, students reported positive experiences and attitudes toward service-learning, the course, and the project, a finding that is similar to other studies of students’ perceptions of service-learning (Amtmann, 2004; Connor-Greene, 2002; Hagenbuch, 2006; McClam et al., 2008; Weglarz, 2004). Most of the critical comments students made were with regard to the specific project (e.g., not collaborative, time-consuming) and the accompanying assignments (e.g., unclear, vague).

## Implications for Service-Learning Stakeholders

The effect of service-learning can be generalized beyond the social work discipline and diversity curriculum to disciplines, curricula, and benefactors across the academic and service-learning spectrums. Student participants benefitted from this research first by having their voices heard, engaging them as equal partners in the process rather than as subordinates who must simply carry out an assignment for a grade, and second by making their feedback a priority and using it to improve how students are presented with, engaged in, and allowed to shape service-learning. Other students can benefit from their predecessors’ insight in answering the questions “What might I expect?” and “How might I contribute to making this a positive and worthwhile experience?” Instructors stand to gain from the first-hand accounts of 43 students who shared their perceptions of and suggestions for service-learning, as well as a faculty member who presented lessons learned from which other faculty can benefit. Regarding service-learning settings and partners, it has been demonstrated here how field educators need not be excluded from service-learning partnerships as long as one delivery method is not mistaken for the other. Likewise, community partners serving as field education sites can also engage in service-learning partnerships using this same logic of distinction. Field educators and classroom instructors must work closely to ensure that field learning and service-learning are separate activities each with its own purpose and goals. In these scenarios, the field setting’s constituents are the ultimate benefactors of the service-learning partnership. Last, colleges and universities are increasingly promoting civic engagement among their students, faculty, and administrators (Gibson, n.d.). Service-learning helps to further institutional missions by providing a structured

approach to bridging higher education institutions and the communities in which they are situated.

### **Implications for Education**

Service-learning is an experiential method of teaching and learning that offers students a hands-on approach to education. Students have reported here and elsewhere (Hagenbuch, 2006) that they prefer such hands-on experiences, which may promote students' engagement and investment in experiential courses. Service-learning is also an outlet, in addition to field education, for students to apply classroom knowledge to real-world scenarios. Despite a small portion of students perceiving service-learning as redundant in light of their internships, service-learning does what field education does not: promote civic engagement among students and encourage personal reflection on their experiences and how they and their community partners are situated in a larger social context. This serves the purpose of a diversity curriculum that explains oppression, discrimination, and prejudice as functions of power within a society comprised of competing social, political, and economic realities.

Service-learning also encourages creativity, since community-identified needs are often unique to the environment and do not come with a pre-established, prescribed remedy. Fostering creativity in social workers and other mental health and social service providers is vital. For example, clinical social work practice with clients from vulnerable and traditionally underserved populations requires openness on the part of social workers who are not familiar with the clients' racial, ethnic, class, or religious background, among others. In order to respond sensitively and competently, providers are well served by their ability to think and problem solve creatively, outside of a dominant paradigm. Service-learning offers a chance for students to stimulate and enhance their creativity in advance of professional practice.

### **Recommendations for Education and Research**

Hosting service-learning at field education sites brings its own rewards and challenges. To begin, a clear distinction between the two experiential methods must be made for students and field supervisors. Students' internship hours must be protected while also allowing students time to meet the service-learning project's goals and requirements. This might mean the student arrives earlier to the site or leaves later than his or her regularly scheduled times. It might also mean, with the field supervisor's permission, working on service-learning activities when there are no immediate internship duties to be completed. For those students who view service-learning as a duplication of their field education, a further distinction should be made that field education teaches students specific skills and often includes no self-reflection, while service-learning is predicated on self-reflection and teaches students broad skills that the instructor ties to course content.

Students should also be informed that service-learning is an approach to teaching and learning, not an add-on component to the course. Service-learning assignments are intended to replace, not accompany, traditional course assignments. At most, these traditional assignments can be modified to fulfill service-learning objectives, for example critical reflection, but service-learning assignments are meant to enhance course material.

Instructors would do well to reach out personally to field supervisors who will be responsible for supporting students' service-learning activity at the field site. The first author engaged supervisors only through a handwritten form letter, which likely did little to endear them to her or to service-learning. A site visit or at least a phone call would have benefitted not only

the supervisors but also the students, some of whom commented on their supervisor's inability to guide the service-learning activity.

A substantial recommendation, one that applies not only to service-learning assignments but to educational assignments in general, is to build in structure, make instructions clear, and clearly convey expectations. Students' most significant complaint was that the project's instructions were unclear and the instructor's expectations vague. Although autonomy is important, students in the present study made it clear that structure is just as important. Structure may include specifying a minimum number of hours to be logged, generating project suggestions, requiring pre-approval of project ideas, and standardizing project evaluation.

This particular service-learning venture—identifying a gap in service and devising a product to fill that gap—proved to be a successful one. Despite its limitations, this exploratory study provides useful insights into social work students' perceptions of service-learning, particularly with regard to service-learning within a diversity course. These insights serve as a resource for education and educators.

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# *Undergraduate Honors Service-Learning & Effects on Locus of Control*

*Trae Stewart*

Locus of control is a psychological construct that captures the extent to which we can control events in our lives. One can either have an internal or external locus of control. Internal locus means that individuals believe that they have control over their life and that their own behavior and actions result in the events that they experience. An external locus means that individuals believe that fate or powerful others have control.

For service-learning and other community engagement activities, understanding changes in students' locus of control after participating could be useful. For example, individuals with a high internal locus of control would arguably assume that their efforts will be successful, work more deliberately at the task by seeking information, are more likely to influence other people, and perhaps even continue with the task/activities after the end of the project as they have better control over their behavior. In essence, they perceive themselves as responsible for certain occurrences and, as a result, see their actions as having a direct bearing on the result. Those with greater external locus of control may shy away from participating in activities for which they do not feel their efforts matter.

While locus of control has been studied extensively in psychology, the field of service-learning has yet to broadly address this particular construct. In those studies that have been conducted, findings on the effects of service-learning are overall positive, yet inconclusive (Billig, 2005; Drane, 2001; McCarty & Hazelkorn, 2001; Myers-Lipton, 1998; Stevick & Adleman, 1995). Empirical studies on service-learning in undergraduate honors education have not included locus of control as a dependent variable.

## ABSTRACT

*Research examining service-learning in honors undergraduate education is scarce, and there have been no empirical studies that examine the effect of service-learning participation on honors undergraduates' locus of control. The current study aimed to determine whether 119 first-year undergraduate honors students experienced significant changes in their internal and external locus of control after completing required service-learning projects in Title 1 elementary schools. Paired-samples t-tests showed that participants' locus of control was significantly changed over time on two of the three dependent variables (i.e., internal, powerful others).*

The current study aims to fill a gap in the literature by examining the extent to which postsecondary honors students' engagement in a mandatory service-learning program, linking a course on the "Evolution of Community" to direct volunteerism in struggling schools, affects their locus of control. The theoretical construct of locus of control frames the analysis pre-/post-surveys administered to 119 participants. A discussion on the major findings in relation to previous research is provided with implications for further study.

## Review of Relevant Literature

### Social Learning Theory & Locus of Control

In social learning theory, Rotter (1966) posited that individuals' expectations are established and strengthened via reinforcements. Rotter (1966) emphasized that behavior is influenced not only by the reinforcement itself, but more importantly by the individual's perception of the relationship between his/her behavior and the reinforcement. "Locus of control," therefore, refers to whether an individual can acquire a reinforcement through his/her own abilities and efforts (i.e., internals), or if it flows from uncontrollable external factors (i.e., externals).

When a reinforcement is perceived by the subject as following some action of his own but not being entirely contingent upon his action, then, in our culture, it is typically perceived as the result of luck, chance, fate, as under the control of powerful others, or as unpredictable because of the great complexity of the forces surrounding him. When the event is interpreted in this way by an individual, we have labeled this a belief in external control. If the person perceived that the event is contingent upon his own behavior or his own relative permanent characteristics, we have termed this a belief in internal control. (Rotter, 1966, p. 1)

Under Rotter's (1966) original conceptualization, locus of control is bipolar and unidimensional, meaning that an individual has either one or the other locus of control. Other scholars have argued that locus of control is actually multidimensional, distinguishing between externals who attribute causation to chance/fate or powerful others (Hirsch & Scheibe, 1967; Joe, 1971; Levenson, 1974, 1975; Murels, 1970; Reid & Ware, 1973), and a continuum along which we may vary throughout life.

Key here is the relationship between one's locus of control and behavior. In particular, it is understood that one's perceived locus of control influences his/her specific goal expectancy in each situation (Weiner, 1992). For internals who believe individual skills and efforts determine outcomes, their selection to engage in, and their efforts during, future activities is correlated directly with if s/he perceived success or failure in previously similar activities (Rotter, 1975; Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972; Rotter & Hochreich, 1975; Rotter, Seeman, & Liverant, 1962). On the other hand, when individuals believe a situation will be determined by chance (i.e., external control), success and failure are beyond their control and expectancies change little following success or failure. Regardless, no persistent effort will be made by the individual.

Rotter postulated that understanding and predicting behavior is best accomplished by examining three factors in the social environment that affect various choices of behavior available to the individual. These factors are expectancy, reinforcement value, and the psychological situations. Expectancy and reinforcement value are based on the notion that

behaviors are goal-directed to attain or avoid particular outcomes, and that people will engage in behaviors for which they expect goals to be realized. Expectancy was defined by Rotter (1954) as the "probability held by the individual that a particular reinforcement will occur as a function of the specific behavior on his part in a specific situation or situations" (p. 107). That is, "behaviors determined by the degree to which people expect that their behavior will lead to goals" (Phares, 1976, p. 13). Reinforcement value refers to the degree of preference given to a stimulus that affects behavior, indicates preference for particular reinforcement, and is dependent on the "needs" of the individual at a time various reinforcements are available. The psychological situation refers to the environment in which the individual makes decisions. From this perspective, situational cues - other people present, social interaction, time of day, familiarity - and other factors will help determine the impact of expectancies and reinforcers.

### **Internal & External Locus of Control Characteristics**

From the many studies on locus of control that have been conducted over the past 50 years, a set of characteristics attributed to individuals with either an internally- or externally-oriented locus of control has emerged. Findings overall characterize internals as independent, resourceful, and goal-directed high-achievers who exhibit control over themselves and their environments. They tend to be more psychologically healthy, reporting less anxiety, greater ability to cope, and more motivation and assertiveness. Select findings from some of the most well-known studies are listed below.

- Control, not only over their own impulses (Joe, 1971; Lefcourt, 1976), but over their environments (Phares, 1976)
- Efficient learners and discerners of information (Lefcourt, 1966; Nowiki & Barnes, 1973; Seaman, 1963; Seaman & Evans, 1962)
- Goal-directed, higher aspirations, number of activities engaged in, and take greater initiative to attain goals, even if means deferring short term rewards (Joe, 1971; Miller, 1978; Nowiki & Barnes, 1973; Robinson & Shaver, 1973)
- Ability to deal with frustration and a willingness to remedy personal problems (Tolor & Reznikoff, 1967)
- Achievement-oriented (Freeman, Anderson, Kairey, & Hunt, 1982)
- Self-confidence and reduced anxiousness (Deery, 1983; Nunn, 1988)
- Leadership tendencies and performance (Anderson & Schneier, 1978; McCullough, Ashbridge, & Pegg, 1994)
- Actively work to improve their environment (Deery, 1983)
- Responsible for own actions and independent (Nunn, 1988)
- Positive relationship adjustment (Nowicki & Duke, 1983; Nunn, 1987)

In contrast, individuals with an external locus of control appear to function less effectively in society. More specifically, externally-oriented individuals often are less likely to report good mental health or emotional well-being. Externals tend to be anxious (Leung, Salili, & Baber, 1986; Tolor & Reznikoff, 1967), have lower global self-esteem (Hunter, J. & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003), and report greater depression (Lester, 1989; Siegel & Griffin, 1984; Topol & Reznikoff, 1982).



## Service-Learning, Experiential Education & Locus of Control

Studies of locus of control and service-learning are few and inconclusive. Myers-Lipton (1998) concluded that community service-learning groups gained significantly in their locus of control, while non-service-learning groups' scores stayed the same or declined. Drane (2001) found a statistically significant higher level of locus of control among college-aged students who participated in service-learning courses compared to students who have not participated. And, in a monograph for the National Service-learning Partnership on using research knowledge to advance service-learning, Billig (2005) found that students who participated in high-quality service-learning projects report greater internal locus of control than their nonparticipating peers. Qualifying the potential impact of service-learning on locus of control, McCarty and Hazelkorn (2001) reported that including a reflection component was the key to increasing locus of control between groups of service-learners, not just the service-learning activity itself. In contrast, Stevick and Addleman (1995) found no significant differences in pre-post locus of control between control and treatment groups following a short-term volunteer experience.

Related to service-learning, yet distinct in their design, implementation, and outcome expectations, are other experiential education programs. Similarly, few research studies have been conducted over the past 30 years on experiential education programs and locus of control. The available studies highlight that participation in experiential education programs resulted in more internally-oriented participants when compared to the control group (Newberry & Lindsay, 2000). Three meta-analyses on the impacts of experiential education programs on participants' locus of control have been conducted. Reporting effect sizes of .30 (Cason & Gillis, 1994; Hattie et al., 1997) and .38 (Hans, 2000) evidences that "subjects across studies become significantly more internal as a result of participation" (Hans, 2000, p. 33). When compared to residential (.40) and mixed residential/day programs (.53), however, Hans (2000) did find that day program participants, those most similar to the participants in the current study, reported the lowest effect size (.20).

## Research Question

To what extent does mandatory participation in a service-learning program, a combination of enrollment in a symposium on the "Evolution of Community" and direct service in local schools teaching Social Studies lessons, affect postsecondary honors students' internal and external locus of control?

## Methods

### Design & Sample

To investigate the impact of service-learning participation on locus of control, a one-group, quasi-experimental pretest-posttest research design was conducted with 119 freshman honors students enrolled in a service-learning program at a large public research-intensive university in the United States. There were 58 males (48.7%) and 61 females (51.3%) in the study sample. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of the student participants were Caucasian, 1% African American, 3% Asian American, and 12% Hispanic/Latino. Six percent of students represented other ethnic groups, including, but not limited to, Native American, Sub-Continent Indian, and Biracial. All students were over 18 years of age and consented to participating in the study per IRB guidelines.

### **Context: The Honors College**

The Honors College (pseudonym) aims to provide a challenging academic program and a foundation for future achievement to the most academically talented students by combining the intimacy of a small liberal arts college with the benefits of a large, metropolitan research university.

The College strives to create a diverse learning community that fosters the pursuit of excellence, a sense of social and civic responsibility, and a passion for life-long learning. Students are asked to participate in the learning experience instead of merely observing it, thereby developing their intellects in a way that will enhance them as thoughtful, productive, and creative individuals. These aims are succinctly stated in the College's goals:

1. achieve national prominence in Honors education;
2. foster academic excellence, personal growth, and civic responsibility in our students;
3. be the premier program to foster intellectual curiosity, creativity, and undergraduate research; and,
4. become more inclusive and diverse.

The Honors Program provides a special course of study to the most promising undergraduate students at the university. The program is a four-year course of studies that requires a minimum of 21 hours of Honors courses. These courses include Honors sections of General Education courses, upper-level Honors courses, and interdisciplinary seminars. Students are also required to attend Honors Freshmen Symposium in the semester in which they are admitted. Students who successfully complete the program graduate with University Honors distinction on their diplomas and transcripts.

### **Context: Honors Symposium and Service-Learning Project**

To prepare its graduates as socially responsible young women and men who fully understand the importance of being civically engaged, the Honors College requires that all first year students serve in public schools struggling to meet social studies standards. The Honors College therefore partnered with Junior Achievement which provides structured, standards-aligned lesson plans on the roles individuals, consumers, and workers play in an expanding cultural environment that extends from the self and family to global relations. Implicit in these lessons is that every student has the potential to succeed in life, regardless of his or her background or economic status. Junior Achievement maintains a database of K-12 teachers that have requested a volunteer and, therefore, could facilitate placement and training.

To prepare honors students for their service activities, representatives from Junior Achievement provided an orientation to the organization and training workshop on the curricula for the honors students during the third week of classes. At that time, honors students were walked through each of the five lessons in their curricular packets, so that any misunderstandings could be addressed at that time.

Honors students made six visits. The first visit was to orient the volunteers to the school and hosts, and the K-12 students to their service provider. The remaining five visits were to teach social studies lessons. Total volunteer time was 15 hours and included the teaching of the lessons, visits to the schools, and preparation.

Volunteer experiences were linked to "Evolution of Community" symposium. In this required first-semester course, students examine the historical, cultural and psychosocial development of "community" with a particular emphasis on how traditional notions of community

have been defined and redefined in the context of American history. All students meet once per week in a lecture class for two hours with the course instructor and team leaders. The role of group leaders was to help incoming students adjust to campus and college life, facilitate post-lecture discussions, encourage student involvement, and to lead meaningful reflective activities about service experiences. For the first hour, all students meet for a lecture by a guest faculty member. Students then divide into their small group led by an upper class honors team leader. Thirty minutes of the small group meetings are used to discuss the preceding lecture and connect it to service-learning experiences and course readings. The remaining time is then devoted to first-year orientation topics (e.g., services on campus, wellness issues, study habits). Group leaders present topics as well as answer questions from students. To facilitate the socialization process at the beginning of the semester, each group went on a field trip exclusive of course content.

Several assignments were related to service-learning activities. Throughout the semester, students had to complete service-learning reflection reports. Each report stemmed from a different prompt that required students to reflect critically on their experiential activities vis-à-vis course readings. At the end of the semester, students were to complete a summative reflection paper that synthesized their experiences, reactions, and readings across the entire semester and tie these conclusions to civic engagement and school reform. To ensure students' understanding of class readings, weekly online reaction postings to selected readings were required. These reactions were to enable students to move to a more critical discussion of their service-learning experiences in the reaction reports.

## Instrument

To measure students' locus of control, the Multidimensional Locus of Control Scale (MLCS; Levenson, 1973) was used. The MLCS is composed of three separate scales: Internal, Chance, and Powerful Others. Each scale has eight items. All items are presented to participants as one unified attitude scale of 24 items in a seven-point Likert format - from strongly disagree to strongly agree (from -3 to +3, including in the point of zero). A score on each scale is obtained by adding up points of the corresponding items and then adding a constant +24 to the total to eliminate negative values. An individual could, therefore, score high or low on all three dimensions simultaneously. High ratings on either the Powerful Others scale or the Chance scale indicate a strong external locus of control. If you rate high on the Powerful Others scale, you typically believe that your fate is controlled by other people; if you rate high on the Chance scale, you believe your fate is controlled by chance. High scores on the Internal scale indicate that respondents expect to have a high degree of control over their own lives.

The MLCS has acceptable-to-good reliability and validity evidence. Levenson (1974) found the test-retest reliability for this instrument to be .64 for the internal scale, .77 for the powerful other scale, and .78 for the chance scale. The current study found similar reliability alphas: .60 for the internal scale, .80 for the chance scale, and .79 for the powerful others scale. While the alpha of .60 for the internal scale, in particular, is concerning, the reliability estimate of the scores produced by the instrument is similar to those found in previous studies. As Gulliksen (1987) and DeVellis (2003) note, the reliability of scores is directly related to the number of items on the test, the quality of the items, and the magnitude of the item intercorrelations comprising the instrument.

In order to increase the reliability of .60 to .80 on the internal scale without changing or revising the items, the number of items on the instrument would have to be multiplied by 2.5

times (i.e. to 25 items). To this end, the low reliability estimates observed in this study (and others) appears to be an artifact of the instrument items rather than the sample. Regardless of these issues, and acknowledging that additional work is arguably necessary to develop a more reliable measure of locus of control, Luckner (1989) has noted that this instrument has among the highest reliability and validity evidence of all locus of control tests.

## Procedures

During the second class meeting, students over the age of 18 years were asked to complete an informed consent form that had been approved by the University's Institutional Review Board. Students were not required to participate, and their results were not connected to the instructor evaluations of students or student evaluations of instructional teams. Those willing to participate were asked to complete an online survey by the second week of class.

Participating students completed the same surveys during the penultimate class meeting. This was to ensure that students had completed all of their required service-learning hours and accompanying assignments. Pre- and post-responses on surveys were then matched by the last four digits of a student personal identification number (i.e., not social security number). Incomplete surveys and surveys without a pre- or post-match (less than 5% of total number of participants) were removed from the sample, leaving a final sample of 119. Responses were then coded following the coding instructions of the instrument, including reverse coding and summed totals.

## Data Analysis

Descriptive analyses were conducted to determine general information about the data. The descriptive statistics included measures of central tendency (e.g., means) and measures of dispersion (e.g., standard deviations) of the pre-test and post-test scores of the variables. To answer the research questions, paired-samples t-tests were calculated to determine overtime changes on each sub-scale measure of the MLOC. Cohen's *d* (1988) statistic was also calculated for effect sizes between the pre- and post-means on the DVs.

While MANOVA may be used to examine means between samples with multiple DVs simultaneously, it is not ideal when working with those variables whose pairwise correlations are  $> |.6|$  or  $< |.3|$  (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Pearson correlation coefficients were, therefore, computed to assess the relationship between the DVs. Intercorrelations among the DVs across pre- and post-test measures ranged between  $-.217$  and  $.594$ . These results support not using MANOVA as the analytic method.

## Results

### Descriptives

Participants' scores on the Internal Power subscale decreased by 4.87 points from pre-test ( $M=31.95$ ) to post-test ( $M=27.08$ ). Powerful Others scores also increased by 2.13 from pre-test ( $M=18.26$ ) to post-test ( $M=20.39$ ). Pre-test Chance scores ( $M=17.45$ ) increased by 0.97 points over time ( $M=18.42$ ).

## Paired-Samples t-Tests

Paired-samples t-tests (Table 1) reveals a highly significant difference and large practical effect (Cohen's  $d$ ) between the pre- and post-tests scores on the internal DV,  $t(118)=8.33$ ,  $p = 0.0005$ ,  $d = 1.53$ . The powerful others DV also showed a very significant overtime changes,  $t(118)=-3.15$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ,  $d = .58$ . In contrast, overtime changes on the chance DV were not significant at the .05 level,  $t(118)=-1.414$ ,  $p = 0.160$ ,  $d = .26$ .

Table 1

*Paired Samples Means and t-Test with Cohen's  $d$  (n=119)*

	Pre-test $M$	$SD$	Post-test $M$	$SD$	Means Diff.	$SD$	$t$	$df$	$Sig.$	$d$
Internal	31.95	6.23	27.08	6.14	-4.87	6.38	8.334	118	** .0005	1.53
Chance	17.45	8.16	18.42	8.92	0.98	7.52	-1.414	118	.160	.26
Powerful Others	18.26	8.32	20.39	7.46	2.13	7.36	-3.152	118	*.002	.58

Note. \* $p < .005$ , \*\* $p < .0005$

## Discussion

This study investigated first-semester honors postsecondary students' locus of control before and after completing service-learning, linking a course on the "Evolution of Community" to direct volunteerism in struggling schools. Results show that participants' internal locus of control decreased significantly, while external locus of control increased significantly. Although participants' internal locus of control scores were, and remained, higher than their external scores before and after the service-learning intervention, it is important to consider the role that service-learning may play on locus of control given the overtime changes.

Locus of control is interwoven with one's "attribution style." Attribution style determines to which forces an individual attributes success. Weiner (1974) reasoned that the concept of "locus of control" was misleading and, in fact, that locus and control should be considered two distinct dimensions. Weiner held that a person could have an internal or external locus, and yet believe that s/he either was or was not in control. For example, ability and efforts are both internal in their loci, but ability is uncontrollable and effort is controllable. Weiner's point, therefore, is that there actually are two independent dimensions of causality, and that Rotter's theory that individuals' expectations are established and strengthened via reinforcements may be limited in assuming that an internal locus always means that the person also is in control, and that an external locus always means that the person is not in control. Heider (1958) has postulated both personal (internal) and environmental (external) forces affect an individual's outcome expectations. Two factors make up personal force: power and motivation. "Power" refers to abilities, and "motivation" refers to one's intention or effort.

In terms of power or abilities in the current study, honors students arguably enter postsecondary studies with a high set of academic abilities. Their ability to understand the elementary civics material that they were asked to teach to K-5 learners should be high as well. Therefore, their sense of power or ability over the content should result in a high internal locus

of control. However, intertwined in service-learning is also the service activity in which one is engaged. For the honors students, the service comprised traditional teaching activities, or delivery of information by engaging young school-aged children. Such abilities would entail having pedagogical and child development knowledge, which one would not expect matriculating freshmen to habitually possess.

Given that a person enters a situation with expectancies concerning the probable outcomes of his/her behaviors based on past experiences, honors students might have entered the experience with heightened outcome impact expectations as students who grasp content easily or having been students of seasoned, effective teachers. The service-learners' abilities to present the information clearly, handle students in a classroom management situation, keep on schedule to the lesson, and organize information for learners at the different developmental stage might all adversely affect how they perceived their power/abilities in the end. And the fact that service-learners were engaged in underperforming schools should not be discounted, as it adds an additional element to complicate students' experiences and their understandings of these experiences.

This reading of the data parallels previous discussions of university honors' students reduced sense of efficacy following service-learning participation (e.g., Stewart, 2008). Simply put, abilities in service-learning comprise both knowledge of content and service activity. Discomfort in one may lower one's overall perception of his/her ability and ultimate internal control. Further, service implies that some need is being addressed. Sadly, most social issues or needs are likely to be steeped in histories of multilayered systems of inequity (Zinn, 2003). Students' experiences may be their first face-to-face experience with these realities, which in essence bursts their ontological bubble and opens their eyes to a world much more complex than they had experienced or even imagined. They may realize that their intelligence, hard work, and talents are necessary, but not alone sufficient for ultimate solutions. In this case, their sense of internal power would be reduced.

Another element affecting students' sense of power/abilities, and ultimately their internal locus of control, may be the dogmatic nature of the honors service-learning course. The honors service-learning program aimed to reduce any extra pressure and stress on first-year honors students by providing them with prefabricated lessons and logistical support. This external control extended beyond getting students established with service activities and placements. Each week that the course met, time was structured by the course instructors. The classes each began with announcements, followed by a lecture by a guest speaker, and ended with breakouts into small groups led by an honors peer. For assignments, students were provided prompts with identified course readings for each reflective essay. Students were not invited to introduce other materials, experiences, readings outside of those within the controlled course space. And, service-learners were constantly reminded of the strict dress code expectations and scheduled times for chartered buses to the service sites.

An essential consideration for high achieving honors students, in particular, is that they have surely had an academic career filled with messages of success. A less challenging, more comfortable service activity may diminish service-learners' receiving messages that others are unable to perform these particular tasks which would in turn build their personal perceptions of ability (Weiner, 1974).

Related to the inflexibility of the service-learning course, and the second internal locus of control element, is motivation or one's effort toward task. Although honors students are recognized for their high academic abilities, problem solving, creativity, and propensity to be bored when not challenged, these first year service-learners were not provided with

opportunities to select, create, or deviate from the actual service activity. If service-learners similarly read the service-learning course as prescriptive, it does run the risk of alleviating interest and buy-in by a group of students known to be creative and thirsty for leadership positions. Paralleling the issues of power diminution mentioned above, it may be possible that service-learners, upon realizing their limited role in affecting long-term change in their service settings and in their own course, simply go through the motions of a prescribed curriculum even more mindlessly.

Further, the provision of a cookie-cutter curriculum, process, approach, and expected learning outcomes removes a sense of causality from service-learners' involvement. They may see themselves as actors fulfilling a role by directors off-stage, and even internalize the attempt by course designers to lessen their stress as powerful others not seeing them as able. The difficulty for program designers is in striking a balance between trying to help students by taking on some of the burdensome preparatory tasks, and incorporating or retaining those elements that allow for positive personal development. Those programs that reduce the amount of student involvement seem to run the risk of sending a message of assumed incompetence to genuinely capable service-learners.

One difficulty in drawing conclusions from the current study, and arguably service-learning in general, is that researchers of locus of control do not agree whether the construct is a general disposition (Rotter, 1966) or situationally specific (Phares, 1976). They do agree that it reflects outcome expectations and that these outcome expectations are important determinants of achievement and other behaviors (Bandura, 1997). Locations of attributions are key as they are tied to motivation and influence beliefs, emotions, and behavior. Students who believe that they have control over their successes and failures, or a higher internal locus of control, would be expected to engage in tasks, expend effort, and persist to a larger degree more than those who have an external locus of control, and believe that their behaviors are hardly contingent on outcomes. In the case of service learning and civic engagement, a decrease in internal locus of control could arguably result in decreased beliefs, emotions, and behaviors in favor of volunteerism for other community engaged activities. Research shows that the most successful students have a tendency to overestimate the degree to which their own behavior leads to success or failure (Lefcourt, 1976). In fact, students report higher increases in self-confidence and personal efficacy, and are more interested in volunteering in the future, when they have ownership over the planning and implementation of their service-learning projects (Bradley, Eyler, Goldzweig, Juarez, Schlundt, & Tolliver, 2007; Spring, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006).

## Implications & Recommendations

Given the findings from this study and the related discussion points above, the following implications and recommendations are offered to honors program administrators and service-learning researchers. First, institutions that require newly matriculated honors students to engage in service-learning or other community-based learning experiences should consider how program design elements will impact students' locus of control. Echoing research on youth voice and positive youth development in particular, program structures and management might consider the level to which they want participants to have a say in their service-learning experiences. Specifically, students may have a greater role in identifying problems, pathways to address these issues, and even how to report their meaning-making from their experiences. While such extemporaneity is difficult with larger classes, prescribed approaches carry a message of normalizing education to students who are used to thinking outside of the box. It is

advised that programs also think strategically about matching these elements to the course theme itself. Whereas the theme of this course was on “community,” the general approach to the course seemed top-down and, ironically, could have played a role in the changes in students’ locus of control scores.

To better understand the phenomena at work in these programs, it is recommended that future research utilize a mixed-methods design when possible. By adding a qualitative data set, it would increase the opportunity to determine and explain the sources of students’ attributions (i.e., effort vs. ability). In addition, longitudinal time series designs would permit researchers to make more definitive statements on how service-learning may impact locus of control over time. Future data may also illustrate how students’ internal or external locus of control manifests in terms of civic engagement. Lastly, the addition of a control group would permit more immediate and definitive comparisons between peers of similar ages, abilities, and experiences during their first year at university.



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## ABSTRACT

*This article is based on a keynote presentation delivered at the Alabama Poverty Project Lifetime of Learning Summit at the University of Montevallo on September 30, 2011. Conference organizers asked for the perspective of a survivor of a significant natural disaster, for information regarding Louisiana's recovery from hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the short- and long-term, and for advice on rebuilding and recovery within the framework of poverty eradication. This paper details the author's experiences in the 2005 hurricanes and lessons learned through subsequent community-engagement efforts.*

# ***Community at the Center of the Storm***

*Marybeth Lima*

Before hurricane Katrina, I was steady and confident in my job as an associate professor in the department of biological & agricultural engineering at LSU. I had been doing service-learning since 1998, and I worked very closely with the staff from the Center for Community Engagement, Learning and Leadership, or CCELL. In working closely with CCELL and with my community, I had developed the LSU Community Playground Project.

I teach a required, first-year biological engineering design course in which my students partner with local public elementary schools to work with the true experts at play, the children at the schools, to develop dream playground designs at those schools. My class consists of two to three sections of students, and each section is assigned a separate public school. College students work collaboratively in teams of three to four people with the elementary school students, teachers, and school administrators, and sometimes parents or school improvement teams, to develop playground designs. They present their designs, get resulting input from community partners, make design changes accordingly, and complete a design report (and poster detailing their design, which resides at the school). In this way, each school has seven to nine different designs for a new playground.

After the semester ends, my playground research and design team continues to collaborate with partner schools to consolidate the different design ideas into a single one, and to develop fundraising and grant writing plans to obtain the funding necessary to build the playground. Once this occurs, we typically install the playground design on a volunteer basis; approximately one-third of my students return as volunteers to build the playground that they helped to design on paper.

In July 2005, I had begun a sabbatical with the governor's office, trying to figure out ways to bring better play spaces to public schools at the state level. After hurricane Katrina, my sabbatical plans were finished. I never met with the governor's office contact again; in a phone call shortly after the storm, he said that all focus had shifted to recovery efforts, and I was done.

I am a survivor of the edge of Hurricane Katrina, and I know that it was not even close to the same as going through the guts of that huge storm. What struck me about going through it, time and time again, was the interesting ways in which the kindness of people, to those they knew, but especially to those that they didn't, spun off into a fabric that sheltered many of us with the best of humanity through our experiences. Although this kindness didn't happen for everyone in some very notable ways, here are several examples:

- Louisiana is known as the sportsman's paradise, and in parts of south Louisiana, there are as many boats as cars. Lots of places in our state are accessible only by boat. As soon as the last of the winds blew through New Orleans, the folks with boats in south Louisiana who were not impacted by the storm, those in Cajun country, marshaled their resources and resolve and set sail for New Orleans. In the week following Katrina, this group of men and women and their boats plucked some 9,000 people from rooftops and other flooded structures and delivered them safely to dry land. This group of people is known as the Cajun navy. I am confident that they did more to keep the death toll of the storm down than any other single action in the aftermath of Katrina.
- My mother retired to Long Beach, Mississippi in the spring of 2004; she bought a house from my next door neighbor's mother, who was a real estate agent for coastal Mississippi. My mother evacuated to Baton Rouge to stay with us two days before Katrina; my next door neighbor's family stayed behind in Pass Christian, MS. They had survived hurricanes Betsy and Camille, so why not this one? By the time they decided to heed the mandatory evacuation order, it was about eight hours before the storm reached the Mississippi coastline, and strong wind and rain bands were already pelting the area. They drove eight miles in three hours on congested roads before deciding to take up a stranger on an offer she had made through the friend of a friend, a woman who owned a double wide trailer in Poplarville, Mississippi, and let it be known that anyone stranded on the road was welcome there. My neighbor's parents pulled into that rural place in pitch darkness, torrential rain, and snapping pine trees. The woman walked out into the storm to greet them and to help bring in their bags. There were almost 20 people inside that trailer and the woman had prepared a smorgasbord of fried everything for her guests. The trailer rocked, rattled, and shook all night, and cracking trees were a constant aural companion, as was wind and rain. "I had lost my appetite, and I wasn't eating a thing," my neighbor's father said, "but I was so thankful to that woman. She didn't even know us, and she saved our lives."

Katrina was a complicated storm; I've heard people say that Katrina was two storms, and I think that's true in so many ways: the Katrina that hit south Florida, and the one that hit Louisiana; the "direct impact" Katrina (the tip of southern Florida, coastal Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama) and the "indirect impact" Katrina (levee failure in New Orleans); the Katrina that affected the poor, and the Katrina that affected the affluent.

In Baton Rouge, we prepared for Katrina as we did for any hurricane, by battening down all things that could move (potted plants, lawn furniture, etc.) and stocking up on non-perishable supplies. Katrina hit in the middle of the night and went on for many hours. We listened to



branches raining down on the roof, but the windows didn't break. When the TV went out that morning, I turned on the battery-powered radio and tuned in to NPR - the station wasn't there. Late August and early September is the height of hummingbird season in Baton Rouge; during this time, millions of ruby throated hummingbirds grace our communities on their way to Central America. I left up a hummingbird feeder away from the house and the birds fed there throughout the storm. Katrina picked up and flung 110 ton pieces of concrete bridge in the same storm that tiny hummingbirds navigated with seeming ease.

The aftermath of Katrina was very different from hurricanes I'd experienced during my nine years in Louisiana at that point; we had no cell phone communication for two days, no power for three days, no gasoline available for five days, and an acute gas shortage for five weeks thereafter. Our population doubled within a period of approximately two weeks.

A good friend of ours named Dorothy lived in a remote area about 15 miles from Baton Rouge. She called us on our land line on our third day without power and invited us to her house. We jumped at the invitation, not just because of her company, but because somehow, she had power. The night before Dorothy called, when we had gone to sleep in our house, the temperature inside the house was 87.3° F; when we woke that morning, it was 83.7° F. Having the chance to cool off and to consume a meal that didn't consist of non-perishables vaulted us into the car.

Once there, Dorothy told us that Bogey Boudreaux, her neighbor across the street, had saved the day. Bogey was retired from the power company and still owned all the tools from his trade. Hours after Katrina made its way through the area, Bogey, in a highly illegal move, shimmied up the power pole on their street, repaired the blown out transformer, and the whole street had had power ever since. Dorothy reported that because of his actions, she was finally willing to forgive Bogey for shooting a wild turkey in her front yard on Thanksgiving Day in 2002. Dorothy is an animal lover, and at the time of the shooting, she informed Bogey that he'd probably shoot a reindeer in her yard on Christmas, that he'd better not hunt in her yard again, and that she was officially mad at him. Time and natural disasters can heal many wounds.

We reveled in the air conditioning and enjoyed a home cooked lunch of pasta and summer vegetables; our revelation turned to horror when after lunch, Dorothy turned on the TV. I will never forget the images of flooded New Orleans. The full impact of the broken levees really didn't hit us until we saw the pictures; Dorothy was also hosting two people from New Orleans whose houses were among flooded dwellings depicted. That devastation, in addition to my mother not knowing about her house, made for everyone's emotions being all over the place<sup>1</sup>.

Once we got our power back on and cleaned up our debris, I began looking outward for ways to assist with the unprecedented efforts going on to serve survivors of the hurricanes. I did several stints of volunteer work, most notably at the Parker Coliseum on the LSU campus, which had been turned into a staging area for pets who had been evacuated as a result of the storm. Evacuees could drop off their pets or could call in to the Center to ask volunteers to travel to their homes, break in, and rescue their pets. Additionally, any rescue worker who picked up pets could drop them off at the Coliseum.

This volunteer experience produced my most haunting Katrina moment, one I will never forget. On the way into the Coliseum, volunteers had to check in and fill out paperwork. My partner Lynn and I were dutifully writing when I noticed the wall behind the people checking us in. On this wall, there hung approximately 150 Polaroid pictures, which formed a huge poster of sorts. Every single Polaroid picture featured a pet, with tags and with a name. On the white space under every single picture were the words, "owner missing." To see the normal scenario of people looking for animals turned upside down was unnerving; to see it on such a grand scale

was unsettling in a way that is difficult to articulate even now. Experiencing the wall of animals without people opened a chamber in my heart that had no defenses. I cried and could not stop, not while I toured the facility and became familiar with the volunteer jobs (walking animals especially, to keep them out of their crates for a time and to give them fresh air and exercise) and the concerns of the Center, especially heat, and especially with elderly animals.

We were led to the back area of the Coliseum, where animals were initially dropped off in droves before being sorted into individual crates; in a row of stalls intended for individual livestock, 10-30 dogs were roaming around per stall. We arrived at the Coliseum for the first time during a single, magical 24-hour window in which, if the staff were absolutely sure that an animal was a stray, they allowed people to adopt the animal.

Lynn and I had already had the conversation on our way to the Coliseum in case adoption was a possibility; our first choice was to foster a dog, preferably a little one and an older one, whom we thought would fit in best with our five cats and dog at home. Alternatively, we could adopt one with the same profile. Lynn and I looked down opposite sides of the row of stalls; I spotted a plump Jack Russell terrier, clearly someone's dog and an outstanding foster candidate, and had just taken a breath to tell Lynn to come and look, when I heard, "Oh honey, LOOK..." in a voice I knew well, the voice of my partner in love. So I went to look; an interestingly patterned, skinny puppy with long legs was trying to hurl its body through an opening half the size of a brick in order to wrap itself around Lynn's hand. Two Coliseum volunteers came up behind us and expertly extracted the dog from the hoard in the stall. The stray dog plastered itself to Lynn's legs, and it was all over: no Jack Russell terrier, no foster situation, no small, older dog that would fit in with our other animals. The volunteers knew a tiny amount about the dog: she had been rescued by boat from St. Tammany parish and was definitely a stray.

"What kind of dog is it?" we asked, and they informed us that it was a Catahoula hound dog (also known as a Catahoula Leopard dog).

"Is that a good dog?" I asked. Both graced me with big smiles - too big smiles, I remember thinking, as they said, "Oh YES, Catahoulas are GREAT DOGS!" I finally managed to stop crying.

We named our new dog Hurricane, in honor of the storm. Dumb, dumb, dumb. There is an adage about how things will live up to their names, and in this case, it certainly proved true. We later tried to change her name to Sugarcane, but it just didn't stick. Hurricane curled up in Lynn's lap and rode quietly home with us after our day at Parker Coliseum. It is the only time she has curled up and been quiet since.

We did a little research on Catahoulas; they are believed to be a cross between dogs brought to Louisiana by explorer Hernando De Soto and dogs kept by Native Americans. They are high energy, working dogs and historically were used for hunting and herding. Though they are not recognized by the American Kennel Club as an official breed, the Catahoula is most definitely recognized here: it is the official state dog of Louisiana.

Hurricane has brought a lot of joy to our household. She keeps the cats on their toes. She chases squirrels, rabbits, possums, snakes, turtles, and any other wildlife that shows up in the backyard; most often, she chases our other dog. Her favorite spot to sit in the backyard is on top of the riding lawn mower, unless it's wintertime, in which case she graces the top of the hot tub cover. Ultimately, Hurricane is a force to be reckoned with; not counting normal expenses associated with keeping a dog (food, vet, medicine, etc.), she has cost us more than any hurricane-related insurance claim we have ever made in terms of items she's chewed through. Listen to this list and hum to the tune of 12 days of Christmas<sup>2</sup>:

- A Western suede sweater jacket
- 2 hot tub power cords
- 3 hot tub covers
- 4 seat cushions
- 5 hose pipes (that's a hose for anyone living outside of LA)
- 6 hummingbird feeders
- 7 pairs of shoes
- 10 pairs of silicon ear plugs
- 22 pairs of goggles

After getting Hurricane the dog situated in our house (even though it was really the other way around, with the house situating around the dog), we continued to work with other Coliseum staff volunteers, one in particular, who kept “breaking out” elderly dogs and getting them into foster situations so that the dogs wouldn’t die of heat exhaustion. One evening, Dorothy came to our house to meet one of these dogs, a 16-year-old Brittany spaniel named Annie. She was frantic and kept running this way and that, searching for her family, or so it seemed. It took about an hour, but Dorothy, who with red hair looked a little like the dog herself, was slowly able to calm the dog down by constantly speaking gently to her, taking control of the leash and walking increasingly slowly, and finally, when the dog collapsed, sitting down next to her and petting her until the dog climbed into her lap and curled up, still panting a little, but calm for the first time since she had arrived at the Coliseum. Dorothy took Annie home to foster until she was reunited with her family approximately eight months later.

It was tiny miracles like these, and acts of kindness, that restored my faith in humanity. In Louisiana, we use the word Lagniappe: it means a little bit extra for free. In the aftermath of the hurricanes, it seemed like everyone gave a little extra for free.

I witnessed so many every day heroes, from Cecile Guin, who broke out almost ten elderly dogs from the Coliseum and got them into successful foster homes, to the people like Dorothy who took them in, to so many of our friends who took in families, to all the people from outside Louisiana who asked us, “What can we send?” Our answer after volunteering at Parker Coliseum was to send fans; we delivered some half dozen to the Coliseum over the period of a couple of weeks.

I volunteered to organize school supplies that had been sent from all over the nation to kids affected by both hurricanes. We opened boxes, sorted materials, and put them in logical order so that teachers and schools could share them with the children in their classrooms who had evacuated from the hurricanes. Our group of ten volunteers had several emotional moments as we unpacked boxes sent from individuals and classrooms all over the United States. I won’t forget one box in particular: a Boy Scout troop had filled a number of backpacks with school supplies, coloring books, action figures, and other toys, some new, but some which had obviously been beloved. It was the notes in those back packs that were so poignant, written in crayon, many with illustrations, and with short messages like, “Hang in there, dude,” or “We’re pulling for you, man.”

It is that kind of effort - the rally cry in crayon - the lagniappe effort that doesn’t necessarily take all day every day, the one with a single purpose in mind, from the heart, that when taken cumulatively, becomes Herculean. It’s not that you set out to change the world, you just set out to impact someone’s life, someone that you may not know, but who needs your assistance, and you reach out and do something. And when you take into account everyone’s

collective efforts, in essence, it does change the world, and for the better. This is the best part of what I experienced about hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Although I was privileged to see the best of humanity, this state of affairs was not the only one, and in no way takes away from the ever present storms of fear, violence, lack of resources, and profit motive that drove many tragedies in the aftermath, like the Danziger Bridge, the ordeal of Charmaine Neville, the Superdome, and the Convention Center. Or, a little further down the road, big insurance companies, that in the words of Don McLean (1971), “caught the last train for the coast,” in other words, which came first, the wind or the surge, and yes, you’ve been paying your insurance, but no, we’re not going to honor your claim. People who expressed sentiments like, “They (the evacuees) are taking down our neighborhood,” or “New Orleans has been cleansed.” Media reports stating that White survivors of the hurricanes took items that they needed to survive from stores, while Black survivors looted. The Red Cross sticking its collective hands out like a layer of clouds above us, collecting a large percentage of the aid money coming this way, and diverting a percentage of it elsewhere. The Red Cross “ran” a shelter in north Louisiana in name only, with the LSU AgCenter footing all the bills - the Red Cross contributed their name, took 100% of the credit, and left the AgCenter with 100% of the expenses. The toxic trailers supplied to evacuees by FEMA; Chinese drywall; international construction workers who were brought in to rebuild New Orleans and were cheated of their earnings; the amount of federal recovery money steered to states based on the political party affiliation of that state’s governor.

It is difficult to hold all the hope and despair wrought by these hurricanes in your heart at the same time. Or, as novelist Ann Pancake (2007) wrote, “In times like these, you have to grow big enough inside to hold both the loss and the hope.”

Louisianians did what they tend to do: they scrapped and survived. And they laughed. The first shops that re-opened in the French Quarter post-Katrina sold T-shirts that said things like: “FEMA evacuation plan: run motherfucker, run,” or “I survived hurricane Katrina and all I got was this T-shirt, and this Cadillac, and this plasma TV.” For the less irreverent ilk, a favorite motto was, “New Orleans: Proud to Swim Home.”

My most haunting memory from hurricane Rita reminds me of pictures I’ve seen in National Geographic magazine. In early December 2005, Lynn and I drove to Cameron parish to observe the great diversity of birds in the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge. As soon as we drove south on Route 27 from the interstate, we were met by mile after mile of blackened, dead marsh grass. The birds were almost non-existent, and the Wetland Walkway was closed, as it would remain for more than two years. About ten miles down the road, we came around a bend and saw a double wide trailer in an expansive yard; debris from the trailer and from places unknown was strewn across the yard in tornado-style wreckage. In this yard were three people: a man and a woman, who were working together, deliberately placing twisting siding in a pile toward the back end of the property, and a little boy who was maybe six years old.

It is the boy who stands out so clearly in my mind; it was sunny and cold that morning - it might have been 50 degrees, but no higher. The boy had on green rubber boots, a red and blue bathing suit, and nothing else. Mud streaked his bare chest, and sun lit his short blonde hair. He was standing at the front of the property, amidst the rubble, a small bucket in one hand and a shovel in the other. He appeared to be surveying his surroundings, maybe trying to decide where his tiny shovel should next grace the ground.

These are the people of Louisiana. Whether in southeast or southwest Louisiana, people were out there, with heads up and hands down, maybe overwhelmed, but out there, with buckets, shovels, and gloves, toiling together, trying to clean up.

As I look back at the hurricanes some six years later, I know that I am not the same person I was, that many communities are not what they were, and that Louisiana as a state has not recovered in all the ways I hoped that it might. The sad truth is that Louisiana is even more vulnerable to hurricanes like Katrina and Rita now than it was in 2005, and the sadder truth is that we have the knowledge to effectively address this vulnerability, but not the resources. Recovery is a slow, steady process at times, and works in fits and starts at others. All I can say is that Louisiana is on that road, marching to a tune that is part Zydeco, part Catahoula hound dog, and all heart.

\* \* \* \*

I was asked to provide y'all with advice as you recover from a significant natural disaster. I struggled with this concept before realizing that I cannot give you advice - it's because I sat in your seat some five and a half years ago, and there was plenty of advice going around, often from the outside and often uninformed - well intentioned, but uninformed. Advice is hard to hear when the advice-givers have swooped in from DC or NY to tell you their "expert" opinions. The message, overtly or covertly, is "We know how to do it, and you don't," or "We're going to tell you how to do it because we have the money, and you don't."

When the advice-givers haven't seen the roiling skies, heard the high winds whistling through unseen air holes in their homes, or heard the freight train sound of a tornado; when their ears haven't popped from pressure drop even as they stand on the ground; when they haven't flinched as a tree walloped a roof or broke a window, or huddled in fear wondering if they would make it, or searched for their neighbors in the aftermath - part of their message falls flat.

I remember listening to outside experts and trying to take the useful things from their messages, but I also felt resentful. When you haven't gone through it, there's a piece of you that very simply doesn't get it.

I get Katrina and Rita. Although I understand parts of what happened in Alabama between April 26 and 29, 2011, I don't understand everything. You can identify with the tornadoes because you experienced them - and you live in this community, the community of Alabama. Those two important, salient points, so often overlooked in the aftermath of hurricanes in Louisiana, give you a critically important perspective. You are the experts by virtue of your experience and your knowledge of place - and because of that, I will not give you advice. It would be absolutely arrogant for me to even try.

All I can do is to share the five things I learned as a result of going through hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and my experiences in subsequent recovery efforts. It's up to you to translate the parts of this message into what will work in your communities, because y'all are the experts.

First, I learned that my experiences with the hurricanes were shaped largely by my previous work with community engagement. Every community has a trench, a place in which people hunker down together to address needs that bolster the common good. Because of my history in working with my community, I knew the shape of that trench and how to connect to it. I knew the strengths and weaknesses of my community and whos to contact to find out the best ways in which to contribute my energy.

Y'all know the shape of the trench of your community, and the fact that you do makes your contributions to recovery especially important. Talmage Stanley, the Director of the Appalachian Center for Community Service at Emory and Henry College in VA, writes extensively about place. I had the honor of hearing him speak, and he said best what I learned about the importance of that trench after the hurricanes: "Yet here these places have taught

me, continue to teach me, and can begin to teach us all a way through. These places teach us about ourselves, teach us about what it means to teach, teach us what is necessary in order to enter into the work of building alliances and coalitions to address these critical issues. From these places, I am learning what it means to be a citizen of a place, to have my mind and my teaching shaped in that place, to see better what it means to link meaningfully service and learning, and why it is so urgent that we do.

The defining characteristic of a citizenship of place is attentiveness to the totality of the place - its natural history and life, its built environment, the complexities and conflicts of its human history and culture. Our places need people who are prepared to see and to understand the world from the perspective of a place, to have a deep attentiveness to all the realities of a place.” (Stanley, 2011).

In my opinion, these people are you. This place needs you.

Second, I learned not to wait. I was able to meet with the LSU Foundation shortly after hurricane Katrina; I wanted to ask some of the major playground manufacturers if they had equipment that they were willing to donate to hurricane survivors in Baton Rouge or in New Orleans (through my service-learning contacts there). There was a lot of discussion on timing, and the Foundation thought that we should wait six weeks before asking because they didn't want to look like they had their hand out or that they were trying to take advantage of the situation. When I sent my requests six weeks later, every play company had already sent their donated equipment. I spent a long time chasing that playground equipment, and I never caught up with it. Political strategist Donna Brazile, a Louisiana native who doggedly worked President Bush and congress after the hurricanes to ensure that we had our share of federal resources to recover, says: “We're waiting for someone to tell us that it's okay to go through the door. Don't wait for someone to tell you. Find the envelope. Open it. Walk to the elevator. Push the button. Ride it.” (Brazile, 2011).

Third, I learned to work on short-term and long-term goals simultaneously, and the absolute importance of both. After hurricane Katrina, a number of community groups working on children's issues formed the YK coalition. YK stood for Why Katrina (and/or Youth of Katrina, the coalition left the name open for interpretation deliberately) - this group approached me to design a playground inside Renaissance Village.

Renaissance Village was a temporary housing community created immediately after Hurricane Katrina to house survivors of the hurricane; it was located in Baker, Louisiana, about 10 miles North of Baton Rouge, and was home to approximately 1600 people (including 637 children) in the months after the hurricane.

The YK Coalition and other community groups collaborated with FEMA, who was in charge of Renaissance Village, in an effort to positively impact the quality of life for hurricane survivors. Our efforts stalled when it came to the playground because FEMA said that the presence of a playground would encourage people to stay in the temporary community. Renaissance Village consisted of crude blocks of trailers and had no community gathering spaces initially; it was enclosed by tall barbed-wire fence and the only entry and exit point sported armed guards. It was difficult to imagine that even with basic support services, including playgrounds, anyone would elect to stay in the Spartan, temporary community.

The community groups decided to work on short- and long-term goals simultaneously. They addressed the short-term issue by working with Baker mayor Harold Rideau to build a playground for hurricane survivors that was adjacent to (but not inside) Renaissance Village. At the same time, the community groups continued to lobby FEMA to build support services, including playgrounds, inside Renaissance Village. Ultimately, both efforts paid off; the

Renaissance Playground was constructed adjacent to Renaissance Village in April, 2006, and three playgrounds were constructed inside Renaissance Village in September, 2006. Short- and long-term goals, simultaneously.

Fourth, I learned Ken Reardon's edict regarding community engagement: "Generally, we're taught the steps "ready, aim, fire" in terms of accomplishing something. That approach doesn't work in community engagement. If you do proceed through the steps "ready" and "aim" in community engagement, by the time you get to "fire," 90% of the people you started with are dead, and the other 10% are so tired that they don't have the energy left to do anything. In community engaged work, you fire first. Fire and figure out where to aim the stream while it's moving, and forget about ready. If you want to get anything done in community engagement, "fire, aim, ready" is a much better approach."

As I look back at the hurricanes, I'm really glad that the Cajun Navy decided to fire first. I'm glad that Bogey Boudreaux shimmied up the power pole and got his little corner of the community functioning more quickly. When FEMA and community groups were locked in a stalemate over whether or not playground and support services construction would be allowed in Renaissance Village, a famous Louisiana-based company that was providing other services in Renaissance Village decided to hell with the stalemate. They poured a concrete slab and built a basketball court in the middle of the night, and dared FEMA to tear it down. FEMA did not; the basketball court quickly became a cherished community gathering place.

Finally, I learned about the importance of questions. Questions haunted me after hurricane Katrina and still haunt me today. And yet, the act of constructing and answering hard questions, and doing so together, in that trench in which we hunker down to impact the common good, is critically important. It is what we must do to address natural disasters, and to eradicate poverty. It is, in short, our life's work. These are some of my questions:

- One year prior to Hurricane Katrina, I learned about the prediction of 100,000 people dying in New Orleans if the levees broke. I remember thinking to myself, "Wow, that's terrible," and then going back to life as usual. How could I have done that?
- How could the Army Corps of Engineers have known that the levee was breached at the Industrial Canal in May, 2005 and not fixed it?
- My friend Jan Shoemaker, director of LSU's CCELL during hurricane Katrina, remembers thinking, "Boy, I wish that everyone who had been involved in evacuation planning prior to the hurricanes had had a really good service-learning class, because evacuation plans would have been created with community input. Good citizens would have bothered to ask the elderly and other community members with evacuation challenges, "Would you leave without your pet?" and would have made accommodations accordingly."

I've learned to watch out for false dualisms in questions that others construct, and to "call them on it," for example:

- Which is more important, serving our students or our community?
- Which should we choose, creating jobs now or saving our environment later?

Questions that haunt me today run something like this:

- Approximately 25% of all the nation's exports and imports come through our state; we provide 33% of all seafood to this country, and more than a third of oil and natural gas. Every person living in the United States is connected to Louisiana through the bountiful food and energy resources we provide, but providing these resources has cost us land and has taken an environmental toll. The Louisiana Recovery Act of 1990, a \$14B research-based, sound plan to fix our coast, re-build land, and shore up levies, has never been even close to fully funded. The property damage from Hurricane Katrina was \$81B. The property damage from Hurricane Rita was \$11B. This is property damage only, it doesn't take into account the more than 2000 people who lost their lives in these combined storms or the damage to the environment. By not funding the Recovery Act, Congress is saying that it is too expensive, and by extension, that the negative ramifications our state suffers in order to provide resources to the nation, is not the nation's responsibility. How can that be?
- 95-97% of all experts in atmospheric science agree that climate change is real, and that we've got to do something about it. And there are clearly defined, research-based paths for doing so. We know that one effect of climate change is more frequent natural disasters like tornados and hurricanes. How do we stand in the face of all this and do nothing?
- Will the hurricanes of 2005 and the tornadoes of 2011 be remembered or paid attention to if the frequency of natural disasters becomes so prevalent that community devastation is commonplace and therefore unremarkable?
- What will we do?
- What do we need to do?

In summary, those are the five things I learned: The importance of the community trench (the rally cry in crayon); don't wait; work on short- and long-term goals simultaneously; fire, aim, ready; ask and answer questions.

If I look at Louisiana then and now (and in Louisiana we use the terms "before Katrina" and "after Katrina"), some opportunities for improvement were seized. There now exist organized, codified evacuation plans for people with or without animals, and there now exist sophisticated communication networks for disaster preparation. Some universities made a great impact in the state through service-learning and community-university partnerships<sup>3</sup>.

Other opportunities have not been seized. The poverty rate in Louisiana is still high and is currently rising; some neighborhoods have never been re-built after the storms. And as stated previously, Louisiana is still as vulnerable to hurricanes as ever.

Research done in Louisiana in the aftermath of the storms by my friend Betsy Garrison and some of her colleagues (Garrison & Sasser, 2009; Knowles et al., 2009) led to the following maxims<sup>4</sup> on community recovery from natural disasters:

- Make people the priority
- One size doesn't fit all (and FEMA trailers fit no one)
- Ensure cultural competence
- Hope rules and humor helps



They also write (Garrison & Sasser, 2009),

“Families are the bedrock of society. In the event of a disaster, resources that keep families strong are often less readily available or diminished, rendering families vulnerable. When families are vulnerable, communities can become vulnerable. Therefore, the commitment to policies, resources, and practices that result in sustainable communities must also include the intentional and programmatic development of stronger, healthier, and resilient families.”

I'd like to leave you with a story that happened after the hurricanes. Although it has nothing to do with a natural disaster, the lesson I took from it is my metaphor for community engagement.

I collaborated with Twin Oaks Elementary School on a playground for their school. The original playground had three pieces of equipment, one of which was located far away from the other two pieces. My students and I nicknamed this artifact “the gate to nowhere,” because that's what it appeared to be.

We later learned that the gate provided an entry to play equipment that had once been part of the playground, but had been removed due to age. The school principal didn't know why the gate had not been removed when the play equipment was, but she told us that the gate was still used during recess. A teacher had created a game in which the children would line up in front of the gate. The teacher asked each child in line where in the universe they wanted to go, and when the child had thought of a suitable place, the teacher told that child to run through the gate, and for that child to yell where they were going as they ran through it.

I then realized that what my students and I had nicknamed the “gate to nowhere” was actually the kids' “portal to anywhere.” I also realized that the Twin Oaks Elementary staff was determined to enhance the hopes, dreams, and imaginations of their students, despite a lack of playground equipment. We upgraded the Twin Oaks playground by adding swings, slides, climbers, a rock wall, and a balance beam. We removed two pieces of old equipment. And we left the gate: the portal to anywhere is still a part of the Twin Oaks playground.

Sometimes, when I look into my community, I see gates to nowhere. I try to remember that with a little ingenuity, a little teamwork, and with a lot of caring, that we can turn gates to nowhere into portals to anywhere.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> My mother's house was amazingly intact; she had lost her back fence, shingles, shutters, and roof façade. Her dwarf magnolia tree was upended in her front yard. We put the fence back up, re-planted the tree (which lived and has now almost doubled in size), found the shutter and re-hung it, and re-shingled the roof. We never found the façade, and she had that replaced professionally. My mother experienced a case of survivor guilt; as she lived some three miles inland (north of the famous railroad tracks), her house didn't take any water. Her house was also a year old and had been built in accordance with the most recent building codes. Across the street from her, houses had come off their foundations; one small business caddy corner to her house was nothing but a frame. Almost everyone who attended her church had lost everything; one of her church friends found her house in a neighbor's pool. My mother's house became the gathering place for the members of her church, many of whom stayed with her on an on-going, rotating basis. For Christmas that year, they made her a blanket that said, "Kay's Bed & Breakfast" to thank her. I think that moving back to Long Beach while it was still essentially a ghost town (especially for the quarter mile inland from the beach, which was razed), serving the people who knew her to the best of her ability, and practicing random acts of kindness, like seeing people waiting outside in unrelenting sun in a Red Cross line, going to the grocery store, buying bottles of water, and then passing them out to people in line, says a lot about my mother's character. The way her house came through Katrina says a lot about the importance of building codes and keeping up with them.

<sup>2</sup>Other assorted items that don't fit the song include the riding lawn mower seat, a wet suit, a queen sized memory foam mattress cover, two full length pool floats, and three kickboards.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.servicelearning.org/library/resource/8869> and <http://tulane.edu/cps/> for further information on service-learning efforts directed at state-wide recovery in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

<sup>4</sup>These are a sample of maxims and recommendations; for the full list developed by these researchers, please consult the references.

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