

Service Learning of An Inmate Re-entry Program In An Urban Commuter University

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ABSTRACT

The pedagogy of a service-learning course is applied in a large urban commuter university to explore the impact of a service-learning course on upper-level students. The study population was engaged in an inmate re-entry program, and students were placed in non-profit re-entry agencies. Results show changes in students' perception of offenders during the re-entry process. Furthermore, students' empathy and understanding of the re-entry population indicate internal changes from fundamental offender-based thinking. Offering a Recovery Coach training opportunity seems to positively impact student self-awareness while providing an essential resource to non-profit community agencies.

Public universities were created in the 1860s with the belief that they would serve the needs of their communities. However, universities have evolved into insulated entities using a traditional lecture-based pedagogy. The growth in experiential learning programs suggests that universities may finally begin to fulfill the promise of their original mission. Not only do these programs have the potential to benefit the community, but a growing body of literature has also found that students benefit more from an experiential learning experience than traditional classroom instruction (Hawtrey, 2007; Bradberry & De Maio, 2019; Nikzad-Terhune & Taylor, 2020).

The AACU documents several high-impact practices that help with student success at the undergraduate level (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2022). This list includes many practices that have become popular in the past few years and are present in the current study. Service-Learning and Community based learning are often experiential-based learning components that allow students to give back to the community while applying what they are being taught in the classroom. Capstone courses are required in some degree programs as the concluding

course in the degree plan in which soon-to-be graduates can apply their knowledge to a specific issue. Collaborative assignments and projects have students working together to solve a problem, complete an assignment, or complete other parts of a course. Writing-intensive courses have structured writing components in the course, in which feedback from the professor and revision from the student is expected. These high-impact teaching practices allow an instructor to reach a student on a different plane than that of a traditional lecture or seminar format. Students are gaining the knowledge and learning to apply it in real-world settings or gaining the knowledge in a different form than they are used to. As such, learning diversity is being triggered, and students who may not have been heavily involved in the university or classwork suddenly find themselves actively engaged in the material and within the university community because they are being reached in ways they were not before.

We describe a prisoner re-entry service-learning (SL) project in an undergraduate criminal justice course. We present quantitative and qualitative evaluations of the course from the student's perspective. Finally, we discuss the promises and pitfalls of incorporating experiential learning into the traditional criminal justice curriculum.

Overview of Service-Learning

Public universities were created with the central focus of serving their local communities (Fitzgerald, Bruns, Furco, & Swanson, 2016). The Morrill Act was passed in 1862 with the notion that an educated public was essential for sustaining a democracy (Bonnen, 1998). Over the years, universities have drifted away from their traditional land-grant missions to become more narrowly focused on knowledge production within disciplines and have become somewhat insulated from the issues and concerns of their communities (Pasque, 2006). There is a growing recognition that not all knowledge and expertise reside in higher education (Fitzgerald, Bruns, Furco, & Swanson, 2016). Communities should draw on partnerships with universities to solve complex problems (Savery, 2015). State legislatures must see that universities deliver value to the general public beyond granting degrees (Fitzgerald, Bruns, Furco, & Swanson, 2016). Universities have important resources such as students, faculty, research expertise, technology, and libraries (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

Various experiential learning opportunities are available to students, such as study abroad, internships, and field experiences (Nzaranyimana et al., 2019; Constantinou, 2018). However, they tend to emphasize extending students' professional skills by exposing them to the profession. Faculty and students often engage in community service projects, especially within student organizations, but not as a course-based approach integrating clear learning objectives and reflection exercises. Bringle and Hatcher (1996) provide a helpful definition of service-learning as "a credit-bearing educational experience which students participate in an organized 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. 222).

Service-learning courses may be particularly important in urban commuter campuses. It is difficult for commuter universities to develop traditions and a sense of belonging among students that is prevalent in traditional universities (Gianoutsos &

Rosser, 2014). Urban universities can create a robust learning environment and promote a greater sense of belonging among commuter students by involving them in service-learning activities (Schuh, Andreas, & Strange, 1991; Jacoby, 2020). This is especially true for urban commuter universities that enroll large numbers of non-traditional students or large community college transfers. These students come in with large amounts of course credits and often are at the university for a shorter period than FTIC students (Yang et al., 2018).

Several scholars have mentioned the importance of integrating service-learning into the spectrum of teaching, service, and scholarship (Fitzgerald, Bruns, Furco, & Swanson, 2016; Stallworth-Clark, 2017; Goodell, Cooke, & Ash, 2016; Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kielsmeier, & Benson, 2006; Kraft, 1996). Successful integration of service-learning would include involvement within the university's original mission, planning and allocating resources, recruitment and rewarding of service-learning faculty, and publicizing successful service-learning activities (Morton & Troppe, 1996; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000). Effective communication of engagement activities to the community can help build public support for higher education as a public good (Fitzgerald, Bruns, Furco, & Swanson, 2016). This is especially important when universities are under increasing scrutiny from state legislatures around the country (See, Kelderman & Pettit, 2022) and are increasingly seen through a partisan lens by the public at large (Green, 2021). Goodwill begets goodwill.

Faculty and Student Perceptions of Service-Learning

Faculty who teach High-Impact (HIP) courses report that it brings new life to the classroom, is a more enjoyable way to teach, and increases student interest and performance. Students in service-learning courses report more positive beliefs in the importance of serving the community and learning outcomes (Boss, 1994; Bringle & Kremer, 1993; Cohen & Kinsey, 1994; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002; Novak, Markey, & Allen, 2007).

Gray and colleagues (2000) evaluated curriculum-based service-learning with Learning and Save America Higher Education grants among colleges and universities. They compared students in service-learning courses with students in similar courses that did not involve service-learning across 28 colleges and universities. Service-learning students were significantly more likely to indicate they would engage in civic activities and reported improved life skills (Gray, Ondaatje, Fricker Jr., & Geschwind, 2000).

A meta-analysis of 62 studies involving 11,837 students showed that, compared to controls, students participating in SL programs demonstrated significant gains in five outcome areas: attitudes toward self, attitudes toward school and learning, civic engagement, social skills, and academic performance. There was empirical support for the position that following certain recommended practices—such as linking to curriculum, voice, community involvement, and reflection—was associated with better outcomes (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011).

In a longitudinal study of over 22,000 college and university students, students that had participated in service-learning courses had significantly higher academic performance (GPA, writing skills, critical thinking skills), values (commitment to activism

and to promoting racial understanding), choice of a service career, and plans to participate in service after college (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000).

Service-learning courses may be especially important for first-generation college students. Many of these students struggle to integrate into college life in terms of interactions with other students and faculty (Polinsky, 2002) and are less likely to finish their degrees (Chen, 2005). McKay and Estrella (2008) found that service-learning courses increased positive interactions with students and faculty, leading to greater retention rates among first-generation students (McKay & Estrella, 2008).

Service-Learning in the Criminal Justice Field

The criminal justice field provides enormous opportunities for service-learning education. Service-learning courses have been developed in the areas of juvenile delinquency (Hirschinger-Blank & Markowitz, 2006), restorative justice (Vigorita, 2002), women in the system (Love, 2008), and prisons (Pompa, 2002); Vigorita, 2002). These courses have sought to challenge students' perceptions of offenders (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hirschinger-Blank & Markowitz, 2006; Hirschinger-Blank, Simons, & Kenyon, 2009; Pompa, 2002; Swanson, King, & Wolbert, 1997; Vigorita, 2002), bridge the gap between theory and practice (Breci & Martin, 2000), develop greater comprehension of the topic (Hirschinger-Blank & Markowitz, 2006; Penn, 2003), and introduce students to community service and related careers (Dantzker, Kubin & Stein, 1997; Hirschinger-Blank & Markowitz, 2006; Vigorita, 2002).

There are many practical obstacles to developing criminal justice service-learning courses. It may be challenging to identify community partners willing to take on students for a limited time (Koliba, Campbell, & Shapiro, 2006; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). Placing students in the field and around offenders creates the possibility of liability for the facility, university, and students (Koliba, Campbell, & Shapiro, 2006; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). Another important obstacle would include finding the time to develop and implement a service-learning course when faculty have other teaching, service, and scholarship obligations. These impediments to service-learning education are why institutional support is critical.

Program Description

The Re-entry Project is multifaceted and provides students in an undergraduate Senior Capstone Course in Criminal Justice with opportunities to work with the prison re-entry community. The degrees are offered at a large regional public teaching university in the South. The university is located in a major metropolitan area, and the campus is in the downtown area.

The university has around 14,000 students in a given semester, with the vast majority non-traditional and most being transfer students from other institutions (University of Houston-Downtown, 2022b). The institution is a Hispanic Serving Institution and a minority-majority institution. According to the university's factbook (Office of Data Analytics and Institutional Research, 2021), the undergraduate student body is around 64% female, 56% Hispanic, 18% Black, 12% White, 8% Asian, and has an average age of 26.7 years old. Additionally, among the undergraduate population, juniors and seniors comprise close to 75% of this group. Close to 90% of the

undergraduate students at the university are classified as part-time (less than 15 credit hours per semester).

The university started focusing on high-impact learning practices, emphasizing community involvement during the previous SACSCOC reaffirmation in 2016. More recently, an office focused on impact learning was created, and university monies are directed to service-learning courses, high-impact learning activities, and experiential learning options for students. The criminal justice capstone class checks off several boxes for the university related to impact learning and furthers the goal of developing community relationships.

The Senior Capstone course has been a part of the criminal justice curriculum for several years. The course is intended to be a culmination of the students' learned knowledge throughout the degree program. The university catalog description of the course (University of Houston-Downtown, 2022a, CJ 4370) says,

This is a capstone course for criminal justice majors. It facilitates critical examination by the student of contemporary criminal justice issues and topics. Particular emphasis is placed on the application of theoretical and ethical frameworks in a variety of decision-making contexts in criminal justice. Ancillary foci of the course are student writing and appropriate use of citation. This is a writing-intensive course that adheres to the department policy on writing-intensive coursework.

Multiple instructors teach the Senior Capstone Course in various formats each semester. Some classes incorporate high-impact practices, while others do not. Before registration, students are made aware that the course involves a significant time commitment for the current capstone course. Students have other registration options with less intensive involvement. However, even in the actual class, students are allowed to pick a level of involvement suitable for their availability in that semester. Students are divided into seven different groups, and each group is assigned to a different local provider of services to formerly incarcerated offenders.

One of the local providers that students work with is Service Employment Development Jobs for Progress (SER). SER has received a grant of over one million to work with felons returning from prison using holistic and professional services. Senior Seminar students were assigned to SER to assist those in the re-entry process who need mentoring, resume building, and other life skills. Another example of student placement is with Unlimited Visions (UV). This agency works with at-risk youth. Students begin their work at UV by shadowing trained counselors, social workers, and other re-entry personnel with at-risk teens and young adults.

A carefully selected subgroup of students was chosen to receive training to become a Recovery Coach (RC). Recovery Coaches are trained in the four domains of advocacy, ethical responsibilities, mentoring and education, and recovery wellness support. Once RC training has ended, students may earn the Peer Recovery Coach (PRC) title. This designation comes after an individual completes 500 hours with twenty-five hours of supervision within the recovery community. Recovery Coaches promote quality of life for those in the re-entry process. The holistic approach includes steering

the client into active participation and empowerment. Individuals often provide the scope of RC work with a lived experience in recovery. The role of an RC is non-clinical. Coaches are trained to broker out their clients to professionally trained clinicians if necessary.

Training to be an RC within the academic arena consists of 6 hours of course materials and fifty-four hours of face-to-face training. All training is completed on two consecutive weekends by a state trainer. Students who complete the training receive a certificate issued by the state and can use the designation, Recovery Coach when applying for jobs in the re-entry community. The certification allows students to use the designation RC after their name.

Each student is expected to work at least ten hours per week with their agency. Community partners and a faculty member meet to discuss the deployment of each student. Each partner and faculty member work toward the best interests of both students and the agency. Students are responsible for maintaining professionalism and self-efficacy when working with their particular agency. Each agency reports back to the faculty member if there are any problems with the student placement. One of the outstanding features of this collaboration is the willingness of the community agencies to mentor and follow each student's progress.

In addition to the formal training, each RC student must complete a weekly journal to include: hours worked at a facility, lessons learned while working with clients, and how self-efficacy is addressed personally and with clients. Students in this course gain a firm understanding of ex-offenders challenges in re-entry. The students provide agency personnel with academic and theoretical expertise to improve services to clients at little or no cost.

Methods

Study Population

This study implemented a case study method to examine the impact of an experiential learning project on the self-efficacy, community service, and re-entry offenders' perception of two cohorts of undergraduate students. This qualitative approach provides contextual information and deeper insight into the students' lived realities and a basis for evaluating their responses to the project. With this method, the researcher strives to avoid subjective assessment and thus strengthening the quality of the researchers' arguments. The study purposively selected two cohorts of respondents comprising fall 2015 and spring semester 2016 criminal justice seminar class students. Figure 1 is a chart of the distribution of the student's demographic data. Over two semesters, thirty students (7 males and 23 females) participated in this service-learning experience. All students were criminal justice majors. The students in these courses represent the diversity of the [University]. Fifty-seven percent ($n = 17$) were Hispanic, 23 percent ($n = 7$) were African-American, and ten percent ($n = 28$) were Caucasian, Table 1. The average age of the students was 21.2. The vast majority of students were employed including twenty-seven percent ($n = 8$) full-time and forty-seven percent ($n = 14$) part-time. All but three students were considered enrolled as full-time students by their number of credit hours. Fifty-three percent ($n = 28$) of the students transferred to [University] from a community college. Seventy-three percent ($n = 22$) of the students

received financial aid. Forty-seven percent ($n = 14$) were seniors, 47% ($n = 14$) juniors, and 6% ($n = 2$) sophomores. Only twenty percent ($n = 6$) had a college grade point average of 3.0 or above with an average of 2.49.

Figure 1
Chart Showing the Demographic Distribution of the Respondents

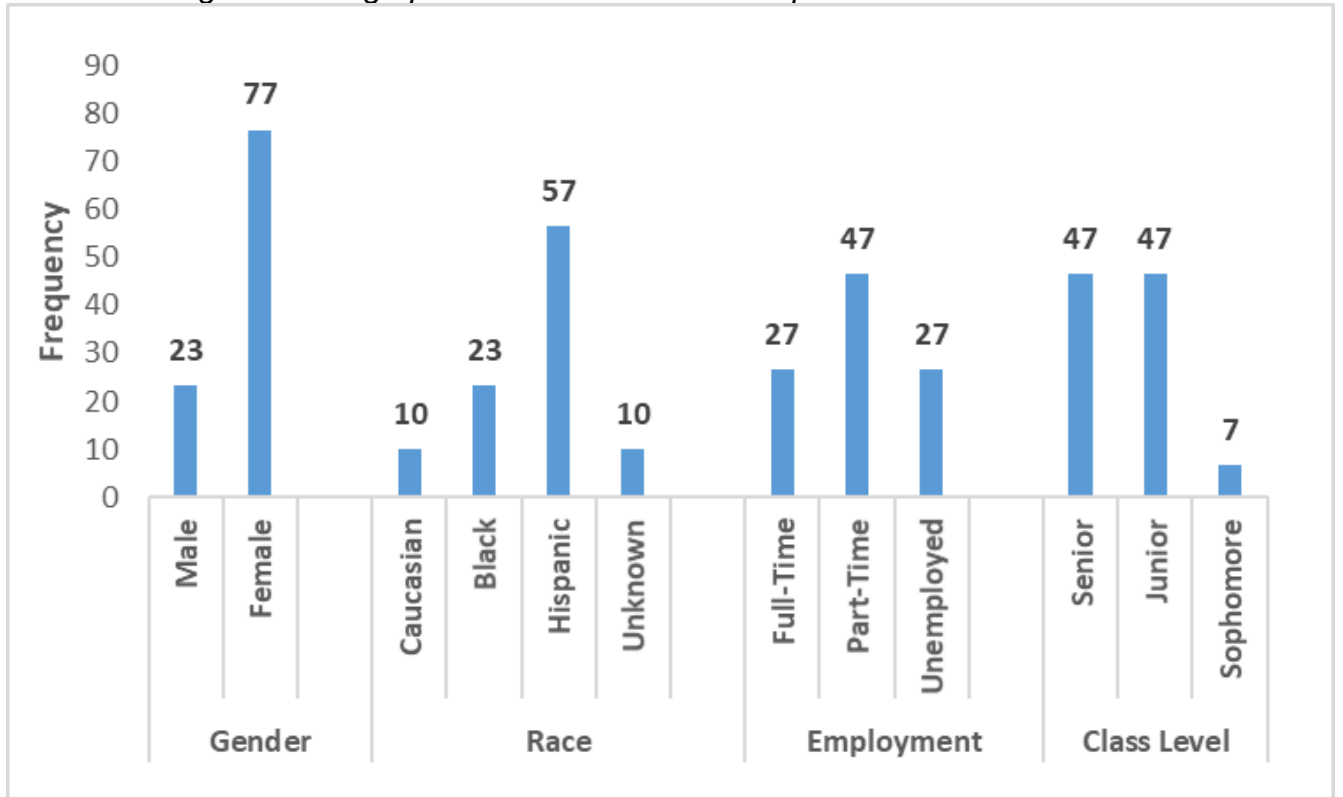


Table 1
Student Demographics

		N	%
Gender	Male	7	23
	Female	23	77
Race	Caucasian	3	10
	Black	7	23
	Hispanic	17	57
	Unknown	3	10
Employment	Full-Time	8	27
	Part-Time	14	47
	Unemployed	8	27
Class Level	Senior	14	47
	Junior	14	47
	Sophomore	2	6
Student Hours	Full-time	27	90
	Part-time	3	10
Financial Aid	Yes	22	73%
	No	8	27%
Transfer Student	Yes	16	53%
	No	14	47%
Grade Point (avg.)		2.49	
Age (avg.)		21.2	

Data Collection, Measures, and Analysis

The data collection method involved an online survey and written exit assignments. The surveys included closed-ended, open-ended, and 8 Likert scale questions. The assignment required the student to write a reflective essay about their participation in the experiential learning project. The students were directed to an online portal at the end of the service-learning period. 100 percent of the selected students responded to the survey. The question items assessed the student's self-awareness and perception of re-entry offenders. Students were asked about their perceptions of the service-learning course at exit. There were two questions concerning content comprehension: 1) I was able to apply the academic content of this course to a real-world situation; and 2) I learned the course content better because of the service-learning project. One question asked about the student's personal development: Participating in the Service-Learning project increased my self-confidence. There were three questions concerning career development: 1) The service-learning project in this

course gave me knowledge and skills that will help me beyond this class; 2) Service-learning in this course helped me to think about my career and professional options, and 3) The service-learning project has allowed me to explore career pathways in my area of interest. One question asked whether the service-learning project benefitted community partners: I feel that my project made a positive contribution to my/our community partner. One question posed was regarding service-learning and citizenship: Participating in the service-learning project has made me a better citizen. Finally, there were three questions concerning the students' perceptions of their contribution to the course and whether service-learning should be incorporated in future courses: 1) I feel that I contributed personally to this project; 2) I would recommend that service-learning be incorporated into this class in the future, and 3) I will consider taking another service-learning course in the future.

Reflections Analysis

For the qualitative measures in both semesters, a content analysis was conducted of students' answers to two assignments using the QDA Miner Lite Qualitative Software. The QDA Miner Lite is a computer-assisted qualitative software used to analyze textual information. It also incorporates strong capabilities for coding, analysis, and writing reports. The first assignment required students to 1) explain why self-efficacy is a necessary theoretical approach to prisoner re-entry; and 2) what best practices would you suggest ensuring that community, group, and personal efficacy be maintained? Students were also required to complete a reflection assignment at the end of the course to reflect on their experiences. Based on five major themes developed as the experiential learning cornerstones in the program, Figure 2, these assessments were entered into the QDA Miner Lite for coding and analysis. The program themes were thus further categorized into— attitude, career, clients, education, and service-learning.

Results

Student Perceptions

Using the survey tool, the student perception element of the study primarily addressed five categories of items –career development, leadership development, benefit to community, citizenship, and contribution to the course (Figure 2). Generally, the students felt that their participation in the experiential learning project positively impacted the five key items addressed by the survey. The study adopted a conservative approach in the assignment of the Likert scale responses between the positive and negative impact factors. The 'strongly agree' responses were assigned to measure students' perception of the positive impact, and the responses 'neutral,' 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' to measure the negative impact of the program. Students felt strongly that they learned the content of the course through the service-learning experience; 97% strongly agreed that they were able to apply academic content to a real-world situation, and 94% strongly agreed that they learned the content of the course better.

Students believed (Table 2) they developed self-confidence (91% strongly agreed), and the project contributed to their leadership (85% strongly agreed). Students also agreed that the course helped develop skills that will help beyond the class (94%

strongly agreed). Service-learning students also agreed that the course aided their career development; 87% strongly agreed that the course helped them think about their careers and explore career pathways in their area of interest. Additionally, a significant number of students (80%) agreed or strongly agreed that they would consider a career in the non-profit sector.

Students also agreed that the course benefitted the community. All students agreed that the project positively contributed to the community partners, including 87% who strongly agreed. Finally, all students agreed or strongly agreed that they contributed to the project (74% strongly agreed). All students strongly agreed that service-learning should be incorporated into this course in the future, and 87% strongly agreed that they would consider taking another service-learning course. Figure 2 is a bar graph of a frequency distribution of the student perception of the impact of the experiential learning program on the five categories of items addressed. On average, each of the five response item categories positively impacted approximately 70% of the respondents or more. The respondents realized the highest positive in leadership development, and the area of career development recorded the least positive impact (70 percent) of the project on the respondents. The respondents also perceived a low positive impact on their ideals of citizenship (73.3 percent) comparatively. All the response responsive categories were perceived negatively by less than 10 percent of the respondents.

Figure 2
Bar Graph of the Respondent's Perception of the Impact of the Experiential Learning Project

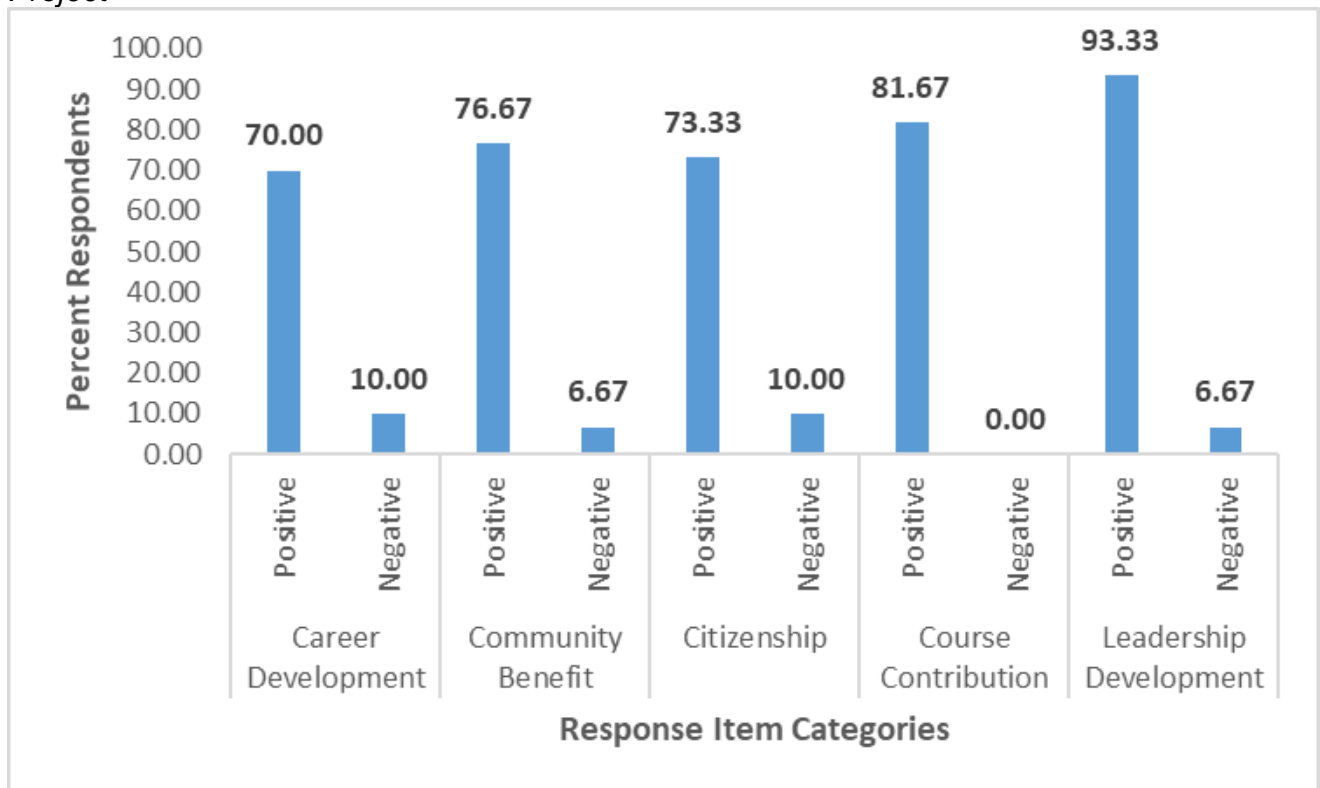


Table 2
Student Attitudes Concerning Service-Learning

	SA	A	N	D
I was able to apply the academic content of this course to a real-world situation	97% (30)	3% (1)		
I learned the course content better because of the service-learning project	94% (29)	6% (2)		
Participating in the service-learning project increased my self-confidence	91% (28)	6% (2)	3% (1)	
Participating in the service-learning project contributed to leadership development	85% (16)	6% (2)	6% (2)	3% (1)
The service-learning project in this course gave me knowledge and skills that will help me beyond this class	94% (29)	6% (2)		
The service-learning in this course helped me to think about my career and professional options	87% (27)	10% (3)	3% (1)	
The service-learning project has allowed me to explore career pathways in my area of interest	87% (27)	13% (4)		
Form: Due to this experience, I would consider a career in the non-profit sector.	53% (16)	27% (8)	20% (6)	
Participating in the service-learning project has made me a better citizen	73% (22)	17% (5)	10% (3)	
I feel that I contributed personally to this project	74% (23)	26% (8)		
I feel that my project made a positive contribution to my/our community partner	87% (27)	13% (4)		
I would recommend that service-learning be incorporated into this class in the future	100% (31)			
I will consider taking another service-learning course in the future	87% (27)	3% (1)	10% (3)	

SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; N=Neutral; D=Disagree

Content Analysis

Table 3 lists the program themes (category), codes, and the percentages of cases reflected under each coded item. These items were derived from the student's reflections on their participation in the re-entry course experiential learning project. The table showed the percentage of students that mentioned a particular item and the number of times that item occurred. For instance, the item 'experience' were mentioned by 89.3 % of the respondents and comprised 36% of items mentioned. Figures 3 and 4 show the word chart and bar chart frequency distribution of codes derived from students' exit essays and surveys. The most important item the students reflected on was the experience gained during the program. This was followed by the opportunity to learn and be involved in a research team. Next, the students considered service-learning amazing and were generally grateful that the program was incorporated into the course.

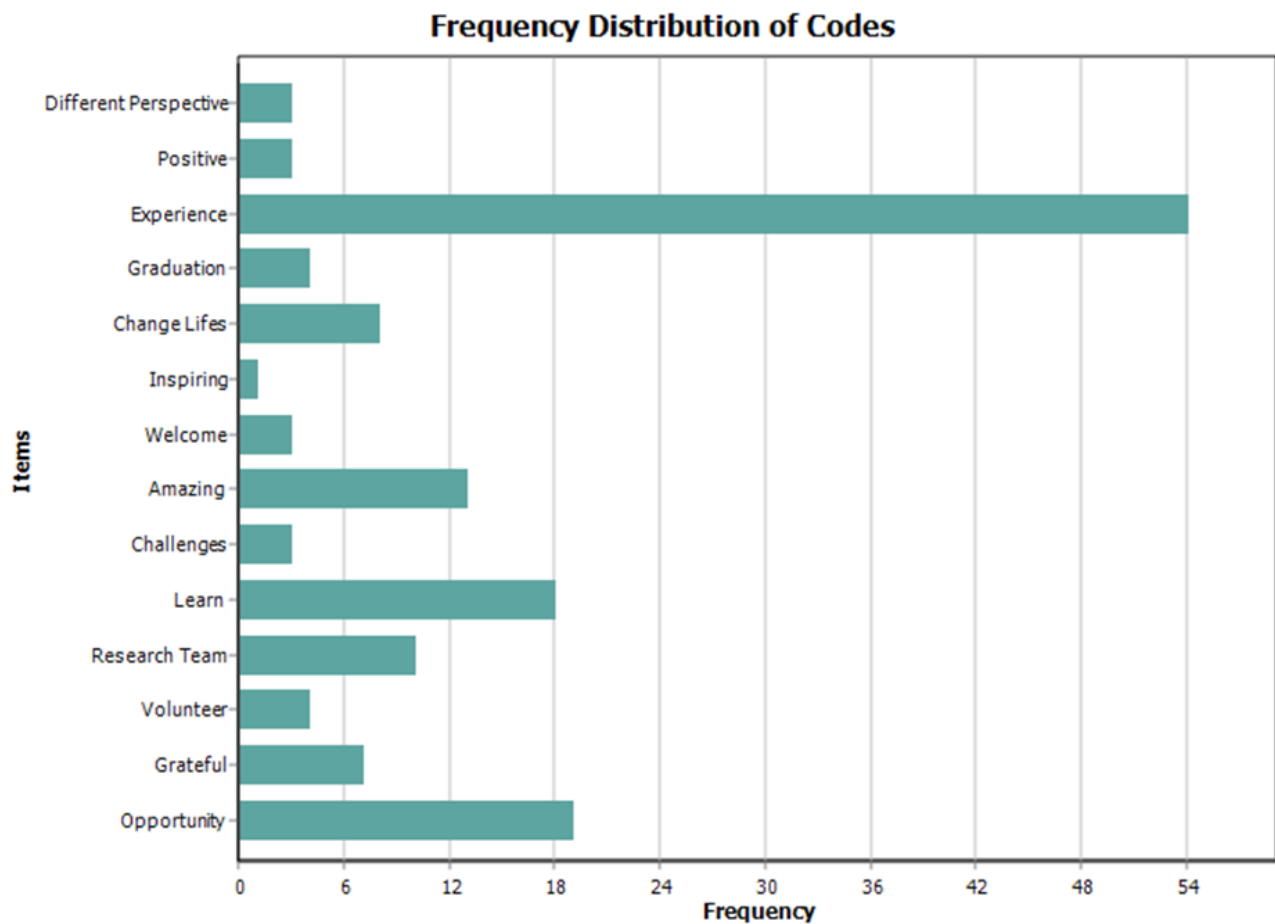
Table 3
Themes, Codes, and Percentages of Cases, and Items Based on Student Reflections

Category	Code	Count	%Codes	Cases	%Cases
	Different				
Attitude	Perspective	3	2.00%	2	7.10%
Attitude	Positive	3	2.00%	3	10.70%
Career	Experience	54	36.00%	25	89.30%
Career	Graduation	4	2.70%	3	10.70%
Clients	Change Lives	8	5.30%	6	21.40%
Clients	Inspiring	1	0.70%	1	3.60%
Clients	Welcome	3	2.00%	2	7.10%
Education	Amazing	13	8.70%	12	42.90%
Education	Challenges	3	2.00%	2	7.10%
Education	Learn	18	12.00%	10	35.70%
	Research				
Education	Team	10	6.70%	6	21.40%
Education	Volunteer	4	2.70%	4	14.30%
Service					
Learning	Grateful	7	4.70%	6	21.40%
Service					
Learning	Opportunity	19	12.70%	9	32.10%

Figure 3:
Code Frequency Word Chart



Figure 4:
Codes Frequency Bar Chart



Self-efficacy among the reentering population:

Students were required to complete a written assignment concerning the importance of self-efficacy among the re-entry population. The prompt asks: (a) how

have you contributed to the self-efficacy of your population? (b) use the textbook (use your journal information as well) to critically define and explain why self-efficacy is an important theoretical approach to re-entry. (c) What best practices would you suggest to ensure that community, group, and personal efficacy be maintained?

The vast majority of students were able to define self-efficacy and apply that term to the services they provided at their sites. Students recognized that self-efficacy can be an important internal mechanism for change and overcoming obstacles.

Student 1: Self-efficacy is one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. The people on probation are doing everything in their hands to succeed in life and accomplish everything they set their mind to. In order for success to take place and allow re-entry back into the community, those looking for a different life have to be willing to change for the better.

Student 2: High self-efficacy is an important aspect in a person's life because it allows them to handle stressful conditions and situations appropriately. People with high self-efficacy are seen to have a better grasp and control of their lives. Rather than dwelling on the negative consequences of an action, they focus on the positive outcomes that can come from overcoming an obstacle.

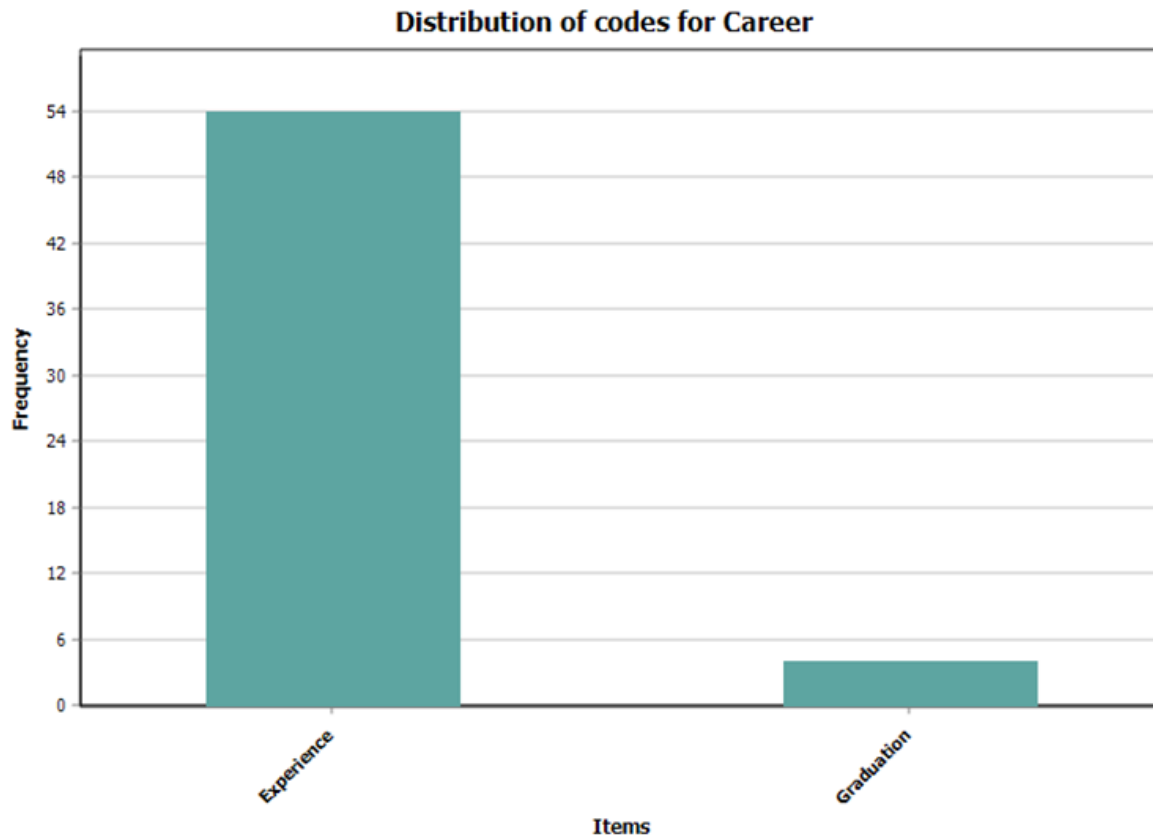
Student 8: In order for reentrants to successfully reintegrate and become productive members of society, belief in one's own personal abilities is a necessity. In order to succeed, the re-entry population must possess a perspective of viewing challenging problems as solvable and have the ability to recover from setbacks and disappointments rather quickly.

Student 3: Self-efficacy is a very important theoretical approach to re-entry. Individuals who have criminal backgrounds with low self-efficacy are at-risk of recidivating. A criminal conviction results in consequences that extend beyond incarceration. Self-stigmatization is a negative consequence that many former offenders experience. It manifests in low self-esteem and personal barriers to re-entry. When an individual is labeled as a criminal and seen only as a criminal, then they tend to live as they are labeled.

Other students recognized that the criminal justice system could have a negative impact on the self-efficacy of the re-entry population, and the community can play an important role in reversing the stigma associated with offending.

Student 3: When reentering individuals see that they have the support from society, then their self-efficacy can be higher. Rather than discourage and stigmatize those who are trying to reenter into society, the community should show support and help those reentering. By providing a sense of support and care, the reentering individuals are able to achieve the goal of becoming a model citizen again.

Figure 5:
Distribution of Codes for Career



Clients:

The importance of empathy and understanding

Figure 6 reflects a distribution of students' perceptions of the clients after the program. Many students in the criminal justice field hold negative views of offenders, and in many cases, they see offending behavior as a rational choice and the system as generally lenient on most offenders. One purpose of criminal justice education is to teach students that the causes of crime are often complicated and multifaceted. For offenders committed to changing their lives, society puts up many obstacles. Students must recognize the humanity in offenders, and they are not so different from themselves in many respects.

Student 3: Family reunification is one more critical component of the re-entry and integration of every individual coming out of corrections. I have been a witness to both sides of the criminalized world. From working inside of a Correctional Facility to having family or known friends that have or are serving time currently. Within this semester, it has opened my eyes to both sides of the equation, and has shown me a different perspective.

Student 4: Ms. Mary has learned from her past behaviors, letting go of who she was, finding significance in life and making new plans for her future. Learning about Ms.

Mary's experience before, during and after prison was quite shocking but it taught me these programs are definitely needed to help those who want to change their ways and do better in life.

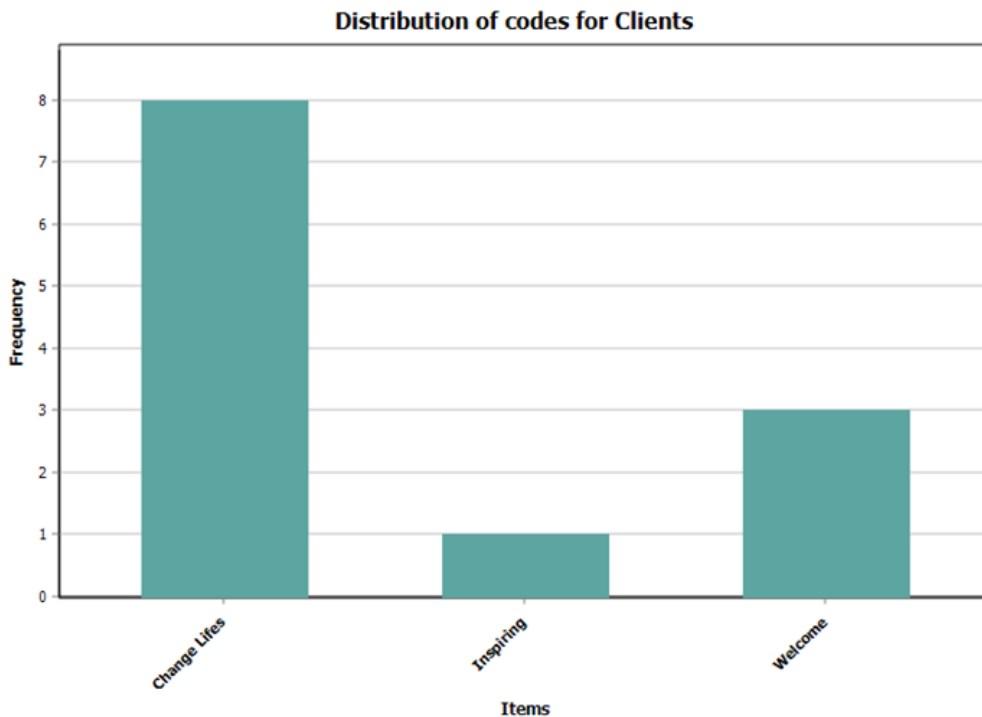
Student 7: The recovery movement is about caring for an addict in a way that makes them want to change their lifestyle. This movement is about de-objectification of individuals. The recovery movement is about giving people choices and options to renew themselves.

Student 8: The women wanted someone to listen to them, understand their point of view, see them as an equal, and meet them where they were without judging them or forming an opinion about their personal circumstances and/or past history. Allowing the women to see and feel the care and concern by those working with them is an effective approach to letting the women know they matter, thus strengthening their personal belief in self.

Student 9: As a detention officer, I am up close and personal with inmates daily. I can honestly say that since volunteering at Angela's House, I have become more curious about the stories of how the inmates ended up in jail.

Student 10: There has always been a misinterpretation about how ex-convicts lack motivation to change...I could not disagree with this more.

Figure 6:
Distribution of Codes for Clients



Service-Learning:

Internal Change among Students

One of the strengths of a service-learning course is that it can lead to a change in students. When these courses are at their best, students change their views of themselves and their place in society. Figure 8 is a reflection of the student's attitudes toward the clients and themselves after the service-learning interaction with the correctional system. The student's attitudes were equally shared between having different perspectives about the offenders and being more self-aware and positive about their own abilities and self-efficacy.

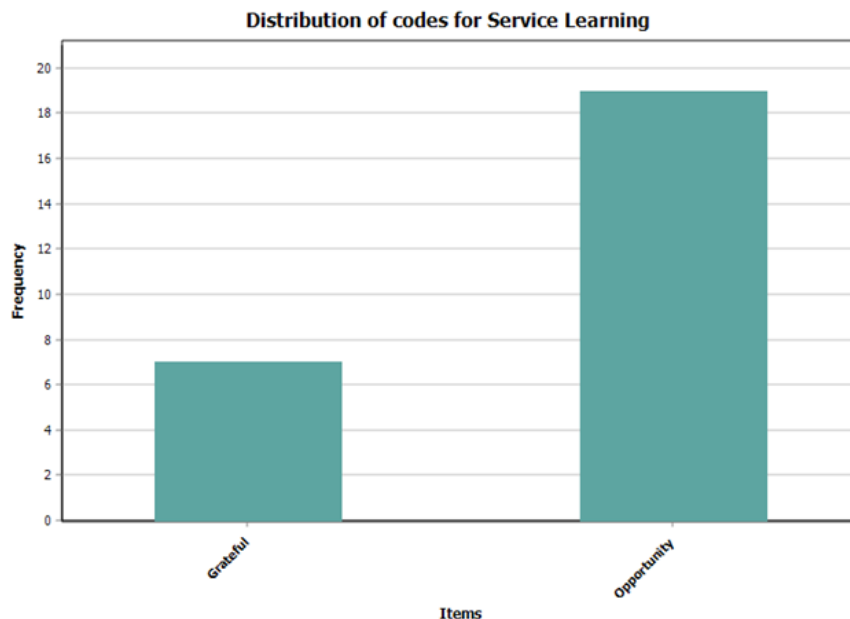
Student 5: I was able to witness how different people overcame their situation through determination. It was these people that gave me the template to better myself and not be afraid of failure but rather embrace it and learn from it.

Student 6: This is an important realization for me as I learned while working at Work Faith Connections. The notion that people will seek me as their version of a successful model and emulate my behaviors was a humbling thought.

So now for the question, how have I contributed to the self-efficacy of my population? I didn't. They contributed to me and taught me more about life and overcoming adversity than I have ever experienced in my own life. To witness people coming from prison and reentering society with smiles and positive outlooks taught me more than I could ever teach them.

Student 10: What I wasn't prepared for was the fact that throughout this experience I would be digging in the roots of my problems/life and analyze my life as a whole as well.

Figure 7
Distribution of Codes for Service-Learning



Attitudes:

Recovery Coaches

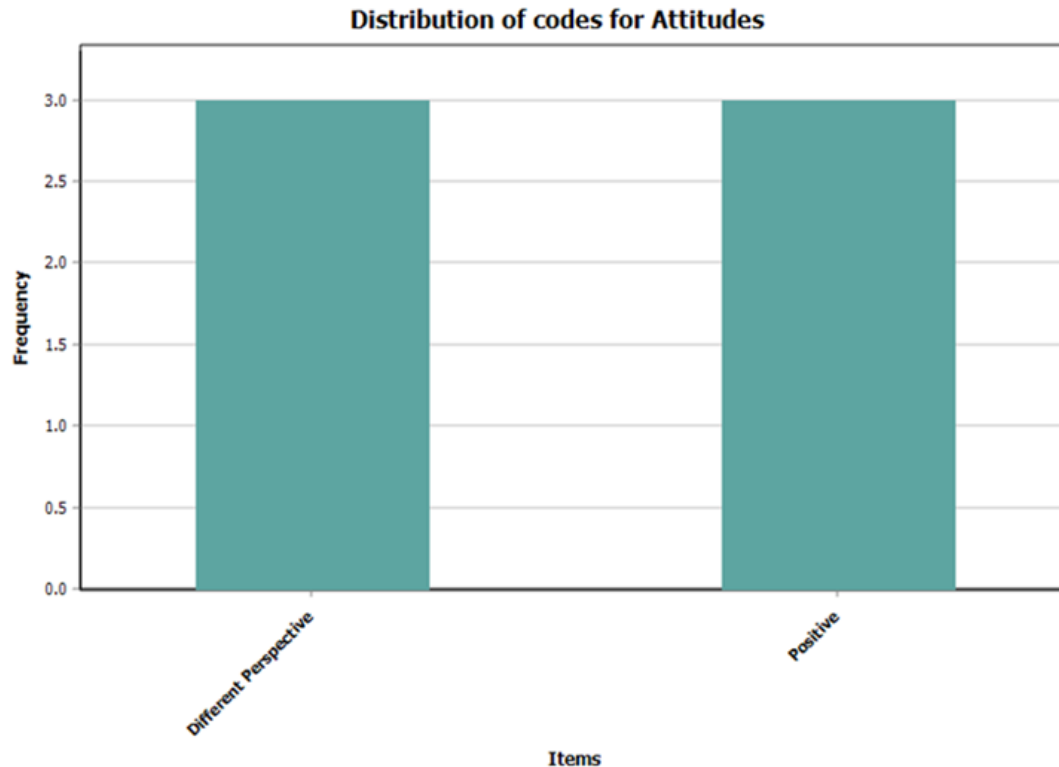
The training to become a recovery coach is intense in many respects and requires role playing and self-examination. The approach suggests that recovery coaches can be effective only after addressing their own issues.

Student 12: The recovery coach training was the most emotional, life-changing experience out of the whole course.

Student 13: The recovery coach training was practically indescribable. The purpose of the training is to get to be able to acknowledge your own troubles and issues in order to be able to help others with theirs. When it was my time to share it was not easy...the fear of being stripped down to all of your insecurities. It was intense and one of my hardest challenges.

Student 15: I am very thankful to have the recovery coach training. Through this opportunity, I have learned that recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential. It is also built on access to evidence-based clinical treatment and recovery support services.

Figure 8:
Distribution of Codes for Attitudes



Education:

Volunteering at Agencies as a Recovery Coach:

After students undergo recovery coach training, they apply what they learned at Unlimited Visions. This is a mentoring program for juvenile offenders. Students could see the impact they were making on their clients, leading to internal changes and the possibility of continuing to work in this arena.

Student 12: I had the opportunity to follow other recovery coaches at Unlimited Visions aftercare. I got to use and see all of my training at my work site, and am in shock at how amazing and life-changing the experience was. After graduation, I plan on working with youth and this experience has really confirmed that.

Student 13: It was such a liberating experience to be able to help these kids [at Unlimited Visions] and try to guide them and give them advice on how they can change their lives. I feel it has shaped me into a better person.

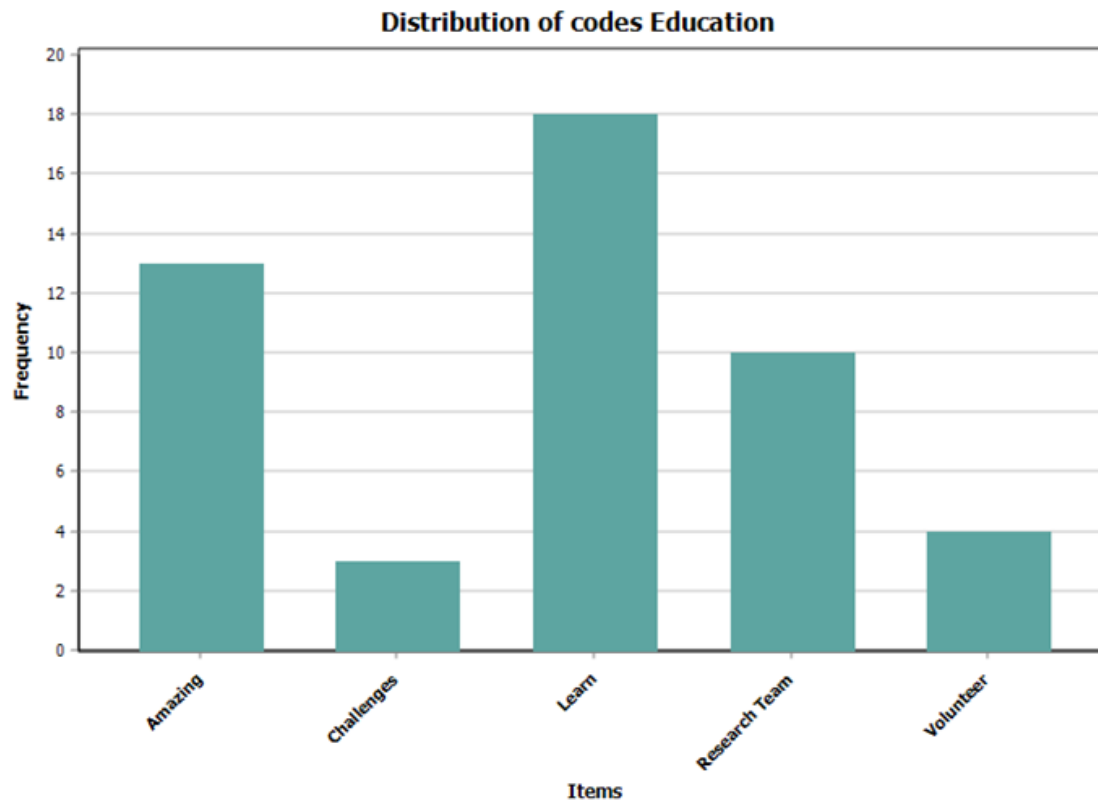
Student 14: As I worked at the agency I came across one resident who was willing to attend school, but had no knowledge about computers. She was eager to start college to become a medical assistant. I felt a sense of accomplishment in being able to guide her through the steps to accomplish her dreams.

Student 14: This course has given me an opportunity to support the community and make a difference in peoples' lives. This course has been a tremendous experience. My goals have changed to continue helping my community and those in need.

Student 15: In the future, I hope to apply what I have learned in Asian communities and perhaps introduce the recovery coach method to mainland China's criminal justice system.

To date, five students who have been trained to be Recovery Coaches through the Senior Capstone course are working full-time in the re-entry field. Another student has pending employment. Three of the five employed students are now [University] graduates working full-time in criminal justice. One student became a full-time case manager at SER and is now seeking her law degree. The most recent hire will be working at Santa Maria Hostel where she will work with women and their children who need a "safe place" to live while going through re-entry. Some of these women are serving the remainder of their jail sentences at Santa Maria after giving birth while being incarcerated.

Figure 9
Distribution of Codes for Education



Discussion

The present study examines a service-learning course's impact on students in their senior capstone class for criminal justice. These findings are consistent with previous studies and suggest that students involved in their own learning demonstrate consistently better outcomes (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011). Valentine, Price, and Yang (2021) found that high-impact practice learning enhanced student learning of 25 years or older black and Hispanic students. There were exceptionally high learning gains for students involved in service-learning programs involving community participation. In other words, underserved student populations record positive learning results when participating in High Impact Programs. In the present study, while students were intentionally taken out of their comfort zone, they could synthesize their prior academic learning experiences and apply them in unfamiliar settings. Also, students in the course strongly agreed they learned the content of the course better than they would have in a traditional course (Figure 9). This particular observation is significant as less time was spent in the classroom.

Moreover, a significant number of students are considering a career in prisoner re-entry or as a recovery coach. A majority of the students were of the opinion that experience gained from the program would enhance their career opportunities (Figure 5). This finding has important implications as many criminal justice students are unsure of their career paths.

One of the more important implications of this study is the career possibilities of working in a non-profit agency. As a general rule, the role of the non-profit agency is not taught or represented in the criminal justice curriculum. Thus, it is noteworthy that the vast majority of the study population is considering a job in non-profit agencies. This may suggest incorporating the role of non-profit agencies into the criminal justice curriculum. Many students may lose interest in the field of criminal justice when presented with only the traditional options of policing, corrections, probation, and legal studies as career choices. Exposure to other career options could help in the recruiting and retention of criminal justice students.

The most ambitious part of the service-learning course was training a subgroup of volunteer students to prepare for the [State] Recovery Coach (RC) certification. The training consists of forty-six contact hours with a board-certified trainer, six hours of reading, and 500 hours working within the re-entry community. This is not a requirement of the course. However, those students who attended the training clearly gained a deeper understanding of themselves and the individuals in recovery based on their reflections (Figures 6 & 8).

Results from the writing assignments reveal the integration of theory, research, and policy. Students can better comprehend and apply criminological theory by observing how offenders are impacted in real-world settings. Several students made the connection between labeling theory, economic disadvantage, systemic racism, and the difficulty of re-entry. The writing assignments also revealed that students could understand and apply the concept of self-efficacy to service-learning clients and themselves, which was an important learning objective of the course (Figure 7).

Many criminal justice students come to the discipline with biases regarding the offender population. One of the most important results of this service-learning course was the development of empathy for the plight of ex-offenders (Figure 8). Students witnessed the re-entry population as extremely motivated toward working on self-improvement and change. Many students come to the discipline believing that ex-offenders are not motivated to change their lives, which is the primary reason for recidivism. The service-learning students working with ex-offenders dispelled this belief, and they see the community's barriers to re-entry as systemic labeling (Figure 6). An important part of the development of empathy among the students is the realization that the plight of ex-offenders could have been their plight or anyone's plight under similar circumstances. This realization resonated throughout the study population, indicating the power of service-learning opportunities. Students can play an integral role in enabling offenders to shed negative labels and help them with their future, not as offenders but as returning members of society.

There are many challenges when setting up a service-learning course. Service-learning is curriculum-based. Therefore, one must ensure that course outcomes and goals reflect the university's mission. There is extant literature on service-learning complete with the competencies necessary to achieve student success. Nonetheless, it is necessary to look at a service-learning course in terms of the student population and the community in which they live. There is no "cookie-cutter" approach as one size does not fit all. The student population in this study lives in or close to a large urban city. All students are commuters, and most have work or household commitments that limit their free time. The student body reflects the diversity of the city (Figure 1).

This service-learning course draws on every facet of the criminal justice community. The challenge in setting goals and outcomes is contingent on many factors. The university administration must support service-learning courses and the practical challenges involved. The buy-in from the university administration is vital as community partnerships must be created and maintained. These partnerships are supported with memorandums of understanding (MOU). Creating partner MOUs allows each partner and the instructor to create reciprocal opportunities. Each partner agency has different needs. Thus, the instructor must keep up with academic currency within the field and work toward agency goals. Many service-learning courses require at least some funding. This course received financial support from a university fund specifically established for service-learning initiatives.

There are some significant limitations to this study. It could have been strengthened using a standardized instrument such as the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire. This would allow for a pre and post-test design and comparison to a class with similar content that does not use a service-learning approach. The authors will be using this approach in an upcoming study. The course in this study is discipline-specific and focused on prisoner re-entry, limiting its generalizability. However, this course can be adapted to other university settings with similar community needs. By looking at university policies, working with community partners, and receiving support from the university administration, instructors could implement a similar course at their institution.

Conclusion

Experiential education is an essential pedagogical tool that moves higher education back toward its traditional mission of serving its communities. How do instructors fully engage students who may lack the requisite motivation to learn the course material or advance in their academic careers? Service-learning is a fresh look at this old problem. Not only does the service-learning environment take on a new and more intense approach, but service-learning also removes many barriers between the student and instructor. While this study is discipline-specific, the art of engaging students at a more meaningful level overlaps all disciplines. Some students work harder and retain more information when fully engaged in their learning. The study population in this service-learning course has explored their potential, found new ways to expand their knowledge base, and provided essential services to the community.

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