

Long-Term Effects of Service-Learning on Students' Civic Engagement After College



Presented by: Dr. Shannon O'Brien Wilder, Office of Service-Learning, The University of Georgia

Research Collaborators: Dr. Sarah Brackmann, Director of Civic Engagement, Southwestern University; Prof. David Berle, UGA; and Dr. David Knauff, UGA

Abstract

Survey research examines the long-term effects of service-learning participation on civic engagement behaviors and beliefs of students enrolled in a specific service-learning course at one institution from 2004-2011 compared to a similar population of alumni who did not take this service-learning course.

What do we know about the long-term effects of service-learning?

- **Overall Learning Outcomes of Service-Learning point to long-term effects (e.g., critical thinking skills, citizenship, personal and interpersonal development, understanding and applying knowledge)**
 - Eyster, J., & Giles, D. E. (1999). *Where's the learning in service-learning?* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- **Little research on long-term effects of SL**
 - Astin, A. W., Sax, L. J., & Avalos, J. (1999). The Long-Term Effects of Volunteerism During the Undergraduate Years. *The Review of Higher Education*, 21(2): 187-202.
 - Misa, K., Anderson, J., & Yamamura, E. (2005). The lasting impact of college on young adults' civic and political engagement. Unpublished manuscript.

Some previous studies point to . . .

- **Positive effects on civic engagement**
 - Astin, A., Vogelgesang, L. J., Misa, K., Anderson, J., Denson, N., Jayakumar, U., et al. (2006). Understanding the effects of service-learning: A study of students and faculty. Final Report to the Atlantic Philanthropies, U.S.A.
- **Positive effects on career development in service-related careers**
 - Fenzel, M., & Peyrot, M. (2005). Comparing college community participation and future service behaviors and attitudes. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, 12(1), 23-31.



Purpose

- **How does participation in Project FOCUS (a UGA service-learning course) effect civic engagement behaviors and beliefs in the years following graduation?**
- **Is there a difference in civic engagement behaviors and beliefs between university graduates who participated in Project FOCUS and graduates who did not?**

Study Framework

Astin and Vogelgesang (2006) studied the effects of service-learning on post-graduation civic beliefs and behaviors, specifically studying:

- **Community/civic engagement:** civic leadership, working with communities, volunteerism, charitable giving and involvement with alma mater
- **Political engagement:** general political engagement and its four subfactors: political activism, political expression, commitment to political/ social change, and voting behavior
- **Civic values/goals:** pluralistic orientation, self-efficacy, and the goal of promoting racial understanding

Their national sample could not control for different teaching styles, reflection strategies, service experiences, and conceptions of service-learning. Studying FOCUS graduates controls for these variables.

Project FOCUS Course Overview

AESC(FCID) 4920S/6920S - FOCUS (Fostering Our Community's Understanding of Science): Service-Learning Experience

- 3-hour (A-F graded) course created in Fall 2002 in College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
- Elective course open to all UGA students with at least 12 hours of college science (actual avg. 35 hours) and 2.5 GPA (actual avg. 3.47 GPA)

Course Goals

- Expose children to science through interactive and hands-on lessons.
- Provide support to K-5 teachers to enhance science instruction.
- Create opportunities for university students to interact with teachers and children in the local community.

Community & Civic Engagement: Working with Communities 1				
Working with Communities 1	Mean FOCUS	Mean Comp.	t	Sig
Worked on a community project with government agency/program	1.84 (1.105)	1.53 (.908)	2.054*	.042
Worked with others to solve a community problem	1.97 (1.136)	1.60 (.871)	2.475*	.014
Played a leadership role in improving community	1.96 (1.126)	1.52 (.780)	3.150*	.002

***p < .01
** p < .05
* p < .10

Community & Civic Engagement: Working with Communities 2				
Working with Communities 2	Mean FOCUS	Mean Comp.	t	Sig
Participated in community/neighborhood group	3.16 (1.044)	3.57 (.774)	3.298*	.001

***p < .01
** p < .05
* p < .10

Community & Civic Engagement: Working with Communities 3				
Working with Communities 3	Mean FOCUS	Mean Comp.	t	Sig
Participating in a community action program	2.46 (.936)	1.98 (.845)	3.581*	.001
Becoming a community leader	2.40 (1.035)	1.88 (.934)	3.410*	.001

***p < .01
** p < .05
* p < .10

Survey Instrument

Our survey instrument is based on the Higher Education Research Institute's (HERI) Life After College Survey: A Survey of Former Undergraduates (LAC), and modified to capture the data needed for our study. LAC was developed in 2003 to study post-graduate values, opinions, and activities. Developed by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute and reviewed by a working group of service-learning experts, the survey was designed to "gain a deeper understanding of the various ways in which young adults are involved in their communities approximately six years after graduation" (Astin et al, 2006).

Methodology

Sample Selection

- All graduates who enrolled in Project FOCUS from 2004-2011
- n=475

Comparison Group

- Sample of alumni who graduated with similar majors as the Project FOCUS sample, and who graduated during the same time period

Data Collection & Survey Administration

- Administered using the Qualtrics survey research suite
- 187 alumni finished the survey (87=FOCUS Sample, 100=Control Sample)
- 23% response rate from Project FOCUS alumni

Results

FOCUS alumni compared to other UGA alumni were significantly more likely to:

- Continue with civic and community engagement activities after graduation (e.g., volunteering, serving in community leadership roles, and working on community projects.)
- Attend alumni events
- Use the alumni association for professional and social support
- Recruit others to attend UGA
- Donate money to an educational organization

Community & Civic Engagement: Volunteer Work 1 and 2				
Volunteer Work 1	Mean FOCUS	Mean Comp.	t	Sig
Frequency of volunteer work in past year	2.33 (.612)	1.91 (.655)	4.464*	.001

Community & Civic Engagement: Volunteer Work 2				
Volunteer Work 2	Mean FOCUS	Mean Comp.	t	Sig
Hours per week volunteering	2.88 (1.565)	2.27 (1.635)	2.463**	.015

***p < .01
** p < .05
* p < .10

Community & Civic Engagement: Charitable				
Charitable	Mean FOCUS	Mean Comp.	t	Sig
Donated money to an education organization	1.98 (1.023)	1.63 (.917)	2.348**	.018

***p < .01
** p < .05
* p < .10

Community & Civic Engagement: Involvement with Alma Mater				
Involvement with Alma Mater	Mean FOCUS	Mean Comp.	t	Sig
Attended an alumni event	1.48 (.658)	1.29 (.551)	2.121*	.036
Used an alumni association service	1.46 (.646)	1.28 (.573)	2.009*	.046
Recruited new students to college	1.64 (.700)	1.38 (.578)	2.709*	.008

***p < .01
** p < .05
* p < .10

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