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

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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)
• Little research on long-term effects of SL

Some previous studies point to . . .
• Positive effects on civic engagement
  • Positive effects on career development in service-related careers

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.

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

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