

# Connecting the Dots: Community Health, Civic Engagement and Service-Learning

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## What ...

Students in Community Health (HTH 230) class were required to engage in **12-15 service-learning hours** throughout the community. Service-learning took place in after school programs, nursing homes, the Boys & Girls Club, food pantries, and the Special Olympics, among others.

A team of professionals across campus collaborated to measure the effect of service-learning on students in the academic setting. The team included the course instructor, an administrator from the Community Service-Learning office and an assessment specialist.

### Objectives

1. Increase appreciation for the benefits of reflection
2. Report an increased level of engaged citizenship (defined as “civic-mindedness”)
3. Communicate the relationship between social policy and health outcomes.

In order to measure if there was a change, students participated in a **pre and post-test**.

## Pre and Post-Test

The Pre and Post-Test had items measuring each of the three objectives.

**Objective 1** measured by items that were developed by the researchers. Example items include

- Rate the degree to which reflection influenced your
  - Awareness of the benefits of your service-learning experience
  - Awareness of the value of your service-learning experience

**Objective 2** measured using the 25 item Civic Mindedness Scale (Hatcher, 2008). The scale is organized into 5 subscales (Voluntary Action, Identity and Calling, Citizenship, Consensus Building, Social Trustee). Sample items include:

- I am very willing to volunteer my time to participate in community service.
- I often feel a deep sense of purpose when participating in my community-related activities.
- I stay up-to-date on social justice issues.

**Objective 3** measured using the specific “Social Trustee” sub-scale of the Civic Mindedness Scale. Sample items include:

- It is important for students to give a portion of their time to community or voluntary service.
- I think that students have a civic responsibility to improve society by serving others.

## So What ...

In both cohorts, from the beginning to the end of the semester and after engaging in 12-15 hours of service-learning, students reported an increased appreciation for reflection, increased level of engaged citizenship and were able to communicate the relationship between social policy and health outcomes. The findings lend support for the **“high impact”** gains associated with service-learning.

## Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics and T-Test Results for both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 (Scale 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree)*

Subscale	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		N	df	t*	d
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test				
	M	SD	M	SD				
Appreciation for Reflection	5.39	1.27	6.29	0.92	103	102	-6.33	0.62

<i>Civic-Mindedness</i>								
Voluntary Action	5.37	0.77	5.87	0.80	99	98	5.35	0.54
Identity and Calling	5.78	0.90	6.08	0.89	99	98	2.93	0.29
Citizenship	4.65	1.06	5.16	1.15	99	98	4.16	0.42
Social Trustee	5.68	0.83	6.15	0.73	99	98	5.84	0.59
Consensus Building	5.73	0.74	6.11	0.66	99	98	4.43	0.45

Subscale	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		N	df	t*	d
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test				
	M	SD	M	SD				
Appreciation for Reflection	5.13	1.19	6.43	0.75	61	60	-8.32	1.07

<i>Civic-Mindedness</i>								
Voluntary Action	5.34	0.85	5.91	0.71	61	60	5.89	0.75
Identity and Calling	5.65	0.96	6.06	0.68	61	60	4.10	0.53
Citizenship	4.56	1.10	5.11	1.07	61	60	4.47	0.57
Social Trustee	5.54	0.75	6.15	0.52	61	60	6.90	0.88
Consensus Building	5.75	0.70	6.05	0.59	61	60	3.52	0.45

\*All tests were significant  $p < .01$  with gains from pre-to-post.

## Now What ...

Although we saw consistent gains from pre- to post-test scores, we cannot attribute it only to the service-learning. There may be other factors involved, such as course content information and natural maturity and growth of college students. Moreover, the measures were self-reported and are prone to common challenges associated with self-reported measures, such as social desirability. The appreciation for reflection scale and the civic mindedness scale were the only tools used to measure these research questions. It will be advantageous to work on a **mixed methods approach** to get a better understanding of the scope to which the students were impacted by their service-learning placements. Future research studies may include **intervention and non-intervention cohorts**.

"I would say eye-opening, because there is a whole different world out there that you haven't quite experienced yet and you don't know what it's like to be in someone else's shoes."

"... the ability to just be aware of people from all walks of life and the struggles they can be facing and how to still provide them with the appropriate care ... And how to be an approachable provider."

### Citation

Hatcher, J. A. (2008). *The public role of professionals: Developing and evaluating the civic-minded professional scale* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Indiana University - Purdue University: Indianapolis, IN. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1805/1703>

