

Institutional Analysis, Assessment & Reporting

What Factors Predict Learning in Service-Learning Courses? Research Report 2005-05

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This study used the results of the service-learning survey from the prior two academic years to look at students' perceptions of service-learning strengths and weaknesses, to test the extent that students in UNIV 101 have a different service-learning experience, and to better understand the relationship between what occurred in the course and the extent of learning about the subject matter that students reported. "Learning" was measured by students' responses to two items: (1) I will be able to use and recall course information because of service learning, and (2) Service-learning helped me understand the basic concepts and theories of the subject.

What are students' perceptions of service-learning strengths and weaknesses?

Most of the items on the survey relate to outcomes that students will hopefully experience through service-learning (e.g., increased learning, more interest in the subject matter, personal growth). Students in UNIV 101 most thought that they gained practical experience that would appeal to employers and others (62% agreement) and that the experience had fostered personal insights and growth (60% agreement). Students not enrolled in UNIV 101 also most strongly thought that the experience fostered personal insights and growth (67% agreement). The non-UNIV 101 group also thought that service-learning helped them to see how course concepts could be applied to everyday life (65% agreement). Both groups were least likely to think that service-learning helped them clarify their majors or professions (26% agreement for UNIV 101 students and 35% agreement for non-UNIV 101 students). On a general note, about 70% of both groups agreed they would recommend service-learning to other students. Details on descriptive statistics can be found in Table 1.

Do students in UNIV 101 have the same perceptions as students in other courses?

Generally, new freshmen enrolled in UNIV 101 (Freshman Success course) and students who were enrolled in courses that were more discipline specific had the same perceptions (see Table 1). Out of 20 items, statistically significant differences were found for six items (after excluding for differences in hours worked). Students who were enrolled in UNIV 101 were less likely to think that :

- service-learning helped them see how the course concepts could be applied to every day life
- they would be better able to use and recall course information because of service-learning
- the service-learning activities helped them bring lessons from the community into the classroom
- service-learning helped them understand the concepts and theories of the subject
- performing service work helped them clarify their major and profession

In addition, students enrolled in UNIV 101 thought they received clearer directions for beginning their service-learning project than did students in other courses.

These findings are likely due to the type of course that UNIV 101 is designed to be. In UNIV 101, students do not have a large body of discipline-specific subject matter. Instead, they are introduced to the university and ways to help them be successful. Thus, they would be less likely to see a relationship between service-learning and the course.

Note that in most ways, the two groups were similar. Freshmen enrolled in UNIV 101 were just as likely to agree that service-learning: helped them become more interested in solving community problems,

made class discussion more stimulating and attendance more likely, and fostered personal insights and growth, among other things.

What correlates with increased learning?

Almost everything correlated with increased learning, whether students were enrolled in UNIV 101 or in another course with a service-learning component (see Table 2). Only number of hours worked, prior number of service-learning courses, and previous community volunteer experience were uncorrelated with learning.

Looking at the strongest group of correlations, it appears that faculty who helped their students to see the applicability of the course concepts and who brought service-learning experiences back into the classroom to enliven classroom discussions also had students who were most likely to agree that they would better be able to understand and recall course information.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics based on enrollment in UNIV 101

	GROUP					
	Mean	UNIV 101 Standard Deviation	Valid N	Mean	Not UNIV 101 Standard Deviation	Valid N
How many hours per week do you work at a job off-campus?	3.77	2.27	246	4.35	2.28	1024
Prior to this semester, how many service-learning courses have you taken? (Not including this semester)	.72	6.12	242	.81	3.59	1028
Before this class I participated in community service regularly (at least twice a month)	2.17	1.36	278	2.28	1.38	1178
This class helped me become more interested in helping solve community problems	3.61	1.00	279	3.58	1.11	1180
Service-learning helped me see how course concepts can be applied to everyday life	3.40	1.07	280	3.68	1.07	1176
Through service-learning I gained practical experience that will appeal to employers, graduate school, and/or scholarship reviewers	3.69	.99	278	3.65	1.14	1178

	GROUP					
	Mean	UNIV 101 Standard Deviation	Valid N	Mean	Not UNIV 101 Standard Deviation	Valid N
I will be able to use and recall course information because of service-learning	3.11	1.07	279	3.36	1.16	1179
Activities in the course helped me bring lessons I learned in the community back into the classroom (e.g., through journals or class discussion)	3.27	1.00	279	3.50	1.08	1177
Service-learning made class discussions more stimulating	3.39	1.06	278	3.44	1.16	1174
Service-learning helped me understand the basic concepts and theories of the subject	3.22	1.08	278	3.37	1.13	1175
Structured reflection activities (e.g., journals, reflection sessions) helped me analyze issues about citizenship or my responsibility in the community.	3.40	1.01	277	3.38	1.10	1177
The service activities I performed for this class made me more interested in attending class	3.23	1.14	280	3.20	1.17	1174
Directions on how to get started with the service-learning experience were clear	3.86	.96	279	3.57	1.17	1175
I would recommend service-learning to other students	3.93	1.09	278	3.83	1.08	1177
Service-learning helped me learn more about group dynamics and group skills	3.59	1.09	279	3.56	1.13	1172
Service-learning gave me an opportunity to interact more with my professor	3.19	1.12	279	3.12	1.20	1174

	GROUP					
	Mean	UNIV 101 Standard Deviation	Valid N	Mean	Not UNIV 101 Standard Deviation	Valid N
The service-learning experience fostered personal insights and growth	3.67	1.02	279	3.76	1.07	1175
I am more comfortable in my dealings with people of diverse backgrounds as a result of my service-learning experience	3.55	1.13	278	3.43	1.18	1176
Performing service work helped clarify which major and/or profession I will pursue	2.60	1.29	279	2.95	1.28	1175
I will continue volunteering with my agency after the class ends	3.18	1.19	278	3.11	1.34	1169

Note: Statistically significant differences in group means ($p < .05$) are in bold

Table 2. Correlations between learning items and other items

Item:	Correlation with:	
	I will be able to use & recall course information because of service-learning	Service-learning helped me understand the basic concepts & theories of the subject
How many hours per week do you work at a job off-campus	-.002	.002
Prior to this semester, how many S-L courses have you taken?	.049	.052
Before this class I participated in community service regularly	.092	.092
This class helped me become more interested in helping solve community problems	.499	.518
S-L helped me see how course concepts can be applied to everyday life	.640	.631
Through S-L I gained practical experience that will appeal to employers, graduate school, and/or scholarship reviewers	.628	.561
Activities in the course helped me bring lessoned I learned in the community back into the classroom (e.g., through journals or class discussion	.656	.657
S-L made class discussions more stimulating	.645	.693
Structured reflection activities (e.g., journals, reflection sessions) helped me analyze issues about citizenship or my responsibility in the community	.490	.540
The service activities I performed for this class made me more interested in attending class	.606	.633
Directions on how to get started with the S-L experience were clear	.284	.287
S-L helped me learn more about group dynamics and group skills	.551	.544
S-L gave me an opportunity to interact more with my professor	.525	.519
The S-L experience fostered personal insights and growth	.559	.581
I am more comfortable in my dealing with people of diverse backgrounds as a result of my S-L experience	.537	.527
Performing service work helped clarify which major and/or profession I will pursue	.513	3497
I would recommend S-L to other students	.530	.561
I will continue volunteering with my agency after the class ends	.362	.358
I would recommend S-L to other students	.530	.561