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Service-Learning Outcomes in English Composition Courses An Application of the Campus Compact Assessment Protocol

This article compares ten English composition courses - six taught with traditional methodologies and four incorporating service-learning. Four instructors, each of whom taught both the traditional and service-learning versions of the composition courses, and one hundred twenty-eight students were involved in the study. The authors demonstrate that service-learning improves students' attitudes toward civic engagement and social responsibility, sense of personal efficacy, and understanding of the complexity of social issues while enabling students to meet traditional standards for proficiency in the composition course. Because service-learning enhances liberal arts institutions' ability to fulfill their missions (which often include the development of citizenship and service) without sacrificing academic content, the authors argue for a value-added approach to ser-

Introduction

This article compares traditional English composition classes with service-learning versions. We address the question, "Does service-learning improve students' writing as represented in a course portfolio and course grades and their attention to social issues?" Students enrolled in six sections of traditionally taught English composition courses at SUNY Cortland in the Spring of 2002 are compared with students enrolled in four sections of service-learning composition courses in the same semester taught by the same four teachers. A total of 128 students were involved in the study—96 in traditional composition courses and 32 in service-learning composition courses.

The study's outcomes involve student performance in composition courses and the effectiveness of using service-learning as a tool for instilling the ideals of citizenship and community involvement in our students. Although the study addresses student performance in writing, we focus on those outcomes for which service-learning is uniquely suited: improving attitudes toward citizenship and community service and developing a greater sense of personal efficacy. We also consider student retention and ask if service-learning students were any more likely to express favorable attitudes about college or actually return to our

college following their service-learning semester, as compared to traditionally taught students.

Our view is that service-learning research is best served by comprehensive, comparative studies that consider both students' proficiencies in course skills and knowledge *and* the value added by service-learning. Overall, the evidence for the impact of service-learning on traditional academic learning outcomes is, at best, mixed (Eyler, et al.). However, a study by Wurr (2002) that focused on composition courses found that the writing by service-learning students was consistently better than that of non-service-learning students. Although his findings are encouraging, we do not believe that the terms of the debate over whether service-learning is effective should be dictated by traditional classroom learning outcomes alone. After all, "educating students morally and for good citizenship as well as intellectually is part of the mission statement of almost all higher education institutions and has been since their inception" (Kezar, 15).

CONTEXT OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION AT SUNY CORTLAND

Goals

The benefits of service-learning for civic engagement aside, it was the "learning" aspect of service-learning that first prompted one of the co-authors, John Suarez, to adopt a service-learning methodology for his four fall 1999 composition classes at the State University of New York (SUNY) College at Cortland, a liberal arts institution of about 6,000 students.

Suarez teaches composition courses whose goals are for students to intensify their awareness of audience, improve their ability to write concisely, and deepen their appreciation for the complexity of issues. He had noticed that many students were unmotivated and did not recognize the relevance of the course work to their lives. He wanted his students to understand and to *feel* that, in Eddy and Carducci's words, "their writing matter(ed)." Consequently, he began to investigate service-learning as a vehicle for improving students' motivation to write.

Service-learning provided a connection between composition courses and the college's aims to have its students understand that their work can make a difference. Our college mission statement says, "We focus on helping students become good citizens with a strong social conscience and an appreciation of the environment and diverse intellectual and cultural heritages. We strive to instill within students a sense of responsibility, an eagerness to make a difference in their community, and an awareness of the important positive role they must play in an increasingly global society" (Mission Statement, 7).

Motivations

The Provost and the Dean of SUNY Cortland's School of Arts and Sciences have supported efforts to expand service-learning, due at least in part to their perception that service-learning fosters civic engagement, improves campus-community relations, and can improve retention rates.

In the Fall of 2000, three other English composition faculty were drawn to service-learning by the enthusiasm of many students and by the chance to make learning active, relevant, and (to borrow Haussamen's phrase) "based in reality." They wanted their students' work to be socially responsible.

Students have enrolled in service-learning courses for a variety of reasons, including advisor recommendations, improved educational and career opportunities, good memories of volunteer experiences at home, and the desire to use community service as an academically-oriented learning experience. Still others registered because those were the only sections open. As of Fall 2002, about 450 English composition students have engaged in service-learning, their placements coordinated by Suarez.

During the Spring 2002 semester, some students volunteered at agencies such as Cortland Loaves and Fishes, where students served meals to the poor, and at the SUNY Cortland Day Care Center. However, most students were placed with "special friends" through the YWCA. The Y's Bridges for Kids program links volunteers with youngsters in need of companionship and guidance. In the Cortland community, more than one in five children lives below the poverty level, almost a third of 10- to 15-year-olds are "persons in need of supervision," and more than 4% - almost twice the upstate New York average - drop out of high school (Cortland Counts). A number of our composition students are studying to be teachers, and they devoted a good deal of time, effort, and in many cases, money to their special friends.

Format

Cortland's Writing Program now has two service-learning variants of previously existing composition courses. Students interested in community-based learning can now take Composition 102 (instead of Composition 100) and/or Composition 103 (instead of Composition 101). Each service-learning composition course grants students a fourth credit in recognition of the additional out-of-class hours that service-learning requires. Because the additional credit is formally granted for service hours and not for additional class hours, the college administration gives no additional compensation to service-learning composition instructors.

Composition 102 (Academic Writing I, Writing in the Community), like

Composition 100, focuses on summary, paraphrase, and quotation. Students develop and organize ideas into short essays based on a limited number of academic sources. Composition 103 (Academic Writing in the Community II), like Composition 101, focuses on argument, research, and attention to audience. Students analyze and critique readings, produce essays based on multiple sources, and conduct library research. In the service-learning courses, students are required to complete 30 hours of community service, and they integrate community service experiences with course work through journal writing, class discussion, and essays.

Students in Composition 102 and 103 typically have more written work than do students in Composition 100 or 101, including (in some cases) additional sets of journal entries and separate reports amounting to a minimum of 15 pages. One of the instructors justifies the fourth credit as acknowledgement of the extra writing, not for the community service, while another gives credit for quality community service, as determined largely by agency representative assessments.

Evaluation

To ensure that student writing in any composition course, service-learning or traditional, meets Writing Program standards, writing instructors share their students' work with three- or four-member faculty portfolio evaluation teams. At midterm, instructors collect a trial portfolio consisting of one revised essay from each student; they swap and holistically evaluate the portfolios, basing their judgments on such concerns as attention to audience, focus, integration of sources, paragraphing, and mechanics. Students earn an *acceptable* or an *unacceptable*. At the end of the semester, students submit a final portfolio consisting of two revised essays and a reflective piece composed in class. The final portfolio must earn an *acceptable* in order for the student to pass the course.

Each instructor in the traditionally taught sections of composition used some combination of the following work to determine final grades: quizzes (including some that evaluate improvements in grammar), oral presentations, 15 topical writing assignments of approximately one page in length and based mostly on readings, ten two-page (minimum) journal entries that focus on students' understanding of their writing habits and skills, homework assignments, class participation, and a set of departmental requirements: two in-class essays and three out-of-class (major) essays.

In addition to or instead of some of these types of assignments, instructors in Composition 102 and 103 designed community service-specific assignments, including service-learning journal entries and topical writing assignments

regarding service-learning experiences. For the Spring 2002 semester, instructors also created special projects, such as Roundtable Discussions, which offered students a chance to interact with experts in a particular field, e.g., homelessness. Students helped choose the fields and the guests, and they helped promote these open-to-the-public discussions.

One other special project was the Poster Session at Scholars' Day, a college-wide celebration of student and faculty scholarship held during the third week of April. It provided an opportunity for faculty, staff, and students to share their academic projects in the form of presentations, workshops, discussions, or poster sessions. Some of these projects provided a verbal and visual summary of students' community-based work. Others were poster versions of students' argument essays, which blended library research with authoritative interviews. Roundtable Discussions and Scholars' Day projects received grades.

For this study, instructors tried to keep the amount and the kind of work between service-learning and traditional classes the same, whether considering homework, exercises dealing with mechanical issues, the number of (non-service-learning) journal entries, and the number of major assignments. In some cases, the only difference between major assignments in the two approaches was that service-learning students were expected to weave examples from community service into their essays.

The overall similarities between the service-learning and non-service-learning composition courses created an ideal context in which to conduct an evaluation of service-learning in composition courses at our institution in the spring of 2002. Our approach is consistent with the research agenda promoted by Nora Bacon in which she suggests that service-learning research needs to include comparisons between service-learning and other pedagogies and to control for teacher variables (4).

Methodology

Our approach was to administer the Campus Compact protocol for assessing community service learning (Gelmon, et al.) with some modifications. We administered this modified survey to students in both traditionally taught composition classes and service-learning. A total of 128 students participated in the traditional and service-learning composition courses in which we assessed learning outcomes. Ninety-six students were distributed across six sections of traditional composition courses and 32 students were in four sections of service-learning courses. Four instructors were involved, with each instructor teaching at least one service-learning course and at least one section of a traditional composition course (two instructors taught two traditional sections). Not all students who were in the courses responded to each of our surveys. Most, but not

all, gave us permission to gather background information from their admissions files – SAT scores, high school GPAs, and so on.

We selected the Campus Compact protocol because of its fairly broad approach to evaluating service-learning outcomes. We sought to avoid what Kezar terms “the conventional trap of not seeing [service-learning outcomes such as] openness to diversity or citizenship as intellectual skills” (18). The Campus Compact protocol asks students to respond to questions in several areas: perspectives on community-based learning, attitudes toward community involvement, the impact of service on choice of major or profession, and personal reflections on the service experience. The Campus Compact measures are post-test-only questions to be administered to service-learning students. Because we wanted to include a comparison group in our study, we added a set of questions asking students to indicate whether their course had affected their intentions to become more socially involved (drawn from the Social Responsibility Inventory developed by Jeffrey Howard and Wilber McKeachie, as described in Markus, et al., 1993), a set of questions designed to assess likelihood of retention in school (Stratil), and a set of questions designed to evaluate the courses involved in the study, the instructors, and the students’ perceptions of their learning from the course (drawn from the University of Michigan’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching questionnaire).

As mentioned previously, we attempted to make the two types of composition course—those with service-learning and those without—as comparable in workload as possible. At the same time we realized that, in spite of the similarities between the courses, each instructor brought an individual approach to their courses. Three of the instructors used the same text (*Community Matters*) in their service-learning courses, but readings sometimes differed or were supplemented with newspaper articles. Journal writing also varied: Two of the four instructors used the same prompts, and one instructor asked students in both his service-learning and traditional classes to keep collaborative writing journals, with entries annotated by the instructor and by at least one other student.

Three of the instructors asked students to choose an agency with which to do their service assignments from a list provided by the composition instructors in their Welcome Packet, but the fourth instructor took most of her students to an overnight community service at a Mohawk reservation about two hours from campus.

The semester studied was the most active and ambitious in the Writing Program’s service-learning history. A series of six Roundtable Discussions brought agency representatives to campus so that students from across campus could discuss community service experiences and information from class readings with experts in the field. Every service-learning composition student par-

ticipated in a service-learning Poster Session at the annual Scholars' Day.

This level of activity was bought with a juggling of scheduled activities. Depending on the instructor, time spent on discussing community service was sacrificed in favor of Scholars' Day preparation. Quizzes were dropped, their grades replaced by students' Scholars' Day grades. Lessons on writing skills were replaced by intense discussion of community service incidents.

How did all of this affect student learning? We turn now to the effects of service-learning on traditional academic learning, retention, civic engagement, and student perceptions of course content, delivery, and learning outcomes. We analyzed the effects of service-learning between service-learning and traditionally taught sections of composition using an independent samples t-test, establishing statistical significance at $p \leq .05$. For those measures that were applied to service-learning students only, we used the one-sample t-test establishing statistical significance at the same level.

EFFECTS ON STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Comparability of Classes

The students in these courses were very similar in most regards. There was a slightly higher percentage of non-White students in the traditional sections (16% as compared to 6% in the service-learning sections). One hundred percent of the undergraduates in the service-learning sections were under the age of 25, whereas 95% of the students in the traditional courses were under age 25. Ninety-seven percent of the students in the service-learning sections were freshmen, compared to 73% of the students in the traditionally taught sections. Fourteen percent of the students in the traditional sections were sophomores, 7% juniors, and 6% seniors, whereas only 3% of the service-learning students were non-freshmen, and all of the non-freshmen were sophomores. Eighty-eight percent of the students in the service-learning classes either did not work or worked no more than 10 hours per week as compared to seventy-five percent of the students in the traditional course. Although attendance was slightly higher among service-learning students than among traditional course students, the difference was not statistically significant. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups on high school grade point averages, their verbal or math SAT scores, or their grade point averages at the end of the semester prior to this study (see Table 1).

On the other hand, nearly all of the students in the service-learning sections were female (90%) compared to a nearly equal split between males and females in traditional courses (44% male; 56% female). Thirty-eight percent of the students in the service-learning sections said that they were doing additional vol-

unteer work – above and beyond the service requirement for their composition course – whereas only 18% of the students in the traditional courses said they were doing volunteer work.

Table 1 • Comparisons of Means for Students in Traditional and Service-Learning Courses on Background Variables

	Traditional	Service-Learning	All Students
High school grade point average	85.8	86.6	86.1
Verbal SAT score	500	511	504
Math SAT score	513	518	515
Total SAT verbal and math	1014	1030	1020
Fall 2001 grade point average	2.70	2.63	2.68

Academic Learning Outcomes

As is consistent with the general literature, we found little evidence of difference in academic learning outcomes when using final course grades and portfolio evaluations as the basis of comparison between the traditional and service-learning sections. Ninety-four percent of the students in the service-learning sections created acceptable portfolios at the end of the semester as did 91% of the students in the traditional sections. Averages of the final grades were nearly identical for the two groups—service-learning students averaged 2.73 (on a 4-point scale), and students in traditionally taught composition courses averaged 2.81 (see Table 2). Even though there was no substantial difference between service-learning and traditionally taught students on these measures of learning outcomes, it is at least possible to conclude that service-learning does not compromise student learning of traditional composition content. Student writing performance is not suffering despite the focus of discussion on community issues or the additional work that they are putting into their service-learning courses. This work, in fact, may enable service-learning students to perform substantially better than traditionally taught students on indicators of civic engagement, indicating the value that is added by service-learning.

Table 2 • Comparisons of Service-Learning and Traditionally-Taught Students On Measures of Learning Outcomes

	Traditional	Service-Learning	All Students
Final Portfolio Acceptable	73 (91.3%)	30 (93.8%)	103 (92.0%)
Final Portfolio Unacceptable	7 (8.8%)	2 (6.3%)	9 (5.8%)

Retention

Our survey included several measures designed to assess whether service-learning students were more academically motivated and, therefore, more likely to be retained by the college as compared to students in traditional courses. These questions, which do not appear in the Campus Compact protocol, were drawn, with permission, from the Noel-Levitz (Stratil) College Student Inventory (CSI). These questions ask students to respond to statements like, “I dread the thought of going to school for several more years and there is a part of me that would like to give the whole thing up,” “Of all the things I could be doing at this point in my life, going to college is definitely the most satisfying,” and “I plan to transfer to another school sometime before completing a degree at this college or university.” Surprisingly to us, the only measures on which there were statistically significant differences between service-learning and traditional course students are those that focus on transferring to another school—and not in the expected direction. Traditional course students were *less* likely to say that they were thinking about transferring (see Table 3).

One explanation may be that the students in the traditional sections were older and included some juniors and seniors who would, understandably, be less likely to transfer than freshmen or sophomore students. When we controlled for class year, the differences between the traditional and service-learning groups did not disappear, but they were no longer statistically significant.

Surprisingly, actual retention among freshmen was substantially greater among traditionally taught composition students as compared to service-learning students. Ninety-two percent of the freshmen in composition 101 were registered for classes in the Fall 2002 semester, but only 77% of the service-learning freshmen were enrolled in the Fall 2002 semester.

Engagement Outcomes

Given the mission of liberal arts institutions to prepare their students to be active participants in a democratic society, it seems to us that these measures are far more important as indicators of the efficacy of service-learning than is the focus on traditional academic learning outcomes. On these measures, service-learning is far preferable to standard courses in its ability to foster attitudes of civic engagement and social responsibility (see Table 4).

On all nine measures of civic engagement and social responsibility, the differences between the traditionally taught and service-learning students were statistically significant, and in the hypothesized direction. Service-learning students were more likely to agree that their courses strengthened their intentions to serve others in need and give to charity. They were more likely to say their courses strengthened their sense of purpose or direction in life, their orientation

Table 3 • Comparison of Traditionally-Taught and Service-Learning Students on Retention Variables

	Traditional	Service-Learning	All Students
I dread the thought of going to school	2.60	2.78	2.65
College is the most satisfying thing I could be doing	5.30	5.66	5.39
I plan to transfer to another college before I complete my degree	2.55	3.53*	2.80
I am deeply committed to my educational goals	5.76	5.78	5.77
I am dedicated to finishing college	6.25	6.28	6.26
I have a strong desire to finish my education	6.34	6.25	6.32
I'd really rather be doing other things than college	3.05	3.31	3.12
I have no desire to transfer	4.43	3.63	4.23
I can think of many things I'd rather do than college	2.95	2.72	2.89
I often wonder if college is worth it	3.17	3.16	3.16

NOTE: The higher the mean values, the more in agreement are the respondents with the statements (on a scale of 1 to 7; with 1 being not at all true and 7 being completely true). An asterisk indicates statistical significance using an independent-samples t-test at the .05 level or less.

towards others and away from self, and their intention to work on behalf of social justice. Service-learning students were more likely to agree that their courses helped strengthen their belief that helping those in need is one's social responsibility, their belief that one can make a difference in the world, and their understanding of the role of external forces as shapers of the individual. Finally, given the emphasis in many colleges on diversity and multi-cultural sensitivity, it is worth emphasizing that service-learning students were more likely to say that their courses strengthened their tolerance of and appreciation for people from different walks of life. In short, service-learning has significant advantages over traditionally taught courses in all of the areas dealing with the mission of liberal arts institutions to foster civic engagement, social responsibility, and a sense of efficacy.

Likewise, on the measures that attempt to evaluate service-learning students' perspectives on their experience, their attitudes toward community involvement, and the influence of their experience on their choice of major or profession, service-learning students reported overwhelmingly positive responses, and all measures except for one were statistically significant (see Table 5) For example, 75% of the service-learning students reported that their experiences helped them to see how the subject matter of their composition courses could

Table 4 • Comparison of Traditionally Taught and Service-Learning Students on Social Responsibility Measures Strengthened by Course

	Traditional	Service-Learning	All Students
intention to serve others in need	2.02	3.16*	2.30
intention to give to charity	1.83	3.09*	2.15
sense of purpose or direction in life	2.23	3.00*	2.42
orientation towards others and away from self	2.08	3.09*	2.34
intention to work on behalf of social justice	1.74	2.50*	1.93
belief that helping those in need is one's social responsibility	2.10	3.06*	2.34
belief that one can make a difference in the world	2.24	3.34*	2.52
understanding the role of external forces as shapers of the individual	2.24	3.09*	2.45
tolerance and appreciation for others	2.59	3.66*	2.86

NOTE: The higher the mean values, the more in agreement are the respondents with the statement (on a scale of 1 to 4; with 1 being not at all and 4 being a great deal.) An asterisk indicates statistical significance using an independent-samples t-test at the .05 level or less.

be used in everyday life, and 84% said that service-learning should be used in more classes. Eighty-seven percent reported that service-learning helped them to see how they can become more involved in their communities, 81% said they became more aware of community needs, and 66% said they have a responsibility to serve their communities. Ninety-one percent indicated that they believe that most people can make a difference in their communities, 56% reported that they became more aware of their biases and prejudices, and 87% said that they believed that they themselves could make a difference in their communities.

In addition, students reported a number of personal benefits from their service-learning experiences. Eighty-one percent said community service helped them to define their strengths and weaknesses, 53% said they believed that community work made them more marketable, 62% said that their community experiences helped them to communicate in the real world, 78% said that their community work helped them to learn how to plan and complete a project, and, by the same percentage, they said that community participation enhanced their leadership skills.

Student Perceptions of Course Content and Delivery

On only about half of the measures of student perceptions of course content and delivery were the differences between the traditionally taught and service-learning students statistically significant (see Table 6). However, the differences were

Table 5 • Service-Learning Students' Outcomes on Campus Compact Protocol Variables

Community based participation helped me to see how subject matter can be used every day	3.91*
Community work helped me understand lectures, readings	3.19
More time in classroom would have been better	2.32*
Service learning should be used more	4.03*
I was responsible for knowledge gained in class	4.00*
I can see how to be more involved in community	4.19*
Community work benefited community	4.00*
I probably won't volunteer again	2.06*
I became more aware of community needs	4.13*
I have a responsibility to serve my community	3.94*
Community work helped me define my strengths and weaknesses	3.97*
Community work helped clarify major	3.44*
Community work helped define profession	3.41*
Community work made me more marketable	3.44*
Most people can make a difference in their community	4.22*
Community work helped develop a good relationship with teacher	3.59*
I was comfortable with other cultures	4.25*
Community work made me aware of biases and prejudices	3.47
Community work helped me learn how to plan and complete a project	3.75
Community participation enhanced leadership skills	4.00*
Community work enhanced my ability to communicate in the real world	3.72*
I can make a difference in the community	4.28*

NOTE: The higher the mean score the more the students agreed with the statement. Answers were recorded on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with category 3 as neutral. Asterisks indicate statistical significance at $p \leq .05$ using the one-sample t-test.

important ones. Service-learning students were more likely to report having a strong desire to take the course (and this difference was statistically significant)¹ Service-learning students were more likely to agree that the course was an excellent one and that the instructor was an excellent teacher (although these differences were not statistically significant). Service-learning students were also more likely to report learning a great deal from their course, learning to apply principles from the course to new situations, and developing a set of overall values in their field (all statistically significant).

Nevertheless, service-learning students were more likely to report that the course required more work than others of equal credit. Even though service-learning students believed they had to do more work than other students, they

Table 6 • Comparison of Traditionally-Taught and Service-Learning Students on Course Evaluation Variables

	Traditional	Service-Learning	All Students
Overall, this is an excellent course	2.64	2.47	2.60
Overall, the instructor is an excellent teacher	1.90	1.78	1.87
The instructor motivates me to do my best work	2.05	1.72	1.97
I feel that I am performing up to my potential in this course	2.16	1.94	2.10
I had a strong desire to take this course	3.56	2.25*	3.22
Grading was a fair assessment of my performance in this course	2.05	2.13	2.07
This course required more work than others of equal credit	2.41	1.94*	2.29
The instructor showed a genuine concern for the students	1.70	1.63	1.68
The instructor delivered clear, organized, explanations	2.18	2.22	2.19
The grading system was clearly defined	2.00	2.03	2.01
The instructor made class interesting	2.22	1.94	2.15
The instructor was receptive to discussion outside of class	1.72	1.53	1.67
I learned a great deal from this course	2.23	1.88*	2.14
I learned a good deal of factual material in this course	2.49	2.44	2.48
I learned to apply new principles from this course to new situations	2.31	1.97*	2.22
I deepened my interest in the subject matter of this course	2.68	2.44	2.62
I developed a set of overall values in this field	2.80	2.31*	2.67
I developed a greater awareness of societal problems	2.77	1.81*	2.52
I became interested in community projects related to this course	3.36	2.13*	3.05
I reconsidered many of my former attitudes	3.07	2.41*	2.90
I developed a greater sense of personal responsibility	2.50	2.00*	2.37
The amount of work required is appropriate for the credit received	2.59	2.72	2.62
Reading assignments are interesting and stimulating	2.76	2.81	2.77
Examinations cover important aspects of this course	2.67	2.41	2.60
I felt motivated to learn while in this class	2.51	2.28	2.45

NOTE: The LOWER the mean values, the more in agreement are the respondents with the statement (on a scale of 1 to 5; with 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree). An asterisk indicates statistical significance using an independent-samples t-test at the .05 level or less.

were more satisfied with the outcome than were traditionally taught students.

More important, service-learning students were more likely than were traditionally taught students to report that the course enhanced their appreciation of community and their likelihood of civic engagement. They were more apt to say that their service-learning sections developed a greater awareness of societal

problems, helped them become interested in community projects related to the course, made them reconsider many of their former attitudes, and helped to develop a greater sense of personal responsibility (all statistically significant). Once again, on those measures that strike at the heart of the mission of a liberal arts institution, the students in the service-learning sections reported more favorable attitudes toward the ideals of citizenship and engagement.

Control Variables

Because almost 90% of the students enrolled in the service-learning courses were female first year students, we thought it important to control for sex, class year, and the combination of sex and class year. We discovered that holding these variables constant does not substantially change the analysis, although a few interesting patterns emerge. For example among freshmen, service-learning students were more likely to say that the instructor motivated them to do their best work and that they had a strong desire to take the course. They were, as were all of the students in the service-learning sections, more likely to say that the course required more work than others of equal credit. All of these differences were statistically significant.

Among female freshmen, a number of additional factors become statistically significant in addition to those that are true of freshmen as a whole. Service-learning students who are freshmen and female are more likely than traditionally taught female freshmen students to say that the instructor made class interesting and that they deepened their interest in the subject matter of course. Consequently, when you add the factors that emerge as statistically significant among freshmen to those that begin to appear as statistically significant for female freshmen, it appears that service-learning has its greatest impact on female freshmen. One limitation of our study is our inability to compare first year female students in service-learning courses with freshmen male students in service-learning courses, because there were only three male students in the service-learning composition sections.

Discussion

Our research points to the particular value of service-learning for fostering a variety of attitudes important for civic engagement. Students in service-learning sections of composition were more likely than those in traditionally taught sections to report that their course strengthened their intentions to serve others, their sense of purpose or direction in life, their orientation away from self and towards others, their intention to work on behalf of social justice, their belief that helping others in need is one's social responsibility, their belief that they can make a difference in the world, and their understanding of the role of external

forces as shapers of the individual. Service-learning students were more likely to say their courses strengthened their tolerance and appreciation for others. These findings are similar to those of Moely et al. in their research involving Tulane undergraduates. They found that “students who participated in service-learning showed expected changes in civic attitudes and rating their own skills for community engagement, as well as expressing plans to be involved in civic activities in the future” (23).

Service-learning students were also more likely to see the applicability of their courses to the real world than were traditionally taught students. Service-learning students reported that their community service experiences helped them to see how the subject matter of their courses could be used in everyday life. They said that their service experiences helped them to see how they could become more involved in their communities and that they believed that they themselves could make a difference in their communities.

On the more instrumental side, service-learning students indicated that their service experiences helped them to define their strengths and weaknesses, become more marketable, learn to communicate more effectively, learn to plan and complete a project, and enhance their leadership skills.

Less clear in this research, as in other research projects, is the impact of service-learning on traditional academic learning. One limitation of our study is its reliance on broad indicators of learning (portfolio assessment and student’s final grades in the course). Wurr’s research on learning outcomes in composition courses involved a much more comprehensive look at student learning that took into account differences in the content of student writing between service-learning and non-service-learning courses. He found that “service-learning had a positive impact on student writing both in terms of their written product and their attitude towards, and understanding of, the writing process. In terms of writing quality, the essays written by service-learning students were judged by independent raters to be better than the comparison essays on every measure” (119). Wurr’s project points to the need for more attention to the quality of learning that takes place between service-learning and non-service-learning courses as opposed to the rather blunt instrument of final grades.

However, based on class discussions and on students’ essays, we came to understand that service-learning in composition classes seems to set the stage for a more complex understanding of issues that may otherwise be considered “simple.” Students seem to develop a more complex view of the issues that they are exposed to in their service environments. For example, poverty, illiteracy, and illegitimate births are no longer considered simple matters of needing a handout or needing to (in the paraphrased words of one student) “get out there and get a job.” Systemic explanations for social problems begin to enter student writ-

ing. Because traditional forms of assessment may not be looking at these complexities, other approaches – such as content analysis of student journals, reflections, and papers – should be employed. For example, researchers could use Marshall Welch’s journal evaluation ABC123 rubric that examines affective, behavioral, and cognitive/content dimensions of student writing and the depth of understanding that students exhibit when writing about social problems. Bacon also calls for the addition of qualitative approaches to the assessment of learning outcomes (5).

A second limitation of our research design is the fact that service-learning classes tended to be somewhat smaller than traditionally taught courses. Although there were no significant differences in learning outcomes between the two types of courses, it is possible that students in service-learning courses gave more favorable evaluations of those courses in part because of the smaller class size (rather than the service-learning content).

Students’ positive evaluations of their courses seem at odds with our findings regarding retention; we were not expecting such sizeable differences to emerge between freshmen in traditionally taught courses and freshmen in service-learning courses, and in the “wrong” direction. It may be that students who value learning linked to service may seek campus cultures whose values seem, at least, to more closely match their own. We wonder if students continue to be involved with their communities in some way, whether in their home communities or with their campus community. We believe it is important to continue to evaluate the effects of service-learning on civic engagement and retention by following the progress of students over time.

Conclusions

Questions regarding service-learning’s impact on traditional academic learning and on retention reinforce Kezar’s point that, as a non-traditional pedagogy, service-learning requires non-traditional assessment of learning outcomes, including forms of assessment that account for students’ learning styles preferences. We realized that many service-learning students’ learning flourished with what could be considered non-traditional methods of assessment, e.g. discussion and artwork. Scholars’ Day posters, for example, may help students who have a visual learning style preference display their knowledge, creating significant transition points into writing skills.

As with most service-learning experiences, there were a number of obstacles to overcome. These obstacles turned into learning opportunities that additional measures of service-learning outcomes may be able to assess. For example, many students became frustrated with delays in contacting their agency representatives and/or in contacting their “special friends” or other clients. In part,

at least, this is due to the nature of not-for-profit organizations, as described by McEachern, including directors who perform a variety of tasks, who are very busy, and who work with under-trained employees. Our experience also included a high turnover rate for a few of our partnering agencies' directors. Understanding the nature of social service work – its stresses, challenges, and rewards – then becomes another aspect of the learning that occurs through service.

Complicating their experiences even further, students find themselves in a Twilight Zone of undefined roles, much as Gere and Sinor describe: To what extent should the student be a friend? A “big brother/sister”? A teacher? A server (of food)? A confidant? Such questions serve as fodder for reflection in class discussion and in journal entries. How students resolve these issues and what they take from their experiences in resolving them should become matters of interest to researchers on service-learning.

There is still a great deal of work to be done, but our study provides support for the contention that service-learning is an effective technique for achieving important educational goals. Unless we are only giving lip service to the ideals of an engaged citizenry, service-learning has to be an important component of any liberal arts education.

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Note

¹This finding may be somewhat misleading because students were asked to reflect on their desire to take the course as it was nearing its completion. As a result, students may not have been thinking about their desire to take the course when they enrolled in it. Instead, this question may be a more global assessment of their attitude toward having taken the course.

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