

The Impact and Effects of Service-Learning on Native and Non-native English Speaking College Composition Students

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Based on the belief that students produce better writing when they are personally engaged in the writing topic, the University of Arizona's Composition program is working to integrate service-learning into a variety of the courses it offers. Research to date suggests that composition students and instructors feel a greater sense of purpose and meaning when they believe that their work will have tangible results in the lives of others.

Few empirical studies have investigated these claims, however, and none has focused specifically on linguistically and culturally diverse student populations. Given the diverse student population at most American universities, it is imperative to better understand how different student populations are affected by service-learning. This study examines the impact on student writing performance, motivation, and social orientation of a required service-learning component in an introductory-level first-year college composition course. The general research question is: In what ways does participation in service-learning impact student learning? Specific research questions pertain to the general categories of student writing performance, motivation, and social orientation:

1. Does service-learning impact students' perceptions of self, school, community, and society? If so, how?
2. Do native and non-native English speaking students respond to service-learning similarly? Why or why not?
3. Are native and non-native English speaking students affected by service-learning similarly? Why or why not?
4. What other factors—such as personality type, previous experience with community service, and career goals—impact service-learning outcomes?
5. Does service-learning lead to improved student writing? If so, in what ways?

The study consists of treatment and comparison groups of native and non-native English speaking students, for a total of four classes to be included in the case study. Each class section includes about 20 students and one graduate student or adjunct faculty instructor. Data collection involves surveys, student interviews, participant observations, analysis of students' journal and essay writing, and final course evaluations.

Two initial reports related to the study have been published:

Wurr, Adrian. "Assessing the Effects of Service-Learning on Student Writing." *Arizona Working Papers in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching* 7 (2000).

Wurr, Adrian. "A Pilot Study of the Impact of Service-Learning in College Composition on Native and Non-native Speakers of English." *Academic Exchange Quarterly* 3.4 (1999): 54-61.

The final dissertation report on the study is scheduled to be completed by December 2000. Correspondence may be sent to awurr@u.arizona.edu.