

# Assessing Student Learning Outcomes in Service-Learning and Experiential Education

Auburn University Service-Learning Colloquium

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# Abstract

What strategies and tools can we use to determine the **civic, academic, and personal outcomes** and impacts of experiential education and academic service-learning on our students? This presentation showcases recent work at the University of Georgia to assess **short- and longer-term impacts of service-learning activities** on students across a range of academic subject areas. The presenters will share information on the goals, methods, and instruments used, as well as how these outcomes relate back to meeting institutional student learning goals.



# UGA: Institutional Context

- Large public research university
- ~34,000 students
- Land- and sea-grant
- Strong historic and current public service mission
- Carnegie elective Community Engagement Classification 2010
- Office of Service-Learning established 2005
- General Education requirements revised 2007



# Survey Background

- In 2007, UGA's Office of Service-Learning (OSL) began considering how to demonstrate learning outcomes and data relating to SL
- Service-Learning Interest Group, Service-Learning Curriculum Committee, and Office of institutional Effectiveness collaborated to design & pilot a survey
- Designed to provide **course and institutional-level data** to aid faculty teaching SL courses and to inform the OSL's faculty development programs



# Learning Outcomes: “General Education Abilities”

- Embedded throughout 1000-, 2000-, 3000- and 4000-level courses
- Departments asked to “identify the courses in your department that substantively develop any of these General Education abilities”:
  - Communicate effectively through writing
  - Communicate effectively through speech
  - Critical Thinking
  - Moral Reasoning (Ethics)



# Survey Development

- Sources: *Service-Learning Benefit Scale* (SELEB; Toncar et al., 2006) and by Campus Compact's (Gelman et al., 2001) *Community-Based Learning – Student Survey*
- Intended to measure academic service-learning's impact in ways that also correspond with UGA's General Education Abilities:

SELEB	UGA General Education Abilities
Practical and Academic Skills	Critical Thinking
Interpersonal Skills	Oral and Written Communication
Citizenship	Moral Reasoning
Personal Responsibility	Moral Reasoning



Academic SL Benefit <i>(Toncar et al., 2006)</i>	UGA General Education Abilities
<p><b>Practical &amp; Academic Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying knowledge to real world</li> <li>• Problem analysis and critical thinking</li> <li>• Social self-confidence</li> <li>• Conflict resolution</li> <li>• Ability to assume personal responsibility</li> <li>• Workplace skills</li> <li>• Skills in learning from experience</li> <li>• Organizational skills</li> <li>• Connecting theory with practice</li> </ul>	<p><b>Critical Thinking</b> (Engage in complex thought, analysis, and reasoning)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider and engage opposing points of view</li> <li>• Communicate for academic and professional contexts</li> <li>• Support a consistent purpose and point of view</li> <li>• Assimilate, analyze, and present a body of information</li> <li>• Analyze arguments</li> <li>• Interpret inferences and develop subtleties of symbolic and indirect discourse</li> </ul>

Academic SL Benefit <i>(Toncar et al., 2006)</i>	UGA General Education Abilities
<p><b>Interpersonal Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Growth</li> <li>• Ability to work well with others</li> <li>• Leadership skills</li> <li>• Communication Skills</li> </ul>	<p><b>Communicate effectively through writing and speech</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assimilate, analyze and present a body of information</li> <li>• Adapt communication to circumstances and audience</li> <li>• Interpret content of written materials on related topics from various disciplines</li> <li>• Communicate for academic and professional contexts</li> <li>• Produce communication that is stylistically appropriate and mature</li> <li>• Communicate in various modes and media, including the proper use of appropriate technology</li> </ul>

Academic SL Benefits <i>(Toncar et al., 2006)</i>	UGA General Education Abilities
<p><b>Citizenship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding cultural and racial differences</li> <li>• Social responsibility and citizenship skills</li> <li>• Community involvement</li> <li>• Ability to make a difference in the community</li> </ul>	<p><b>Moral Reasoning (Ethics)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize the community and the greater common good in addition to individual needs and goals</li> <li>• Contribute to the eradication of stereotypes and prejudices that exist in society, either in crude forms or in more sophisticated and sometimes pseudo-scientific ones</li> <li>• Judge and understand ethical behavior in social applications</li> </ul>
<p><b>Personal Responsibility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caring Relationship</li> <li>• Be trusted by others</li> <li>• Empathy and sensitivity to the plight of others</li> </ul>	

# Service-Learning Student Survey

- Piloted for 2007-08 school year to sample existing SL courses
- Modifications to the survey made after the survey was piloted for two consecutive semesters, and again in 2011
- Since initial pilot, OSL administers the survey at the end of each semester (Fall, Spring, some Summer)
- Available online (Qualtrics) or in paper form
- Able to export to Excel or SPSS, and to customize reports for individual courses/faculty members' use



# Implementation

Spring 2010 Service and Community-Based Learning: Student Follow-Up Survey - Windows Internet Explorer  
http://ovicci.com/web.dll/s/129af944350

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Spring 2010 Service and Community-Based Learning: Student Follow-Up Survey

Thank you for taking a few minutes to complete the following survey. We ask you to think about your experience in the UGA course with a service component that you took **this semester**. Your thoughtful responses on this survey will provide feedback to the instructor and the UGA Office of Service-Learning to help us improve this and other UGA service-learning courses.

**Service-Learning**

1) Academic service-learning is defined as a course-based teaching and learning method in which students engage in structured service and action that allows them to apply what they are learning to community-based issues and applied problems. Students learn while serving, and grow through reflection on their contributions. Before this course, had you previously been involved in service-learning, or taken courses with a service-learning component?

Yes  
 No

**About this Course**

2) Please use the drop-down menu to select the service-learning course in which you were enrolled this semester.

Choose One

If you selected other, please specify:

3) Estimate the percentage of time *in class* devoted to the service-learning project for this course.

% (0-100)

4) Estimate the total amount of time *outside* of scheduled class hours that you devoted to the service project for the whole semester.

hours

5) In what type of service project did you participate this semester? (select the one most appropriate)

Tutor/Mentor (in a school or non-school setting)  
 Consultation (to an organization or government agency)  
 Environmental Restoration or Rehabilitation  
 Educational Programs/Teaching (variety of audiences)  
 Research and report on a topic of interest to the community or organization  
 Building/Construction (e.g. Habitat for Humanity)  
 Political/Policy Change  
 Social Justice Project or Campaign  
 Other (please specify)

If you selected other, please specify:

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# Survey Responses

Semester & Year	# of Respondents
Fall 2007	78
Spring 2008	91
Fall 2008	145
Spring 2009	238
Summer 2009	36
Fall 2009	171
Spring 2010	209
Summer 2010	11
Fall 2010	234
Spring 2011	249
Summer 2011	71
Fall 2011	340
Total	1700



# Possible Uses for Data

- Institutional Uses:
  - Executive Summary
  - Presentations for Campus Stakeholders
  - Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement
  - Accreditation (Institution, Programs)
- Benefits for Faculty and Students
- Investigating Variables of Institutional Interest
  - Example: Moral Reasoning and Time on Service
  - Example: Project FOCUS/long-term outcomes



# EXAMPLE 1: Teaching & Learning

- Counters the assumption that SL courses have lower student evaluations-- can show specific impact
- Faculty can use course-level data for:
  - Scholarship of teaching & learning
  - Comparing similar courses with different levels of service-learning
  - Comparing course outcomes across time
  - Enhancing their P&T dossiers to show impact
- Improving quality and effectiveness of SL courses



## EXAMPLE 2: Moral Reasoning

- Impact of *time spent on service activity* (in class and outside class) on general education learner outcome of *moral reasoning*
- Taking into account (possible) influences of
  - Student demographics
  - Relationship with instructor
  - Inclusion of reflection activities



# For Fall 2009-Fall 2011 Undergrads

Ethnicity	Gender	Year in College
<b>White (74.1%)</b>	Female (65.9%)	First Year (8.3%)
<b>Black/African American (7.5%)</b>	Male (34.1%)	Second Year (12.0%)
<b>Asian/Pacific Islander (6.2%)</b>		Third Year (26.1%)
<b>American Indian/ Native</b>		Fourth or Fifth Year (53.6%)
<b>American (4.2%)</b>		
<b>Hispanic/Latino(a) (2.4%)</b>		
<b>Multiracial (1.9%)</b>		
<b>Prefer Not To Report (3.7%)</b>		



# Time Spent in Service Activity

Self-Reported, open-ended responses:

- “Estimate the **percentage of time in class** devoted to the service-learning project for this course.”
- “Estimate the total amount of **time outside of scheduled class hours** that you devoted to the service project for the whole semester.”

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
% In-Class Time	1071	0%	100%	44.82	34.09
Out-of-Class Hours	1071	0 hours	499 hours	32.90	36.70



# Survey Items: Moral Reasoning

Stem: The service-learning project in this course...	Mean (SD)
• helped me better understand people of different ages, abilities, cultures, or economic backgrounds	4.37 (.81)
• encouraged me to seek additional opportunities to learn about people of different ages, abilities, cultures, or economic backgrounds	4.17 (.87)
• made me aware of some of my own biases and prejudices	3.95 (.98)
• helped me clarify my personal values	4.00 (.94)
• required me to make judgments about how to behave in new social situations	4.12 (.86)
• made me more aware of my possible impact on others	4.44 (.69)
• helped me reconsider some of my former attitudes about social problems	4.00 (.96)
Composite, Cronbach's alpha = .891	4.14 (.68)



# Moral Reasoning & Time Regression Analysis

Model	Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.666	.147		18.103	.000
	Age	-.005	.005	-.025	-.886	.376
	Sex	-.181	.041	-.127	-4.435	.000*
	Ethnicity Dichotomous	-.005	.046	-.003	-.112	.911
	Prior SL	.096	.039	.069	2.441	.015*
	Relationship with instructor	.260	.021	.369	12.592	.000*
	Journaling	.136	.018	.226	7.614	.000*

\*Significant at p<.05



Model	Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
2	(Constant)	2.617	.147		17.857	.000
	Age	-.006	.005	-.034	-1.203	.229
	Sex	-.159	.041	-.112	-3.898	.000*
	Ethnicity Dichotomous	.024	.046	.015	.517	.606
	Prior SL	.106	.039	.077	2.716	.007*
	Relationship with instructor	.252	.021	.358	12.032	.000*
	Journaling	.129	.018	.214	7.190	.000*
	Percent Class Time SL	.001	.001	.047	1.617	.106
	Time out of Class SL	.002	.001	.109	3.859	.000*

\*Significant at p<.05



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# Implications

- Need continued investigation into impact and implications of other variables found to have significant associations (e.g., gender, prior SL)– however, these are outside of instructor's control
- While spending more time on the service activity is associated with improved Moral Reasoning outcomes, this impact appears minimal.



# Implications

- More significant impact is associated with the development of a positive relationship with the instructor through the service activity – so **having the instructor involved** in the activity seems more important to prioritize.
- Opportunities for **critical reflection** also are associated with enhanced Moral Reasoning, and also a service-learning best practice, so should also be high priority



# Challenges/Limitations

- Different pilot survey data; as refined, some changes to questions and answers
- Faculty and student participation is voluntary, so variable response rates
- No pre/post data so difficult to determine causality
- Data is self-report so subject to interpretation or recall (even on things like how much of the class focused on the service-learning activity!)



## EXAMPLE 3: Project FOCUS long-term outcomes

- Long-term impact of service-learning
  - AESC 4920S/6920S FOCUS – Fostering Our Community’s Understanding of Science: Service-Learning Experience
- **Study Purpose:** Examine how participation in FOCUS affects civic engagement behaviors and beliefs in the years following graduation.
  - Instrument modified from Higher Education Research Institute’s (HERI) *Life After College Survey: A Survey of Former Undergraduates*
  - Builds on Astin and Vogelgsang’s (2006) similar study of a national sample of alumni identifying three positive outcomes related to SL (civic leadership, charitable giving, and overall political engagement)



## EXAMPLE 3: Project FOCUS long-term outcomes (2)

- **Sample:** 475 UGA alumni who took FOCUS as undergraduates from 2004-2011
- **Comparison Group:** Sample of alumni with a similar breakdown of graduates from the same colleges as the FOCUS sample, and who graduated during the time period.
- Early analysis of results indicate FOCUS participants—
  - are more likely to continue involvement with community and civic engagement activities
  - spend more time volunteering
  - were significantly more likely to attend alumni events, use an alumni association for professional and social support, and recruit others to attend their alma mater.



# Questions?



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