

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
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CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO MEANINGFUL SERVICE-LEARNING
AND INTENTION FOR FUTURE VOLUNTEERISM:
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ABSTRACT

Service-learning is a teaching tool in which a service experience is assigned in an academic course and is different from other teaching tools such as internships or out-of-classroom volunteer work. Service-learning offers a structured reflection component targeted at applying classroom knowledge to societal issues with the ultimate goal of encouraging students to volunteer within their communities in the future (Mooney & Edwards, 2001). Astin (1993) suggests that service-learning is one of the most promising practices to help students understand their responsibility to support society through volunteerism.

This study sought to assess a service-learning program at a community college that used three essential service-learning program components to determine its impact, if any, on the students. The three essential service-learning components used in the study were: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an impact on the community; and (3) the training or orientation students receive at the community agency.

Using a qualitative case study approach, this research effort sought to understand contributing factors to meaningful service-learning and intention for future volunteerism at a community college among nontraditional students. Multiple data sources were collected and triangulated to formulate the findings of the study. The data sources gathered and analyzed included faculty survey results, course syllabi, agency surveys, student surveys, both prior to the implementation of the Service-Learning Center and following their service-learning experience in the classroom, and semi-structured

interviews conducted with students who were of a nontraditional age and participated in service-learning as part of an academic course.

Findings confirmed much of the previous research. Results of the study revealed the importance of the three essential service-learning program components identified previously, as well as the potential for service-learning experiences to increase the likelihood that students will intend to volunteer after graduation. This study also expanded the previous body of literature and yielded a number of new implications for practice and future research.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the past two decades, many institutions of higher education have responded to both community needs and student learning needs through the development of outreach programs such as service-learning (Sapp & Crabtree, 2002). Service-learning is a teaching tool in which a service experience is a mandatory or optional assignment in an academic course. The service experience is designed to help students learn specific course objectives. Service-learning differs from volunteerism in that service-learning, unlike volunteerism, has structured and intentional learning objectives linked to course content. Evidence of higher education's commitment to learning through engagement in service over the past 10 years can be observed through membership in Campus Compact, a prominent organization that promotes service among young adults, which has experienced membership growth among colleges and universities to over 950 member institutions (Butin, 2006). Community colleges, with historically strong connections to their respective communities, have been noted as leaders in the establishment of strong service-learning programs. A survey conducted in 2001 by the American Association of Community Colleges revealed that almost half of all community colleges incorporated service-learning into their academic curricula (Weglarz & Seybert, 2004).

Service-learning is different from other teaching tools such as internships or out-of-classroom volunteer work. Service-learning offers a structured reflection component targeted at applying classroom knowledge to societal issues with the ultimate goal of encouraging students to volunteer within their communities in the future (Mooney &

Edwards, 2001). For example, to teach empathy in a nursing course, students may be required to serve in a soup kitchen, and then, discuss their experiences in class or engineering students may work together to build a wheelchair ramp for a youth home and write a paper regarding the need for volunteerism among engineering experts within the larger society. Following their service experience, students are expected to connect their knowledge to course content and then return to serve again. In addition to learning course content, one of the primary outcomes of service-learning is to increase the likelihood that students will volunteer after college graduation. Long-term activism or volunteerism is essentially the why of service-learning (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002). Astin (1993) suggested that service-learning is one of the most promising practices to help students understand their responsibility to support society through volunteerism.

Butin (2006), however, cited limitations to institutionalizing service-learning programs related to the target population. As the nontraditional student population increases in institutions of higher education across the United States, service-learning programs often do not meet their needs, as the target of most programs is the traditional, inexperienced, unemployed, full-time student. Additional research is needed to study the use of service-learning among nontraditional student populations, such as those attending community colleges.

This study sought to assess a service-learning program at a community college that used three essential service-learning program components to determine its impact, if any, on the students. The three essential service-learning components used in the study were: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an

impact on the community; and (3) the training or orientation students receive at the community agency.

Statement of the Problem

Although much has been written in recent decades regarding service-learning, empirical research on service-learning is weak and often limited to anecdotal theoretical definitions and unsubstantiated suggestions for practice (Astin, Keup & Lindholm, 2002; Astin, Sax & Avalos', 1999; Brisbin & Hunter, 2003). In addition, research on service-learning is limited, in that, too often, researchers use service-learning as the predictor variable, despite the fact that there are wide-ranging program elements that may impact whether or not service-learning encourages students to continue volunteering after completing the academic assignment (Eyler, 2000). That is, researchers often design studies that do not take into account variables such as the nature of the reflection exercise following the service experience, how much training and information students receive prior to their volunteer work and other important variables related to the design of the service-learning program. Finally, research on the impact of service-learning on nontraditional students attending a community college is also limited (Butin, 2006). Therefore, additional research was needed to study whether the critical service-learning program components cited throughout the literature are effective in producing students who intend to volunteer in the future, specifically among nontraditional student populations attending community colleges (Butin, 2006; Kahne, Westheimer & Rogers, 2000).

The service-learning program studied was in place at a large, single-campus, urban community college in the southwest with an annual enrollment of approximately

20,000 students. The community college context was identified as the appropriate context for the study for two primary reasons. First, the community college is a different environment from that of a four-year university. Community college missions are generally linked to service to their communities, whereas meeting community needs is considered a more auxiliary function of a university (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Targeting the community college environment as the context for this study also allowed the researcher to compare the findings of this study to those service-learning studies that have been conducted only in the university setting. Secondly, the service-learning program in place at the community college studied used practices that sought to include the three essential service-learning components reviewed in the study. These three components were: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an impact on the community, and (3) the quality of the training or orientation students receive at the community agency. The service-learning program and the community college studied will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to understand contributing factors to meaningful service-learning and intention for future volunteerism at a community college among nontraditional students. Three service-learning program components are cited throughout the literature as important to aid in creating a meaningful service-learning experience and to increase the likelihood that students will intend to volunteer in the future. The three commonly cited service-learning program components used as the framework for the study were: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service

experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning contributed to meeting a community need, and (3) the training students received at the agency (Cauley, et al., 2001; Johnson, 2000; Karoayan & Gathercoal, 2005; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998; Robinson and Barnett, 1998; Schaffer, 2004; Werner & McVaugh, 2000).

Connections to course content through reflection is the first key component of a service-learning program that transforms service or volunteerism into service-learning by challenging students' values and engaging their emotions to aid in making connections to course content (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Schaffer, 2004). Quality reflection is a way for learners to take in information, consider it and then integrate it into understanding or application of the information. Reflection is often done by the faculty member both prior to the service and following the service activity. Pre-reflection ought to include a discussion regarding community needs, explanation of course objectives, and a clear connection between the two. Reflection after the service is typically an individual summative paper submitted by students or individual or group presentations that provide a forum for the students to reflect on their assumptions prior to the service and lessons learned in the context of the course content.

In addition, it is also important to give consideration to the second critical characteristic of a service-learning program, whether or not students feel as if participation in service-learning had an impact on the community being served. In other words, it is important that students feel as if their service experience was meaningful and contributed to meeting a need in the community. Gorelick (2002) proposed that in order for the service to be perceived as meaningful, it is important for the faculty members and

agency representatives to aid students in defining the concept of community and understanding the population they are serving. Often, journaling during the service experience or in-class discussion can serve as an aid in helping students feel as if participation in service-learning was meaningful. The students' connection between course material and the service experience, the extent to which the students believe they had an impact on the community and the quality of the training students receive at the agency are all critical components of a service-learning program and cited throughout the literature as necessary in order for service-learning to emotionally and cognitively benefit the student (Cauley, et al., 2001; Johnson, 2000; Karoayan & Gathercoal, 2005; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998; Robinson & Barnett, 1998; Schaffer, 2004; Werner & McVaugh, 2000).

Agency orientation, the final critical service-learning program characteristic, ought to occur prior to the service experience and include an agency description, explanation of course objectives, an emphasis of the needs of the community or population being served and an overview of the task to be completed during the service experience (Cauley, et al., 2001). An agency orientation is said to aid students in understanding how the tasks they perform during their service-learning experience meet community needs (McCarthy & Tucker, 1999). An orientation may be conducted by the faculty member when introducing the service-learning project in the classroom, or be performed by an agency representative at the agency, or by both, depending on available time and student needs.

Research Questions

This study sought to assess a service-learning program at a community college.

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the extent to which the three essential components of a service-learning program are apparent in their service-learning experience? The three essential service-learning components to be used in the study are: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an impact on the community; and (3) the training or orientation students receive at the community agency.
2. What potential impact will the students' service-learning experience have on their intention to volunteer after graduation?

Significance of the Study

Administrators of service-learning programs often rely upon the literature to design service-learning experiences. The literature on specific program characteristics that make service-learning an effective teaching tool, however, is often limited and anecdotal, rather than defined through empirical research (Butin, 2003). This study contributed to the body of research by using three commonly cited service-learning program components as a framework to guide the discovery of information. Thus, this study has both implications for theory and practice. In terms of practice, a stronger empirical body of research on what practices in service-learning yield benefits to students may aid service-learning practitioners in better structuring their programs and services. Specifically, given the lack of research regarding the use of service-learning with

nontraditional student populations, such as those found in a community college environment, this study serves as a model in the development of service-learning programs for educators and administrators working in similar institutions. Additionally, faculty members may benefit from better understanding how to implement an effective service-learning experience. Faculty members have indicated that use of service-learning makes teaching more rewarding as students have more enthusiasm for course material and engage in course material at higher cognitive levels (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998). Building a service-learning program has also been shown to encourage greater collaboration among instructors and affords new opportunities for research (Rich, 2003; Sipe, 2001).

In regard to theory, this study contributed to the growing body of research that aids in understanding service-learning as a dynamic teaching tool and its potential impact on students. Studies have revealed that students who had engaged in service-learning showed significantly higher likelihood of performing community service in the future than those who had not participated in a service-learning experience (Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer & Ilustre, 2002). Better understanding of this potential positive impact of service-learning benefits higher education generally by crediting colleges and universities with producing a civically minded population of graduates, which in term may benefit society.

Definitions

Agency Representative is an individual who is employed at a community agency and serves as a spokesperson and expert on the day-to-day functioning of the agency.

Community Agency is a group or organization, often not for profit, that exists to fulfill a need in the immediate community.

Community College is a comprehensive and regionally accredited institution of higher education that awards the associate's degree as its highest degree (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Nontraditional Student, for the purpose of this study, was defined as a student that is age 22 or older (Sorey & Duggan, 2008).

Service-Learning, for the purpose of this study, was a teaching tool in which a service experience is assigned in an academic course and is incorporated into the curriculum as a form of experiential education. Thus, the service experience is designed to help students learn specific course objectives (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Volunteerism, also often called community service, is an activity in which an individual engages in service work at a community agency or within a charitable organization (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Summary

Governmental policies and research over the past two decades suggest a strong link between higher education and adults' commitment to volunteerism after graduation. Service-learning is a teaching tool in which students link course material to a meaningful service experience and return to the classroom to reflect on this learning experience. Service-learning has been shown in empirical research studies to have many positive impacts on the community, institutions of higher education, faculty members and students alike. To this end, numerous researchers have sought to define critical program components for use in service-learning. Butin (2006) suggested, however, that a great

deal of the research is anecdotal in nature and lacks the necessary empiricism to adequately establish a more comprehensive understanding of service-learning. This study explored a service learning program at a community college using three service-learning program components as a framework, as evidenced by faculty members, community agency representatives, students and service-learning program administrators. The three essential service-learning components used in the study were: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an impact on the community, and (3) the quality of the training or orientation that students receive at the community agency. Chapter Two will discuss the current empirical research studies on service-learning, including a review of how the three components of effective service-learning programs have been studied and utilized at institutions of higher education.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In approaching this research study, it was useful to explore the breadth of research that has been conducted on service-learning, as well as review literature related to the target population of this study, the nontraditional student. Although the majority of research is in regard to how service-learning impacts students, understanding its influence on secondary beneficiaries such as faculty members, institutions of higher education and the community is also critical in capturing the complexity of service-learning. In conducting a review of the literature, it was first useful to explore volunteerism, as this is the broader context under which service-learning was used. For this portion of the literature review, it was important to discuss national research on volunteerism and legislation related to volunteerism. The second area of the literature review explored service-learning generally in terms of its definition and uses in different types of higher education institutional settings. Understanding such differences aids in gaining a broad perspective on the uses of service-learning, as well as, lends insight into how community colleges, the context for this study, may be unique in the approach to applying service-learning as a teaching tool. The third area covered in the review of the literature is in relationship to critical program components for service-learning. Connections to course content through reflection, meaningful service experiences and agency orientation are the three service-learning critical program components that were examined for this study. The next area of the literature review explored the breadth of research and current thinking regarding the characteristics and needs of nontraditional students, the target

sample population of this study. While little research is available regarding nontraditional students engaged in service-learning, exploring this unique student population aids in understanding the targeted participants of this study. The final portion of the research that was important to explore was the results of numerous research projects that have indicated various impacts of service-learning on students, faculty members and community agencies.

National Research on Volunteerism

Interest in volunteerism has sparked a number of studies regarding trends in the level of civic engagement for various populations, many of which have focused on demographics and personal characteristics, such as age, gender and educational attainment, as predictive indicators as to whether or not one volunteers. Drawing on a national database of 6,491 students in higher education, Marks and Jones (2004) found that high socioeconomic status is positively correlated with volunteerism. In a longitudinal study of 640 people, tracking them from age 18 to 27, results indicated that volunteering increased in a year by 5% for each month one was in college and that those who volunteered the previous year were eight times more likely to volunteer in the current year (Oesterle, Johnson & Mortimer, 2004). In a study of volunteerism among women, college degrees and higher status careers were most positively associated with participants' likelihood of volunteering. Such studies confirm direct and indirect links to higher education and its potential to contribute to a spirit of volunteerism among adults. To this end, service-learning has emerged as a means for higher education to teach students how to serve society by volunteering (Sapp & Crabtree, 2002).

Legislation That Addresses Volunteerism

A number of governmental programs and national research initiatives have also been implemented to seek to increase volunteerism in the United States. Volunteerism was strengthened in 1990s through a number of governmental supported programs. In 1993, President Clinton sanctioned the AmeriCorps program, which provided an educational stipend of \$4,725 to 20,000 adults for contributing a year of volunteer service (Myers-Lipton, 1998). AmeriCorps has since grown and is a network of local, state, and national service agencies that connects more than 70,000 volunteers annually to projects to meet critical needs in education, public safety, health, and the environment. In addition, the National Community Service Act of 1990 was passed and provided \$275 million to common and higher education for implementation of service-learning related initiatives (Myers-Lipton, 1998). The Commission on National and Community Service was also established in the 1990s to monitor service trends and further ignite a civic mission within institutions of higher education (Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998). Such governmental programs, not only reinforce volunteerism as a core value in American society, but also send a message regarding the role that higher education plays in contributing to this value system.

Service-Learning Defined

Much of the research and philosophy guiding the use of service-learning is rooted in the work of John Dewey (1997), who suggested that in order to be truly meaningful, education must engage both the cognitive and the emotional. Education is enhanced when students are making connections between the course material and their personal experiences. Service-learning accomplishes this experiential learning goal by providing

opportunities to apply course content to real life situations, contributing to the development of life skills, helping clarify career goals and enhancing the emotional capacity to participate in volunteer activities (Moore, 2000). Service-learning goes beyond making students feel good about themselves, by challenging their values and beliefs (McCarthy, Damrongmanee, Pushpalatha, Chithra & Yamamoto, 2005).

Growing from its origins in experiential education, the use of service-learning as a teaching tool has gained popularity, and as a result, many definitions have emerged that seek to encapsulate it within a framework so that it may be applied broadly, effectively and consistently. Jacoby (1996) defined service-learning as

A form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote service-learning and development (p. 5).

In addition, Hollis (2002) described that

[Service-learning] differs from a community service model in that it involves combining traditional methods of teaching academic skills and materials with more structured or intentional educational activities, increased opportunity for students' reflections on the normative dimensions of civic life, and experiential activities that address community needs or assist individuals, families and communities in need (p. 201).

Furthermore, speaking directly to the application of service-learning in the classroom, Sheffield (2005) suggested,

Service-learning provides the opportunity to apply classroom-developed knowledge and skills to a community problem thereby increasing the depth and

understanding of that knowledge and skill while solving a community problem through interaction with diverse community stakeholders (p. 47).

These definitions express three common themes regarding service-learning.

Meaningful service-learning includes: (1) clear connection to academic course material, (2) true aid to others and (3) time for reflection on the learning experience (McCarthy, 2003; Sipe, 2001). Therefore, these are three essential components of a service-learning program that were used as a framework for this research study.

Service-Learning and Institutional Type

Institutions vary greatly in their size, mission and relationship to their individual communities. As a result of such variance, institutional type can be a significant factor in how institutions of higher education approach the use of service-learning as an instructional tool. Colleges and universities often approach the use of service-learning differently based on their own unique missions and subsequent relationship with their communities. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) suggested that institutions that seek to serve specific student populations not only approach service-learning differently, but often with more ease than predominately white colleges and universities. For example, Hispanic-Serving Institutions have strong and clearly defined communities, making service-learning programs less complicated to frame and implement. Tribal colleges are deeply rooted in service as a value and frequently serve as a community meeting place, thus making service-learning programs a natural fit within the environment. Historically Black Colleges and Universities also have a strong relationship with their communities and are traditionally dedicated to improving their surrounding neighborhoods, which complements the use of service-learning (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). Institutions

with roots in Christian values also embraced the basic philosophies of service-learning. In a study of 90 faith-based higher education institutions, results indicated that faith-based institutions embraced service-learning because such programs compliment the mission of the institution and have strong support from faculty members who believe that service-learning is an academically valid teaching tool as it is a means by which to teach faith in conjunction with course material (Schaffer, 2004).

In other research on how institutional type affects students' volunteer behavior, Cruce and Moore (2007) found a number of institutional characteristics that may be predictors of volunteerism among students. This study used a sample of 623 institutions in the United States and data from the National Survey of Student Engagement. Findings revealed that students attending institutions located in an urban environment were less likely to volunteer during their college experience than those students attending colleges and universities in rural settings. In addition, Cruce and Moore (2007) found that students attending smaller institutions were more likely to volunteer or participate in service-learning during their first year of college than those students attending larger universities. Institutions of higher education are indeed dynamic environments. Research suggested that institutional type or characteristics of the institutional environment may impact student volunteer behavior (Cruce & Moore, 2007; Schaffer, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000).

Service-Learning and Its Use in Community Colleges

Community colleges also serve a unique function that may be enhanced and supported through the use of service-learning. The historical roots and traditional mission of the community college is well aligned with the philosophical underpinnings of

service-learning in the shared goal to improve the economic and social environment of the community (Elwell, 2001). While responsiveness to the educational needs of the community have been and continue to be at the forefront of the community college mission, service to the community in order to meet more basic and personal needs have gained prominence on community college campuses in the past two decades. In 1994 the American Association of Community Colleges formally endorsed the use of service-learning as another means by which to fulfill the mission of the community college, which is to educate students and to serve the community. Following this endorsement, many community colleges lead the way in developing strong service-learning programs. In 2001, research conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges revealed that almost half of all community colleges incorporated service-learning into the academic curriculum (Weglarz & Seybert, 2004).

This growth in the use of service-learning among community colleges has sparked a number of research endeavors to better understand the relationship between community college missions and the philosophies of service-learning. Prins (2002) conducted a survey of 78 chief academic officers and student affairs officers at 24 community colleges in the United States. Results indicated that 67% of respondents stated that their formal mission statements included service. Among those whose mission statements did not include service, half of the participants directly stated that service to the community was an institutional priority. Academics was consistently listed as the top priority of the colleges, while economic and community development were typically the second most important focus of the community colleges included in the study. The three most frequently listed reasons for not offering a service-learning program were that it was not

an institutional priority, no faculty interest and students do not have enough time. The most often cited reasons for supporting a service-learning program were: (1) retention, (2) wise use of limited resources, (3) a means by which to measure service in the community, and (4) service-learning is an effective method to work with community leaders to resolve societal concerns (Prins, 2002).

This surge in the use of service-learning within the community college environment has been well received by faculty members and students. Welgarz and Seybrant (2004) conducted research on satisfaction with service-learning among faculty members and students. The results of the satisfaction survey of 81 faculty members and 216 students at an urban community college revealed overall satisfaction with the use of service-learning as a teaching tool. Among the faculty members surveyed, 88% rated the use of service-learning as excellent, indicating that such instructional methods enhanced the ability of their students to more effectively apply classroom knowledge. The faculty members, however, also indicated that they had a need for additional training, more contact with agency representatives and increased time to incorporate service-learning into their curriculum.

Among the students surveyed, results revealed that student satisfaction with service-learning increased as the number of hours spent on the project increased. Student satisfaction was also increased when service-learning was presented as an option for completing an assignment, rather than as a course requirement. Student respondents suggested that the five most important skills learned through their experience were social skills, personal development, career choice clarity, a development of the desire to volunteer, and intellectual and academic development (Weglarz & Seybrant, 2004).

Based on this research, service-learning is reported to have positive impact on faculty members and students in the community college environment.

Essential Components of a Service-Learning Program

Despite a growing body of research that suggests service-learning, when used as a teaching tool, has the potential to positively impact students, faculty members and the community, there is a lack of clearly defined goals for service-learning. In addition, there is limited empirical evidence to support those critical service-learning program components, which are frequently cited throughout the literature (Butin, 2003). Yet, regardless of these criticisms, much has been written to outline practices that are said to be most effective in maximizing the benefits of service-learning.

McCarthy and Tucker (1999) suggested three critical components of service-learning. First, the use of teams or small group discussion ought to be used to aid students in building self-efficacy. Secondly, training or orientation prior to the service experience is important. Such training during class ought to include an agency description, explanation of course objectives and an overview of the tasks involved in the service experience. Finally, faculty members should lecture on the importance of community service to aid students in understanding the value of volunteering. Battistoni (1997) added that service-learning should be such that students have input into the development of the program. This method further teaches students about democracy and citizenship and gives them ownership so that they develop the necessary skill set to engage in future service. Johnson (2000) reiterated these service-learning program components by suggesting that effective service-learning ought to include opportunities for reflection, be mutually beneficial to the community, have clearly defined goals for the

community agency, students and faculty members and provide pre-service training to students.

Adding to the body of literature on service-learning, are program components that specifically target the use of service-learning in the community college environment. Robinson and Barnett (1998) presented three elements for community college service-learning programs, including holding an orientation to service-learning and the agency, involving students in agency selection and overall structure of the experience and holding group reflection sessions. Of a similar nature, others have sought to define service-learning program components in terms of specific service-learning goals. Werner and McVaugh (2000) suggested four elements that are critical to service-learning programs in order to foster students' long-term interest in service. First, service-learning ought to be optional; as a requirement service-learning is not effective because it uses extrinsic motivation which does not produce enduring results. Secondly, students ought to be given a choice of agencies so that they will take an increased ownership for providing quality work. Students must also enjoy their experience. That is, students should feel as if they are making a difference or contributing to the community. Finally, it is recommended that one component of reflection should focus on future service and why volunteerism is critical to society.

Service-learning program components are also presented as standards developed to assess student competencies. Karayan and Gathercoal (2005) presented an assessment rubric, which mirrors much of the service-learning literature and aids in clarifying learning outcomes. The rubric contains six standards of a quality service-learning program.

First, is the integration of learning, thus students ought to gain life skills during their service experience that may be applied inside and outside of the classroom. Secondly, service-learning ought to be of high quality as to benefit both students and the community agency. To this end, collaborative service-learning is critical. Agency representatives, students and faculty members ought to all be involved in defining goals for the service activity. The third standard emphasizes the importance of the role that students play in service-learning by reiterating the importance of students playing an active role in choosing and planning the service experience. Fourth is the development of a desire to participate in volunteer activities after graduation. It is important that service-learning experiences be such that students feel as if they have helped others and contributed to the community. Students must be brought to understand how their actions contribute to or have an impact on the community. Fifth is the incorporation of a quality reflection component, as reflection connects service to the course content. Quality reflection occurs before, during and after the service and calls for students to examine the process and outcomes of their experience. Sixth, it is recommended by Karayan and Gathercoal (2005) that all participants are provided an opportunity to evaluate their experience and changes be made based on these results. The researchers suggest that these six service-learning program elements be held as standards by which to measure the success of a given program.

Guidelines have also been established within specific academic fields to aid in guiding faculty members in the inclusion of service-learning as a part of their syllabi. Among one of most predominant academic areas that utilizes service-learning is the health profession field. Guidelines adapted from the *Service Learning Protocol for*

Health Professions Schools included four key practices that mirror those previously outlined (Cauley, et.al., 2001).

First is the establishment of a relationship between faculty members and the service agency in order to define clear roles and to ensure that the needs of both are met. Second an orientation to the learning experience ought to emphasize the needs of the population being served. Thirdly, a reflection component should aid students in linking course content to the service experience. Fourth, it is important that the service-learning program is structured so that the value of service as a professional in the health care industry is emphasized. Such guidelines capture previously outlined essential components of an effective service-learning program, while also paying special attention to the value that health profession fields place on service during and after formal education.

Although limited, there have been several studies that have defined service-learning essential program components through the use of empirical research. A study of 50 students in a service-learning academic experience revealed four important practices. First, students ought to be given the opportunity to pre-reflect on the current beliefs regarding service and others. Secondly, the selection of agencies ought to be done with care such that agencies selected are prepared philosophically and in terms of infrastructure to work effectively with students. In addition, faculty members must ensure that students understand the purpose of the service-learning experience as it is related to course learning objectives. Finally, reflection should combine the students' experience and previous beliefs, the service experience and course content. In this qualitative study, the researchers determined that these four components contributed to

students' satisfaction with the service-learning experience (Rochquomore & Schaffer, 2000).

In another study of 177 students at six Midwestern colleges, Mabry (1998) indicated that performance feedback from agency representatives and faculty members is a critical practice that increases student learning by teaching students to accept feedback, which is a useful skill in future professional workplace settings (Subramony, 2000). Finally, in a study of 232 students engaged in service-learning, results of a pre and post questionnaire revealed five key practices in the implementation of an effective service-learning program. First, it was determined that between 15 and 24 hours of service maximizes the benefits of the service-learning. Secondly, frequent contact with agency representatives and clients contributed to a desire to continue to participate in volunteer activities and academic knowledge. In addition, both weekly in-class and summative reflection components aided students in making the appropriate connections to course content. Finally, personal discussions about the service experience with faculty members and agency representatives also contribute to maximizing the benefits of service-learning.

In a review of the literature on practices in service-learning, three common themes or components emerge: agency orientation, connections to course material through reflection and meaningful service. Training or orientation prior to the service experience is recommended in order that students learn about the community and the agency where they will perform the service. Connections to course material through effective reflection prior to, during and after the service experience aid students in applying their service experience to course content and specified learning objectives. Finally, ensuring that students feel as if their service experience was meaningful or met

community needs is a critical component of service-learning. Therefore, it is the combination of such program components that not only contributes to learning in the classroom but also to achieving the ultimate goal of service-learning, which is that students continue to participate in volunteer activities after graduation from college. Critics, however, suggested that there is limited empirical evidence to support a thorough understanding of those program elements that maximize the benefits of service-learning (Butin, 2003).

Connections to Course Content Through Reflection: An Essential Service-Learning Characteristic

Reflection is a key component that transforms service into service-learning by challenging students' values and engaging their emotions to aid in making connections to course content (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Schaffer, 2004). Dewey (1997) suggested that making meaning is critical in education, but one event can hold multiple meanings for different individuals. This is why reflection is critical. Reflection exercises before, during and after the service-learning experience helps students ascribe meaning and understanding to their experience. Quality reflection is a way for learners to take in information, consider it and then integrate it into understanding or apply the information. When reflection is done improperly, however, service-learning can have no results or even negative impacts such as misunderstanding of others and complex social issues (Ash & Clayton, 2004).

In a study of 471 students in 17 service-learning courses at nine colleges, results of a questionnaire indicated that quality reflection that fosters connections to course material has three primary characteristics. First, reflection must aid students in clarifying

their own values. In addition, multiple reflection exercises over time are more effective than one final reflection exercise alone. Finally, students must understand the purpose and goals of the reflection exercise in order for it to be effective (Hatcher, Bringle & Muthiah, 2004).

Although much is written about the importance of reflection in education, quality reflection still remains difficult to apply (Ash & Clayton, 2004). Reflection includes journaling, papers, class presentations, group discussions and other related learning activities, each of which is designed as an opportunity for students to connect their experiences to course material, the academic area and societal concerns (Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998). Ash and Clayton (2004) outline three key phases in effective reflection. First, reflection ought to be descriptive. Students must be afforded an opportunity to objectively recount their service experience. Next, students should be asked to analyze their experience from a personal, civic and academic perspective. Finally, quality reflection must include the answers to four questions that require students to articulate their learning. These four questions include: 1) What did I learn?, 2) How did I learn it?, 3) Why does this learning matter or why is it important? and 4) How will I use this learning? Answers to such questions help move students beyond objective understanding to learning. It is further suggested that effective reflection ought to require students to reflect before, during and after their service-learning experience. This reflection ought to also be varied in terms of reflection that is done alone, with classmates and with members of the community agency (Eyler, 2002).

Meaningful Service: An Essential Service-Learning Characteristic

Ensuring that students feel as if their service had an impact on the community being served is the second essential component of an effective service-learning program. As student reflection papers often do not address issues of community because community can be difficult to define, Gorelick (2002) proposed that in order for the service to be perceived as meaningful, students ought to be introduced to the complexity of community. It is suggested that in order for students to feel as if their service experience was meaningful, they ought to be empowered to fix the community and make significant connections to agencies and clients. By further strengthening these connections students become personally invested in the mission of the agency and the well-being of those being served. Agency selection, pre-service training, quality reflection all contribute to aiding students in developing a sense of meaning, without which little learning or long-term effects may be experienced.

Agency Orientation: An Essential Service-Learning Characteristic

An orientation or training session prior to service experience helps students better understand how their service contributes to the needs of the agency and the community being served. In an interpretive case study of four university students who spent seven days building low-income housing abroad, it was determined that when students are oriented to the mission and operation of the agency they are more likely to feel intimately connected to the client, even if they have not met those being served. When students understand the agency and their needs they feel connected and are more likely to ask questions and engage in self-directed learning (King, 2004). Such an understanding of the agency and community needs lays the groundwork for a quality service-learning

experience. Without this critical first step, it is suggested that the service will not be meaningful and reflection components may lack the necessary depth to elicit long-term results for students. Training or orientation prior to the service experience ought to include an agency description, explanation of course objectives, emphasis on the needs of the community or population being served and an overview of the task to be completed during the service experience (Cauley, et al., 2001; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999).

Service-Learning and Its Impact on Students

Service-learning has consistently been reported to have a positive impact on students within the higher education environment. Service-learning throughout higher education is said to benefit students by aiding in understanding course material, contributes to making academic knowledge relevant, enhances self-esteem, helps students develop critical thinking skills, improves social skills and guides career choice (Johnson, 2000). Use of service-learning has also been reported to help first-year students' transition to college by fostering a sense of connection to faculty members, other students and the community (Preis & Fenzel, 2003).

Service-learning is also reported to have multiple cognitive and emotional impacts on students. Osborne, Hammerich and Hensley (1998), conducted a study comparing students who did and who did not participate in service-learning. Results of their research indicated significant gains in the service-learning students regarding cognitive complexity, attitudes toward others, social competency and in the understanding of course material.

In a study of 356 department chairs and faculty members to determine the extent to which communication departments in colleges and universities sought meaningful

service, a number of positive benefits to students were reported. The respondents suggested that their use of service-learning in the classroom helped students make connections between community needs and their future careers, allowed students to integrate theory into practice, fostered a better understanding of culture and aided students in developing a stronger sense of social responsibility. Although a number of positive impacts were reported, it is interesting to note that in the original study conducted almost ten years earlier, more respondents in the original survey reported that service-learning contributed to students' desire to volunteer (Oster-Aaland, Sellnow, Nelson & Pearson, 2004). Such results suggest that without remaining mindful of the methods used in implementing service-learning programs, one may have reduced benefits to students.

In another study, which analyzed the final reflection papers from 60 students engaged in a service-learning experience, students' writings revealed multiple positive impacts of service-learning, including personal growth, ability to apply classroom knowledge to other settings, sense of connectedness to the community, ability to better understand course material, commitment to future service and ability to understand complex social problems. It is important to note, however, that fewer than 10% of students specifically wrote about their commitment to perform future service as a result of their service-learning experience (Litke, 2002).

Nontraditional Students

While the study of service-learning among nontraditional students is limited, there is much research on nontraditional students in regard to their learning needs in the higher education environment (Butin, 2006). This research on nontraditional students is useful

in understanding more clearly the target student population of this study. Nontraditional students, also referred to as adult learners in the literature, are said to be a unique population with special needs. To meet nontraditional students' learning needs, Knowles (1989) introduced the term andragogy, which is a technique used to maximize learning among adults. Knowles' research built on the original work of John Dewey (1938), which was developed decades earlier and explained that the past experiences of the learner were central to the current learning process. In order to reach a nontraditional student population, Knowles (1989) suggested that educators remain cognizant of four key characteristics of the adult learner. First, adults are more self-directed in their learning than are their younger counterparts. That is, adult learners ought to be given the flexibility to explore subject matter in a way that is most meaningful to them. Secondly, experience serves as a rich source of learning for adults, thus utilizing prior experience to learn new material is critical. Thirdly, adult learners are motivated to learn based on their social roles. Adult learners often draw on their personal or social roles and their professional work responsibilities as a reason to learn, thus connecting material to these roles aids nontraditional or adult learners in learning more effectively. Finally, adult learners need an immediate application of the knowledge being learned. Younger students are more able to assume that learning will eventually be useful, whereas nontraditional or adult students need to be able to apply their knowledge to a current situation or dilemma.

Enrollment of nontraditional students, generally defined as students age 22 or older, has grown at a rate three times that of younger students in higher education between 1970 and 2000. Despite the rapid increase of nontraditional students on college

campuses in the United States, these students do not graduate at the same rate as their younger counterparts. Bachelor's degree completion among nontraditional students was found to be 31 percent compared to 54 percent among traditional students between 1989 and 1994 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). Such findings have led to an increase in awareness, responsiveness and research regarding nontraditional students.

In a study of persistence and retention among nontraditional students, Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005) found a number of unique challenges faced by this student population. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth in 2001, the researchers found that degree completion was negatively impacted among nontraditional students by part-time enrollment status, being married and the complexities associated with having young children. In another study related to persistence, Sorey and Duggan (2008) found a number of differences and similarities when comparing traditional and nontraditional students. The study was conducted at a multi-campus community college in Virginia and used a survey to gather data on 68 traditional and 55 nontraditional students. The researchers revealed that in both groups persistence was higher among those enrolled in technical fields and among those with strong family support. They also found differences among the two groups. Nontraditional students were found to need social connections more than traditional students and traditional students needed more academic integration in order to be successful in the higher education environment.

A number of other studies have also been conducted to better understand the characteristics and needs of nontraditional students in comparison to their traditional-aged counterparts. Morris, Brooks and May (2003) used the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations and Roedel, Schraw and Plake's Goals Inventory to assess the needs

of 22 nontraditional students. The researchers found that nontraditional students embraced learning for learning's sake, had higher grade point averages and were more likely to cope with stress by being task focused. In another study of 258 traditional and nontraditional students using the Purpose of Life survey, researchers determined that nontraditional students had a stronger sense of their own skills and how they used these skills in the roles at work and home (Geiger, Weinstein & Jones, 2004). Lynch and Bishop-Clark (1993) also reported differences among traditional and nontraditional students in the classroom. In a telephone survey of 300 students, the researchers found that 94 percent of students indicated they liked mixed age classrooms, but were uncomfortable when working in small groups or on projects with students of varying ages. Students further indicated that mixed age classrooms helped them see other perspectives. Interestingly, both groups perceived younger students as less serious than nontraditional students.

Family roles, responsibilities and stresses are another area of research that has been prominent among nontraditional student populations. Lundberg, McIntire and Creasman (2008) used a mixed methods approach and found older adult students received increasingly less support from their families as they progressed from entrance to graduation at a university. Using Taylor and Betz's Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale, the Self-Efficacy Expectations for Role Management scale, the Career Barriers Inventory and The Social Provisions Scale, Quimby and O'Brien (2004) found that nontraditional, female students had great confidence in their ability to balance the roles of parent and student and also felt they had strong social support. These findings applied whether or not the students did or did not have children and whether or not the student was married.

Increased research on nontraditional student populations has also lead to the implementation and study of services designed to meet the unique needs of this student population. Keith (2007) sought to study how nontraditional students used student support services to overcome barriers to academic achievement. Results of a survey instrument revealed that older students were not likely to use campus resources. When factoring in other life challenges, such as the number of hours worked in a given week, the research revealed this did not increase the likelihood that a nontraditional student would utilize support services to aid them in overcoming academic challenges. In another study of a transitions program that connected nontraditional to 17 community agencies to provide personal and financial help, findings revealed that not only was the program successful in helping students overcome barriers to academic success, but also promoted the college within the immediate community (Lutes, 2004). In a survey conducted at a small private college, nontraditional students indicated a desire for additional common areas on campus to study and socialize between classes, whereas traditional students were found to want opportunities to socially network through campus events (Kinsella, 1998).

In a continued effort to meet the unique needs of nontraditional students, Mancuso (2001) conducted a survey of 63 institutions of higher education to establish a list of practices that best meet the needs of a nontraditional student population. The research yielded a list of 13 suggested practices, including, (1) the institutional mission ought to include adult-centered practices, (2) faculty, staff and students work collaboratively to efficiently meet student needs, (3) curriculums are designed to meet individual adult learner needs, (4) prior learning assessment is available, (5) multiple

teaching strategies are used to cater to adult students, (6) classroom projects center around students' roles within their families and professional life, (7) open admissions policy, (8) staff help students set and adjust their educational goals, (9) services are offered at a variety of times and locations, (10) faculty both teach and provide services to students, (11) uses of adjuncts to maintain a low cost and flexible curriculum, (12) use of technology to communicate with students, and (13) tuition and other related educational expenses are kept low.

Cognitive Outcomes of Service-Learning on Students

Enhanced cognitive development and improved academic outcomes are among the most frequently studied impacts of service-learning. In research, service-learning has been found to help students better learn and retain knowledge. Given that 10% of what is heard and 15% of what is seen is retained, while 60% of what is done, 80% of what is reflected upon and 90% of what is taught is retained, service-learning goes beyond lectures and textbooks by asking students to do, reflect and teach so that retention of classroom knowledge is enhanced (Johnson, 2000). During a service-learning experience, students retain more classroom knowledge because they actively participate in the learning experience and reflect on this experience, making connections between their own life experiences, the service experience and their learning in the classroom.

Application of course material is among the most frequently cited academic and cognitive impact of service-learning. In a pre and post test study of 180 students, Evangelopoulos, Sidorova and Riolli (2003) found that service-learning contributed to students' views of the usefulness of course material and increased the likelihood that students would use the course-related knowledge in the future. In another study,

Schmidt, Marks and Derrico (2004) also revealed similar results as they sought to determine the impact of a mentoring service-learning project at a private, liberal arts college. Using a pre-survey instrument, analysis of weekly journal entries and a post-survey, findings were consistent with previous research in that students were able to connect and apply classroom knowledge and have an increased awareness of societal issues as a result of participation in service-learning. Singleton (2006) also found in a study of social work students enrolled in a course regarding adult development and aging who were required to complete 30 hours of service at one of three adult aging facilities, findings revealed that prior to the service-learning experience 41% of students felt unprepared to work with older adults; however, after completing the service-learning experience 100% indicated they felt prepared to work with older adults. Such studies suggest that service-learning may serve as a useful teaching tool in aiding students in acquiring the ability to apply knowledge and skills learned in the classroom to their future careers and lives.

A number of studies have sought to compare the use of service-learning to more traditional teaching methods in order to determine the specific academic and cognitive impacts service-learning has on students. For example, in a study comparing 475 students in different sections of the same course, midterm and final exam scores were compared and journal content was analyzed. The findings suggested that students, who participated in a section of the course with a service-learning component, performed significantly better on the essay-style midterm and final exams and were better able to demonstrate the ability to apply course content as evidenced through journal entries. In addition, Strage (2000) concluded that student learning through service-learning is best

assessed through written exams and the cognitive benefits of service-learning take time to be revealed, suggesting that the end of the semester is the most appropriate time to assess learning that results from a service-learning experience. In a similar study of 477 students, 311 of which were enrolled in a course without a service-learning component and 166 who participated in service-learning, academic performance was defined as a students' final course grades and correlated to service-learning participation. Findings revealed that students who were enrolled in courses with a service-learning component earned grades between 2.4 and 4.8% higher than those enrolled in a course that did not include service-learning (Strage, 2004).

Although there have been many research studies conducted on service-learning, not all have shown positive cognitive outcomes for students. In a study of 28 students enrolled in sociology and English courses, researchers found little cognitive growth in students engaged in service-learning. Sperling, Wang, Kelly and Hritsuk (2003) concluded that the lack of academic or cognitive growth was due to the fact that students were not motivated to learn from their experience, but rather completed the service simply to finish the course assignment. Such findings suggested the need for additional research on service-learning to explore how and in what way the components of a service-learning programs impact student outcomes.

Emotional Outcomes of Service-Learning on Students

Service-learning is said to have an impact on students' emotional growth, both during and after their service experience. Rochquomore and Schaffer (2000) found, in a study of 50 students' journals written throughout an academic service-learning experience, three sequential stages of development were identified as occurring during

service-learning experiences. The first stage is that of shock in that the students express surprise or disbelief about the economic and social conditions they are working within. This stage typically occurs during the first three weeks. The second stage is that of normalization as students adapt and begin accepting what they see as *normal*. The second stage occurs during weeks four and five of a 16 week service-learning experience. The third and final stage is that of engagement. Student learning becomes apparent as they personalize their experience and seek to solve societal issues. This study reveals the importance of attention to students' emotional development during the service-learning experience.

Another study conducted with 442 students at nine universities, findings revealed that there were significant affective benefits of using service-learning. Participants exhibited an enhanced knowledge of others through the development of accepting attitudes toward others, a better understanding of the role they may play in initiating social change and an increased likelihood of participating in service in the future as a result of their academic service-learning experience (Root, Callahan & Sepanski, 2002). Use of service-learning as a teaching tool has clear potential to impact students in the classroom and beyond. In addition to helping students gain the capacity to apply classroom knowledge, service-learning may also have long term benefits by aiding students in better understanding societal issues and how individuals may influence change in their communities.

There is growing evidence that service-learning affects short-term identity development among students, but little research has been done to understand the lasting effects of service-learning. To move toward filling this gap in the research, a study of a

10 week leadership theories course was conducted. Students completed three hours of service each week and met with other students during class to aid in integrating the learning. A sample of three students was selected from the current course and five students were selected who had taken the class two to four years prior. Interviews were conducted with each participant and the constant comparative method was used to analyze the data. Results were positive, in that students two to four years past their service-learning experience suggested their experience with service in the classroom continues to affect their sense of self in terms of efficacy and empathy. Specifically, study findings revealed that students continue to integrate an understanding of others as an important part of developing their own identity, thus service-learning aided students in self-reflection beyond the one experience. In addition, findings revealed that service-learning allows students the opportunity to become aware of their own socioeconomic status and understand that with privilege comes responsibility. Participants also exhibited an enduring commitment to volunteer and were more open to new experiences and ideas (Jones & Abes, 2004). Results from this study contribute to the literature which indicated that service-learning may serve as a powerful teaching tool that elicits a long-term impact on students' likelihood of volunteerism.

Other research regarding the impact of service-learning on students' emotional growth has had mixed results. Reed, Jernstedt, Hawley, Reber and DuBois (2005) studied the emotional impact of service-learning on students in a psychology course. Thirty-four students in the course were divided into two groups equal in terms of sex, grade point average, major and year in school. Each student visited a person near the end of life for two to four hours. Students in the experimental group also had an initial

meeting to discuss logistics, a session on understanding death and dying and a debriefing session with a local care provider and faculty member. A pre and post survey was administered to measure the experience, attitudes and beliefs. Results suggested that students participating in the reflective sessions reported no change in their sense of social responsibility, an increase in their sense of the meaningfulness of college, anxiety talking to dying people and in choosing a non-profit career field. Most notable about these findings is the fact that pre-reflection, although often posited as an important service-learning program component, had little impact on improving the service-learning experience for students.

These studies suggested that service-learning may be a powerful tool to aid in students' emotional growth. Throughout multiple stages of emotional development students have been found to better understand others, themselves and their role within the larger society. In addition, research regarding the emotional impacts of service-learning show that those students who participate in service-learning are more likely to volunteer in the future.

The Impact of Service-Learning on Students' Intention to Volunteer in the Future

Although much has been studied and written regarding the cognitive and emotional impact of service-learning in the classroom, whether or not service-learning increases the likelihood that students will engage in future service, remains the primary goal of service-learning programs. To this end, research in this area reveals mixed results. In a study of students in a first year seminar course with a required service-learning component at a Jesuit Catholic liberal arts college, results of a pre and post survey and course evaluation administered to 35 students revealed that students were

committed to future service and felt more connection to the community as a result of their experience with service-learning (Preis & Fenzel, 2003).

In a study of two engineering courses with 40 students engaged in a service-learning project to design a playground, there were similar findings. The purpose of the service-learning project was to provide students with the opportunity to connect classroom knowledge to meet a societal need. All students were surveyed and seven focus groups were conducted. Results revealed four positive findings: student participants exhibited the ability to apply classroom knowledge, a strong desire to be an authority in their field, a concern regarding racial understanding and environmental issues, and most importantly, a commitment to use their engineering expertise to perform future service (Ropers-Huilman, Corwile & Lima, 2005). Another study with a larger sample size utilized the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire to determine the differences between students who did and did not engage in an academic service-learning experience. The sample included 541 students, 217 who participated in service-learning and 324 who did not. Findings suggested that the service-learning students showed greater course satisfaction, more learning about academic material and an understanding of community issues. No difference was found between the two groups regarding diversity attitudes. However, students who had engaged in service-learning showed significantly higher likelihood of performing community service in the future than those who had not participated in a service-learning experience (Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer & Ilustre, 2002).

In addition, a study of 481 former undergraduate students at a religiously affiliated liberal arts college found that those who were engaged in service-learning while

in college were more likely to continue doing service after graduation than those who only volunteered during college (Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005). In another study of one-hundred and seventeen 4-year institutions, comparing data collected over a 10 year period, results indicated positive gains among students were highest in regard to interaction with faculty, number of hours spent volunteering after graduation and overall satisfaction with the college experience as a result of having engaged in service-learning (Astin, Keup & Lindholm, 2002). Indeed, research suggests that service-learning has the potential to have a significant impact on higher education's ability to produce engaged citizens.

All results, however, are not as positive regarding whether or not service-learning increases the likelihood that students will engage in service in the future. In a study of students participating in an academic service-learning program, Parker-Gwin and Mabry (1998) found that one service-learning project alone did not increase the likelihood of future service nor did it lead to an increase in how much value students place on serving others. The authors suggest that future studies focus on how much responsibility students are given, how much training or orientation students receive and how much the institution communicates with agencies to determine how these factors influence student outcomes. Such research brings to light the importance of taking into consideration the importance of proper implementation of service-learning in order to maximize the benefits to students.

Other research confirms these findings. In a study of the factors that motivate college students to serve, 12 students were selected from three public, three private, two liberal arts, one Catholic, two research universities and one state institution for an in-

depth qualitative study. Using interviews and document analysis, findings revealed that for those students still participating in service after high school, their motivation was internal, whereas those who had done service in high school, but had not continued participating in service in college, their motivation was primarily external, that is their participation in high school was motivated by family and friends. The researchers concluded that requiring service, such as is the case with many academic service-learning experiences, can have a negative impact in that service is seen as only about meeting a requirement, rather than learning and engagement (Jones & Hill, 2003).

Another study of 350 communication departments revealed that fewer faculty members were engaging in meaningful service-learning by incorporating structured reflection activities into their assignments, despite the research that suggests such reflection is critical to effective service-learning. The study also found a decrease in reports that students were gaining a desire to volunteer in the future as a result of their service-learning experience (Oster-Aaland, Sellnow, Nelson & Pearson, 2004). Such research suggests that there may be a connection between service-learning program components and achieving the intended learning outcomes. Additional research is needed, however, if the components of a service-learning program impact a student's likelihood of participating in future service, specifically among nontraditional-age students.

Unintentional Impacts of Service Learning on Students

Although service-learning may appear to be one of higher education's most significant tools in producing engaged citizens, there may also be unintended results when service-learning is not properly implemented. As Dewey (1938) explains, "The

belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative” (p. 25). For instance, if students are not appropriately prepared for their service experience, they may view those they serve with preconceived stereotypes or view the experience as little more than one more class assignment to complete, which can mean that very little learning occurs (Sipe, 2001). Additionally, Bickford and Reynolds (2002) outlined five important pitfalls in creating effective service-learning programs. First, when service-learning is required, it may be viewed as punitive, rather than an important learning experience. Secondly, if students are not prepared to meet people different from themselves, stereotypes are reinforced and differences are magnified, rather than understood. Thirdly, if agency needs are not assessed, one-time service-learning programs may not truly impact the community. Fourth, in order to produce the intended results, social change must be read about and discussed by students; however, such a topic may be difficult to link to course subject matter. Fifth, too often in service-learning students are not sent into the community as community members to engage, but rather they are often sent as observers, thus creating an *us versus them* view of society.

Service-learning has been shown to have positive emotional and cognitive impacts on students’ development. Additionally, some research suggested that students are more likely to volunteer in the future, following their service-learning experience (Preis & Fenzel, 2003 and Ropers-Huilman, Corwile & Lima, 2005). There may, however, be unintentional outcomes on students’ likelihood of future volunteer work when service-learning programs are not properly designed (Sipe, 2001). This study contributes to the growing body of research in service-learning by assessing a service-

learning program at a community college that uses three essential service-learning program components to determine its potential impact on the students.

Service-Learning and the Impact on Faculty

Faculty members have indicated that use of service-learning makes teaching more rewarding as students have more enthusiasm for course material and engage in course material at higher cognitive levels (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998). Building a service-learning program has also been shown to encourage greater collaboration among instructors and affords new opportunities for research (Rich, 2003; Sipe, 2001).

Although several studies have been conducted, more are needed to understand the role of and impact on faculty members who use service-learning as a teaching tool. To this end, Driscoll (2000) suggested critical areas of future research: (a) why faculty members are or are not motivated to use service-learning, (b) what support faculty members need to implement service-learning, (c) overall impact on faculty members using service-learning, (d) basic satisfaction of faculty members who use service-learning and (e) basic dissatisfaction or challenges faculty members face in using service-learning. Despite this gap in the literature there has been a number of studies that provide insight into the impact of service-learning on faculty members.

In a survey of 48 faculty members, representing 16 academic disciplines across the nation, findings revealed overall satisfaction and awareness among faculty members regarding service-learning. Results suggested that 50% of those surveyed believed that service-learning contributed to students participating in future service and that service-learning contributed to students' problem-solving skills. Almost 70% believed that

service-learning helped their students learn about culture and differences. Over 70% suggested that service-learning enabled their student to better understand course concepts and improved critical thinking skills. Finally, results revealed that over 80% of faculty members surveyed believed that service-learning improved the overall quality of student learning in their classroom (Hesser, 1995). In this broad nation-wide study, results indicated that faculty members view service-learning as a useful teaching tool across disciplines.

In another study of the satisfaction with service-learning among faculty members, similar results were found. Johnson (2000) found that use of service-learning helped faculty members enhance their relationship with students, allowing them to move from expert on the subject matter to coach or guide in the learning process. Additionally, faculty members reported that the use of service-learning helped them gain a better sense of societal needs and identify new areas of scholarly research. Such results highlight, not only the potential service-learning has to impact students, but also emphasize that service-learning may also contribute to the growth and enhancement of faculty members' skills and scholarly pursuits.

Pribbenow's (2005) research reinforced and expanded these findings in a qualitative study of 35 faculty at a single institution in the Midwest. Findings revealed six areas that describe how faculty teach and learn through the use of service-learning. First, faculty members reported that they and their students were more engaged in and came to better understand the surrounding community as a result of participation in service-learning. Secondly, faculty members reported that service-learning provided them a unique opportunity to establish deeper relationships with students, enabling them

to better aid students in the learning process. In addition, faculty indicated that due to the increase in student contact which resulted from utilizing service-learning in the classroom they gained greater insight into students and their cognitive development and learning processes. Results also indicated that faculty members who used service-learning began to challenge their own knowledge and practices of teaching. Finally, faculty members reported that by learning about the community they were able to enhance their lectures by drawing on a broader array of concrete examples. Such research highlights the benefits of service-learning not only to the students who participate, but also to the faculty that elect to use service-learning as a teaching tool.

In an effort to understand the role faculty members play in service-learning, research has sought to clarify support services and resources necessary for faculty members to effectively utilize service-learning as a teaching tool. A survey of over 500 faculty members at 29 diverse institutions in the United States revealed clear reasons faculty members do and do not use service-learning and what needs they have associated with incorporating service-learning as a teaching tool. Findings revealed that involving community agency representatives and students in identifying faculty members likely to use service-learning in the classroom was an effective means by which to solicit broader use of service-learning on a given campus. Faculty members currently using service-learning were also identified as effective promoters of service-learning as they are able to concretely communicate the benefits to their colleagues. Other effective means to encourage the effective use of service-learning included incorporating the use of service-learning into the faculty reward structure, providing logistical support on how to use

service-learning as a teaching tool and providing faculty members with data regarding the successful use of service-learning in the classroom (Abes, Jackson & Jones, 2002).

Implementing a broad-based service-learning program at any institution begins with high-level administrative support, but in order for a program to be successful, it is critical that faculty members' needs be considered. It is imperative that faculty members understand the underlying philosophies of service-learning and are well versed in how to properly utilize service-learning as an instructional tool. Given the many benefits service-learning may have for students, as well as faculty members, service-learning programs must work in partnership with members of the faculty.

Partnerships: Service-Learning Programs and the Community

Institutions of higher education have historically valued the relationship with their communities and have been shown to contribute economically. A culture of service to the community is not a new concept in higher education, but service-learning has strengthened this relationship and made connections more intentional and mutually beneficial (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker and Donohue (2003) suggested that partnerships between institutions of higher education and their communities have grown increasingly strong in the past decade due to public demands for accountability. In a time of heightened criticism and calls for accountability in higher education, it is important to emphasize the leaders in our communities who speak out on the short and long term benefits of higher education's efforts to engage students in the community. In a study of 456 community leaders, results suggested that 87.9% of students who volunteered through community service and service-learning initiatives greatly or modestly contributed to meeting the needs of their agency (Brisbin & Hunter,

2003). As a result of service-learning, students become more invested in the community, relationships are strengthened between the community and the institution, enthusiasm for students is energized within the community, and ultimately, community needs are met (Sipe, 2001).

In order to be truly effective, service-learning must be developed in partnership between institutions of higher education and community agencies. The community must have a voice in the evaluation and setting of goals for institutionalized programs (Gelmon, Holland, Seifer, Shinnamon & Connors, 1998). It is important that institutions of higher education faculty and administrators view service-learning as a way to work with the community, rather than a way to do something for the community (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). Service-learning can be most harmful to students when presented from a one-sided perspective. That is, students see themselves helping others, but do not directly recognize that they are learning from and being helped by those being served (King, 2004). When implemented effectively, service-learning is said to have a number of positive impacts on the community. Service-learning benefits communities by providing the community with resources, strengthening relationships among community agencies, broadening problem-solving capacity, developing more positive town and gown relationships and increasing the likelihood that students will continue to serve their community in the future (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Johnson, 2000).

Strong community relationships are an essential component of effective service-learning. In a qualitative study of 13 faculty members, using a grounded theory approach, three primary modes of interaction were found to contribute to strengthening community and institutional partnerships (Dorado & Giles, 2004). First is the mode of

learning. It is critical that leaders at community agencies and at institutions of higher education engage in frequent, structured discussions to understand the needs one another has and be able to respond quickly as these needs change or evolve. Second is the mode of aligning. Leaders within both the community and the academic institution must negotiate mutually acceptable goals for students and clearly define the expectations of the volunteer experience. Finally is the mode of nurturing. Once a relationship has been established, it is critical that channels of communication are established to provide for the resolution of problems and to discover new ways to support one another. Essentially, open and regular communication before, during and after the establishment of formal community partnerships is critical in the successful implementation of academic service-learning.

Successful community partnerships have been shown to have a number of positive results. In a survey of 30 community agency representatives regarding their perceptions of 109 students the agency received as volunteers through a higher education service-learning program, the representatives indicated that the students were punctual, dependable, produced high quality work, presented a positive attitude and exhibited sensitivity to their needs and the needs of the populations being serviced (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000). Other positive results were found in a study of 260 elementary school children in four schools who received tutoring from local college students and 256 children who did not receive the tutoring services. The children who worked with a volunteer tutor scored measurably higher on the Stanford Achievement Tests, making significant gains from their previous test scores compared to those children who did not participate in the tutoring program. Also, interestingly, those children showing the

highest gains were those who worked with a tutor who placed a high level of value on diversity awareness and sensitivity (Schmidt & Robby, 2002).

Well-coordinated partnerships between institutions of higher education and community agencies have clear potential to have significant positive benefits to both constituencies. The development of high quality service-learning programs must consider the needs of the community in harmony with those of the institution.

Summary

As national research emerged, concerns grew that volunteerism in the United States was on the decline, specifically among young adults (Markes & Jones, 2004). In response to this worry, a number of governmental programs, such as AmeriCorps and the National Community Service Act of 1990, were established to seek to correct this trend (Myers-Lipton, 1998). Such governmental programs and national research confirmed direct links to higher education and its potential to contribute to a spirit of volunteerism among young adults. As a result, service-learning emerged as a means for higher education to produce citizens who engaged in service during and after college (Sapp & Crabtree, 2002). Service-Learning, for the purpose of this study, was defined as a teaching tool in which a service experience is assigned in an academic course and is incorporated into the curriculum as a form of experiential education. Thus, the service experience is designed to help students learn specific course objectives (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Colleges and universities approach service-learning differently based on their missions and relationships to their community (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). The historic roots and traditional mission of the community college is well-aligned with the

philosophical underpinnings of service-learning, in the shared goal to educate students, while also improving their communities (Elwell, 2001). In 1994, the American Association of Community Colleges formally endorsed the use of service-learning and in 2001, a survey revealed that almost half of all community colleges used service-learning as a part of the academic curriculum (Weglarz & Seybrant, 2004).

While the study of service-learning among nontraditional students is limited, there is much research on nontraditional students in regard to their learning needs in the higher education environment (Butin, 2006). Adult or nontraditional students need flexibility, opportunities for application of material and the encouragement to connect their learning to previous experiences (Knowles, 1989). Enrollment of nontraditional students, generally defined as students age 22 or older, has grown at a rate three times that of younger students in higher education between 1970 and 2000, yet retention and persistence rates among this population is lower than that of traditional students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). Such research has led to additional research and, as a result, increased knowledge regarding the challenges faced by nontraditional students. This unique population is said to face retention issues due to part-time enrollment status, being married and the complexities associated with having young children (Taniguchi & Kafman, 2005). A number of other studies have also been conducted to better understand the characteristics and needs of nontraditional students in comparison to their traditional-aged counterparts. Morris, Brooks and May (2003) found that nontraditional students embraced learning for learning's sake, had higher grade point averages and were more likely to cope with stress by being task focused. Family roles, responsibilities and stresses are another area of research that has been prominent among

nontraditional student populations. Lundberg, McIntire and Creasman (2008) found older adult students received increasingly less support from their families as they progressed from entrance to graduation at a university. While little research has been conducted regarding nontraditional students engaged in service-learning, such an understanding of this unique population, the target sample for the study, is useful.

As service-learning has gained popularity in institutions of higher education, a number of researchers have found that service-learning has a number of positive impacts on students' emotional and cognitive development, as well as contributes to the likelihood that they will volunteer after graduation from college. Concerning cognitive development, students who engaged in service-learning are said to be better able to understand and apply course material and generally score better on exams. (Evangelopoulos, Sidorova & Riolli, 2003; Schmidt, Marks & Derrico, 2004; Singleton, 2006; Strage, 2000; Strage, 2004). Researchers have also revealed emotional growth as a result of students' participation in service-learning. Students who engage in service-learning have been found to have an enhanced awareness of others, a better understanding of their role in initiating social change, and greater self efficacy (Jones & Abes, 2004; Root, Callahan & Sepanski, 2002). Results regarding whether or not service-learning increases the likelihood that students will volunteer after graduation have had mixed results. While some findings suggested that service-learning contributes to students' commitment to future service, other research revealed that service-learning does not achieve this goal (Astin, Keup & Lindholm, 2002; Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005; Jones & Hill, 2003; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer & Ilustre, 2002; Oster-Aaland, Sellnow, Nelson & Pearson, 2004; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998; Preis & Fenzel, 2003; Ropers-

Huilman, Corwile & Lima, 2005). Research on the impacts of service-learning on students has also shown mixed results. Studies revealed that if students are not adequately prepared for their experience and the service experience is not well designed, then students may not meet the intended learning outcomes (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002; Sipe, 2001). These mixed findings suggested that more research is needed to understand whether or not service-learning contributes to students' likelihood of future volunteer work, as well as how the structure or components of a service-learning program may influence the results.

Research on service-learning has also been conducted to discover the impact such programs have among faculty members and community agencies. Faculty members have indicated that use of service-learning makes teaching more rewarding as students have more enthusiasm for course material and engage in course material at higher cognitive levels (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998). Building a service-learning program has also been shown to encourage greater collaboration among instructors and affords new opportunities for research (Rich, 2003; Sipe, 2001). Among community agencies, researchers have found that service-learning has strengthened the relationship between the community and institutions of higher education (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker & Donohue, 2003). Community agency representatives have suggested that this strengthened relationship has contributed greatly to better meeting community needs (Brisbin & Hunter, 2003; Sipe, 2001).

As research on service-learning has continued to grow, much has been written regarding what components of a service-learning program maximize its effectiveness. In a review of the literature on practices in service-learning, three common themes or

components emerge that are said to maximize the benefits of service-learning: agency orientation, connections to course material through reflection and meaningful service (Cauley, et al., 2001; Johnson, 2000; Karoayan & Gathercoal, 2005; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998; Robinson & Barnett, 1998; Schaffer, 2004; Werner & McVaugh, 2000).

Agency orientation, the first critical service-learning program characteristic, ought to occur prior to the service experience and include an agency description, explanation of course objectives, emphasize the needs of the community or population being served and an overview the task to be completed during the service experience (Cauley, et al., 2001; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999). An orientation may be conducted by the faculty member when introducing the service-learning project in the classroom, be performed by an agency representative at the agency or both depending on available time and student needs. Connections to course content through reflection is the second key component of a service-learning program that transforms service into service-learning by challenging students' values and engaging their emotions to aid in making connections to course content (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Schaffer, 2004). Reflection is often done by the faculty member both prior to the service and following the service activity. In addition to agency orientation and quality reflection, it is also important that students feel as if their service experience was meaningful and contributed to meeting a need in the community. Gorelick (2002) proposed that in order for the service to be perceived as meaningful, it is important for the faculty members and agency representatives to aid students in defining the concept of community and understanding the population they are serving. Often, journaling during the service experience or in-class discussion can serve as an aid in

helping students feel as if their service experience was meaningful. Critics, however, suggest that there is limited empirical evidence to support a thorough understanding of those program elements that maximize the benefits of service-learning (Butin, 2003).

Service-learning is a teaching tool utilized within institutions of higher education that continues to grow in terms of practice and research. There is much research regarding, not only the broad uses of service-learning within higher education, but also about the impact service-learning has on students, faculty members and community agencies. As service-learning has gained prominence as a teaching tool at colleges and universities, many have contributed to the literature by suggesting specific components of effective service-learning programs. There remains, however, gaps in the research that provide an opportunity to contribute to the literature. Specifically, further research is necessary to understand the use of service-learning among non traditional students, such as those attending a community college.

This study sought to assess a service-learning program at a community college that used three essential service-learning program components to determine its potential impact on the students. The three essential service-learning components used in the study are: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an impact on the community, and (3) the quality of the training or orientation students receive at the community agency. Students in the community college environment were selected in order to provide the best opportunity to assess the use of service-learning among students of diverse ages.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The review of the literature provided information about current research on the impact of service-learning, as well as suggestions for practices related to service-learning. Additional research, however, is needed to better understand the use of service-learning among nontraditional students, particularly those engaged in a community college environment (Butin, 2006). Using a case study approach, this research effort sought to assess a service-learning program at a community college that uses three essential service-learning program components to determine its potential impact on the students. The three essential service-learning components used in the study were: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe their participation in service-learning had an impact on the community, and (3) the quality of the training or orientation students receive at the community agency.

Graziano and Rualin (2000) suggested that empiricism and rationalism are needed to transform information into knowledge. Rationalism is to substantiate ideas through evidence and empiricism is to know by systematically testing and comparing isolated facts to produce knowledge. This study was both rational and empirical in that isolated facts and untested information were collected and systematically analyzed with the aim of creating both theoretical knowledge and practical understanding. This chapter will detail the qualitative methodology utilized, explain the measures of quality implemented and address limitations of the study.

Methods

A number of paradigms have been defined to describe researchers' philosophical approach to their work. Constructivism is one such paradigm. Constructivists hold that the social world is complex and significantly context bound, thus the use of rich description and the qualitative approach is the preferred methodology (Mertens, 2005). Given this research endeavor sought to assess the complex nature of service-learning within a specific context, the constructivist paradigm was the most appropriate framework from which to approach this study.

Mertens (2005) presented over fifty types of qualitative methodologies. Among the options available for conducting qualitative research, the case study approach was most appropriate for use in this study. The case study methodology seeks an understanding of an individual unit, which may be a person, organization, setting or event (Creswell, 1998). In this research endeavor, the individual unit studied was a service-learning program in place at a community college.

Purposeful Sampling

Sampling is a consideration in approaching qualitative research projects. Purposeful sampling is the term used in qualitative research to describe the technique of targeting a specific and narrow subject and context. The goal of sampling in qualitative research is to carefully select an individual, group or setting that is best for understanding the phenomenon being explored (Mertens, 2005). In this case study, a purposeful sampling technique referred to as criterion sampling, was applied. Criterion sampling is an approach used to identify cases that meet specified criterion and are considered most appropriate in lending an understanding to the research questions (Mertens, 2005).

The Setting

The service-learning program studied was in place at a large, single-campus, urban community college in the southwest with an annual enrollment of approximately 20,000 students. The community college context was identified as the appropriate context for the study for three primary reasons. First, the community college is a different environment from that of a four-year university. Community college missions are generally linked to service to their communities, whereas meeting community needs is considered a more auxiliary function of a university, rather than a primary focus (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Secondly, targeting the community college environment as the context for this study also allowed the researcher to compare the findings of this study to those service-learning studies that have been conducted only in the university setting. Thirdly, the service-learning program in place at the community college studied used practices that included the three essential service-learning components used in the study. These three components are: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service-learning experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an impact on the community, and (3) the quality of the training or orientation students receive at the community agency.

The service-learning program at the institution had been fully implemented for three and a half academic years. Between 8 and 15 courses each semester incorporated a formal service-learning component. Faculty members instructing each course worked with administrators to include service-learning in their curricula. Faculty members submitted specific learning objectives for their courses linked to service-learning and

selected appropriate service agencies at which the students may complete their service-learning assignment.

Eighty-two service agencies were available from which students could choose. Representatives from each agency completed an initial intake form to be considered a partner agency. Representatives were sent training materials and also invited to one-hour training sessions at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters. When selected by a faculty member, each agency representative was sent the learning objectives associated with the course for which the agency had been selected. In some cases one agency was selected for multiple courses. In order to serve as a partner agency, each group had to meet the following criteria:

1. Non-profit, or provide needed service to the community.
2. Offer continuous volunteer opportunities.
3. Have a designated volunteer coordinator.
4. Operate within an approximate 50 mile radius of the campus.
5. Attend the agency orientation or schedule an individual meeting with service-learning administrators.

Participants

The targeted population and focus of the study were thirteen students who participated in semi-structured interviews. A potential student participant list was generated from institutional enrollment records from the academic courses with a service-learning component. A purposeful sampling technique called criterion sampling was used to ensure that students were at least 22 years of age or older and varied in terms of major and number of credit hours completed so that the sample was diverse and more

likely to capture the experiences of all nontraditional aged students at the institution who had participated in a service-learning experience (Mertens, 2005). Students were contacted via telephone and asked to participate (See Appendix D). Thirteen students were interviewed, that is until data saturation was achieved, which was determined to be the point at which students' answers to the semi-structured interview questions continued to repeat previously noted remarks from other participants.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The participants met with the researcher for between 30 minutes and one hour. Guiding questions were established prior to the interview, but the interaction remained flexible to allow for the exploration of topics as they arose. A semi-structured interview guide was established (See Appendix A). A minimum of 10 participants was established, the goal of the interviews, however, was to reach data saturation. That is, the intent of the researcher was to continue to conduct interviews until no new information was being gathered (Mertens, 2005). A personal researcher journal was also kept throughout the process of interview data collection as a means by which to monitor the collection of data and reduce researcher bias, which is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Data Analysis

As with any qualitative research project, the reader must find the analysis credible. Polkinghorne (as cited in Creswell, 1998) presented five questions that researchers use to test the overall trustworthiness of the analysis:

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the subjects' responses?

2. Is the transcription accurate and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation?
3. In the analysis, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived?
4. Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?
5. Is the structural description situation specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations? (Creswell, 1998, p. 208)

Throughout this study, from data collection and analysis to the discussion of the results, each of these five measures of trustworthiness was addressed. Prior to beginning the interview process, each question was evaluated to ensure that it was unbiased and open-ended and did not lead the participants in a specific direction. Transcripts were reviewed and compared to the original audio recording to ensure accuracy. Finally, descriptions of the data in the results portion of the report were compared to that of the transcripts to ensure the examples used were in the appropriate context and conveyed the intended meaning of the participants. Additional efforts to ensure the quality of the study are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

After interviews were transcribed from audio tape to a type-written document, several steps were taken to analyze the data. First, horizontalization or open coding of the data was conducted in that each transcript was reviewed and significant topics or statements extracted. Next, axial coding was used to group statements or topics by similarities into thematic meaning units. Finally, the researcher was able to capture the

essence of the experience, using the two research questions to develop themes as a guide for thick description of the data (Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2005).

Secondary Data Sources

Secondary sources were also used in order to provide a thick description of the individual unit being studied, as well as to triangulate the data gathered through interviews. Data triangulation will be described in greater detail later in this chapter. There were five documents or data sources that served as secondary sources: (1) personal researcher notes kept throughout the interview process, (2) agency needs assessment, (3) faculty member survey results, (4) course syllabi, and (5) student survey data.

Measures of Study Quality

The extent to which readers of a research report can trust findings of a research project is critical. In qualitative research, the terms credibility, transferability and dependability are all important in establishing a quality research project. In addition, in qualitative research, the human is the instrument for data collection. Therefore, in establishing a quality research study, the potential for research bias or subjectivity must be addressed.

Credibility and Transferability

Credibility is the term used in qualitative research most closely associated with quantitative research's internal validity. Credibility refers to whether or not the researcher accurately captures the experience of a subject or essence of the subject matter (Mertens, 2005). There were two primary methods used to establish credibility. First, was to triangulate the data, or use multiple data sources to support and explain one another. The interview transcriptions of students were compared to survey data

collected over the past two years by the service-learning administrator from students, faculty and agency representatives. In addition, syllabi from several courses were collected to better understand how service-learning was incorporated into the course. The data were also compared to interview transcripts of students' interviews. The second method used to further establish credibility was the use of member checks for narrative accuracy (Mertens, 2005). Following the transcription of the audio tape of each of the interviews into a written document, participants were invited to again meet with the researcher to review their interview transcription and clarify or add any additional information.

Transferability is the term used in qualitative research most closely associated with external validity in quantitative methods. Transferability refers to the extent to which results may be generalized (Mertens, 2005). The qualitative researcher can aid in increasing the transferability of their work by clearly describing the setting and their methods and using the words of their subjects to explain their findings (Creswell, 1998). Thick description, which is a comprehensive description of the context, participants and experiences, was used in the presentation of the data to establish the transferability of the study. Additionally, participant quotes were utilized whenever possible to further enhance the transferability of the study.

Dependability

Dependability is the term used in qualitative research most closely associated with reliability in quantitative methods. Dependability refers to whether or not a research project would get the same results using the same methodology a second time. While change is expected in qualitative research, adjustments in research protocols should be

clearly noted (Mertens, 2005). In qualitative research, dependability can be best established by clearly describing the research protocol so that it is clear to the reader how each step in the research was approached (Glesne, 2006). Although some difference is expected when replicating a study, changes to the protocol should be clearly stated so that the reader can form their own opinions regarding the dependability of the research (Mertens, 2005). Throughout this chapter efforts have been made to clearly describe the purpose and procedures used in this case study research endeavor. The research plans, as well as any alterations, have been clearly outlined in the final analysis to aid in establishing the dependability of the study.

Human as the Instrument

A case study approach was used to collect and analyze data, as such the researcher served as the primary data collection instrument in order to solicit the perspective of the participants (Creswell, 1998). Given the characteristics of human nature, subjectivity was a concern (Glesne, 2006). Once understood, however, measures were put in place to reduce the researcher's bias and subjectivity.

Revealing potential areas for researcher bias and maintaining a personal record throughout data collection were the two methods utilized in this study to reduce bias and subjectivity (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006). First, it is important to reveal potential areas for researcher bias so that the research effort is transparent and may be understood more completely by the reader. There are two specific experiences that may have lent themselves to researcher bias in this study. First, the researcher has utilized service-learning as an instructional tool in the classroom at a community college prior to this research project. Secondly, the researcher serves as an administrator where the study

took place. While there was potential for these two factors to bias or introduce subjectivity to the study, measures were put into place to reduce the likelihood of such a happening. The second method used in this study in an effort to reduce bias and subjectivity was to maintain a personal record throughout the data collection and analysis process. The researcher maintained a personal journal, which was used in the analysis of the data to reduce the potential for subjectivity and bias on the part of the researcher.

Limitations

Coleman and Briggs (2002) suggested that educational research must be systematic, focused and self-critical. To this end, effort was made to ensure that this research endeavor was ordered and well planned, limited to a specific issue and remained open to scrutiny by others. A concerted effort was made to ensure that all processes were transparent to the reader.

The most notable limitations to this study are as follows:

1. The study's external validity or transferability may be limited in that the focus was on one community college in the southwestern United States at one point in time and caution should be given to generalizing the results to other populations, contexts and locations.
2. The researcher served as the primary instrument for the collection of the qualitative data, thus human bias and error are limiting factors (Mertens, 2005).
3. The researcher is employed as an administrator where the study took place, which is another factor that may pose concerns for bias.

Summary

In qualitative research, the case study approach is used to create a rich description and understanding of the unit being studied (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002). This study sought to assess a service-learning program at a community college that used three essential service-learning program components to determine the potential impact on the nontraditional aged students' decision to volunteer in the future. The three essential service-learning components used in the study are: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an impact on the community, and (3) the quality of the training or orientation students receive at the community agency.

Given that the primary purpose was to seek an understanding of one community college in the southwestern United States, the case study methodology was appropriate for this study (Creswell, 1998). The case study approach provided a rich description of the service-learning program being studied. In order to yield results that are trustworthy, the researcher adhered to the recommended approach to scientific methodology within qualitative research by being transparent about the process, following the outlined protocol and implementing strategies to avoid bias and ensure accuracy.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This study sought to understand contributing factors to meaningful service-learning and intention for future volunteerism at a community college among nontraditional students. Three service-learning program components are cited throughout the literature as important to aid in creating a meaningful service-learning experience and to increase the likelihood that students will intend to volunteer after graduation. The three commonly cited service-learning program components that were used as the framework for the study were: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning contributed to meeting a community need, and (3) the training that students receive at the agency (Cauley, et al., 2001; Johnson, 2000; Karoayan & Gathercoal, 2005; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998; Robinson & Barnett, 1998; Schaffer, 2004; Werner & McVaugh, 2000).

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the extent to which the three essential components of a service-learning program are apparent in their service-learning experience? The three essential service-learning components to be used in the study are: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an impact on the community, and (3) the training or orientation that students receive at the community agency.

2. What potential impact will the students' service-learning experience have on their intention to volunteer after graduation?

The data presented in this chapter were collected and analyzed according to the research methods set forth in Chapter Three. To begin the analysis of data, a detailed overview of the context of this case study will be presented. This discussion of the context will be followed by an analysis of the faculty survey results, course syllabi, agency survey and the student surveys both prior to the implementation of the Service-Learning Center and following their service-learning experience in the classroom. Finally, the data analysis will conclude with a summary of the findings from the primary data source, the semi-structured interviews conducted with students who are of a nontraditional age and participated in service-learning as part of an academic course.

The Setting

The Community College

The community college, which served as the setting for this study, is a large, single-campus, urban institution located in the southwestern United States. The 2008 annual student headcount is approximately 20,000 students. The median age is 22 and the mean age is 26.7. Forty percent of students are enrolled full-time with 12 or more credit hours taken each semester, and 60% of students are enrolled part-time. In terms of ethnicity, the institution reports 67.9% of students are Caucasian, while 32.1% of students represent ethnic minority populations. Business, nursing and technology are the academic programs with the largest enrollment, accounting for 40% of student enrollment. Fifty-eight percent of students are female, while 42% are male. The institution used as the setting for this study was established in 1972 and employees

approximately 1,200 full and part-time faculty and staff (Oklahoma City Community College, 2008).

The Service-Learning Program

The Service-Learning Center, which served as the context for this study, was established in the fall of 2005. The primary impetus for initiating the service-learning program was the addition of Criterion Five as a part of the institutional accreditation requirements as outlined by the Higher Learning Commission. Among the litany of key activities that an institution may conduct to meet the guidelines set forth by the Higher Learning Commission, service-learning is cited as an important component under Criterion Five. The current Service-Learning Center is housed within the Division of Enrollment and Student Services, within the Office of Student Life. The center has one full-time, professional staff member, who has a master's degree in higher education administration.

The Service-Learning Center manages four service-learning activities. The first, which was the focus of this study, is the use of service-learning in the classroom. That is, faculty members work with the center to include service-learning as a formal assignment in one or more of their courses. The second activity is a Civic Honors program. Students who complete 50 or more community service hours in one academic year and write a reflective paper are given an award called Civic Honors. The third activity managed by the Service-Learning Center is the co-curricular service events, known as Service Saturdays. During approximately four Saturdays each semester, students may sign up to attend a day-long service event sponsored by the center. The fourth and final activity managed by the center is the promotion of volunteerism. The Service-Learning Center

maintains an online listing of local agencies in need of volunteers. Students may search the listing online and contact the agency directly to arrange participation in a volunteer experience.

Use of the Service-Learning Center by faculty members and students remained steady throughout its three years of implementation, as shown in Table 1 (Horinek, 2006; 2007; 2008).

Table 1: Summary of Service-Learning Use in the Classroom

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Faculty Utilizing Service-Learning	9	18	11
Courses Incorporating Service-Learning	15	18	12
Student Participants	489	540	465

Source: Institutional data collected in 2006, 2007 and 2008 and maintained in the Service-Learning Center.

Faculty Surveys and Syllabi

Between 12 and 18 courses each semester incorporated a formal service-learning component into the curriculum. Faculty members instructing these courses worked with administrators in the Service-Learning Center to include service-learning in their course. Faculty members submitted specific learning objectives for their courses linked to service-learning and selected appropriate service agencies at which the students may complete their assignment. In addition, faculty members are periodically asked to complete a survey regarding their use of service-learning in the classroom (See Appendix F). Results of the survey, as well as the learning objectives for service-learning outlined in the course syllabi, were analyzed and compared to the three essential service-learning components where appropriate (Horinek, 2007; 2008). The three essential service-

learning components used in the study were: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an impact on the community, and (3) the training or orientation students receive at the community agency. This portion of the data analysis sought to discover whether or not faculty members indicated the use of one or more of the three essential service-learning components in their survey responses or in the course syllabi.

Faculty Evaluation of Service-Learning Integration

An evaluative faculty survey is periodically conducted by the Service-Learning Center at the community college in order to solicit suggestions for program improvements, as well as to gain a better understanding of faculty members' practices for service-learning implementation (Horinek, 2007). The most recent survey was conducted in the spring of 2007. Surveys were sent to each instructor utilizing service-learning in the classroom. Fourteen surveys were sent to faculty members, with 12 respondents to the survey. The survey instrument consisted of five open-ended questions, as well as three questions asking faculty members the number of students who participated in service-learning, the total number of hours of service each student completed and whether or not the service-learning assignment was mandatory (See Appendix F). Axial coding was used to group responses to each of the five questions by similarities into thematic meaning units (Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2005). Information gathered in the three additional questions was summarized using the mean for each question.

Nine of the 12 faculty members represented the nursing discipline, two were humanities instructors and one was a professor of sociology. While the number of

faculty members representing the discipline of nursing is disproportionate to the college's overall demographics, it is proportionate to those faculty members who use service-learning as a teaching tool. All 12 faculty surveyed indicated that the service-learning assignment was a mandatory part of the course, rather than offered as an optional project or extra credit. A total of 578 students participated in the service-learning assignments represented by the 12 instructors, with class sizes ranging from nine to 60. A total of 3,948 hours were completed, which is a mean of 6.83 per student.

Question One

The first open-ended question asked the faculty about the extent to which they thought the service-learning experience impacted their students. Two primary themes emerged in the faculty's responses to question one. First, several faculty identified professional growth among the students in their classes. Secondly, many of the respondents indicated that the impact on students was more personal, than academic.

Regarding the professional growth, one faculty noted:

I think they are finally seeing the value of volunteerism and the impact nursing can have in a community.

Another respondent stated:

[Service-learning] gave the students the chance to experience different resources for their profession.

Regarding personal growth among the students, one faculty suggested:

Students unambiguously articulated that the experience had been life-changing, and most included in their final essays that they see the world in new ways, particularly with a greater understanding of racial and class divisions.

Another faculty member indicated that not only did the service-learning experience make a professional impact on students, but that students also indicated a

desire to volunteer in the future as a result of their experience; specifically the faculty member stated:

Several [students] noted that it was life-changing and that they plan to continue to volunteer.

One faculty respondent indicated a negative impact on students as a result of being required to participate in service-learning. This individual explained:

. . . no time to do this. Students already think they give back to their community through memberships and where they work.

Question Two

The second open-ended question asked faculty whether or not inclusion of service-learning enhanced the teaching and learning experience. Overall faculty noted in this section of the survey that the greatest impact on students was their increased ability to understand course materials. One faculty respondent explained:

Yes, it enhanced the course as it brought home that nursing is not just giving meds and performing tasks, it requires thinking outside the box.

One faculty respondent indicated that while the students grew personally from the experience, the reflection exercises and other classroom time devoted to service-learning reduced the amount of time to review other course materials. This faculty member suggested:

This attention to service-learning, however, required that I abbreviate some of the lectures, skim certain chapters to focus on only the most critical topics, reduce the reading load and give take-home short essay exams with only two or three questions per chapter. . . . In the final analysis, the students did not learn the corpus of sociological information contained in the assigned introductory text.

Question Three

The third open-ended question on the survey asked faculty if the Service-Learning Center provided adequate support and resources to aid faculty in incorporating service-

learning into their curriculum. All respondents indicated a positive response, suggesting that the collaboration with the center's staff was critical, not only in aiding faculty in the selection of agencies and other administrative assistance, but also in providing guidance regarding how to help students best reflect on their service-learning experience. One faculty noted:

Definitely, [the Service-Learning Center staff's] orientation got the ball rolling.

Another respondent explained:

Yes, [the Service-Learning Center staff] does an excellent job of obtaining sites/experiences and of providing feedback and suggestions for talking with students.

Question Four

Question four of the faculty survey asked participating faculty whether or not they will consider using service-learning as a part of their future courses and why or why not. All respondents indicated their intention to use service-learning as a teaching tool in their future courses. Most faculty members suggested that their future use of service-learning was related to the positive impact the experience had on students personally and academically. One respondent also suggested that the use of service-learning in the future was due, in part, to the experience increasing the likelihood of future service among the students. The faculty respondent explained:

It is mandatory in nursing program. Would recommend anyway. Great variety of community activities they might be interested in after graduation.

Question Five

The final question on the survey instrument asked faculty what could be done to improve the process, experience or outcomes of service-learning. Three respondents asked for improvements at the agencies regarding more organization at the site and a

need for agency representatives to provide students with more information regarding their tasks and how these tasks aided the agency in accomplishing their purpose. One faculty member suggested:

Have the approved facilities keep a record of number of students needed per shift. Sometimes there are too many students at one site and they don't have a good experience.

Overall faculty respondents to the survey indicated that they believed students were able to connect their service-learning experience to the course materials and that students believed their experience met a community need. However, in regard to the third essential program component of an effective service-learning experience, some of the faculty respondents indicated the need for additional orientation at the service site.

Course Syllabi

Syllabi were available from five of the courses that had incorporated service-learning into a course (Horinek, 2008). Three syllabi were from nursing courses; one was from a humanities course and the other was from a sociology course. The learning objectives related to service-learning are outlined in Table 2. The clearly stated course objectives that were included in each syllabus indicated the intention of the faculty members to have students connect their service experience to the course material, which is one of the three essential components of service-learning.

The humanities course incorporated service-learning into the curriculum as a mandatory assignment, accounting for 32% of the total grade for the course. Students were required to complete ten hours of service at an agency of their choice and write a four-page paper describing the agency and reflecting on their service experiences. The reflection component of the paper was guided by faculty questions requiring the student

to consider the consequences if the agency did not exist and specifically how their volunteer work did or did not contribute to the work of the agency.

Table 2: Summary of Course Objectives Related to Service-Learning

Course	Learning Objective
HUM 2163: Leadership Development	Expand awareness of leadership to include the concept of servant leadership.
SOC 1113: Introduction to Sociology	Identify and address short-term and long-term needs of the African American community in northeast Oklahoma City.
NUR 1519: Nursing Process I	Define the concept of person as a unified whole with basic human needs, including physiological, safety and security, and psychosocial needs and as having certain predictable developmental stages/tasks that characterize the lifespan.
NUR 2539: Nursing Process III	Examine the concepts of community and specific groups and how each relates to the definition of person.
NUR 2549: Nursing Process IV	Examine the concepts of leadership, management, power, group dynamics, change, conflict, and delegation and supervision, relating each to the three roles of nursing.

Source: Institutional data collected in 2008 and maintained in the Service-Learning Center.

The sociology course used service-learning as a mandatory assignment, accounting for 53% of the grade for the course. Students were required to complete 12 hours of service at a specific agency selected by the faculty member. As a part of the assessment for each student's grade, they were asked to submit a journal that documented their experience, interview agency representatives and the community members being served and take a final exam on the service-learning project.

In each of the three nursing courses, service-learning was a required part of the course assignments, accounting for 4% of the total grade for the course. Students were required to complete eight hours of service at one or more agencies of their choice and complete a two page type-written paper following their experience. The paper was to include a description of how the service-learning project enhanced their personal awareness of community needs, a description of the nursing roles they identified during their experience, and an explanation of how their view of the values of the nursing professional was or was not enhanced as a result of their experience.

While the percent of the total grade at which the service-learning assignment was valued in the overall course, the number of hours required and the specific outline of the papers varied; each of the course syllabi incorporated service-learning such that it was mandatory and directly connected to course subject matter. In each case, the written paper at the conclusion of the service-learning experience encouraged students to reflect on their experience at the service agency and to connect these observations to topics covered in the classroom. Use of clear learning objectives and a final reflection assignment reveal the faculty members' intentions to meet two of the essential components of service-learning by aiding students in making connections between course

material and the service experience and understanding the extent to which the students believe they had an impact on the community.

Community Needs Assessment Survey

In May of 2005, the Service-Learning Center being used as the context of this study, conducted a Community Needs Assessment Survey (See Appendix E). The purpose of the assessment was twofold: (1) to promote the service-learning program among service agencies and (2) to better understand how the service-learning program could work in collaboration with service agencies to meet community needs. Sixty-four surveys were mailed to service agencies within a 50 mile radius of the community college. Seventeen surveys or twenty six percent were completed and returned to the Service-Learning Center (Horinek, 2005).

Table 3 outlines the responses to the kinds of volunteer assistance that the agency was interested in receiving from students at the college. Agency representatives completing the survey were able to check all areas that applied. Responses to the “other” category on the survey included development of educational curriculum guides, serving as a museum docent, grant-writing skills, fundraising assistance, landscaping, speech/language development aids, supply delivery drivers.

Table 4 outlines the responses to how student volunteers could assist the agency. Agency representatives completing the survey were able to check all areas that applied. Responses to the “other” category on the survey included: Spanish/English translators, filing, teaching life skills classes, writing articles for local newspapers, skilled trades people (carpentry, plumbing, electrical, roofing, heat and air, tiling), clerical assistance.

Overall, responses depicted in Tables 3 and 4 are diverse, indicating community needs are broad and require a litany of skill sets and interests.

Table 3: Summary of Volunteer Assistance Needed From the College

Area of Needed Assistance	Percentage of Reponses
Physical Outreach	41%
Educational Outreach	35%
Social Outreach	24%
Research/Writing Outreach	64%
Organizing Outreach	53%

Source: Data collected in 2005 and maintained in the Service-Learning Center.

Note: Respondents were able to mark more than one choice.

Table 4: Summary of Volunteer Assistance Needed From Students

Area of Needed Assistance	Percentage of Reponses
Tutoring Clients	18%
Office Clients	18%
Advertising/Public Relations	47%
Programming	24%
Direct Care Service	18%
Financial/Accounting Service	24%

Source: Data collected in 2005 and maintained in the Service-Learning Center.

Note: Respondents were able to mark more than one choice.

Responses to the open-ended question on the survey asking agency representatives to indicate additional ways the Service-Learning Center could collaborate with their agency repeated the findings of the previous two questions. No additional

needs or ideas were brought forward on this section of the survey. On the final question of the survey, asking whether or not the agency was interested in serving as a partner agency with the Service-Learning Center, 16 of the 17 respondents indicated that they would like more information about serving as a partner agency. The one respondent, that indicated that they did not wish to become a partner agency, cited space limitations and the lack of need for new volunteers as their rationale for their response.

In August 2008, 82 service agencies were available from which students may have chosen to participate as a part of their service-learning course requirement. Seven of the agencies were designated as faith-based and 18 required a formal training prior to the volunteer experience. Agencies were also categorized according to function: 11 of the agencies worked with youth in a mentoring capacity; 12 provided tutoring for children ranging in age from pre-kindergarten through the 12th grade; 14 of the agencies worked to develop the infrastructure of their surrounding communities and the remaining 15 agencies worked with health-related issues. All agencies were located within 50 miles of the metropolitan area in which the community college is located.

Representatives from each agency completed an initial intake form to be considered a partner agency. Representatives were mailed training materials and also invited for a one-hour training session at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters. When selected by a faculty member, each agency representative received the learning objectives associated with the course for which they had been selected. In some cases one agency was selected for multiple courses. In order to serve as a partner agency, each service organization had to meet the following criteria:

1. Non-profit, or provide needed service to the community.

2. Offer continuous volunteer opportunities.
3. Have a designated volunteer coordinator.
4. Operate within an approximate 50 mile radius of the campus.
5. Attend the agency orientation or schedule an individual meeting with service-learning administrator.

Student Survey Data

Student Service-Learning Assessment

Prior to the implementation of the Service-Learning Center, a Student Service-Learning Assessment was administered in the spring of 2005 to better understand students' experiences, motivation and perceptions of service (See Appendix G). The surveys were administered to students in the general cafeteria area of the college over a one week period and 289 surveys were collected (Horinek, 2005). Of the students completing the survey, 65% were age 22 or younger and had spent an average of three semesters in college; 37.9% had participated in service during their college experience and 81% indicated that this service experience had had no effect on their choice of major. The students were also asked to rank what does or would motivate them to participate in service. For this portion of the survey, a Likert scale was used with one being did not motivate me and five being was a major motivation. The survey consisted of 26 items, divided into three sections: (1) demographic data, (2) motivation to participate in service-learning, and (3) interest in participating in specific service programs. Their responses are shown in Table 5.

The three highest mean areas for student motivation to participate in service were a desire to help others, personal development and enjoyment. Such data indicated that

students' participation in service at the time the survey was administered was primarily for personal gain or internal desire.

Table 5: Summary of Student Service-Learning Assessment

	Mean
Course Credit	3.5
Desire to Help Others	4.3
Experience/Career Exploration	3.6
Social/Political Activism	3.1
Apply Classroom Knowledge	3.2
Knowledge	3.7
Personal Development	4.1
Skill Development	3.4
Enjoyment	4.1
Meeting Others/Social	3.8
Free Time	3.4

Source: Data collected in 2005 and maintained in the Service-Learning Center.

The next portion of the survey asked students about their experiences or lack of experiences with service in the classroom. Ninety-two percent of students indicated that they had not participated in service as a part of a course requirement and an additional 70% indicated that had not participated in service in a course as part of an extra credit option. In regard to their participation in service generally, 58% of students indicated that their experience with service was equally educational to the learning that occurs in the classroom, while 30% believed that service was less educational than formal

classroom learning and 10% indicated that they believed their experience with service was more educational than the material they learned in the classroom.

Students were then asked on the survey instrument to rate their interest in doing volunteer work in the future. Of those surveyed, 67% marked that they were interested or very interested in participating in service in the future, while 30% were neutral on the matter and 2% were not interested in participating in service in the future.

The final portion of the survey asked students which volunteer program at the college they would be most interested in: academic service-learning, civic honors or a volunteer center. All three programs received a mean of 3.9, on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating that no program was viewed as more important or valuable than another.

Overall, the survey results suggested that, while students had limited experience with service in the educational environment, there was interest in such college-sponsored initiatives. Furthermore, the survey suggested that students, while they lacked personal experience, saw the educational value of service.

Student Survey of Service-Learning Experience

Each semester data are collected from students regarding their experiences participating in service-learning in the classroom. The survey consisted of eight numerically rated questions and two open-ended questions (See Appendix H). Students were asked to rate their responses to the eight numeric questions on a Likert scale, with one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree. The mean for the data gathered from each of the three years of operation on the eight numerically rated questions can be seen in Table 6 (Horinek, 2006; 2007; 2008).

Table 6: Summary of Student Survey of Service-Learning Experience

	2005-2006 N=489	2006-2007 N=540	2007-2008 N=465
The service increased my awareness of the larger community.	3.96	4.04	4.06
The service helped me better understand community needs.	3.9726	4.09	4.10
The service helped me reflect on my life and goals.	3.49	3.78	3.79
The service helped me decide on career and life goals.	2.85	3.02	3.03
The service has increased by interest in doing further service.	3.61	3.78	3.78
I would recommend this activity to my friends.	3.62	3.85	3.87
My experience with the community agency was positive.	4.24	4.27	4.31
My experience with the Service-Learning program has been positive.	4.05	4.13	4.17

Source: Institutional data collected in 2006, 2007 and 2008 and maintained in the Service-Learning Center.

The two open-ended questions asked the students to describe how they would explain their service-learning experience to a friend and generally what improvements could be made to the service-learning program (See Appendix H). In analyzing the two open-ended questions from the 1,494 surveys collected over three years, three significant

themes emerged, two of which may be described as positive toward the service-learning experience and one that expresses students' frustration with the use of service-learning in the classroom (Horinek, 2006; 2007; 2008).

The first positive theme that arose in the data from the Student Survey of Service-Learning Experience was students' connections between their service-learning experience and the need for such volunteerism in the community. One student explained:

It was good and it helped me understand the need for people to take part in their community.

Another student added:

There is so much that we can do. My experience not only benefits my community but myself and I am planning to go back in the summer with my daughter.

Additionally, a student suggested:

I became more aware of what it is like to be an illegal immigrant, political refugee, or simply be a family without anything and all of a sudden have a helping hand that would help until things get better.

In the second positive theme, students expressed more generally that the experience was fun or personally rewarding.

One student suggested:

It makes you a better person, to come out of self and see what so many others are going through.

Another student explained:

It was definitely a neat experience. It was fun to get my hands dirty and meet some new people.

Students also expressed their frustration with the experience. Overwhelmingly, those that expressed negative comments regarding their service-learning experience noted the lack of time to do such a project. One student wrote:

Overall I think service-learning is a waste of time. We are so overwhelmed with things to do that it is hard to take it seriously – we focus mostly on just getting the time done.

Another student suggested:

I have little time with my family and this takes more of my time and I hate doing it.

Another student added:

I don't appreciate being told what to do in my free time. The nursing program itself places a large enough demand on my time besides being 'voluntold' to do charity work.

While the majority of the student comments were positive, some students clearly felt that the experience did not benefit them personally or in regard to enhancing their learning experience in the classroom. It is interesting, however, to note that the student comments grew more positive over the three years of survey data. During the first two semesters, the survey data was divided equally, with about half of the students who expressed that they enjoyed and benefited from the experience and the remaining half of the surveys were either neutral or negative in nature. In examining the two open-ended questions in the most recent semester, the surveys were overwhelmingly positive, with less than ten percent being negative or neutral about the experience. Although without further research it cannot be confirmed, but perhaps this trend suggests that the philosophies and culture of students may be shifting toward a more clear understanding of service-learning and its uses in the classroom.

Semi-Structured Interview Analysis

The experiences of the students were the focus of the study, therefore students participants served as the primary sample. A potential student participant list was generated from institutional enrollment records from the academic courses with a service-

learning component between fall 2007 and spring 2008. A maximum variation purposeful sampling technique was used to ensure that students are at least 22 years of age or older and vary in terms of major and number of credit hours completed so that the sample is diverse and more likely to capture the experiences of all nontraditional aged students at the institution who have participated in a service-learning experience. Students were contacted via telephone and asked to participate.

Twenty-five students were initially contacted to participate and, of those contacted, nine agreed to participate in the study. Participating students met with the primary researcher for between 30 minutes and one hour and interviews were captured on audio tape. The intent of the researcher was to continue to conduct interviews until no new information was being gathered or until data saturation was achieved (Mertens, 2005).

After conducting the first nine interviews and reviewing the data collected, the researcher determined that data saturation had not been achieved, that is students' responses to the semi-structured interview questions were not being significantly repeated by other participants, thus ten additional students were contacted to participate in the study. Of the ten students contacted, four agreed to participate in the study. Upon completion of the four additional interviews, the researcher determined that data saturation had been achieved and began the formal data analysis. A personal researcher journal was kept throughout the process of data collection as a means by which to monitor the collection of data and reduce researcher bias.

After interviews were transcribed from audio tape to a type-written document, several steps were taken to analyze the data. First, participants were given a copy of the

transcriptions of their respective interview to ensure accuracy and allow each participant the opportunity to add or clarify any statements. Second, horizontalization or open coding of the data was conducted in that each of the transcripts was reviewed and significant topics or statements were extracted. Next, axial coding was used to group statements or topics by similarities into thematic meaning units. Axial coding was performed in two phases: first themes were extracted that directly related to the two research questions, then other significant thematic areas were identified, which were not directly related to the two research questions. Finally, the researcher captured the essence of the experience, using the developed themes as a guide for thick description of the data (Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2005).

Participant Profiles

Each student participant chose to remain anonymous in the description of the data and only be identified by an arbitrary name assignment. It is useful, however, to provide demographic and characteristic data about each participant to aid in a more thorough understanding of the analysis. The information about each student was collected on a student participant demographic form, as well as through the initial questions during the interview process (See Appendix A and C).

Jayne was female, age 29. She had completed 114 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in nursing. She had participated in service-learning as a part of three different courses she had taken at the institution being studied and each course required eight hours of service to be completed, although the student completed more than the minimum number of hours required each semester. The final reflection assignment for each course, however, varied from a four-page paper to a presentation to a

descriptive poster display. The student had done previous volunteer work as a part of a youth organization she was involved with as a child in middle school, but had not participated in volunteer work as an adult.

Evelyn was female, age 28. She had completed 64 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in diversified studies. She had participated in service-learning as a part of one course she had taken at the institution, which required three hours of service to be completed, although the student completed more than the minimum number of hours required. The final reflection assignment for the course was the completion of a four-page paper. The student had done previous volunteer work throughout her life, not as a part of a formal organization, but with her family.

Ross was male, age 22 and a first-generation college student, which means that neither of his parents had completed a bachelor's degree. He had completed 50 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in mechanical engineering. He had participated in service-learning as a part of one course he had taken at the institution, which required ten hours of service to be completed, although the student completed more than the minimum number of hours required for the assignment. The final reflection assignment for the course was the completion of a five-page paper. The student had no previous volunteer experience.

Mason was male, age 26. He had completed 76 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in nursing. He had participated in service-learning as a part of three different courses he had taken at the institution being studied and each course required eight hours of service to be completed. The student completed only the number of required hours each semester. The final reflection assignment for each course

was a four-page paper. The student had previous volunteer experiences prior to entering college.

Lucy was female, age 57 and a first-generation college student. She had completed 150 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in nursing. She had participated in service-learning as a part of three different courses she had taken at the institution being studied and each course required 16 hours of service to be completed. The student completed only the number of required hours each semester. The final reflection assignment for each course was a four-page paper. The student had participated in previous volunteer work throughout her life, none of which was through an official group or organization.

Anne was female, age 22 and a first-generation college student. She had completed 70 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in nursing. She had participated in service-learning as a part of three courses she had taken at the institution, which required eight hours of service to be completed each semester, although the student completed more than the minimum number of hours required for the assignment. The final reflection assignment for the course was the completion of a five-page paper. The student had participated in previous volunteer work at a homeless shelter and at a jail through her church.

Sara was female, age 38. She had completed 30 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in pre-baccalaureate nursing. She had participated in service-learning as a part of one humanities course she had taken at the institution, which required ten hours of service to be completed. The final reflection assignment for the

course was the completion of a four-page paper. The student had participated in previous volunteer work at a hospital prior to her service-learning experience.

Harriet was female, age 34. She had completed 193 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in nursing. She had participated in service-learning as a part of three courses she had taken at the institution, which required eight hours of service to be completed each semester. The final reflection assignment for each of the courses was the completion of a four-page paper. The student had no previous volunteer experience.

Mike was male, age 24 and a first-generation college student. He had completed 150 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in nursing. He had participated in service-learning as a part of three courses he had taken at the institution, which required eight hours of service to be completed each semester. The final reflection assignment for the courses was the completion of a four-page paper. The student had participated in previous volunteer work as a requirement to graduate from high school.

Leslie was female, age 33 and a first-generation college student. She had completed 99 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in sociology. She had participated in service-learning as a part of one course she had taken at the institution, which required ten hours of service to be completed, although the student completed more than the minimum number of hours required for the assignment. The final reflection assignment for the course was the completion of a five-page paper. The student had participated in previous volunteer work at her child's school.

Molly was female, age 51 and a first-generation college student. She had completed 80 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in

nursing. She had participated in service-learning as a part of three courses she had taken at the institution, each of which required eight hours of service to be completed, although the student completed more than the minimum number of hours required for the assignment. The final reflection assignment for the course was the completion of a four-page paper. The student had no previous volunteer experience.

Kim was female, age 25 and a first-generation college student. She had completed 46 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in journalism and broadcasting. She had participated in service-learning as a part of two courses she had taken at the institution, one of which required the completion of ten hours of service and the other required three hours. The final reflection assignment for each course was the completion of an essay. The student had not previously volunteered.

Mary was female, age 22 and a first-generation college student. She had completed 100 college credit hours at the time of the interview and was majoring in biotechnology. She had participated in service-learning as a part of one course she had taken at the institution, which required twelve hours of service to be completed, although the student completed more than the minimum number of hours required for the assignment. The final reflection assignment for the course was the completion of a four-page paper. The student had not previously participated in volunteer work.

Interview Data

Several themes emerged in the data, four of which related directly to the two research questions that guided the study, and three themes that emerged as a result of the semi-structured interview process and the use of probing follow-up questions. The four primary themes addressing the two research questions included how students connected

their service-learning experiences to the course materials, elements of the service-learning experience that students indicated impacted whether or not they felt the service work they did was meaningful or had an impact on the community, the role agency orientation plays in students' service-learning experience and students' perceptions of performing service in the future. The three secondary themes that emerged in the data included reasons students selected to perform service at the agency they chose, the importance of interaction with others while serving and perceptions of students who regard service-learning as beneficial for only the younger students in the classroom. While the three secondary themes did not emerge consistently in a majority of the interviews, it is useful to present the data, as such a description provides a broader understanding of the students' perspectives.

To review, the research questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the extent to which the three essential components of a service-learning program are apparent in their service-learning experience? The three essential service-learning components used in the study were: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an impact on the community, and (3) the training or orientation students receive at the community agency.
2. What potential impact will the students' service-learning experience have on their intention to volunteer after graduation?

The first four themes of the following section directly answer the research questions regarding the three essential service-learning components and the intent of

future volunteerism after graduation. The final three themes discussed in the section are additional thematic areas that arose in the data through the semi-structured interview process that were significant, but beyond the scope of the two research questions.

Connections to Course Material

In order for service-learning to be an effective teaching tool, students must be able to connect their service experience to course content. The primary means by which these connections are made is through reflection; reflection prior to the experience, reflection during the experience or reflection after the service experience.

Student participants in this study indicated that they understood the importance of service-learning and suggested such an out-of-classroom experience improved their understanding of course material. Jayne indicated that the use of service-learning contributed significantly to the overall nursing program at the institution:

I like totally see why they want us to do it [service-learning]. So, I guess, I mean, the nursing program wouldn't be as well-rounded if we didn't have to do service-learning. You have to see the big picture.

Jayne further explained that reflection and consideration for course material separated volunteerism from service-learning:

I volunteered summers before I could work and you know, I volunteer here and there. This is the first time though I had to relate it back to my profession. So, that makes it kind of different, you know, I guess when you're volunteering for fun, it's different than really spending time thinking about the impact it has.

Student participants also suggested that the pre-reflection and post reflection exercises were instrumental in aiding them in making these connections to course content. Anne noted that knowing about the service-learning project and final reflection paper before serving helped her be more observant while performing the service. That is,

she approached the service from a career perspective, versus from a community citizen perspective:

I think I had to go as a nurse, because when we wrote the paper we had to write about things we were learning in the class. I had to look for things about teamwork or leadership or whatever the faculty are asking for in the paper.

Mary also explained that knowing about the final reflection assignment helped her to be more observant at the service agency:

We had concepts in the class that we had to tie our service-learning back to. . . You are thinking about those things when you are doing service. So, you picked up on things that were going on in the classroom because you were looking for it.

Throughout the interview process, student participants cited repeatedly that the learning and connection to course material became evident when they wrote their final reflection paper:

I think you would have to have something after. I don't think you could just do the volunteer work. I think you have to spend some time reflecting. I think without the paper it would still be effective but not as effective as it could be.

Jayne agreed, the final reflection paper helped her relate the service experience back to course concepts:

I always do the paper. You know, it's really funny, because they [the faculty members] have you put in specific words they want you to relate to nursing, like teamwork and respect and integrity. I mean, you don't think of it at the time, but when you look back, I think it's a really awesome memory to have.

Molly concurred, although she indicated that the final reflection was, perhaps, most useful for the younger students in the class.

I think that connecting it to certain aspects of the class was great, especially for younger people that may have trouble making those connections. I think it was good, I mean it wasn't hard. It was just a brief few pages, and it was easy to write. It kind of brought everything full circle.

Speaking about her past volunteer work, Mary explained that her service-learning experience was quite different due to the need to connect the experience to course content:

For a lot of the service projects or volunteer work or any kind of outreach with my home school group, it was more family oriented. We always, went as groups or with a community of people. With this [service-learning project] we really had to make it our own experience because we had to write a reflection paper about what we specifically had gotten out of it. I found I was much less likely to put it on autopilot and just help out. I spent a lot more time thinking about what I was doing and what it was I was learning. I thought about what good it was doing and for whom. I also thought about other ways I could be of service. Doing service learning for a class helped solidify how serious I was about being of service to others. It really added the learning to the service.

There were, however, two participants that believed the final reflection paper was not valuable. Mason explained:

I do feel like there are some people that need to write a paper to understand what they've done. Me personally, I can see what I've done. I can take a step back and see that I'm helping out and see why. But, the paper was more or less busy work, just putting my thoughts down. You know things that I already understood. So I wouldn't say it enhanced it.

Mike indicated that a final reflection paper was too time consuming and an alternative final reflection exercise may be more effective:

I'm not a big fan of the paper. Some of the classroom concepts are hard to relate to the agencies that you're working with. We have to relate certain classroom concepts to the service. . . You really have to dig deep to make it relate. I think instead of a paper would be better to do a worksheet that had the same criteria as the paper, but were just easier to fill out. . . The whole paper, though it's just so time consuming.

Overall, student participants indicated that an explanation of the service-learning assignment prior to the service experience and a summative reflection paper or other assignment was critical in aiding students in connecting their service work to course

content. Meaningful service is the next theme that was noted by the participants to be an important component in an effective service-learning experience.

Meaningful Service

Ensuring that students feel as if their service had an impact on the community being served is the third essential component of an effective service-learning program. Gorelick (2002) proposed that in order for service to be perceived as meaningful, students ought to be introduced to the complexity of community. Agency selection, pre-service training, quality reflection all contribute to aiding students in developing a sense of meaning, without which little learning or long-term effects may be experienced.

Student participants shared three primary reasons or activities that contributed to a feeling that the service the students performed had an impact on the community: appreciative agency representatives, pre-reflection exercises and post-reflection writing assignments. In regard to appreciative agency representatives, Evelyn explained:

I've been to other agencies before where it was like they didn't really care that you are there. If it doesn't seem like the agency staff cares, then you have to wonder what kind of impact your making. So if you're just like raking leaves somewhere and it makes you wonder, if you're really actually helping other people.

Anne agreed and described the agency representative she had the most contact with while performing the service:

Every time I went [to the service agency] I ended up getting a load of work done and the woman, Valerie, that works there, said how thankful she was and was very kind to me. That made me happy.

In addition to appreciative agency representatives, a number of student participants suggested that pre-reflection, or an understanding of the work of the community agency prior to serving, aided in making the service experience more

meaningful. Mary explained how the pre-reflection exercise done in class lead her to better understand community needs and the importance of service:

We had 20 or 30 minutes out of class time that someone came and really oriented us to the idea of service-learning. It helped because when they talked to us about it [service-learning] they told stories and talked about different ways you could serve. . . It helped me have a more positive attitude toward it. Less like a chore, more like an opportunity.

A number of the student participants also indicated that the post reflection writing assignment was important in helping them reach closure on their service experience and understand how their work had contributed to the community they were serving. Jayne explained that, for her, the final reflection paper enhanced her service experience:

It's kind of like a task [service-learning], you're just doing it and there's no end unless you wrote the paper. I think we should reflect on more of our activities in class because without the paper at the end you don't get as much out of it. It's like a finishing note to what you've done.

Ross agreed that writing the paper brought closure to the service experience and helped him feel as though his service contributed to a need within the community:

Writing the paper, I think you need little bit of time because, you know, usually you think that was a good time, but then you forget it. But, when you sit down and write a paper it makes you stop and think about some of the things that you did.

Leslie also agreed that the reflection paper added value to her experience:

When you're writing the paper it helps remind you of things you probably would've forgotten otherwise. I mean, I shared my paper with other people. I shared it with my mom and my friends.

Prior to the beginning of the participant interviews, the researcher noted in her research journal that it was expected that students would feel personally good about their experience, but would indicate that their actual work at the agency was the most important contributing factor to ensuring that their experience was meaningful. Analysis

of the data from the semi-structured interviews, however, revealed that the actual work performed at the agency was secondary to pre-reflection, post reflection and the attitude of the agency representatives from the agencies identified as partner agencies. The next section addresses the role of agency orientation and how such an introduction to the service experience impacts students.

Role of Agency Orientation

Agency orientation is a training session or workshop that ought to take place prior to the service experience. Such information is said to help students better understand how their service contributes to the needs of the agency and the community being served. Training or orientation prior to the service experience ought to include an agency description, explanation of course objectives, emphasis of the needs of the community or population being served and an overview of the task to be completed during the service experience (Cauley, et al., 2001; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999). The majority of students expressed the importance of an orientation to the agency and how such knowledge contributed to creating a more meaningful service experience. Speaking to the importance of agency orientation, Mike expressed:

It's [agency orientation] pretty important in, you know, to know what you're getting into. I mean, if you're just loading bread into boxes all day it's hard to understand, but because I knew about the agency beforehand, I kind of knew why we were helping and how we were helping.

Sara also explained more generally the importance of agency orientation:

I think people want to know what they're getting into. I think that [agency orientation] would be important. . . if you explain to them so they can picture it in their own minds and know what great benefits it is for the kids or the family who receives help building that house, I think that would really make a difference.

A number of students described the agency orientation they received and how this experience contributed to enhancing their service time at the agency. For several of the participants, the agency orientation occurred in the classroom, and for others it occurred at the service site. Mary explained:

The teacher went over it before we started and really explained what we were supposed to be learning from our service. . . Then I learned about Habitat and how the people had to do so much before they could move into the house and that does kick me to get a lot of stuff done. That was what made the connection for me, that's what hit me. If I can be of any service here I am. Once I learned what I was doing and how it would help, that's when it kicked in for me.

When asked what made the experience a positive one, Leslie described her agency orientation and how it contributed to creating a more meaningful experience:

It was when I started, she [the agency representative] showed me two photo albums of people that had gotten their homes. It was just so neat to see their experiences. I mean, you could see the look on their face when they got their house.

Ross also shared his experience, receiving agency orientation, not formally, but through other volunteers at the service site:

Yes of course, you know. No one wants to go and have someone say here are some cans of paint and you don't really know what's going on or why you're doing it. You know, you want to know that it's a good cause, then you do better painting. At first, that's kind of what happened they just said, here nail this thing. Then, slowly I started to blend in and other workers shared their experience with me. . . they start to talk about why we're doing this and how this helps other people.

While some students received their agency orientation in the classroom, others received it at the service agency and still others received it informally while performing service. All the students who received an understanding of how they were contributing to meeting a community need indicated such knowledge enhanced their service-learning

experience. A few students, however, did not receive an agency orientation formally or informally, and expressed their frustration as a result. Evelyn explained:

They were too busy. There were hundreds of dogs and so I just had to get started. But, whenever I went to teen line, there was some training. And then you were always there with an actual employee. I wish there would have been more. I think that would've benefited me anyway.

Mason also explained his confusion with the service and challenge writing the final reflection paper as a result of not having received an orientation to the agency:

I went the first time, they just kind of threw me in there, you know. After I went home the first time, I kind of looked back and thought, you know what was it that I did? What is that place all about? And when I had to write a paper for it I realized I didn't have a lot of information I needed. So, I had to call and I got some information over the phone. Then the last couple times I went I asked the right questions. So I figured out what was going on.

As a part of this study, the researcher maintained a journal throughout the semi-structured interview process in order to reduce the potential for subjectivity and bias on the part of the researcher (Mertens, 2005). Prior to beginning participant interviews, the researcher noted that it was expected that students would view agency orientation positively, but would struggle to articulate specifically how they received an orientation to the agency and how this knowledge would contribute to their service experience. The data, however, revealed that not only did students place a high value on receiving an agency orientation prior to beginning their service work, but were able to clearly outline how they received their information and the contribution this knowledge made to enhancing their overall service-learning experience. The next section will directly address the second research question regarding whether or not students who participate in service-learning intend to continue to volunteer after graduation.

Future Service

Previous research results regarding whether or not service-learning increases the likelihood that students will volunteer after graduation were mixed. While some findings suggested service-learning contributes to students' commitment to future service, other research revealed that service-learning does not achieve this goal (Astin, Keup & Lindholm, 2002; Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005; Jones & Hill, 2003; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer & Ilustre, 2002; Oster-Aaland, Sellnow, Nelson & Pearson, 2004; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998; Preis & Fenzel, 2003; Ropers-Huilman, Corwile & Lima, 2005).

The analysis of the data gathered in this study suggested that students are overwhelmingly more likely to perform service after graduation as a direct result of their service-learning experience. Not only did students explain that they were more likely to serve in their communities after graduation, but many indicated they had already begun serving in a variety of capacities following their service-learning experiences.

Jayne explained how service was always a value for her, but service-learning expanded her understanding of community needs and motivated her to seek future volunteer opportunities:

I think everyone values it. I did the race for the cure and, you know, those women really needed a lot of support and help. So I see why they make us do it [service-learning] for a reason. And, since I've been doing it, and in the nursing program I've started to donate money more often and I never would've done that before, because you think someone else is going to do it. I don't know if it's because the service-learning gives you more empathy or because you know more about what's going on, but now I do more service, helps me be a more well rounded person.

Ross indicated that he had never done previous volunteer work, but while he was too busy at the present time, he intends to serve within his community in the future:

Overall it was fun, so, definitely. I had never volunteered before. . . there's a lot of good things you can go out and do. You just don't really know. And then you

just get busy in your own life and you don't care. So I kind of value it a lot now. If I met somebody that was debating on whether to go [volunteer] or not I would 100% say they should go.

Anne explained how the concept of volunteering had shifted for her since high school as a result of service-learning in college:

It was high on my list of values, I mean, he [God] blesses me every time I do it, but it was like I've got to get it done. It was like I have to do this and then I have to get service in sometime. I think now, though, when I'm finished with school, I will do service. . . I don't think I have to be forced to do it in the syllabus now. . . I think at first. . .it's like I have to get this done, and then you start to realize that you're looking at maybe what you could do after school. You ask how am I going to take this with me after school? Am I going to continue this the kind of thing? Am I going to continue the community work? The longer you do it the more those concepts become ingrained in you.

Mike, like Anne, had a new understanding of service, which was a shift from his experience volunteering in high school:

High school was just bogus. I just did service to get out of high school. A lot of the stuff in high school was stuff I would have done anyway, like the teacher's aide. I've always thought it would be a good idea when I have kids to have them volunteer at like the food kitchen. I think probably without service learning, I wouldn't be as comfortable with it.

Sara also indicated that she planned to volunteer in the future due to her service-learning experience. While she had volunteered previously, she had not been serving the community recently and engaging in service through service-learning reminded her of the value of volunteerism:

Well, I would say when I was back volunteering more it was high on my priority. Then, I moved back to Oklahoma City, I got married and had a family and you know, unfortunately with having a family and all I haven't been able to volunteer like I would like to. So, it wasn't as much for priority. But, volunteering during the service-learning project made me remember how good it made me feel and how happy it made me and the kids were economically disadvantaged. It was very important after I finished the service-learning project. It was a great experience to get back, you know involved in.

Kim, like many of the other participants, had not understood community needs as clearly prior to her service-learning experience. After completing the service-learning assignment, she now sees her community differently, and as a result, intends to volunteer in the future:

Before it was a priority that wasn't that serious for me. I didn't know how much help that was needed. After doing it [service-learning] that opened up my eyes and enlightened me. . . There was an older lady there [at the agency] that made a statement. . . She said, you're just not really living until you're there to help someone else. I thought wow that really changed my view. So, it [service] increased both as a value and a priority after doing service-learning. Without these experiences, I wouldn't have. I would've just been another person walking around worrying about me.

The researcher noted in her research journal that it was expected that student participants would be mixed opinions in terms of whether or not they believed their service-learning experience contributed to their intention to volunteer after graduation, just as the current research suggested. The analysis of the data, however, indicated that students overwhelmingly intended to volunteer in the future as a direct result of their service-learning experience. In fact, most of the participants indicated that not only did they now value and understand the need for service in the community, but such volunteerism was now a priority for them. The next three sections address the themes that arose that were significant, but did not directly answer the two research questions.

Selection of Service-Learning Agency

Beyond the data that spoke directly to the two research questions, there were three secondary themes that emerged. While the three secondary themes did not emerge consistently in a majority of the interviews, it is useful to present the data; as such a description provides a broader understanding of the students' perspectives.

The first of these three themes is the reason students gave for selecting their service agency. Overall, students chose the agency where they would perform their service for two primary reasons: convenience and interest. Mason chose his agency for convenience:

A lot of the reason I went there to that agency is because they didn't require you to call per se before you went there. They were just really eager to have students show up to help. A lot of the other agencies required you to call and they had to check you out, and so, there wasn't any of that red tape involved.

Mary also noted that the agency she selected was the most convenient location and day for her situation:

Well, I noticed a lot of the agencies were in north Oklahoma City, which I live practically in Norman. . . So transportation and Saturday was the only day I had where I didn't have something scheduled in already and I didn't have to be someplace.

Other students chose their location due to interest or personal life experiences.

Evelyn explained her choice of agency was based on her recent adoption of a pet and previous volunteer work with animals:

I decided to do my hours at Pets and People. . . that's where I got my cat from. I have a connection with animals. . . So, with that connection to animals I wanted to do something with my service-learning that had to do with animals.

Sara also chose her agency due to personal interest, she explained:

For me, my mother was a single parent and it was really hard for my sister and I growing up. It was like she was never there. And they didn't have good programs in Colorado that I knew or my mother knew of like the Kids Café program. . . I knew what it was like for me and the sadness that it brought. . . That one person that pats you on the back and says you did a good job can make all the difference in the world.

Kim also followed her personal interests in selecting her agency, as she explained:

I wanted to go pick up the trash because I hate litter, I absolutely hate litter.

The researcher noted in the research journal that it was expected that the majority of students would select agencies either due to familiarity or convenience. While some students indicated convenience was a factor in their selection of agency, the majority of student participants had previous life experiences that lead to their interest in the work of that particular the agency. The next secondary theme to be discussed provided further clarification regarding students' experiences at the community agency by describing the importance of interacting with other volunteers while performing the service work.

Interaction With Others

Another secondary theme that emerged in the data that lends breadth of understanding is students' advice about how performing service with others at the agency enhanced their experiences. Jayne commented:

I like to go with other people. You know, sweating, working hard to get it done, it really makes you feel good to be with your peers and do that kind of stuff. I like to go with friends.

Ross also indicated that performing service with others enhanced the service-learning experience:

It was pretty fun. It was a lot of teamwork and so you started to get to know other people. I mean, that was the best part.

Mike agreed, explaining that service was easier and more enjoyable when done with others:

It was much easier, I think. I did the food bank the first semester by myself. I got together with other students later on and it made it much easier, you just didn't feel so stupid and awkward.

While not a topic discussed by all student participants, many of those interviewed suggested that going to the service agency with others or meeting and working with other volunteers while at the agency enhanced their service-learning experience. The final

secondary theme to be discussed expands our understanding of service-learning experiences among nontraditional students by explaining how two interview participants felt about performing service as a part of a classroom learning experience.

Best for Younger Students

The final secondary theme that emerged was brought forward by only two of the students, but an important note as it was a concern for the two oldest student participants, ages 51 and 57. Given the study's focus on nontraditional age students, it is interesting that only the two oldest participants noted that service-learning, while acceptable to them, was most important for younger students. Lucy, when asked about her reaction the first time service-learning was introduced in the classroom as an assignment, explained:

I was taken a little aback, not so much that I didn't think I should have to do it, I think it's a great assignment for kids coming out of high school, for young kids, but for an older student that has lived a while, and has worked all their lives and been involved in the community, the only opportunity I see it gave me was to look at something different. . . without trying to sound pompous, to meet my individual needs for service-learning at the age I am, I've learned it. The only other thing I can say is for me it gave me an opportunity to look at an area I had not done.

Molly, while slightly more positive in nature, agreed with Lucy, she stated:

We need to learn to step outside of our own box so to speak. They [younger students] need to be aware. There are a lot of younger people in my class and they need to be made aware of all the things that are out there. There are a lot of young people in my class that I know have never done that before. I think it's a good idea because it shows them what kind of things are out there, the kind of things they can do, what kind of needs there are.

Each student defined younger students as those immediately out of high school or traditional age students between 18 and 21. The other student participants in the study, whose ages ranged from 22 to 38, did not, however, suggest that they were too experienced or too old for service-learning. Also, it is important to note that in the study

journal the researcher indicated that she, based on personal experiences using service-learning in the classroom, expected this theme to be more broadly revealed in the data.

Summary of Findings

The data presented in this chapter were collected and analyzed according to the research methods set forth in Chapter Three. The context for this case study was a large, single-campus, urban institution located in the southwestern United States with an annual student enrollment of approximately 20,000 students, a median age of 22 and a mean age of 26.7. The data analysis included a review of faculty survey results, course syllabi, agency surveys, student surveys, both prior to the implementation of the Service-Learning Center and following their service-learning experience in the classroom. Finally, the data analysis concluded with a summary of the findings from the primary data source, the semi-structured interviews conducted with students who were of a nontraditional age and participated in service-learning as part of an academic course.

Data from the Faculty Evaluation of Service-Learning Integration suggested that the faculty members who were using service-learning in the classroom believed there were positive benefits. Respondents to the survey indicated students were better able to connect their service-learning experience to the course material and that students were able to articulate during reflective assignments that their experience met a community need. In regard to the third essential program component of an effective service-learning experience, however, some of the faculty respondents indicated the need for additional orientation at the service site.

Analysis of course syllabi indicated that each faculty member used clear learning objectives and a final reflection assignment. This data suggested that faculty members

included the first two essential components of a meaningful service-learning experience. First, respondents indicated the service-learning assignment had benefited students by aiding them in making connections between course material and the service-learning experience. Secondly, respondents further explained that service-learning had lead students understanding community needs and a belief that the work they had performed as a part of their service-learning assignment had an impact on the community. The analysis of the data from the course syllabi yielded similar results to the faculty survey in that no information about providing an agency orientation prior to the service-learning experience. The course syllabi did not suggest to students that they research their service site prior to performing the service work, nor did the course syllabi note that students should expect an agency orientation once at the site.

Results of the community needs assessment revealed that agency needs varied broadly. The needs of each community agency are included in the information provided to students prior to their service-learning experience, along with a listing of hours of operation and contact information of staff. While this information is not comprehensive, it does provide some information about the agency, which is an initial starting point for students to begin their orientation to the agency, the third service-learning critical component being studied.

Data from the surveys administered to students prior to the implementation of the Service Learning Center indicated that, while students had little experience with service in the educational environment, there was interest in such college-sponsored initiatives. Furthermore, the survey suggested that students, while they lacked experience, saw the

educational value of service. The semi-structured interview analysis revealed similar results.

The surveys administered to students following their service-learning experiences yielded similar results. In analyzing the two open-ended questions from the 1,494 surveys collected over three years, three significant themes emerged, two of which may be described as positive toward the service-learning experience and one that expressed students' frustration with the use of service-learning in the classroom (Horinek, 2006; 2007; 2008). Similar to the student assessment prior to implementing the service-learning program, student surveys following their service-learning experience indicated that students believed their experience met a community need and was therefore personally meaningful.

Conclusion

The primary sample and focus of the study were the students. A purposeful sampling technique was used to ensure that students are at least 22 years of age or older and varied in terms of major and number of credit hours completed so that the sample was diverse and more likely to capture the experiences of all students at the institution who have participated in a service-learning experience. Thirteen students were interviewed. Participating students met with the primary researcher for between 30 minutes and one hour. The intent of the researcher was to continue to conduct interviews until no new information was being gathered (Mertens, 2005). A personal researcher journal was kept throughout the process of data collection as a means by which to monitor the collection of data and reduce researcher bias. Four primary and three secondary themes emerged in the data analysis.

There were several themes developed from the data that directly addressed the two research questions and included: (1) connections to course material, (2) meaningful service, (3) role of agency orientation and (4) future service. The data revealed that not only did students place a high value on receiving an agency orientation prior to beginning their service work, but were able to clearly outline how they received their information and the contribution this knowledge made to enhancing their overall service-learning experience. Overall, student participants also indicated that an explanation of the service-learning assignment prior to the service experience and a summative reflection paper or other reflective assignment were critical in aiding them in connecting their service work to course content. Analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews also revealed that the actual work performed at the agency was secondary to pre-reflection, post reflection and the attitude of the agency representatives in contributing to the experience being a meaningful one. Finally, the analysis of the data indicated that students overwhelmingly intended to volunteer in the future. In fact, most of the participants indicated that not only did they now value and understand the need for service in the community, but such volunteerism was now a priority for them.

The three secondary themes that emerged in the data included: (1) selection of agency, (2) interaction with others, and (3) service-learning is best for younger students. While some students indicated convenience was a factor in their selection of agency, the majority of student participants had previous experiences that led to their interest in the work of the agency. The next secondary theme, interaction with others, was not a topic brought forward by all student participants. Many of those interviewed, however, suggested that going to the service agency with others or meeting and working with other

volunteers while at the agency enhanced their service-learning experience. The final secondary theme, service-learning is best for younger students, was brought forward by only two of the study participants, both of which were over the age of 50 and represented the two oldest participants in the study. Both participants articulated some value in service-learning for themselves, but strongly believed that service-learning was most beneficial to younger, less experienced students.

In this chapter, data were discussed from the primary data sources, where were the student participants, as well as from the secondary sources, including: course syllabi, student pre and post surveys, faculty surveys and agency surveys. Data gathered from each of the sources were triangulated and also compared to the researcher's journal. Data saturation of participant semi-structured interviews was considered achieved when participant responses to the semi-structured interview questions began to significantly repeat from participant to participant. The themes that emerged from the data provided answers to the research questions prepared for this study. Recommendations and the implications for further research are addressed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Governmental policies and research over the past two decades suggests a strong link between higher education and adults' commitment to volunteerism. Service-learning has emerged within higher education as a means by which to teach students course objectives, while at the same time encouraging a commitment to future volunteerism. Service-learning is defined as a teaching tool in which students link course material to a meaningful service experience and return to the classroom to reflect on this learning experience with the goal of producing graduates that engage in service to their communities. Service-learning has been shown in empirical research studies to have many positive impacts on the community, institutions of higher education, faculty members and students alike. To this end, numerous researchers have sought to define critical program components for use in service-learning. Butin (2006) suggested, however, that a great deal of the research is anecdotal in nature and lacks the necessary empiricism to adequately establish a more comprehensive understanding of service-learning.

This study sought to understand contributing factors to meaningful service-learning and intention for future volunteerism at a community college among nontraditional students. To review, the research questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the extent to which the three essential components of a service-learning program are apparent in their service-learning experience? The three essential service-learning components to be used in the

study are: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an impact on the community, and (3) the training or orientation students receive at the community agency.

2. What potential impact will the students' service-learning experience have on their intention to volunteer after graduation?

Three Essential Components of a Service-Learning Program

Chapter Five will discuss the data gathered that related directly to the two primary research questions. The two research questions are used as guiding themes to discuss the findings of this research endeavor.

Question One Related to Connections to Course Material

Reflection is a key component that transforms service into service-learning by engaging students' emotions to aid in making connections to course content (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Schaffer, 2004). Reflection includes journaling, papers, class presentations, group discussions and other related learning activities, each of which is designed as an opportunity for students to connect their experiences to course material, the academic area and societal concerns (Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998).

In analyzing the data, a number of findings confirmed the importance of reflection in aiding students in connecting their service experience to course content. Data from the faculty surveys suggested that overall respondents to the survey believed students were able to connect their service-learning experience to the course material and that students believed their experience met a community need. Analysis of course syllabi indicated that each faculty member used clear learning objectives and a final reflection assignment

with the intention of aiding students in making connections between course material and the service experience. Student participants in the semi-structured interviews also indicated that an explanation of the service-learning assignment prior to the service experience and a summative reflection paper or other post-reflection assignments were critical in aiding students in connecting their service work to course content.

The findings of this study confirmed much of the previous research conducted in the area of service-learning. As Hatcher, Bringle and Muthiah (2004) suggested is important, an explanation of the purpose of the service-learning assignment or pre-reflection exercise was outlined clearly in course syllabi by each faculty member and also brought forward by students as an important aspect of helping them understand how the assignment ought to connect to course material. Student participants indicated that understanding why service is important generally and also receiving an explanation as to how the service-learning assignment was to be connected to course content prior to serving helped them remain more observant during their service experience. Student participants suggested that they were seeking to learn from their service experience within the framework of the course, rather than only connecting their experience to their personal growth. Further confirming previous research was the finding that post reflection assignments, specifically a reflective essay, aided students in connecting course material to their service experience (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Hatcher, Bringle & Muthiah, 2004; Schaffer, 2004). Reflection essay assignments were clearly outlined in course syllabi and student participants suggested that writing the reflective paper helped solidify their connections between the service experience and the course content. Many student

participants indicated that without the final reflective writing assignment the experience would not have resulted in direct connections to course material.

Pre and post-reflection exercises and assignments were found to be important not only in the literature review, but also in the analysis of the data. Such reflection exercises aided students in connecting their service experience to course content. Use of on-going reflective activities throughout the course, however, were cited as important in the literature, but not found in the analysis of the data of this study. Faculty member surveys, course syllabi, student surveys and student interview data did not reference the use of or need for such on-going reflection to aid in connection to course content. Additional research may be useful to better understand the role that on-going reflective exercises may or may not play in enhancing students' connections to course content.

Question One Related to Meaningful Service Experience

Ensuring that students feel as if their service had an impact on the community being served is another component of an effective service-learning program that was examined in this study. Gorelick (2002) proposed that in order for the service to be perceived as meaningful, students ought to be introduced to the complexity of community. Agency selection, pre-service training, quality reflection all contribute to aiding students in developing a sense of meaning, or a feeling that their service contributed to the work of the agency.

Analysis of the faculty surveys yielded that those who had used service-learning as a teaching tool in their classroom believed that students found the experience meaningful by articulating both personal and professional growth as a result of the service-learning assignment. Respondents to the survey suggested that students were

able to clearly articulate their newfound understanding of the community in the final reflection exercises. Overall faculty respondents to the survey indicated that they believed students felt as if they had met a community need following their service-learning experience. The findings from the analysis of the course syllabi confirmed the findings from the faculty surveys by specifically outlining how each course and each instructor had approached the final reflective assignment. In each of the course syllabi, a final reflection assignment was used to assist students in better understanding their community and articulating the ways in which they had an impact on this community.

The findings from the post service-learning experience survey data collected from the students confirmed much of what was found in the faculty surveys as well. Overall, students expressed that the experience was personally meaningful. Students articulated that they better understood the needs of their community and how such needs could be met through volunteerism. Students, unlike the faculty respondents, did not specifically articulate in the open-ended questions what made their experience meaningful, thus no practical implications may be drawn directly from the students' post service-learning surveys.

Student participants in the semi-structured interviews suggested three primary reasons or activities that contributed to a feeling that the service the students performed had an impact on the community; appreciative agency representatives, pre-reflection exercises and post-reflection writing assignments. Another secondary theme emerged in the data that lends breadth to understanding the factors that contribute to a meaningful service experience. Although not a topic discussed by a majority of interview participants, some students suggested that working with others, whether that be friends,

classmates, agency representatives or other volunteers, enhanced their overall service experience.

A meaningful service experience is one in which students are introduced to and come to understand the needs of the community and their own personal responsibility to aid in meeting such needs. The findings of this study reinforced much of the previous research and literature on the topic. Pre-reflection exercises and post-reflection writing assignments are both cited throughout the literature on service-learning as important factors that aid students in developing a sense of meaning, without which little learning or long-term effects may be experienced (Gorelick, 2002). Findings from this study, however, add to this body of research by suggesting that appreciative agency representatives and working with others at the agency also contributed to a sense that the service experience was meaningful. Developing strong partnerships with agency representatives can aid faculty members and service-learning administrators in ensuring that students' experiences include these elements, thus increasing the opportunities for a positive and meaningful service-learning experience for students. Additional research may be needed to better understand these constructs and how it is that working with others and appreciative agency representatives specifically contribute to enhancing the service experience for students.

Question One Related to Agency Orientation

Agency orientation is defined as a training session or workshop that ought to take place prior to the service experience. Such information is said to help students better understand how their service contributed to the needs of the agency and the community being served. King (2004) determined that when students are oriented to the mission and

operation of the agency they are more likely to feel connected to the client, even if they have not met those being served. Training or orientation prior to the service experience ought to include an agency description, explanation of course objectives, emphasis of the needs of the community or population being served and an overview of the task to be completed during the service experience (Cauley, et al., 2001; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999).

Results of the faculty survey, on the final question regarding what could be done to improve the administrative process, experience or outcomes of service-learning, three of the respondents asked for improvements at the agencies regarding more organization at the service site and a need for agency representatives to provide students with more information regarding their tasks and how these tasks aided the agency in accomplishing their purpose. One faculty member suggested:

Have the approved facilities keep a record of the number of students needed per shift. Sometimes there are too many students at one site and they don't have a good experience.

Faculty members also suggested that the in-class time commitment necessary to use service-learning as an instructional tool negatively impacted the time they then had available to review other course content. Although additional research may be needed to understand this sentiment more completely, it is important to note that agency orientation done in-class may not be well received by faculty members due to the reduction in time available to cover other assignments and content.

In analyzing the student post surveys, students overall indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that the service-learning experience helped them to better understand community needs, the primary goal of an agency orientation. Regarding the analysis of

the two open-ended questions on the survey, a number of students spoke directly to their newfound understanding of community needs, in many cases expressing what may be defined as empathy. Student responses, however, did not speak directly to the need for or use of an agency orientation in order to aid them in understanding how their service-learning experience contributed to meeting a community need.

In reviewing the data from the semi-structured interviews, the majority of students expressed the importance of an orientation to the agency and how such knowledge contributed to creating a more meaningful service-learning experience. Student participants articulated that their agency orientation helped them know what to expect, how their work was specifically contributing to the mission of the agency, and gave them confidence to serve at the agency. Student participants suggested that they received an agency orientation one of two primary ways, either on site at the agency or in the classroom. One student also added that the agency orientation or information about the agency was gained from other volunteers at the service site. For those students who did not receive an agency orientation, they expressed their frustration. One student suggested that she had to research information about the agency following their experience in order to fully understand how their work had contributed to meeting a community or agency need. The data revealed that not only did students place a high value on receiving an agency orientation prior to beginning their service work, but were also able to clearly outline how they received their information and the contribution this knowledge made to enhancing their overall service-learning experience.

The findings of this study both confirmed and added to the body of knowledge regarding the uses and benefits of an agency orientation prior to the service experience.

Students articulated the value of an agency orientation whether conducted formally by a faculty member, service-learning administrator, or agency representative or informally gathered from a website, previous life experiences or by other volunteers at the site. The literature on service-learning emphasizes this more formal orientation process. This study, however, expanded these findings by suggesting that informal means by which to receive an orientation to the service agency are of equal value. That is, an agency orientation does not need to be formalized in a classroom type-setting as suggested in the literature. Information gathered by the student from a website or through informal discussions with other volunteers regarding the agency's work all served to help students better understand how their service contributed to the needs of the agency and the community being served.

Question Two Related to Intention to Volunteer After Graduation

Previous research regarding whether or not service-learning experiences increases the likelihood that students will volunteer after graduation had mixed results. A number of studies, conducted at a variety of higher education institutions, have revealed that students were committed to future service and felt more connection to the community as a result of their experience with service-learning (Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer & Ilustre, 2002; Preis & Fenzel, 2003; Ropers-Huilman, Corwile & Lima, 2005). Indeed, much of the previous research suggested that service-learning has the potential to have a significant impact on higher education's ability to produce engaged citizens after graduation. Results of other previous research endeavors, however, are not as positive regarding whether or not service-learning increases the likelihood that students will engage in service in the future (Jones & Hill, 2003; Parker-Gwin and Mabry, 1998). Such

researchers have concluded that requiring service, such as is the case with many academic service-learning experiences, can have a negative impact in that service is seen as only about meeting a requirement, rather than learning and engagement. This case study research endeavor sought to fill a gap in the previous research by exploring whether or not the components of a service-learning program impacted a student's likelihood of participating in service after graduation, specifically among nontraditional age students.

Analysis of the data gathered in the faculty survey revealed that not only did the service-learning experience make a personal and academic impact on students, but the faculty members indicated that students also articulated a desire to volunteer in the future as a result of their service-learning experience. In reviewing the data from the student surveys conducted prior to implementation of the service-learning program, similar results were found. Data revealed that 67% were interested or very interested in participating in service in the future, while 30% were neutral on the matter and 2% were not interested in participating in service in the future. Overall, the survey results indicated that, while students had little experience with service in the educational environment, there was interest in such college-sponsored initiatives. Furthermore, the survey suggested that students, while they lacked experience, saw the educational value of service.

Post service-learning student surveys yielded similar results. The survey consisted of eight numerically rated questions and two open-ended questions (See Appendix H). Students were asked to rate their responses to the eight numeric questions on a Likert scale, with one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree. On the question asking students if their service-learning experience had increased their interest

in doing future service, over the three-year period, the response ranged from a mean of 3.61 to 3.78, which suggested service-learning does contribute to a student's intention to volunteer in the future. In analyzing the two open-ended questions from the 1,494 surveys collected, students also made mention of their desire to continue to volunteer in their communities:

One student explained:

There is so much that we can do. My experience not only benefits my community but myself and I am planning to go back in the summer with my daughter.

The data from the semi-structured interviews with students confirmed these findings as well. Students articulated that service was always a value, but service-learning expanded their understanding of community needs and motivated them to seek future volunteer opportunities. In those cases where students had volunteered prior to their service-learning assignment, students indicated that their understanding of community needs and the reliance on volunteers had been broadened and clarified; as a result, students indicated that they were now more likely than before to continue to volunteer.

Previous researchers have found mixed results as to whether or not service-learning increases the likelihood that students will volunteer after graduation. While some findings suggest service-learning contributes to students' commitment to future service, other research suggests that service-learning does not achieve this goal (Astin, Keup & Lindholm, 2002; Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005; Jones & Hill, 2003; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer & Ilustre, 2002; Oster-Aaland, Sellnow, Nelson & Pearson, 2004; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998; Preis & Fenzel, 2003; Ropers-Huilman, Corwile & Lima, 2005).

The data analysis from this study indicated that students overwhelmingly intended to

volunteer in the future as a result of their service-learning experience. In fact, the majority of the participants explained that not only did they now value and understand the need for service in the community, but volunteerism was now a priority for them. This study confirmed previous findings that suggested intention to volunteer after graduation can be attributable, at least in part, to students' participation in service-learning. Such findings revealed that service-learning, more so than volunteering alone, helps students better understand community needs, thus increasing the likelihood that they will serve in the future.

Implications, Further Research & Conclusions

This study sought to understand contributing factors to meaningful service-learning and intention for future volunteerism at a community college among nontraditional students. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the extent to which the three essential components of a service-learning program are apparent in their service-learning experience? The three essential service-learning components to be used in the study are: (1) the students' connection between course material and the service experience, (2) the extent to which the students believe participation in service-learning had an impact on the community, and (3) the training or orientation students receive at the community agency.
2. What potential impact will the students' service-learning experience have on their intention to volunteer after graduation?

The study used a qualitative case study approach. Multiple data sources were collected and triangulated to formulate the findings of the study. The data sources

gathered and analyzed included faculty survey results, course syllabi, agency surveys, student surveys both prior to the implementation of the Service-Learning Center and following the students' service-learning experiences in the classroom and semi-structured interviews conducted with 13 students who were of a nontraditional age and participated in service-learning as part of an academic course. Findings of the study revealed a number of implications for practice, as well as recommendations for future research.

These implications for practice and research included:

1. Use of on-going reflective activities, such as weekly journaling, throughout the course were cited as important to quality service-learning in the previous research, but not found in the analysis of the data of this study. Additional research may be useful to better understand the role that on-going reflective exercises may or may not play in enhancing students' connections to course content.
2. Confirming previous research, this study revealed the critical importance of post-reflective assignments in helping students connect their service experience to course content, better understand community needs and take the time to consider how they had been impacted either personally or professionally through the service-learning experience. Such knowledge may aid faculty members who seek to utilize service-learning in the classroom by providing guidance in structuring an effective post-reflective assignment to maximize the benefits of service-learning for students.
3. Findings from this study added to the body of research by suggesting that appreciative agency representatives and working with others at the agency contribute to a sense that the service experience was meaningful. Developing

strong partnerships with agency representatives can aid faculty members and service-learning administrators in ensuring that students' experiences include these programmatic elements.

4. Data regarding the important role agency representatives play within this learning partnership may also benefit the service agency. Agency representatives may consider training for their staff; as these findings suggested, if the agency representatives help students have a positive experience, the community agency may acquire a more long term volunteer in the future.
5. Students articulated the value of an agency orientation whether conducted formally in a classroom-type setting by a faculty member, service-learning administrator, or agency representative or informally gathered from a website or by other volunteers at the service site. The literature on service-learning emphasizes this more formal orientation process. This study, however, expanded these findings by suggesting that informal means by which to receive an orientation to the service agency are also of value. Faculty members, service-learning administrators and agency representatives may each benefit from this insight. Faculty members may include in the course syllabi or assignment handouts resources to aid students in conducting research on the service agency prior to the service experience. Service-learning administrators could consider including website links to service agencies on their own website or within printed materials provided to students. Finally, agency representatives can see the value in the information they have available to potential volunteers and strive to maintain accurate and comprehensive websites and printed materials. Additional

research would be useful to examine more closely informal and formal means by which agency orientations are conducted and the resulting impact on students.

6. Data from participant interviews revealed that interaction with others at the agency may enhance the student's volunteer experience. Others, as defined by the participants, included other volunteers that may or may not have been previously known by the student. This finding added to the current body of literature, as interaction with others is not cited in other research as an important component that may contribute to a more meaningful service experience. Additional research is needed to better understand this phenomenon.
7. Although not a majority, a significant number of the participants who completed the faculty survey indicated an *us versus them* attitude in terms of the college and the community. Survey respondents suggested that agency representatives needed to be told to take various steps to improve the students' experiences, but none of the surveys suggested the respondents intended to or had contacted the agency directly to discuss such needs. At the institution used as the context for this study, service-learning administrators serve as a liaison between the faculty members and the community agencies. The advantages of such an organizational structure may be considered to be the ease of administration and consistency of communication between the community and the institution. The findings of this study, however, suggest that such an organizational structure may also inhibit the relationship between the faculty members and the community agencies, which is cited throughout the literature as important. More research may be needed to

better understand the strengths and weaknesses of organizational structure in relationship to quality service-learning programs.

8. It was noted in the analysis of the data that student surveys collected over the three years of operation of the Service-Learning Center grew more positive toward service-learning and volunteerism more generally over time. Such findings begin to suggest that the implementation of an institution-wide service-learning program has the potential to shift students' attitudes or campus culture in regard to service and future volunteerism. Such a shift could have significant implications for society as a whole if more civically minded graduates enter the community. While not explored in this study, further research may be useful to understand this phenomenon.
9. This study confirmed the findings of previous research that suggested intention to volunteer after graduation can be attributable, at least in part, to students' participation in service-learning. Such findings indicate that service-learning, more so than volunteering alone, helps students better understand community needs, thus increasing the likelihood that the student will volunteer after graduation. The findings of this study begin to reveal that it is this clarity regarding community needs that leads to an increase in students' intentions to volunteer in the future. More research, however, is needed to clarify and gain more depth of understanding regarding this finding.

Throughout the past two decades, many institutions of higher education have responded to both community needs and student learning needs through the development of outreach programs such as service-learning (Sapp & Crabtree, 2002). A culture of

service to the community is not a new concept in higher education, but service-learning has strengthened this relationship and made connections more intentional and mutually beneficial (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Community colleges, with historically strong connections to their respective communities, have been noted as leaders in the establishment of strong service-learning programs (Weglarz & Seybert, 2004). Astin (1993) suggested that service-learning is one of the most promising practices to help students understand their responsibility to support society through volunteerism. It is this collaborative partnership and mutually beneficial relationship that lends service-learning its unique and dynamic qualities.

As a result of service-learning, students become more invested in the community, relationships are strengthened between the community and the institution, enthusiasm for students is energized within the community and ultimately community needs are met (Sipe, 2001). Although this study focused on the impact of service-learning on students, the broader impact of service-learning on other constituencies cannot be overlooked. Faculty members have also been shown to benefit from using service-learning as an instructional tool. Researchers have indicated that use of service-learning makes teaching more rewarding as students have more enthusiasm for course material and engage in course material at higher cognitive levels (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998). Service-learning has also been shown to encourage greater collaboration among instructors and affords new opportunities for research (Rich, 2003; Sipe, 2001). Service-learning benefits communities and society as well. By providing the community with resources, strengthening relationships among community agencies, broadening problem solving capacity, developing more positive town and gown relationships and

increasing the likelihood that students will continue to serve their community in the future, the community may benefit immeasurably from the use of service-learning (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Johnson, 2000). Indeed, service-learning is a vibrant and complex tool with the potential to yield long term benefits to all constituencies: faculty, students, community agencies, institutional administrators and the broader society.

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APPENDIX A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your service-learning experience.
2. What tasks did you perform while at the agency?
3. Do you believe the work you performed at the agency helped the agency? If yes, how? If no, why not?
4. What did you learn from your experience?
5. Did you learn about the agency before you began your service work there? If so, when, by whom and was it helpful?
6. Describe any volunteer work you had done prior to this service-learning experience.
7. Do you believe this service experience has made you more likely to volunteer in the future? Why or why not.
8. Before performing the service, what do you expect the experience to be like? Did it meet these expectations?
9. What, if anything, did you learn during your service experience that relates to what you were learning in the classroom.
10. What value, if any, do you place on service-learning?
11. What value, if any, do you place on volunteer work?
12. Would you suggest a friend engage in service-learning?
13. Why did you select the agency you chose to complete your service-learning project?

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO MEANINGFUL SERVICE-LEARNING AND INTENT FOR FUTURE VOLUNTEERISM AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Principal Investigator: Liz Largent
Department: Oklahoma City Community College, Division of Student Services
University of Oklahoma, Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

You are being asked to volunteer for this research study. This study is being conducted at Oklahoma City Community College. You were selected as a possible participant because you participated in a course at Oklahoma City Community College with a service-learning component.

Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of students participating in service-learning at Oklahoma City Community College, Oklahoma City, OK.

Number of Participants

Approximately 30 people will take part in this study.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following: meet with Liz Largent, the primary researcher, for an interview regarding your service-learning experience.

Length of Participation

Each interview conducted will take between 30 minutes and 1 hour.

This study has the following risks:

Research participants will be asked open-ended questions about their service-learning experience at Oklahoma City Community College. Participants will not be asked to share information beyond their level of individual comfort.

Benefits of being in the study are

None.

Confidentiality

In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you without your permission. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers will have access to the records.

There are organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis. These organizations include Oklahoma City Community College and the University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Boards.

Participant Initials:

Compensation

You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you withdraw or decline participation, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the study. If you decide to participate, you may decline to answer any question and may choose to withdraw at any time.

Audio Recording of Study Activities

To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty. Please select one of the following options.

I consent to audio recording. Yes No.

Contacts and Questions

If you have concerns or complaints about the research, the researcher(s) conducting this study can be contacted at 405-381-2049. Contact the researcher(s) if you have questions or if you have experienced a research-related injury.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than individuals on the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this consent form, please request one.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX C: Student Participant Demographic Form

Gender: _____ Age: _____

Major: _____

of Credit Hours Completed in College: _____

Do either of your parents have a bachelor's degree? Yes No

What semester did you complete your service-learning project? _____

What course did you take that required a service-learning project? _____

How many hours of service were you asked to complete? _____

Did you complete the hours required by the instructor for the project? _____

If yes, did you complete more than the required number of hours? _____

In addition to the service hours you were required to complete, what assignment were you asked to complete as part of the service-learning assignment (paper, presentation, etc)?

APPENDIX D: Telephone Request Script

“My name is Liz Largent and I work at O-Triple-C as the Dean of Student Development and am also working on my dissertation research at the University of Oklahoma. I’m contacting you because the topic of my research is service-learning and you recently participated in a service-learning project as part of one of your courses. I would like to ask your participation in this study so I can better understand students’ experiences with service-learning. Your participation includes a 30 minute to 1 hour interview regarding your experiences with service-learning.”

APPENDIX E: Community Needs Assessment Survey

Agency Name: _____

Site Supervisor: _____

Position/Title: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

Indicate the kinds of volunteer assistance you would be interested in receiving from the college? Check all that apply.

- Physical outreach (e.g., building project, stocking shelves)
- Educational outreach (e.g., tutoring, mentoring, literacy)
- Social outreach (e.g., visiting an elderly person, recreation, arts)
- Research/writing outreach (e.g., writing a proposal or newsletter, researching needs, evaluating effectiveness of programs, developing a public service announcement)
- Organizing outreach (e.g., establish a new service program, recruit volunteers, manage/train volunteers)
- Other: _____

Please indicate areas where the college's volunteers (students) can assist your agency.

- Tutoring
- Office Clients
- Advertising/Public Relations
- Programming
- Direct Care Service
- Financial/Accounting Services
- Other: _____

What are additional ways we can collaborate to meet the needs of your agency?

Would you like to receive information about becoming a designated partner agency for volunteer placement?

- Yes
- No

APPENDIX G: Student Service Learning Assessment, Pre-Program Implementation

Please take a few moments to answer the following questions. Your answers will help us develop an effective service-learning and volunteer program.

Age: _____ Major: _____ Semesters in College: _____

During college, have you participated in a volunteer service opportunity? Y N

If yes, please list the program(s) in which you participated: _____

How did you learn about this volunteer opportunity?

Poster, flyer, banner Student club event Faculty Friend

Newspaper Course requirement Off Campus

Other: _____

Did your participation in volunteer service have any effect on your major select? Y N

Rank what motivated you to participate in service:

1=Did not motivate me	3=Neutral		5=Was major motivation		
Course credit	1	2	3	4	5
Desire to help others	1	2	3	4	5
Experience/career exploration	1	2	3	4	5
Social political activism	1	2	3	4	5
Apply classroom knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
Personal development	1	2	3	4	5
Skill development	1	2	3	4	5
Enjoyment	1	2	3	4	5
Meeting others/social	1	2	3	4	5
Free time	1	2	3	4	5

Was the service you completed required by an academic unit or professor? Y N

If not, was the service you completed offered as extra credit? Y N

Would the availability of a service component in a course affect your decision to enroll in that course? Y N

In general my volunteer work was. . .

- More educational than my classroom work.
- Equally educational to my classroom work.
- Less educational than my classroom work.

Rate your interest in future volunteer service.

1=Not Interested 3=Neutral 5=Very Interested

1 2 3 4 5

Rate the following programs in order of your personal interest.

1=Not Interested 3=Neutral 5=Very Interested

Academic Service Learning Program

Faculty would have the option of including volunteer service as part of, or as an addition to academic requirements for their courses.

1 2 3 4 5

Civic/Community Honors Program

Students can choose to participate in a two-semester honors program to complete 50 hours of service. Service activities would be structured and would be tracked. Students would receive recognition for completing the civic/community honors program.

1 2 3 4 5

Campus Volunteer Center

Students can choose to participate in a variety of self-directed volunteer programs at the community agency of their choosing. The volunteer center would maintain a listing of needed volunteers on an on-going basis.

1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX H: Student Survey of Service-Learning Experience

Age _____ Sex _____ Ethnicity _____ Semesters at OCCC _____

Major _____ Do either of your parents have a bachelor's degree? Yes No

Instructor Name _____ Course Name & Number _____

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
The service increased my awareness of the larger community.	1	2	3	4	5
The service helped me better understand community needs.	1	2	3	4	5
The served helped me reflect on my life and goals.	1	2	3	4	5
The service helped me decide on career and life goals.	1	2	3	4	5
The service has increased my interest in doing further service.	1	2	3	4	5
I would recommend this activity to my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
My experience with the community agency was positive.	1	2	3	4	5
My experience with the service-learning program has been positive.	1	2	3	4	5

How would you describe your service-learning experience to a friend?

Is there anything that could have been done to improve your service-learning experience?

With what agency did you complete the majority of your service hours? _____