

Undergraduate Student Diversity Paradigm Expansion: The Role of International Service Learning

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[Abstract] This study investigates the impact of an international service-learning experience on an undergraduate student's self-described worldview. The International Service-Learning Inventory was employed to determine students' views on variables associated with worldview: social justice, intercultural competencies, diversity, global awareness, democracy, civic engagement, and transformative learning. The study was conducted with University of Central Florida undergraduate students (N=9). The participants were enrolled in an international service-learning field experience in Botswana. The study examined educational access and gender issues. The results of the experiment illustrated large effect sizes in four factors: Community, Civic Engagement, Diversity, and Education and Leadership: Which were defined as a student's *worldview*.

A score-card system was used (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005, p.291) to measure individual responses on the Inventory prior to and upon return from the student's experience. One study result showed that diversity had the second highest recorded change. Diversity was the only factor in which students did not demonstrate low scores at either testing interval. Statistical analyses found that the diversity construct demonstrated the largest effect size. Interaction effects were also found between the four factors and gender and ethnicity variables. Main large effects were also found with the diverse populations of first generation students, Pell Grant recipients, and those who have traveled abroad. These findings indicate that students from underrepresented backgrounds may benefit from international service learning in ways that may not have been previously explored in the literature.

[Keywords] international service-learning; worldview; social justice; diversity; civic engagement; transformative learning

Opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in service-based activities within their communities have grown tremendously. From 2009 to 2010, Campus Compact (2011) reported that students have completed more than 382 million service hours (Soria, Troisi & Stebleton, 2013). Service-learning is responsible for many of those service hours and has been described in a number of ways: pedagogy, a philosophy, a high-impact practice, a retention tool, and an experience pivotal to student learning and engagement (Deeley, 2010; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Mendel-Reyes, 1998; Tinto, 2012; Yeh, 2010). The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2005) defines service-learning as, "a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities." To meet this definition, students must participate in real-life activities that meet the needs of the larger community outside of the university which enables them to apply coursework and knowledge to real-world problems (Cashel, Goodman, & Swanson, 2003; McClain, Diambra, Burton, Fuss & Fudge, 2008).

A 1999–2000 survey of 324 universities and colleges found that 82% offered undergraduate and graduate courses with an associated service-learning curriculum (Moser & Rogers, 2005). The benefits of service-learning to student participants have been studied across academic disciplines including nursing (Calvillo, Clark, Ballantyne, Pacquiao, Purnell, & Villarruel, 2009), pharmacology (Coffey, Miller, Barnett, & Turberville-Vega, 2003), teacher education preparation (LaMaster, 2001), and social justice (Warren, 1998; Werner, Voce, Openshaw, & Simons, 2002). The benefits of service-learning activities have also been studied in many unique student populations: honors students (Stewart, 2008), low-income and first-generation students (Yeh, 2010), and first-year students (Stavrianopoulos, 2008).

Student participation in service-learning can yield many positive effects on measures including

academic performance (GPA, writing skills, critical thinking skills), values (commitment to activism and to promoting racial understanding), self-efficacy, leadership (leadership activities, self-rated leadership ability, interpersonal skills), choice of a service career, and plans to participate in service after college (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000; Yeh, 2010). Other benefits of student participation in service-learning activities include increased attendance, further development of students' personal and social responsibility, and the feelings of belonging to a peer group and greater connection to the institution (Deeley, 2010; Kuh, et al., 2005; Soria et al., 2013; "What is Service-Learning," n.d.). The study also shows that Low-income and first-generation students, groups with greater risk of attrition than other student groups, demonstrate increased educational resiliency, increased feelings of personal meaning, and enhanced critical consciousness by engaging in service learning experiences (Yeh, 2010). Service-learning also provides students the opportunity to face societal problems of ignorance, injustice, inequity and prejudices while enabling them to further expand their goals, values, and learning. It is also noted that there can be an increase in cultural competencies and adaptability (Aydlett, Randolph & Wells, 2010; Knuston & Gonzalez, 2009).

International service-learning integrates a targeted culture into a conventional service-learning experience (Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004). By immersing students into experiences that involve interacting with community residents while carrying out a project aimed at benefiting the community, students' sense of global community are enhanced and developed (Prins & Webster, 2010). Short-term international experiences enable students to step outside of their comfort zones and become aware of ideological identity both home and abroad. These trips are often transformative in nature, and enhance participants' abilities to view their world from multiple perspectives (Knuston & Gonzalez, 2009; Prins & Webster, 2010).

The Impact of Service Learning

The present study adds to this body of literature by using a quantitative assessment of perceived changes in students' self-reported worldview. For the purposes of this study, worldview is defined to be community, civic engagement, diversity, and education & leadership. A review of the course and the service-learning trip itself provide the context for the study. The aim of the course was for students to gain an appreciation of some of the challenges that African educators face on a daily basis including exceptionalism, race, gender and language barriers, effects of poverty, and access to quality education. The course was designed to allow students to work within a school community in Botswana while gaining insights into local and global educational issues (Biraimah, 2013).

The University faculty identified several course objectives. These include analyzing the impact of gender on educational and life opportunities for students from Botswana as well as examining the relationships between education, inequality, poverty, and socioeconomic status in Botswana. Other learning outcomes include the ability to demonstrate knowledge of unique and diverse cultures, commonalities, and shared human condition, and reflecting on students' international field experience with regard to serving "the needs of the global community and experience the rewards of helping others" (Biraimah, para. 2, 2013).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study is to determine the impact on students' worldview in the area of Diversity prior to their international service-learning trip and upon their return from Botswana.

Method

Participants

Nine of the ten undergraduate students enrolled in an international service-learning trip at the University of Central Florida served as the participants in this study. One student completed the pre-test but did not complete the post-test and was therefore eliminated from the study. Students were asked to self-disclose demographic information, including gender, academic major, financial aid status, first-generation status,

and previous completion of service-related activities. However, no identifying information was collected so this information could not be verified by the institution. Of the seven students who chose to identify their gender, five (55.6%) were female and two were male (22%). Of the eight students who responded to questions regarding race and ethnicity, four identified as being white or Caucasian (44%), three as being Black or African American (33%), one as Hispanic or Latino (11%). Three of the students self-reported being juniors in college (33%) with the remaining six (66%) identifying as college seniors. Eight students (89%) are completing degrees within the College of Education while one student is pursuing a degree in the College of Sciences (11%). Five of the nine students (56%) indicated that they were Pell Grant recipients. Five students identify as first-generation (56%). Eight of the nine students indicated that they had previously completed service-related activities. Seven of the nine had previously traveled abroad for work or personal reasons.

Materials

After conducting a meta-analysis of service-learning literature using similar instruments, the research team designed the International Service-Learning Research Inventory. The International Service-Learning Research Survey was developed using three previously validated surveys as its basis. The inventory is an online survey consisting of two primary areas: demographic information and assessment questions. Of the instrument's 40 questions, 28 are 6-point Likert Scale questions. Participants using the inventory are asked to self-rank their experiences in areas of sense of community, civic engagement, and thoughts on diversity and educational leadership.

To ensure the instrument's reliability and validity, a control group of similar participants was asked to complete the inventory. Each of these individuals completed the inventory with a member of the research team on hand to answer any questions or address any concerns that were raised. Changes in wording and formatting were then made to the inventory as needed. These individuals then completed the inventory for a second time to ensure that any issues had been resolved.

To validate the measure, a Cronbach Alpha was conducted for each of the four factors. An example of a **Community** factor, "My experiences through my International Service-Learning trip have helped me understand opportunities to become involved in my community," yielded a Cronbach Alpha of .80. One example of a **Civic Engagement** variable, "It is important for me to vote and participate in other civic opportunities," presented a Cronbach Alpha of .66. A **Diversity** factor question, "My community is enhanced with ethnic and cultural diversity," yielded a Cronbach Alpha of .46. The fourth factor, **Education & Leadership**, produced a Cronbach Alpha of .64; a sample question was, "The thought of combining courses that I am taking with service to my community should be practiced more at my college/university."

Procedure

A one-group pre-/post research design was utilized with nine undergraduate students enrolled in the summer 2013 "International Education Field Experiences" at the University of Central Florida to determine the impact of their participation in a 3-week service-learning trip to Botswana. The research was introduced ten days prior to the students' departure. All students in the course were urged to participate and reminded to complete the survey by the faculty members in the classroom prior to departure; however students were not required to participate in the study itself. Students were invited to provide consent before completing the online survey and were redirected to the survey itself once consent was given. To ensure that pre- and post-test responses were accurately matched to the appropriate individual, students were asked to provide the last four digits of their cell phone number.

Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to conduct statistical analyses of the data. Descriptive nonparametric statistics were used to describe demographic information. Paired-sample t-tests were conducted to determine significance in pre- and post- survey aggregate means for each construct. Multivariate and Univariate tests for repeated measures were used to determine relationships between construct scores and demographic information. A scorecard was also developed to measure overall total scores and record any changes in student responses from pre- to post-test.

Results

A scorecard was developed to observe the total score associated with each variable on both the pre- and post- surveys as well as any change from the pre- to the post- assessment (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). These scores were then used to develop low, medium and high ranges for comparison among categories. No changes were observed in the Low range in any of the four factors. At the same time, the changes from pre to post High scores for the four factors were all positive. The overall total scores changed where the Low range from pre- and post- survey decreased by 1, the Medium range from pre- and post- surveys stayed the same and the High range from the pre- and post- survey results increased by 1, suggesting participants' worldviews may have changed as a result of their international service-learning experience. Diversity was second highest pre to post score only to Civic Engagement who both decreased by 2 in the medium category. Diversity was the only one of the four factors that did not score at all in the pre or post scores.

Table 1
International Service-learning Score Card

| Factors | Ranges per factor | Pre-High | Post-High | Change +/- | Pre-Med | Post-Med | Change +/- | Pre-Low | Post-Low | Change +/- |
|-------------|---|----------|-----------|------------|---------|----------|------------|---------|----------|------------|
| Community | 37-42 = H | 4 | 5 | +1 | 4 | 4 | -- | 1 | 0 | -1 |
| CE | 31-36 = M | 2 | 5 | +3 | 5 | 3 | -2 | 2 | 1 | -1 |
| Diversity | ≤30 = L | 4 | 6 | +2 | 5 | 3 | -2 | 0 | 0 | -- |
| Ed & Leader | | 5 | 6 | +1 | 2 | 3 | +1 | 2 | 0 | -2 |
| Overall | Range TOT 150-168 131-149 ≤130 | 2 | 3 | +1 | 6 | 6 | -- | 1 | 0 | -1 |

Changes in rating, opinion, attitude, and evaluation of students' worldview were tested via a repeated measure ANOVA. While no statistically significant difference was found, a large effect size was observed. This suggests that the three-week international service-learning trip accounted for 33.3% of the variance in scores. Effect sizes are labeled into three categories, small (.01), medium (0.6) and large (1.4); as such, two factors demonstrated medium effect sizes (Community Service = .064 and Civic Engagement = .073) and two factors had a large effect size (Diversity = .286 and Education & Leadership = .254) (Cohen, 1992). Note that of the four factors, Diversity had the largest effect size after running the multivariate repeated measure.

Table 2
*Univariate Test of Gender*time for Interaction Effect Size*

| Factor(s) | Pre-survey | | Post-survey | | Eta |
|-----------|------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|-----|
| | Mean | Standard Deviation | Mean | Standard Deviation | |
| Community | 36.29 | 2.21 | 36.29 | 2.29 | .34 |

Table 3
*Univariate Test of Ethnicity*time for Interaction Effect Size*

| Factor(s) | Pre-survey | | Post-survey | | Eta |
|------------------|------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|-----|
| | Mean | Standard Deviation | Mean | Standard Deviation | |
| Community | 36.00 | 4.03 | 37.11 | 2.62 | .23 |
| Diversity | 36.78 | 3.56 | 38.00 | 2.74 | .48 |
| Ed. & Leadership | 37.33 | 3.74 | 38.56 | 2.60 | .27 |

A repeated measures test was also used against five diverse pieces of demographic populations: gender, ethnicity, first generation, Pell Grant, and whether the participant has traveled abroad. The research team was interested in looking at large effect sizes in the Univariate tests; which have scores of .14 and greater. Interaction effects were used in both tables two and three and main effect sizes were used in tables four, five, and six. Dissecting tables two and three, Univariates for Ethnicity versus time and Gender versus time, the Community factor yielded a commonality as a large interaction effect size. Ethnicity also scored large interaction effect sizes in both Education & Leadership and Diversity.

Table 4
*Univariate Test of First Generation Students*time for Main Effect Size*

| Yes | Factor(s) | Pre-survey | | Post-survey | | Eta |
|-----|------------------|------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|-----|
| | | Mean | Standard Deviation | Mean | Standard Deviation | |
| | Diversity | 36.20 | 4.60 | 37.20 | 3.42 | .19 |
| | Ed. & Leadership | 36.00 | 4.24 | 37.60 | 3.05 | .43 |
| No | Community | 36.75 | 1.71 | 37.75 | 1.71 | .33 |
| | Civic Engagement | 35.75 | .96 | 37.75 | .96 | .89 |
| | Diversity | 37.50 | 2.08 | 39.00 | 2.58 | .45 |

Table 5
*Univariate Test of Pell Grants*time for Main Effect Size*

| Yes | Factor(s) | Pre-survey | | Post-survey | | Eta |
|-----|------------------|------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|-----|
| | | Mean | Standard Deviation | Mean | Standard Deviation | |
| | Community | 38.75 | 2.87 | 36.75 | 3.50 | .42 |
| | Diversity | 38.50 | 4.43 | 37.75 | 3.95 | .75 |
| No | Community | 33.80 | 3.56 | 37.40 | 2.07 | .48 |
| | Civic Engagement | 33.80 | 4.44 | 36.40 | 2.61 | .69 |
| | Diversity | 35.40 | 2.30 | 38.20 | 1.79 | .89 |
| | Ed. & Leadership | 35.80 | 3.77 | 38.40 | 2.88 | .87 |

Table 6
*Univariate Test of Travel Abroad*time for Main Effect Size*

| Yes | Factor(s) | Pre-survey | | Post-survey | | Eta |
|-----|------------------|------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|-----|
| | | Mean | Standard Deviation | Mean | Standard Deviation | |
| | Diversity | 37.00 | 3.69 | 38.17 | 3.31 | .28 |
| | Ed. & Leadership | 37.33 | 2.42 | 38.83 | 2.32 | .50 |
| No | Community | 34.67 | 5.86 | 39.00 | 1.00 | .43 |
| | Civic Engagement | 32.67 | 5.86 | 36.33 | 3.79 | .82 |
| | Diversity | 37.33 | 6.43 | 38.00 | 3.61 | .30 |

Large main effects for participants who have traveled abroad and first generation students both included Diversity and Education & Leadership. Similarly, the population of non-first generation students along with those who have not traveled abroad both have large main effects for three factors: Community, Civic Engagement, and Diversity. Main effects for Pell Grant recipients had large effect sizes in Community and Diversity, and for those who do not receive Pell Grants had large effect sizes in all four factors: Community, Civic Engagement, Education & Leadership, and Diversity. Diversity was the common factor for those who answered “yes” to traveling abroad, receiving Pell Grants, and/or first generational students. Conversely, those who answered “no” to these same three main effects repeated measures, Civic Engagement, Community, and Diversity were the three common factors that had large effect sizes. Diversity was the factor used most frequently in the interaction and main effect size tables.

Discussion

Students coming to college are already familiar with new pedagogies of engagement and greater backgrounds in volunteerism (Astin et al., 2000). The results support that statement, as eight of the nine student participants in this study had previously completed service activities prior to their international service-learning experience. Five demographic variables were found to have large effect sizes: Pell Grant recipients, first-generation identification, gender, ethnicity, previous travel experience. However, only first-generation identification, Pell Grant recipients, and previous travel experience; those with large main effect sizes, will be discussed below.

First-Generation Students

The first of the three variables found to demonstrate a large main effect size with repeated measures was the interaction between time and first-generation students. About half (43%) of the first-generation students enrolled in college leave before they complete their degree, in contrast to 20% for non-first-generation students (Chen, 2005). Therefore, interventions are critical for the successful retention of this at-risk student population. Courses in service-learning have been found to enable first-generation students to develop mentor-like relationships with faculty members while also making the course curriculum more personalized for the students (McKay & Estrella, 2008). This process enables the student to become academically and socially integrated into the college community (Tinto, 2012). Previous qualitative research has found several important themes: enabled the community to accomplish important work, ways in which their work contributed to the goals of the community, increased confidence in navigating through the bureaucracy of college, increased their knowledge of social justice, and the ability to connect their academic major to careers of service (McKay, et. al., 2008; Yeh, 2010). Additional research with this population is essential to the development of retention strategies to ensure the academic success of first-generation students.

Low-Income Students (Pell Grant Recipients)

The next variable that was found to demonstrate a large main effect size was the interaction between time and low-income, or students who received Pell Grants. In the 2012-2013 school year, students with EFCs, estimated financial contributions, were between \$0 and \$4,995, and were Pell Grant eligible (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Analysis of data in 2010 generated by the U.S. Census Bureau, Mortenson reports that there is almost a 47% gap in bachelor degree attainment based on age when measuring family income, with those individuals in lower socio-economic statuses, are less likely to complete degrees. Thus, research investigating the impact of service-learning on low-income college students is critical to success of this segment of the postsecondary education population.

Previous qualitative research attributes to low-income students feeling like outsiders in the college community but report that service-learning enables them the opportunities that higher education provides. Another key finding regarding low-income students engaged in service-learning is the importance of identity, both how they saw themselves in the future and while completing service. Henry (2005) writes that this emphasis on development of identity was powerful because low-income students reported sharing important characteristics with the service-learning site, especially, “a similar class background and feelings of isolation and lack of personal value” (p. 64). Future studies should examine the longitudinal impact of such realizations on students’ major selection, GPA, identities, and later participation in service-learning experiences.

Previous Travel Experience

The last variable found to have a large main effect size was the interaction between time and previous travel experience. While the greatest interactions were found between previous international experiences to complete community service and mission trips were demonstrated, any previous international travel experience can also have a strong relationship with participation in the Botswana trip associated with this study.

Research on the assessment of international service-learning is limited. International experiences involve intense physiological, ideological, and psycho-emotional reactions for students. Therefore, students should reflect upon their experiences critically in order for transformation and personal growth of attitudes about the United States to occur (Adler, 1975; Crabtree, 2008). Hartman and Rola (2000) contend that students are “transformed as individuals” because of their international service-learning experience, becoming more “caring and affirmed students” in the process (p. 21). This research appears to compliment these findings, however future research, however, should be longitudinal in nature, focusing on both the short- and long-term effects of international service-learning on students’ personal, academic, and career development.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. For example, the small sample size makes generalizations outside of the population itself rather difficult. As indicated by the statistical results, a larger sample size may have yielded statistically significant results which would be used to truly determine the impact of student participation in international service-learning in a student’s worldview.

Students were invited to complete the post-assessment only ten days after returning from their international service-learning trip. Greater gains may have been observed if the inventory were completed after a longer period of time of reflection, giving students the time to internalize and articulate their experiences after several weeks or several months after returning home from their Botswana service trip.

It was determined that there was a response bias and/or ceiling effect that may have impacted the results. On both, the pre- and post-tests, “Most likely to agree” and “agree” were the most popular answer choices. While individuals in the validation process spent ten to fifteen minutes to complete the inventory, data from the results indicates that the participants in the study itself spent between three and six minutes completing the inventory in both the pre- and post- test situations based on the online instrument.

Finally, the study inferred its findings from statistical data. There was no attention paid to the students’ academic subject matter associated with the service-learning course. A critique of quantitative data is that it may limit student outcomes to the measures selected and analyses completed.

Implications for Future Research

In addition to what was previously stated in the discussion portion of this study, there are several implications for future research in-service learning positively impacting students’ diversity perspective. First, students needed more time to reflect on their international experience serving the communities in Botswana. Future studies should consider the benefits and consequences of delivering post-assessment data collection after a longer period of time. For example, getting students together to conduct a focus group study will engage participants to discuss their experiences, open up and reflect back on their work, what they accomplished, and what they learned in a diverse group setting. Additionally, through observation and working directly with international service-learning participants, interviewing service-learning coordinators would be beneficial future research. Qualitative data may help to address these and other weaknesses associated with quantitative studies. The importance of student artifacts such as journals or reflection assignments as well as their participation in less-structured or out-of-class activities should be attempted. Stories told by individual students and the journey of group as a whole, a coordinator’s perspective would be valuable to understand the growth and development of students’ cultural diversity.

Communication between the institution and specific class and the community agency is crucial so that each party understands their roles and responsibilities, which helps each to hold the other, and the participants, accountable. Great organization and constant communication will produce benefits to the local community and institution and positive learning outcomes for the students participating in the service-learning program such as working on a diverse team, appreciating social justice, and becoming more cultural aware.

Connecting curriculum that students learn in the classroom to hands-on experience in the field through international service-learning creates many beneficiaries including the partnered organizations, the local community, the students, and the institution. Students are exposed to a diverse network of people

who are also trying to make a difference and have the opportunity to work together with those who may have a different viewpoint but finding a way to seek common ground as a cohesive cohort; to become more culturally aware. The research saw interaction effects with diverse populations like Pell grant recipients and first generation students and conducting research on other diverse cohorts with the effect that international service-learning has on their worldview would also be implications for future studies.

Conclusion

The study's intent was to determine if participation in an international service-learning experience would greatly impact an undergraduate student's world view. Results suggest that there is some significance with some questions contained in the online survey. Though we were limited in the number of student participants, the study shows large effect sizes with all four of the factors that we define as students' worldview: Community, Civic Engagement, Diversity, and Education & Leadership. Research proved that there were interaction effects with gender and ethnicity with those four factors and main effect sizes with first generational students, Pell Grant recipients, and participants who have traveled abroad. If the study had a larger population, we may have seen some of the large effect sizes become significant from before participants went on their international service-learning trip and upon their return home with the four factors that are defined as *worldview*. To capitalize on the benefits of service-learning possibilities, professionals should be cognizant that students' prior experiences play an important role in the ways in which they create their worldview then challenge and support student participants to become engaged in service while questioning how their experiences impact their abilities to serve as global citizens and responsible leaders.

John Dewey (1933) stated that, "true learning only occurs when students must grapple with true dilemmas" (Aydlett, Randolph, & Wells, p. 152). Connecting classroom curriculum with hands-on experience in the field overseas through international service-learning has many benefits. Students are exposed to a diverse network of people who are also trying to make a difference and have the opportunity to become civically engaged, grow to become leaders, and work together with those who may have different viewpoints but finding a way to seek common ground as a cohesive cohort; creating an impact by expanding students' worldview. Teaching students about diversity assists them to deal constructively with issues of differences and to develop respect for and become aware of the views, interactions, and contributions of various ethnic groups to society and culture. As this paper reflects, one effective method of exposing students to diversity and expanding their perception of their world is through service learning activities (McTighe-Musil, 2002).

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