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Student Partnerships in Service-Learning: Assessing the Impact

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Abstract

Student peer leaders increasingly serve as partners in service-learning, working with service-learning faculty, administrators, and community partners to administer the service-learning experience. While the impact of service-learning on students is well understood, little is known about the impact on student peer leaders. This study provides both a comparative and longitudinal analysis of student peer leaders in service-learning. The study uses the HERI College Senior Survey to identify ways in which student peer leaders differ from their undergraduate peers by comparing their responses to questions about goals, values, and careers. The study uses a second survey, of former student peer leaders 1-5 years after graduation, to determine whether those differences last, and assess the long-term impact that former student leaders attribute to their experience. This study finds that student leaders differ significantly from their undergraduate peers at graduation in values and career goals, and those values persist 1-5 years after graduation. Alumni report that the peer leadership program shaped their career pathways, and that the experience was fundamental to their college career.

Keywords: Service-learning; students as partners; assessment; student leaders; leadership development

Service-learning was long framed as a dyad involving a university and a community partner outside the university. More recently, however, it has been seen as a triad, with student peer leaders mediating between the community and university participants. These peer student leaders are in a liminal role, working in the place where students, faculty, and community partners meet. As a field, we have learned a great deal about the impact of service-learning on student participants, both during and after college, and we are beginning to understand and assess the impact of service-learning on community partners (Goertzen, Greenleaf, & Dougherty, 2016; James & Logan, 2016; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). We know little, however, about the impact --particularly the long-term impact -- on the student peer leaders who facilitate the work.

This study examines the role of trained student peer leaders, or Service Learning Associates [SLAs], in the service-learning triad so as to identify ways in which they differ from their peers at graduation and assess what they see as the post-graduation impact of student leadership in service-learning. Our research seeks to answer three questions: How do the actions, values, and goals of SLAs differ from their undergraduate peers at graduation? How do the actions, values, and goals of SLAs change 1-5 years after graduation? And, to what extent do graduates who served as SLAs attribute their actions, values, and goals to their experiences as leaders in service-learning?

Students as Partners in Service-Learning

As Barbara Jacoby (2013) notes, "In the space of a few short years, the field of service-learning has evolved from viewing students only as participants in and beneficiaries of service-learning to viewing them as partners in and co-creators of all aspects of the service-learning enterprise" (p. 599). Programs involving student peer leaders in service-learning take different forms and even different names. Sometimes called peer leader programs (Shook and Keup, 2012), peer facilitators (Chesler, Galura, Ford, & Charbeneau, 2006; Kropp, Arrington, & Shankar, 2015), or Service Learning Associates, these programs engage trained peers to assist

with service-learning, as partners with service-learning administrators, faculty, or community organizations (Fisher & Wilson, 2003). Whatever their title, these student peer leaders are partners, not just participants, in service-learning.

Commenting on peer leadership across higher education, Shook and Keup (2012) point out that student peer leaders not only support fellow students in service-learning, but also benefit themselves this leadership role. In service-learning programs, that benefit may be related to peer leaders' role as "border crossers," navigating boundaries between university and community, and between the roles of participant and observer, student and faculty (Chesler, Galura, Ford, & Charbeneau, 2006). They share with faculty members responsibility for planning and supporting students engaged in service-learning, and they often serve as the primary contact for the community partner. As a result, student peer leaders experience a more democratic pedagogy than is common in higher education (Chesler, Kellman-Fritz & Knife-Gould, 2003). To succeed, peer leaders in service-learning need to learn to negotiate and manage disagreements when multiple parties with different needs and agendas collaborate on a project. Swacha (2015) argues that such negotiation is essential in democratic deliberation and is too often obscured by an emphasis on collaboration and reciprocity in service-learning projects.

Despite the importance of such trained student peer leaders, Jacoby (2013) notes that limited research has been done on the roles of student peer leaders in service-learning. Fisher and Wilson (2003) call for research on student peer leaders, recommending that partnerships with students be evaluated much the same way as partnerships between universities and their community organizations. Jacoby (2013) proposes that future longitudinal research should examine the impact of such work on student peer leaders' future community involvement, political participation, consumer behavior, and engagement in social or political causes. Without information about the long-term impact of student peer leadership programs in service-learning, we are ill-prepared to design effective programs or advocate for their funding.

Some research has been done on the impact of student partnerships on the students who serve in the leadership role. In an overview of research on peer leadership in a variety of programs in higher education, Shook and Keup (2012) report that peer leaders report that they have gained greater understanding of themselves and others, feel more deeply attached to their academic institution as alumni, and have developed skills that can be transferred to work after graduation. Looking at experiences in service-learning, Stolley and colleagues (2017) examine post-graduation effects of participation in a student-initiated and student-run, multi-year Shelter Project. While no students were identified formally as peer leaders, the level of responsibility participants had in designing and implementing the program made all project participants, or "project managers" as they were called, resemble trained peer leaders. Using surveys of alumni, Stolley and colleagues found that after graduating, all former project managers reported that they thought about Shelter frequently and continued to be involved with the project. These alumni also identified the development of transferable skills (such as communication, teamwork, and leadership) as a result of leadership work with the Shelter project.

Given how little research there is on student partnerships in service-learning, we need to look more generally at service-learning experience and make hypotheses from there. Considerable research has been done on the impact that participating in service-learning has on students while they are still in college. Those effects included improved academic performance (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000); the development of intercultural competence (DeLeon, 2014; Einfeld & Collins, 2008) or civic-mindedness (Steinberg, Hatcher, & Bringle, 2011); and increased degree completion (Yue & Hart, 2017). (For a comprehensive survey on the impact of service-learning on student participants, as well as community organizations and

faculty, see Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001.) It is important to recognize that these benefits are not automatic and that not all service-learning experience is effective. Eyler (2002), for instance, found that service-learning initiatives in which reflection is used regularly to integrate service and academic learning are most likely to produce benefits for students. Einfeld and Collins (2008) found that even extended service, if not integrated into curriculum, produced mixed results in participants' awareness of inequality and commitment to social justice. Perhaps most worryingly, Mitchell and colleagues (2012) argue that "service learning, lacking a critical focus on race, can reinforce ... socially constructed understandings of whiteness" (p. 614).

The need for long-term research is clear. While the impact of service-learning on students during college has been widely studied, much less research has been done to assess the long-term impact of service-learning on students who participate (Stolley, Collins, Clark, Hotaling, & Takacs, 2017) and even less addresses the post-graduate impact of peer leadership in service-learning. Yet the long-term civic outcomes of service-learning are important to institutions, individuals, and society at large.

As a field, we are just beginning to assess the long-term effects of service-learning on participants and leaders. Examining the relationship between participation in service-learning and employment after graduation, Matthews and colleagues (2015) found that alumni who had engaged in service-learning while undergraduates had a significantly higher mean starting salary than those who had not participated in service-learning. Other studies have found increased community and civic activity among alumni who participated in service-learning as undergraduates (Warchal & Ruiz, 2004; Wilder, Berle, Knauft, & Brackmann, 2013).

Fenzel and Peyrot (2005) compared the long-term effects of service-learning and other forms of community engagement and found that, while both community service and service-learning affect participants' attitudes toward civic engagement after graduation, service-learning was associated with significantly more impact.

As Hill and colleagues (2017) observe, additional longitudinal research is needed to determine whether service-learning has a lasting impact on participants' civic engagement after graduation. Such research, they contend, could provide insight into "why, when, under what circumstance, for whom, and how higher education can promote civic engagement for decades following the university experience" (p. 298). Yet, they note, such research is difficult to conduct. They contend that such research should be multi-site, use consistent measures, and measure development after graduation. Doing the last of these requires following students for years after graduation, a task which presents practical difficulties. This study is designed to contribute to the needed research by examining students who hold leadership roles in service-learning partnerships, both at the point of graduation and several years afterwards.

Context

Fairfield University is a mid-sized Jesuit, Catholic university located in the Northeast U.S. With a largely residential undergraduate population of 4,000, the university includes a college of arts and sciences; and professional schools of business; nursing and health studies; engineering; and education and allied professions. Service-learning courses are offered in all five schools of the university at the undergraduate level.

The Service Learning Associates [SLA] program is a paid student leadership program in which students partner with faculty who teach service-learning courses to assist with course-related activities. The program began in spring 2011, with 6-13 students serving as SLAs each semester, with the number of SLAs determined by faculty demand. The program was initially founded to provide logistical support to faculty teaching service-learning courses. It has evolved to go beyond logistical planning, with duties collaboratively defined by the faculty member and the SLA. These may include facilitating reflection, communicating with community partners,

and meeting regularly with faculty members to fine-tune the service-learning, as well as helping students in the course schedule their service-learning experience.

To be eligible for the program, students must have taken at least one service-learning course. Students then either apply or are asked to apply on the recommendation of a service-learning faculty member. SLAs are matched with faculty and courses based on skills, interest, and availability. Each faculty member has a different mentoring style, and the most successful partnerships take that into account. Some faculty require that SLAs first take the course, so they are familiar with the course material and community partners, while other faculty request a specific major, time slot, or communication style. Some faculty prefer to work with the same student over multiple semesters or years, while some faculty prefer to work with different students each semester. Every relationship and course is different, and requires careful recruitment, listening, and matching of students and faculty. SLAs work an average of 5 hours per week throughout the semester, and many continue as SLAs for multiple semesters.

To be effective as peer leaders in service-learning, SLAs need to learn to value their own expertise, and gain leadership experience collaborating with faculty and community members. Monthly professional development workshops led by the University's Center for Faith and Public Life help SLAs develop the knowledge and skills they need. Workshops consider topics such as multicultural communication, service-learning theory, and career development. All SLAs are trained in reflection facilitation through role playing; examples of reflection styles and activities; and practice composing and asking appropriate follow-up questions. They learn service-learning theory, and practice through reading and discussing articles from service-learning literature, and participation on the Service Learning Advisory Committee. Articles discussed included Mitchell's "Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning" and excerpts from "Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?" by Eyster and Giles, among other excerpts and articles from books, journals, and magazines. The Advisory Committee is composed of students, faculty, staff, and community partners and meets twice a year to discuss long term service-learning strategy and planning.

SLAs are invited to help plan and host other campus events, such as non-profit career panels and high school and elementary school campus visits. Experts from across campus have led workshops on cross-cultural communication, career planning, Catholic Social Teaching, conflict resolution, and leadership development. These workshops vary in style and may be conducted as a lecture, interactive workshop, panel discussion or self-reflective exercise, depending on the facilitator's preference. The SLA program is one of a number of peer leadership opportunities at the university. In the academic division, students serve as peer tutors in the Writing Center, Math Center, and in disciplinary programs. In student affairs, peer leadership programs include orientation leaders, resident assistants, and student government. Some peer leadership opportunities, such as Eucharistic Minister and Kairos retreat leader, reflect the mission-driven character of the university.

SLAs often serve as an essential bridge between the faculty member and the community partner. At Fairfield University, service-learning partnerships vary considerably. Some are well-established partnerships that have lasted for years, and involve multiple courses and faculty members. These include the Students and Teachers Empowerment Partnership (STEP) with Cesar A. Batalla School, designed to improve literacy outcomes for students in grades 2-8, and a partnership with Beardsley Zoo, in which university students provide research support and learn about zoology and conservation from professionals in the field. Other service-learning initiatives involve short-term projects. Accounting students, for instance, assist low-income taxpayers through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance [VITA] program, and students in "Writing for Grants and Non-profits" write and conduct research for local non-profits, such as one providing housing for veterans with addiction; and another providing intervention, reentry,

and mentoring services for people experiencing incarceration or formerly incarcerated. Most partnerships are established and sustained through the University's Office of Service Learning or by faculty members who have developed relationships independently. SLAs communicate and interact regularly with community partners, accompany their peers to the service site, coordinate service activities and schedules, and discuss community needs. Depth of involvement with the community partnership may vary based on the SLA's capability and may change over time.

Methods

In this study, we used three instruments to obtain information about SLAs' views and values as undergraduates. We looked at four years of data (2013-2016) from the HERI College Senior Survey (CSS), focusing on the questions related to values, goals, and community engagement. The CSS is administered to all graduating seniors; students must complete the survey to receive their diploma. (Response rates are usually around 80%.) Total n=3166. From that group, we selected students who had served as SLAs, and compared their responses on values and career questions to those of the general student body. As a result, our n of graduating SLAs was 40 and n of the rest of the senior class was 3126. The SLAs who completed the CSS were 7% male and 8% ALANA, which is lower than the university overall, which was 40% male and 13% ALANA in 2016. As Mitchell (2012) notes, student leaders in service-learning are predominantly white women. While the percentage of ALANA students among SLAs at this institution is increasing, this group, going back several years, does not yet reflect that increase.

In addition, we examined responses to a survey that SLAs had completed as undergraduates about their experience as SLAs. That five-question survey asked SLAs about their initial interest in becoming an SLA and their experiences while serving as an SLA. Together these two surveys provided information on how SLAs compared to their undergraduate peers and how they themselves viewed their SLA experience.

For the post-graduate assessment, we developed an online survey using selected questions from the CSS to assess changes in actions, values, and goals of SLAs 1-5 years after graduation, as well as the extent to which former SLAs attributed their actions, values, and goals to their experiences as peer leaders in service-learning. The post-graduation survey included one open-ended question, soliciting any additional comments respondents wanted to provide. We sent the post-graduation survey to 44 SLA alumni who had graduated in the past 15 years. The response rate was 50%; n = 22. (We relied on alumni email addresses provided by our Office of Alumni Relations. Many alumni still had only their student email address on file, which may have reduced our response rate.) We then compared SLA answers at graduation to their responses 1-5 years after graduation. We performed an independent samples t-test of each question to determine the difference in response of our three groups: SLA alumni, SLAs at graduation, and the rest of the senior class at graduation. This research is preliminary, but it still offers some promising findings around the impact of peer leadership programs on student participants.

Findings

Statistical analysis of questions on the CSS about diversity, goals, frequency of community service, and career concerns showed significant differences between the responses of SLAs at graduation and those of the graduating senior class as a whole. These findings are summarized below; a complete analysis of the data can be found in Appendix A and B.

Comparative Analysis: SLAs vs. Other Seniors at Graduation Diversity Rating

Five questions on the CSS addressed students' response to unfamiliar or divergent ideas. On three of these questions, SLAs showed significantly higher openness to unfamiliar ideas than did respondents as a whole. SLAs reported higher tolerance of others with different beliefs, ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues, and ability to work cooperatively with diverse people [significant at the .01, .05, & .05 levels respectively] than students who had not served as SLAs. [See Table A1.]

Comments from the survey of undergraduate SLAs support these findings. SLAs reported feeling capable in working across divisions. In describing her work as an SLA, one said, "I learned that engagement with people that I may not necessarily know can be a lot easier than I had previously expected." Another wrote, "I learned that I am able to be a bridge between what seems to be two different worlds and I can help both Fairfield students and children."

Action in the past year

Significantly more SLAs reported participating in service activities than did respondents as a whole [significant at the .01 level]. [See Table A2.]

Goals

Nine questions on the CSS assessed students' career and life goals at graduation. Three questions showed significant differences between responses of SLAs and respondents as a whole. SLAs rated participating in a community action program, helping to promote racial understanding, and "influencing social values" significantly higher than did other students surveyed [significant at the .01, .01, and .05 levels respectively]. SLAs did not differ significantly from other students in the value they attributed to raising a family, being very well off financially, developing a meaningful philosophy of life, or integrating spirituality into their life. [See Table A3.]

Although the SLAs did not differ significantly from their undergraduate peers in the value they attributed to developing a meaningful philosophy of life, some wrote about the impact they felt their service as an SLA had had on their self-understanding. One wrote, "As college students, we often find ourselves exploring the bigger questions in life and how we personally relate to them. I think understanding how you fit into bettering the education of future generations is crucial for college students to understand."

Career concerns

Six questions on the CSS asked respondents about concerns that influenced their career plans. On three of the six questions, responses of SLAs differed significantly from those of other seniors. They rated working for social change and leadership potential significantly higher as considerations in choosing a career [significant at the .01 & .05 levels respectively] than did other students. By contrast, they rated high income potential significantly lower than did other students [significant at the .01 level]. SLAs did not differ significantly from other students surveyed in rating the importance of social recognition, expression of personal values, or the ability to pay off debt. [See Table A4.]

Comments on the survey of undergraduate SLAs offer insight into their sense of leadership development. One wrote, "Having the opportunity, as a student, to interact on a professional level with such experienced teachers/professors was a phenomenal experience ...I learned that I can work in a professional setting, communicating well with others and even designating responsibility when needed." Another wrote, "This program has led me to want to eventually pursue education, or at least be involved with education-based initiatives

throughout my life. I would have never known I have the capacity to be a leader, to feel so strongly for these students and their wellbeing.”

Plans

Six questions on the CSS asked students for information about their immediate post-graduation plans. SLAs differed significantly from respondents as a whole on two of these, reporting higher likelihood of attending graduate school part-time or completing additional undergraduate coursework [both significant at the .05 level]. [See Table A5.]

Longitudinal Impact: Comparing SLAs at Graduation and Post-Graduation

To assess the longitudinal impact of serving as an SLA on actions, values, and beliefs, we compared responses SLAs, as a group, had given on the CSS to their responses to a similar survey 1-5 years after graduation. On many variables, these findings indicate no significant difference between the values and beliefs SLAs reported as undergraduates and those they reported after graduation. Their level of commitment to a variety of values did not decline during the 1-5 years after graduation.

Diversity rating

Our analysis showed no significant change in openness toward unfamiliar perspectives, such as the ability to see the world from someone else’s perspective or openness to having one’s views challenged. [See Table B1]. Comments in the follow-up survey of former SLAs provided additional information about these variables. One former SLA wrote, “I think it did influence my personal and professional life. As a Service Learning Associate, I worked with professors, service sites, and students, which taught me how to work with different groups of people. I think the professional development also helped.” Another comment on the follow-up survey stated, “It not only gave me the opportunity to serve in a leadership position, but it allowed me to work in diverse settings, with a variety of partner schools, and gave me a role that extended beyond the student I was in the classroom.”

Action in the past year

The analysis showed no significant change in reported levels of community service. [See Table B2.] Comments in the follow-up survey provided information about attitudes toward community service of the SLA alumni. One wrote that being an SLA “set an example of how service can be integrated into one’s life, whether through a career path or as an extracurricular commitment and priority.” Another commented, “it gave me experiences in the community and as a leader that helped me find my niche through which to contribute to society.”

Goals

Analysis showed a significant change in two areas related to goals. In the post-graduation surveys, former SLAs reported attributing significantly less value to raising a family than they had as undergraduates, and significantly more value to developing a meaningful philosophy of life [both significant at the .05 level]. [See Table B3.]

While the survey data do not, in themselves, indicate causality, the written comments show that some SLAs believe that their work as an SLA helped shape their goals after graduation. One former SLA wrote, “My general experience in service at Fairfield really influenced my personal and professional life. Service Learning Associate played a role in that ... From Fairfield, I developed a ‘service lens,’ through which I view my personal and professional goals within the overall aim of serving others. I think of this perspective as analogous to the Jesuit [ideal of] becoming ‘Men and Women for Others’ and adoption of the perspective of the

poor. I developed this lens through Fairfield's consistent reminder of integrating service with the rest of your life (through rhetorical reminders and participation in service activities/communities). My time as a Service Learning Associate, focused on promoting the integration of service and learning, was a piece of how I built this understanding and came to apply this approach in my own life."

Discussion

This study extends prior research on the impact of participating in a leadership role in service-learning. It also adds to the small but growing body of knowledge on the post-graduation impact of such leadership on alumni. As Jacoby (2013) points out, information of this kind is essential for designing effective student leadership programs in service-learning and for justifying the resources needed to support them. Similar programs often include long-term impact on values and civic activity as desired outcomes. Failure to assess those longitudinal outcomes is a missed opportunity to develop an effective program with lasting benefits, and jeopardizes program sustainability.

Preliminary evidence suggests that these programs are doing what they aspire to do. For our program, while we need further research on which aspects of the program most contribute to SLAs development, we do find that, at the end of their undergraduate experience, SLAs differ significantly from their peers in the values they report. In addition, we found that SLAs largely retain the values they expressed as undergraduates, even several years after graduation. If these results are typical, our findings support the further development and funding of peer leadership programs of this kind.

Differences Between SLAs and Their Undergraduate Peers

Colleges and universities that employ peer leaders in service-learning anticipate that the students who serve in that position are marked by that experience. We expect that, due to training and leadership experiences, these peer leaders in service-learning will differ from their undergraduate peers. Our study suggests that they do, in their actions, values, and goals. While we cannot know how many of these differences come from their preparation and service as peer leaders and which predate that, not all students with a predisposition toward service become SLAs and SLAs are not necessarily selected for their community-oriented values.

Not surprisingly, SLAs reported doing significantly more community service while in college than did their peers. We would expect this outcome, as SLAs often perform regular service as a component of the SLA position, while other students may participate in isolated days of service or a single service-learning course.

Service-learning is designed, in part, to prepare students to create and thrive in a diverse world, and peer leaders in service-learning should contribute meaningfully to that goal. Particularly now, in the social and political climate characterized by fractious debate and polarization, the ability to work with others with different opinions and experiences is especially valuable. During their training, SLAs prepared to work effectively with others who differed from them. As Swacha (2015) points out, "specific pedagogical attention is needed regarding how to incorporate democratic deliberation" (p. 40) into service-learning and community engagement. To that end, SLAs read and discussed seminal articles from the service-learning literature and took turns role playing situations where diverse values were in conflict. During their service as SLAs, these students had sometimes navigated the competing expectations of students, faculty sponsors, and community partners. They practiced challenging students' biases and facilitating discussion.

These experiences, in conjunction with the experiences and values that drew SLAs to their work, showed up in clear differences between SLAs and their peers at graduation. We

found that students who had served as SLAs exceeded their undergraduate peers on multiple measures of openness to others. SLAs reported higher tolerance of others with different beliefs, higher ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues, and higher ability to work cooperatively with diverse people. While SLAs may have participated in other activities on our campus that added to their multicultural competence, in short answer survey questions, they report that the SLA program did have an impact. Further research is needed on which specific activities contributed to these differences.

We also expect that serving in leadership positions in a service-learning program will leave an imprint on students' long-term goals and core values. Shook and Kuep (2012) claim that peer leaders in service-learning develop a "deeper knowledge of themselves and others" (p. 13). Our results support this claim. We found that students who had served as peer leaders in service-learning reported more desire to influence social values, participate in a community action program, and help promote racial understanding.

There were also significant differences in the two groups of students' expectations for life after graduation. Overall, SLAs reported higher interest in working for social change, less interest in income potential, and more interest in leadership potential. Comments from SLAs flagged the value of leadership in their work as SLAs and the confidence they had gained from working in novel ways with faculty, peers, and local organizations. This suggests that peer leadership programs of this kind might highlight opportunities for leadership in recruiting. It included career development workshops focused on how to translate their SLA experience into jobs working for social change, rather than how to talk about service work when applying for jobs in industry. The program is also designed to help SLAs see themselves as student leaders, by positioning program training and recruitment alongside other campus leadership positions such as Resident Assistant and New Student Leader. SLAs attend the annual campus-wide student leadership conference, student leadership recruitment fairs, and are honored at the end of the school year for their service. These activities, along with their work in the classroom and community, help SLAs recognize their own leadership potential and value leadership in their future careers.

Post-graduation Values of Community-engaged Peer Leaders

We hear from anecdotal sources, if not research, that idealism drops off after college. Graduates, we are told, become preoccupied with the demands of finding a job, a partner, a place to live, and absorbed in finding their place in a hectic, consumerist society. They forget, we are told, the values they held as college students. For a mission-driven institution of higher education, that is particularly disturbing. The Fairfield University mission statement for example, identifies as its primary purpose to "develop the creative intellectual potential of its students and to foster in them ethical and religious values and a sense of social responsibility" (Fairfield). We invest time and resources heavily into our service-learning programs, not just to support the service-learning program, but for the formation of our students. We want to know that the values we hope to cultivate in our students last beyond graduation.

Our results show that students who held leadership positions in community engagement have distinctive values, goals, and activities. We need to ask, do these last? Does the training and experience of serving as a peer leader in service-learning make a difference only at graduation, or does it last into lives beyond college? The results from our second survey, comparing values at graduation and 1-5 years afterwards, suggest that they do.

Our study found that, at least among students who held leadership positions in community engagement, those values do last. We found no significant difference between SLAs responses at graduation and their responses as alumni for most of the questions of interest. In other words, even in the fraught early years of their careers, students who had served as peer

leaders in community engagement continued to feel as strongly about influencing the political structure, promoting racial understanding, participating in community action programs, and other values as they had at graduation. Having this unique partnership with faculty during their college career; learning and being valued for their skills and input by faculty; may contribute to their capacity development in this area.

In fact, we identified only two areas in which former peer leaders in service-learning differed significantly from their younger selves. They attributed less value to raising a family than they had at graduation. That may simply mean that, caught up in the early years of work or graduate school, the prospect of a family now seems more distant to them than it had a few years earlier, as they were about to leave college. The responses showed only one other significant difference in attitudes after graduation: these former peer leaders attributed a higher value to developing a meaningful philosophy of life after graduation than they had earlier. This is counter-intuitive, but exactly what we would hope for as a mission-driven institution.

Service-learning peer leader programs are structured differently at different institutions, much like the many different structures of centers and offices of civic engagement. However, these programs have some common goals and characteristics, and this research begins to answer questions about the longitudinal impact of peer leader programs. We see differences between SLAs and their peers; some of those differences remain several years after graduation; and students identify the SLA program as supporting those differences. Certain characteristics of the SLA program may contribute to those lasting effects, such as professional readings, trainings in conflict resolution and multicultural communication, and intentional partnership with faculty.

We do not claim that programs like this are, in themselves, sufficient to create these values in students. Rather, the civic values of the type of student who applies for and is recruited into this program are supported and solidified during their experience as student peer leaders.

Limitations & Future Research

This study has a few limitations. First, it involves a small number of students at a university whose mission includes fostering in students specific ethical and religious values. The findings may best apply to other similar institutions that self-consciously address values in their education. Second, like all studies involving surveys, this study is based on self-reported data.

It is important to note that the study does not allow us to claim that participation in the SLA program has caused the differences between these student peer leaders and their undergraduate peers. The CSS was administered at the end of students' undergraduate careers, after the SLAs had undergone their training and had served as peer leaders for 1-3 courses. Hence, these differences show the values SLAs report after their training and service for one or more semesters. Because there was not a similar survey before they began their training and work as SLAs, we cannot know the degree to which those significant differences are attributable to their experiences as SLAs, as opposed to differences that pre-date their work as SLAs. Indeed, it may be just such differences in values and behaviors that lead students to self-select to serve as SLAs. Nonetheless, SLAs themselves report that serving as an SLA did influence them, as the comments from the surveys show.

Since our survey assessed attitudes, values, and behavior in the period of just 1-5 years after graduation, we do not know if they retain these distinctive characteristics further out, after graduation, or if there is a drop-off later.

Finally, we were not able to compare SLA alumni with other alumni. As Hill and colleagues (2017) note, it is difficult to conduct research that follows participants into adulthood. While we were able to reach out to the relatively small number of alumni who had served as SLAs, we were not able to conduct a comparable survey of alumni who had not served as SLAs. This would be an interesting, but complicated, area for further study.

Suggestions for Further Research

This is a preliminary study, using pre-existing resources to gain insight into the differences between student leaders in service-learning and their peers. Further research would include a comparable longitudinal survey of alumni who had not served as SLAs, as well as further differentiating students who have taken any service-learning courses from students who have not. This research might include a combination of strategies and techniques, including focus groups, structured interviews, and comparison of reflective artifacts from alumni and current students. Deeper qualitative research with alumni would give more detailed insight into which specific aspects and trainings of the SLA program students credit as being particularly beneficial, allowing us to focus and improve program offerings.

Note: This research has been reviewed by the Fairfield University IRB and has been determined to be exempt (Protocol 0456 & 0608). We are grateful to the Office of Institutional Research at Fairfield University for their assistance.

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APPENDIX A: Comparative Analysis

SLAs vs. Other Seniors at Graduation

Table A1: Diversity Rating

Question	All Mean	All SD	SLA Mean	SLA SD	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Ability to see the world from someone else's perspective	4.07	0.73	4.25	0.67	2951	-1.53	0.13
Tolerance of others with different beliefs	4.09	0.74	4.4	0.67	2946	-2.66	0.008*
Openness to having my own views challenged	3.84	0.8	3.95	0.64	41	-1.11	0.28
Ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues	3.93	0.81	4.2	0.61	2950	-2.08	0.04*
Ability to work cooperatively with diverse people	4.21	0.73	4.48	0.6	2947	-2.26	0.02*

* = significant at 0.05, ** = significant at 0.01

Table A2: Action in the Past Year

Question	All Mean	All SD	SLA Mean	SLA SD	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Performed volunteer or community service work	1.89	0.64	2.49	0.56	3024	-5.84	0.00**

* = significant at 0.05, ** = significant at 0.01

Table A3: Goals

Question	All Mean	All SD	SLA Mean	SLA SD	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Becoming an authority in my field	2.95	0.83	3.13	0.78	2178	-1.2	0.23
Influencing the political structure	2.06	0.91	2.29	1.06	38	-1.53	0.2
Influencing social values	2.69	0.88	3.03	0.85	2876	-2.37	0.02*
Raising a family	3.3	0.85	3.29	0.96	2888	0.09	0.93
Being very well off financially	3.2	0.79	2.95	1.21	37	1.3	0.2
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life	2.8	0.97	3.05	0.96	2879	-1.57	0.12
Participating in a community action program	2.52	0.89	2.95	0.84	2880	-2.92	0.003*

Helping to promote racial understanding	2.47	0.92	2.95	0.93	2877	-3.166	0.002*
Integrating spirituality into my life	2.59	0.99	2.71	1.04	2875	-0.77	0.44

* = significant at 0.05, ** = significant at 0.01

Table A4: Career Concern

Question	All Mean	All SD	SLA Mean	SLA SD	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Working for social change	2.54	0.89	3.11	0.88	2853	-3.84	0.00**
High income potential	3.07	0.78	2.59	1.07	37	2.71	0.01**
Social recognition or status	2.55	0.89	2.22	0.95	2853	2.27	0.22
Expression of personal values	3.03	0.78	3.27	0.77	2850	-1.86	0.06
Leadership potential	3.1	0.77	3.38	0.64	2854	-2.23	0.03*
Ability to pay off debt	3.2	0.91	2.97	0.99	2850	1.52	0.13

* = significant at 0.05, ** = significant at 0.01

Table A5: Post-Graduation Plans

Question	All Mean	All SD	SLA Mean	SLA SD	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Working full time	1.94	0.64	1.83	0.78	36	0.81	0.42
Working part time	1.35	0.51	1.46	0.56	2795	-1.27	0.21
Attending graduate/professional school full time	1.32	0.55	1.51	0.7	35	-1.6	0.12
Attending graduate/professional school part time	1.19	0.4	1.06	0.25	33	2.8	0.009*
Completing additional undergraduate coursework/post-baccalaureate program	1.11	0.32	1.03	0.17	37	2.9	0.006*
Participating in an organization like the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps/VISTA, or Teach for America	1.09	0.3	1.17	0.38	36	-1.19	0.24

* = significant at 0.05, ** = significant at 0.01

**APPENDIX B: Longitudinal Comparison
 SLAs at graduation and post-graduation**

Table B1: Diversity Rating

Question	Alumni Mean	Alumni SD	Grad Mean	Grad SD	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Ability to see the world from someone else's perspective	4.44	0.62	4.25	0.67	56	-1.05	0.3
Tolerance of others with different beliefs	4.39	0.61	4.4	0.67	56	0.06	0.95
Openness to having my own views challenged	3.88	0.7	3.95	0.64	55	0.36	0.72
Ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues	4.12	0.86	4.2	0.61	55	0.41	0.68
Ability to work cooperatively with diverse people	4.56	0.62	4.48	0.6	56	-0.47	0.64

* = significant at 0.05, ** = significant at 0.01

Table B2: Action in the Past Year

Question	Alumni Mean	Alumni SD	Grad Mean	Grad SD	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Performed volunteer or community service work	2.33	0.77	2.49	0.56	26	0.76	0.45

* = significant at 0.05, ** = significant at 0.01

Table B3: Goals

Question	Alumni Mean	Alumni SD	Grad Mean	Grad SD	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Becoming an authority in my field	2.88	0.7	3.13	0.78	45	1.104	0.28
Influencing the political structure	2.88	1.05	2.29	1.06	53	-1.916	0.061
Influencing social values	3.28	0.83	3.03	0.85	54	-1.04	0.3
Raising a family	2.47	1.13	3.29	0.96	53	2.78	0.008*
Being very well off financially	2.39	0.98	2.95	1.21	54	1.71	0.09
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life	3.67	0.49	3.05	0.96	54	-3.19	0.002*
Participating in a community action program	3.33	0.77	2.95	0.84	54	-1.65	0.1

Helping to promote racial understanding	3.24	0.75	2.95	0.93	53	-1.12	0.27
Integrating spirituality into my life	2.47	0.94	2.71	1.04	53	0.81	0.42

* = significant at 0.05, ** = significant at 0.01