

CHANGES IN STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD SERVICE LEARNING AND IMMIGRANTS/REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES: INSIGHTS FROM COMPARING FIRST-YEAR LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

This study analyzes attitudes that first-year students from three different learning communities (LCs) and their faculty had about service learning in general and their actual placement with a nongovernmental organization (NGO) serving a West African refugee and immigrant community in particular. Similar to other studies, we found that students who spent more hours engaging with West African refugees and immigrants were more likely to support service learning in the curriculum. Notably, this research adds to the pedagogical discourse around service learning by revealing that the LC, and by extension the professor(s), was even more important than the number of completed hours. Students in only one LC overwhelmingly agreed that the service-learning hours made them more aware of their own biases, helped them develop problem-solving skills, and let them see how the subject matter of their LC is relevant to real life. Our analysis indicates that this statistically significant difference can be explained by how well service-learning hours were integrated in the LCs (e.g., percentage of the grade assigned to the experiential hours; number and type of reflective assignments), the professors' views and attitude about service learning, and the degree professors were (not) part of the actual experiential hours. Hence, this study shows that service-learning courses are most likely to have the intended outcome when experiential hours are an integral and important part of the class and are wholeheartedly, both in theory and in practice, supported by the faculty teaching the course.

Introduction

These [*sic*] experiential learning aspect made me understand and know more about Africans and feel comfortable around more people.

—Student in Learning Community C

I feel like the LC WAS A WASTE OF TIME AND MY MONEY!!!! [all caps in original] All I did was learning [*sic*] about racism all semester[,] gained no knowledge for [*sic*] this term.

—Student in Learning Community B

These statements, made by first-year students at a small liberal arts college in the Northeast, could not be more different from each other. Both students were enrolled in learning communities (LCs) that required students to engage in service-learning hours with the same community organization. So, what explains why these students walked away at the end of the semester with such divergent views? This study seeks to answer this by investigating what causes these differences. Specifically, we analyzed whether this variance in students' attitudes about service learning can be explained by the number of completed experiential hours, student characteristics such as ethnoracial and gender identities, being a student athlete, intended major, and/or LC and if there is a change in students' attitudes over the course of a semester. In addition, we evaluated whether students' views about issues related to social justice, in this case related to immigration, were impacted by working with West African refugees and immigrants. Furthermore, we juxtapose the students' views with those of their respective professors, especially how professors' perspectives on experiential learning were manifested within the curricula and classrooms. Prior research contrasted student outcomes across different classes or compared the same class either offered in different semesters or taught by different instructors (Raymond, 2017; Rockwell et al., 2019). This study extends existing research by focusing on data collected from students in one cohort at the same college and the professors who taught them. The LCs had relatively similar compositions in terms of student demographics and included an experiential learning component where all students engaged with the same community. However, the classes varied by being comprised of diverse disciplines and taught by different professors; these LC distinctions, and by extension the faculty, more than any other, had a significant impact on students' experiences and overall learning. This study seeks to shed light on the reasons for this and, by doing so, provides valuable information for educators who already include experiential or service-learning opportunities in their classes or are planning to do so. In addition, the findings can inform colleges and universities as they strive to improve the quality of their experiential and service-learning offerings and find ways to support faculty teaching such classes or wanting to do so.

Literature Review

Colleges and universities throughout the United States offer students a wide variety of community-engagement activities, including experiential and service learning. Faculty and administrators frequently promote such experiences as an opportunity for students to learn about “real-world” issues and to get to know the community outside their campus (Campus Compact, 2014). Beard and Wilson (2006) define experiential learning as “the sense-making process of active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment” (p. 2). Service learning goes a bit further by stressing the service component and the embeddedness of the experiential component in a class; insofar as it

is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 222).

A main reason why administrators and faculty offer and teach classes with a service or experiential-learning component is the expectation that students will improve or gain new skills (Bettencourt, 2015; Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Bureau et al., 2014; Caspersz & Oлару, 2017; O'Meara, 2008; Song et al., 2017) through a two-way learning process (as opposed to volunteering) (Arellano & Jones, 2018). Scholars found that service learning positively affects students' personal development, including their personal identity and moral growth (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000; Wang & Rodgers, 2006; Weiler et al., 2013). Research also shows that service and experiential learning can help students become better leaders, enhance their communication skills (Caspersz & Oлару, 2017; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000; Weiler et al., 2013), and give them opportunities to learn how to develop and sustain positive and collaborative relationships (Burnett et al., 2005, p. 158). In addition, students who participated in service-learning classes often gained intercultural skills and a greater ability to connect with people who are different from them due to race, ethnicity, nationality, language, age, socioeconomic status, and more (Becker & Paul, 2015; De Leon, 2014; Ludwig, 2016; Myers-Lipton, 1996; Raymond, 2017; Tinkler et al., 2017). Experiential and service-learning opportunities similarly have the potential for students to acquire a more in-depth understanding of ethnoracial and socioeconomic groups that are different from their own and thus present an opportunity for students to reduce prejudices and stereotypes that students had prior to their service-learning experience (Burnett et al., 2005; Erickson & O'Connor, 2014; Ludwig, 2016). Relatedly, some experiential learning opportunities offer the chance for students to improve their skills in a language that is not their native tongue (Bettencourt, 2015). Many scholars have documented that involvement in service and/or experiential learning can lead to the development of procivic engagement attitudes and values and increase civic mindedness among young people (Arellano & Jones, 2018, Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Prentice, 2014; Raymond, 2017; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000). Other times, students reported a more positive view of social equality (Brown et al., 2016) and at times a deeper understanding of the underlying inequities (Raymond, 2017). Studies have also shown that service and experiential learning can also positively impact how able-bodied students interact with people with disabilities (Lawson et al., 2017), students who are US citizens conceive of refugees and immigrants (Bettencourt, 2015; Ludwig, 2016; Tinkler et al., 2017), and young college students think of older adults (ages 65 or older) (Penick et al., 2014).

There are key elements that service-learning courses need to have to ensure that the desired effects (e.g., skill acquisition, shift in attitudes) happen. To begin, the frequency (Burnett et al., 2005; Caspersz & Oлару, 2017; Myers-Lipton, 1996) and quality of the experience matter (Allen et al., 2021). Put differently, encounters and/or the work that students engage with have to be purposeful (Burnett et al., 2005; Caspersz & Oлару, 2017) and connected to opportunities for students to reflect so they can acquire more than just factual knowledge and instead contextualize their experiences (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995, 1996; Burnett et al., 2005; Caspersz &

Olaru, 2017; Heuer et al., 2020; Wetzel et al., 2011). Therefore, service and experiential learning and placements need to be intentional and go beyond the surface level (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996), allowing students to create meaningful relationships with the people they meet and work with, which may necessitate opportunities to interact and socialize in a more informal way (Hughes et al., 2010). Simultaneously, this requires students, as well as faculty, to have “cultural humility,” which goes “beyond superficial understandings of diversity toward critical reflections about their own identities and experiences as they are nestled within complex hierarchies of social class, sexual orientation, gender, . . . racialization” (Lund & Lee, 2015, p. 363), citizenship, language, and (dis)ability. The opposite of the desired outcome occurs, when students lack context and/or only engage in activities that reinforce the image of them as “helpers,” such as just volunteering in a soup kitchen without learning about the systemic issues that lead to food insecurity (and being unhoused) (Caspersz & Olaru, 2017). By doing so, students’ deficit perceptions “that poor communities are helpless” (Thomson et al., 2011, p. 231; see also Conner & Erickson, 2017) and existing power hierarchies are reinforced, making it impossible for equal status contact (Allport, 1954). Moreover, such an encounter “risks further entrenching . . . stereotypes and bias” (Becker & Paul, 2015, p. 196; see also Mitchell et al., 2012). Hence, all service and experiential learning must teach students concurrently about power, privilege, racism, xenophobia, as well as other forms of discrimination and consistently draw their attention to how these affect people on an individual and structural level (Lund & Lee, 2015; Tilley-Lubbs, 2009). Another important component to have successful experiences is to create projects that require students to work with people in the community together on a project that benefits the community (Allport, 1954; Caspersz & Olaru, 2017; Houshmand et al., 2014; Raymond, 2017; Traver et al., 2014) or develop reciprocal projects (Penick et al., 2014; Tinkler et al., 2017).

When assessing the efficacy of service-learning classes, it is essential to remember and account for students’ backgrounds (e.g., race, ethnicity, immigrant/native-born, gender, socioeconomic status) since these differences lead to students having uniquely distinct departure points at the beginning of the semester and/or their college career (Clever & Miller, 2019; Conner & Erickson, 2017; Ludwig, 2016; Song et al., 2017; Traver et al., 2014; Wylie, 2014). Scholars found that service and experiential learning mean something different for students of different ethnracial, socioeconomic, citizenship, and other backgrounds (Becker & Paul, 2015; Caspersz & Olaru, 2017; Clever & Miller, 2019; Ludwig, 2016; Song et al., 2017). For example, in many instances, the shift in racial attitude among White¹ students included becoming more aware of their own race after taking a service-learning class that partnered with a Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) community (Bocci, 2015; Houshmand et al., 2014; Ludwig, 2016; Wetzel et al., 2011). Similarly, Clever and Miller (2019) described that while students from middle and higher socioeconomic statuses of all ethnracial backgrounds enjoyed service-learning experiences, they centered their own journeys and emotions in their reflections more frequently than the people they encountered during their experiential hours.

Similarly, to the conclusions relating to service-learning student outcomes, faculty members who facilitate experiential and service-learning opportunities have found it to be beneficial. Oftentimes these benefits serve

1. *White* in this paper means *non-Hispanic White American*; similarly, *Black* refers to *non-Hispanic Black American*.

as motivational factors for facilitating faculty members. A majority of faculty are driven to incorporate experiential and/or service learning due to its ability to deepen student learning and promote student growth (Abes et al., 2002; Arellano & Jones, 2018; Blakey et al., 2015; Morrison & Wagner, 2017; O'Meara, 2008). A desire to achieve certain disciplinary goals may also influence faculty to teach experiential and/or service-learning classes (Blakey et al., 2015; O'Meara, 2008). Scholars found that faculty are frequently inspired to offer these types of classes because they enjoy collaboration with fellow faculty members and students, across different disciplines, and with community partners (Arellano & Jones, 2018; Morrison & Wagner, 2017; O'Meara, 2008). Finally, institutional support for community partnerships and/or experiential learning is crucial in fostering faculty's interest in this type of pedagogy (Abes et al., 2002; Lewing & York, 2017; O'Meara, 2008). But there are also deterrents that prevent faculty from teaching or wanting to teach service-learning classes, such as time commitment (Abes et al., 2002; Blakey et al., 2015), logistics around the community partnership, students' lack of interest and/or preparedness (Blakey et al., 2015), and absence of institutional support and recognition (Abes et al., 2002; Blakey et al., 2015; O'Meara, 2008).

The current explorative study builds on extant research by examining what happens when students from one college and cohort engage with the same community but are part of different LCs and have different professors. We evaluate this by asking and answering these three research questions:

1. Did students' general views toward service learning, their ability to comprehend course materials, and their acquisition of skills such as bias/prejudice awareness and problem-solving skills change over the course of the semester, especially after spending time with the West African refugee and immigrant community?
2. When these changes in views occurred, what significance do a student's ethnoracial identity, intended major, gender, and their LC play?
3. Did the number of completed hours influence students' levels of support for mandatory service learning as part of an LC and their perception of how service learning can help with knowledge and skill acquisition over the course of the semester?

Methods and Data

Institutional Setting and Description of Service-Learning Component

The small liberal arts college is located in a major city in the Northeast and has about 1,800 undergraduate and 450 graduate students. The majority (62%) of students are White, Hispanics of any race account for 13% of the students, and 8% of students identify as Black. The remaining student populations are Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, international students of any race, or their race is unknown.

About two decades ago, the college implemented a curriculum that connects liberal arts education with experiential learning, often through interdisciplinary courses. Relevant for this study is the First-Year Program (FYP)

in which all incoming first-year students have to participate. The FYP is made up of different LCs; each includes two content classes and a first-year seminar. Every LC is taught by two professors; individually they teach their specific content class and jointly the first-year seminar. Prior to the start of the semester, students are given the opportunity to select the LC they want to be enrolled in based on the description and associated classes. There are generally no restrictions regarding which LC a student can take, with the exception of some LCs that include a foreign language class and require students to already have prior knowledge of that language. Usually, the college makes every effort to honor students' preferences, but constraints due to extracurricular activities such as athletic practice schedules frequently lead to students being in LCs that may not have been their first choice.

Data for this study were collected from three different LCs and their professors. LC A was a humanities class and an arts class; LC B consisted of a humanities class and a social science class; LC C was made up of two social science classes from different disciplines. Only the description of LC C explicitly included that students would be "volunteering with the local West African refugee and immigrant community" while LC A noted that students would be "working with émigrés in [City]." LC B did not mention any experiential learning but emphasized in its description "acting ethically" and reflections on "unjust laws . . . and . . . human rights abuses." Similar themes were part of LC C's description that also included references to diversity and food insecurity.

Most of the service learning took place during the first-year seminar, a class that seeks to bridge the content classes with a common theme and assignments but also to aid students as they adjust to being in college. The hands-on experiential-learning component of all these LCs took place with a grassroots organization that provides various education programming to West African refugees and immigrants. The organization is about 15 minutes' walking distance from the campus, and one of the professors of LC C has had a long-standing relationship with this community and the organization through their research, civic engagement work, and a track record of facilitating different learning opportunities in this community for students (e.g., in the FYP and internships). Faculty from the other LCs were forthcoming that they relied on this LC C professor to facilitate the placement, noting that this professor's "research and expertise [are] so very deeply tied to the . . . community . . ., so we were privileged to have our students join [name of the organization]." In preceding years, the two professors who taught LC B had students tutor in the same refugee and immigrant community but neither fostered nor cultivated close relationships with the community. For faculty of LC A, this was the first and only time they taught an LC with a service-learning component. (All other times their students went on field trips to various cultural institutions in the city.)

At the beginning of the semester, the organization's executive director² came to the college and together with the aforementioned faculty from LC C introduced students to the community, its history, needs, and strengths through an information session where students reviewed expectations regarding the experiential learning hours (e.g., a minimum of 12 hours of engagement with the community over the course of the semester; do's and don'ts of community engagement). During their experiential-learning hours, 40% of students served as tutors

2. The executive director was compensated for their time individually, and the organization received 75% of the grant money awarded for this study. The first author wrote the grant application to request this, in acknowledgment of the fact that service learning cannot take place without NGOs and that they should be remunerated for the learning opportunities they provide for students.

with the adult education program where they assisted West African refugees and immigrants with basic literacy skills and test preparation for the US citizenship exam. A further 42% of students were tutors in the after-school program with 1.5 and second-generation West African refugee and immigrant youth, where they provided help with homework assignments. Some students (10%) divided their experiential hours between the two programs. Students went to the NGO in a mixed group, meaning that students from all LCs were present during a tutoring session. A small proportion of students (8%) never completed any experiential-learning hours. Only the aforementioned professor from LC C accompanied students several times as they went to tutor in the West African refugee and immigrant community; none of the other professors did.

Students of LC C were also required to attend the cultural festival that the NGO put together in the community; 84% of students went along with both of their professors while the rest of LC C students were excused since they participated in Division I sports competitions that took place during the event. Students and professors from the other LCs were invited as well; however, only one student from LC B attended, and no other professor or any student from LC A did.

In addition to tutoring in the local West African refugee and immigrant community, all students in LC C were expected to participate at least twice during the semester in the college's Food Recovery Network (FRN) chapter, where students pack up surplus food from the dining hall that would otherwise be wasted, which then in turn is picked up by a local soup kitchen. (This was not a requirement for the other two LCs.) The intention was to use this as a launching pad for students to conduct community-resource mapping to better understand various aspects of food insecurity.

Instruments

The first author, who taught one of the LCs, designed the student study in Qualtrics and obtained IRB approval for it. The study consisted of a pre- and post-survey that all students ($N = 67$) in the three LCs were invited and encouraged to complete, but no incentive was offered to respondents to finish the surveys. Prior to beginning the survey, the first author spoke to each class individually about the purpose of the study as well as issues related to confidentiality. Students completed the presurvey at the start of the semester and the post-survey at the end of the semester. In order to match participating pre- and post-surveys, students were given an anonymized code. Data from pre- or post-surveys without a match were dropped from the analysis ($N = 4$). Thus, a total of 63 students completed both surveys, for a 94% response rate.

The presurvey began with a set of demographic questions (gender, ethnoracial background, parent(s)/guardian(s)' highest level of education, hometown, immigrant/immigrant-origin/multigenerational US citizen, commuter/resident, student athlete, religious background, political orientation, etc.) and a question regarding their intended major. The next section included a total of 45 questions—most measured on a 4- or 5-level Likert scale—that were identical in both surveys, except for the tenses used (future tense for the pre- and past tense for the post-survey). The first set of questions was about experiential hours in general (whether they should be required, their potential impact on self-development, practical and interpersonal skills, etc.). The second set of

questions was specifically about experiential learning with the local West African refugee and immigrant community (their attitude toward it and how it relates to the topic of their LC). Other questions included in the survey focused on issues around identity (their own, as well as those of others), attitudes toward immigration/immigrants/refugees, their position on several social justice issues (racism, sexism, climate crisis, voting, food waste, among others), and priorities in their lives (e.g., friends, music, fashion).

The first author also designed a faculty survey in Qualtrics—which was IRB approved—and consisted of 20 questions, almost all of them open-ended questions. Topics included, but were not limited to, motivations for teaching in the FYP and (not) including service learning in their LC, general views about experiential learning (service learning, field trips, community research), significance of service learning for learning new skills and as part of the first-year seminar /LC, and how service learning was connected to various aspects of the class.

Moreover, syllabi from the different LC classes (including assignment prompts), data from a database where students tracked their hours and wrote brief comments, and a number of selective essays and reflections were used to contextualize the quantitative data collected from the student survey as well as to gain and provide additional background information on the LCs. These data were also anonymized and coded for each LC.

Participants

Nine students in LC A, 29 students in LC B, and 25 students in LC C completed both the pre- and post-survey. There were fewer students in LC A because this LC had a foreign-language prerequisite. Of the 63 students, 28 identified as female and 35 as male and were between the ages of 17 and 20.³ The majority (51%) of participants reported their ethnoracial identity as White. Of the remaining students, 22% identified as Black, 17% multiracial, 5% Hispanic of any race, 3% Arab, and 2% Asian. For analysis purposes, Hispanic of any race, Asian, Arab, and multiracial students were merged into one category, accounting for 27% of the students, whereas the Black and White categories remained the same. This ethnoracial makeup, for the most part, was reflected in each LC. The majority of the students (55%) in LC A and LC B were White, whereas 44% of students in LC C identified as White. More than half (60%) of all students were student athletes,⁴ with LC A having the smallest percentage (33%) of these students. Three-quarters of students did not have any recent migration history, whereas 25% were immigrants or children of immigrants/refugees.⁵ Only 7% of students described their political view as “conservative” compared to 52% who identified as “middle of the road” and 41% as “liberal.”

Given the college’s location, the majority of the students (62%) called New York or New Jersey their home states while 38% came from other states. Despite these geographical origins, the vast majority (89%) were residential students compared to 11% commuter students. In contrast to this, there was much greater diversity in regard to intended majors; 21% of students planned to major in the arts or humanities, 25% in professional programs,⁶

3. The survey listed other gender options as well.

4. We coded cheerleaders, given the time commitment, as student athletes.

5. There were no international students in any of the LCs.

6. Nursing, physician assistant, education, or business.

Table 1
Intended Majors and LC

Intended Major	LC A ($n = 9$)	LC B ($n = 29$)	LC C ($n = 25$)
Arts & Humanities	11%	24%	20%
Professional Programs	67%	17%	20%
Natural Sciences	0%	11%	12%
Social Sciences	11%	24%	24%
Undecided	11%	24%	24%

Table 2
Completed Tutoring Hours and LC

Completed Hours	LC A ($n = 9$)	LC B ($n = 29$)	LC C ($n = 25$)
None	0%	17%	0%
1 to 4 Hours	0%	24%	4%
5 to 11 Hours	100%	31%	40%
12 or More Hours	0%	28%	56%

10% in natural sciences, 22% in social sciences; 22% were undecided. Notably, as Table 1 shows, two-thirds of students in LC A intended to pursue a degree in the professional programs; this was less the case for students in the other two LCs, which were more evenly split among the intended majors.

Despite the fact that all LCs had the same hourly experiential requirement, students varied in how many hours they actually spent tutoring. About one-third (35%) of all students completed 12 or more hours, 44% between five and 11 hours, and 13% between one and four hours. As noted earlier, 8% of all students did not engage at all with the West African refugee and immigrant community; these students were concentrated in LC B. There was a marked difference across LCs in the number of hours completed (Table 2).

All faculty members ($N = 6$) who taught the LCs that were part of this study completed the survey. LC A faculty were veterans of the FYP; they had been part of it eleven and 19 years respectively; however, as noted before, this was the only time they taught an LC that included a service-learning component. One faculty member in LC B had been in the FYP for 13 years whereas this was the fifth year for their teaching partner. Both LC B faculty members had previous experience with service learning. For one faculty in LC C this was their first time teaching in the FYP and teaching a service-learning course while the other LC C professor had been in the FYP for five years and had extensive experience teaching service-learning classes for first-year students as well as upper-level students.

Results

We begin by providing descriptive statistics, which give some precursory information and insights pertaining to our research questions. At the beginning of the semester, a majority (53%) of students stated that they

were “excited” when thinking of starting their experiential hours with the West African refugee and immigrant community while 44% were “uncertain” and only 3% were “terrified.” There were no significant differences between the three LCs in the enthusiasm for beginning their hours, although LC C students were most likely to report being “excited” (60%) to begin. When students were asked a similar question at the end of the semester—namely, what they felt when thinking about their completed experiential hours (WATHOUGHT)—almost three-quarters (72%) of students were “glad that they had participated,” 19% were “indifferent,” and 9% felt that it was “a waste of time.”⁷ A chi-square test showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between WATHOUGHT and LC, $X^2(4, N = 57) = 19.35, p < .001$. Almost all (96%) students in LC C were glad that they had participated compared to 58% in LC B and 44% in LC A. Notably, only students in LC B (21%) felt that the experiential hours were “a waste of time.”⁸ There was no significant relationship between WATHOUGHT and the number of hours a student completed.

To answer our first research question—of whether students’ views about service learning in general and the utility of completing experiential hours would have/had on their ability to understand course material better and new skill acquisition—we compared pre- and post-survey scores using paired sample t-tests. As presented in Table 3, there was a statistically significant decline⁹ in students’ support of mandatory service learning (MANSL) as part of the LC, $t(62) = 5.38, p < .001$. Similarly, at the end of the semester, students were less likely to agree that the experiential hours with the West African refugee and immigrant community helped them understand lectures and readings for the first-year seminar or content classes better (LECTREAD) (see Table 3). There was also a significant decline in agreement with the statement that the service-learning component helped them to see how the subject of the LC is relevant in real life (LCRELEV), $t(58) = 4.84, p < 0.001$. Likewise, students demonstrated this trend in their assessment of their skills and biases, the very thing that most LC faculty hoped students would take away from completing service-learning hours.¹⁰ There was a significant decrease in students’ agreement that the experiential hours made them more aware of their own biases and prejudices (BIAS) and that this service-learning class helped them develop problem-solving skills (PROBSOLVE) (see Table 3). Thus, students demonstrated changes in their views about service learning, its impact on their ability to understand class materials, and its efficacy as a tool to gain skills related to bias awareness and problem solving. In sum, at the end of the semester, students reported less optimism about service learning and were less likely to view it as something that positively impacted their learning experience.

7. Students who did not complete any experiential hours were not asked this question.

8. One faculty in LC B vividly described how there were students in the class who were “near resentful of the requirement” to engage with the West African refugee and immigrant community. Due to anonymized data, we cannot ascertain whether there is an overlap between the students that the professor is referring to and the students who felt that this was a “waste of time,” but there is a possibility that there is.

9. Levels of agreement for all variables were measured in descending order, thus higher scores denote higher levels of disagreement.

10. For example, one LC B faculty noted that they “wanted . . . [students] to reflect on any biases they bring with them to the experience.”

Table 3
Changes in Means in Dependent Variables

	Mean Change ¹¹	t	df	Sig (two-tailed)
Pair 1 (MANSL) Pre- and Post-Survey	0.67	5.38	62	<0.001*
Pair 2 (LECTREAD) Pre- and Post-Survey	0.81	5.65	58	<0.001*
Pair 3 (LCRELEV) Pre- and Post-Survey	0.73	4.84	58	<0.001*
Pair 4 (BIAS) Pre- and Post-Survey	0.78	5.76	58	<0.001*
Pair 5 (PROBSOLVE) Pre- and Post-Survey	0.63	4.39	58	<0.001*

* Correlation is significant at the <0.001 level (two-tailed).

Before turning to our second research question, we first investigated whether there were any significant baseline differences in the pretest scores based on students' identities (gender, ethnoracial background, intended major, being a student athlete) or the LC that they were part of. There were no significant differences for ethnoracial identities, being a student athlete, or LC for any of the aforementioned presurvey scores. In only one instance, a one-way ANOVA showed that there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level in BIAS scores for the five intended major groups, $F(4, 58) = 2.7, p = 0.040$. Post-hoc comparisons¹² indicated that students intending to pursue a major in the arts or humanities ($M = 1.31, SD = 0.48$) were significantly more likely to agree that the experiential hours would make them more aware of their own biases and prejudices than students who were undecided ($M = 1.93, SD = 0.62$). The other major groups did not differ significantly from each other.

Independent-sample t-tests revealed that gender also mattered at times in the presurvey scores. There was a statistically significant difference in LCRELEV scores for female ($M = 1.43, SD = 0.50$) and male students ($M = 1.74, SD = 0.51; t(61) = -2.46, p = 0.017$, two-tailed). Similarly, there was a significant difference in BIAS scores for female ($M = 1.50, SD = 0.64$) and male students ($M = 1.83, SD = 0.62; t(61) = -2.07, p = 0.043$, two-tailed). Finally, there was also a significant difference in PROBSOLVE scores for female ($M = 1.57, SD = 0.64$) and male students ($M = 1.89, SD = 0.62.47; t(61) = -2.26, p = 0.03$, two-tailed). Overall, female students were more likely to agree that participating in experiential hours would be beneficial toward their knowledge acquisition and gaining of new skills.

Our second research question is concerned with whether the changes that occurred in levels of (dis)agreement were the same for all students, regardless of their identities, intended major, or LCs. As described above, presurvey scores indicated that there were no statistically significant differences across LCs in support of mandatory service learning. That is, at baseline, all students reported a similar degrees of support for mandatory service learning as part of the LC (MANSL). After completing their experiential hours, however, differences emerged

11. As noted before, levels of agreement were measured in descending order, thus higher scores denote higher levels of disagreement, and in this case an increase shows an increased level of disagreement.

12. For all one-way ANOVA post-hoc comparisons, the Tukey-Kramer HSD test was used.

in support for mandating this type of work (MANSL), $F(2, 60) = 6.5, p < 0.003$. Across the three LCs, LC B ($M = 3.03, SD = 0.91$) was least likely to agree that service learning should be mandatory for all first-year students, followed by students in LC A ($M = 2.11, SD = 0.60$) and LC C ($M = 2.28, SD = 0.94$). Thus, participating in service learning impacted students' feelings about whether this type of engagement should be required, and there were statistically significant differences between the LCs. At the same time, we note that, as with the presurvey scores, there were no significant differences between any of the ethnoracial groups or intended majors.

Similarly, when examining the post-survey scores that measured whether students believed that completing experiential hours helped them better understand the class material and gain/improve certain skills, we found that there were statistically significant differences at the $p < 0.05$ level in all of the dependent measures for the three LCs. One-way ANOVAs showed that students in LC C were significantly more likely to agree that experiential learning had a positive impact on LECTREAD, LCRELEV, BIAS, and PROBSOLVE (see Table 4). Post

Table 4
One-Way Analysis of Variance of Post-Survey Attitudes toward Service Learning and Gaining of Skills through Service Learning^{1,2}

Group	Mean	SD
<i>MANSL</i>		
LC A	2.11 ^a	0.60
LC B	3.03 ^{a,b}	0.91
LC C	2.28 ^b	0.94
<i>LECTREAD</i>		
LC A	2.89 ^a	0.60
LC B	2.85 ^c	1.01
LC C	1.92 ^{a,c}	0.83
<i>LCRELEV</i>		
LC A	2.44	0.53
LC B	2.73 ^b	1.15
LC C	1.88 ^b	0.90
<i>BIAS</i>		
LC A	2.33	1.12
LC B	3.00 ^b	1.06
LC C	2.00 ^b	0.89
<i>PROBSOLVE</i>		
LC A	2.67 ^a	1.12
LC B	2.88 ^c	1.07
LC C	1.75 ^{a,c}	0.74

Shared superscripts represent statistically significant differences between the particular groups:

^a = $p < 0.05$, ^b = $p < 0.01$, ^c = $p < 0.001$.

¹ Within each variable category and dependent variable, mean scores without a superscript do not differ at the 0.05 level.

² Post hoc Tukey-Kramer HSD was used to calculate the statistical significance of mean differences.

hoc comparisons for LECTREAD shows that the mean score for LC C ($M = 1.92, SD = 0.83$) was significantly lower from LC A ($M = 2.89, SD = 0.60$) as well as from LC B ($M = 2.85, SD = 1.01$); LC A and LC B did not differ significantly from each other. This indicates that at the end of the semester, students in LC C were most likely to agree that the experiential hours with the West African refugee and immigrant community helped them better understand lectures and readings for their classes. This was also the seen in the post hoc comparison for PROBSOLVE where the mean score for LC C ($M = 1.57, SD = 0.78$) was significantly different (lower) from LC A ($M = 2.67, SD = 1.12$) as well as from LC B ($M = 2.89, SD = 1.07$); LC A and LC B did not differ significantly from each other. We note that the previously found significant differences associated with gender and majors did not exist in conjunction with the post-survey scores. Additionally, there were also no significant differences due to ethnoracial identity or (not) being a student athlete. In sum, these analyses suggest that overall, students in LC C were more likely than all other students to agree that the service-learning component was beneficial to helping them understand the materials and relevancy of their LC as well as gaining/improving skills in areas such as problem solving and awareness of their own biases and prejudices.

Finally, this study found that a more intense service-learning experience (e.g., more hours) had a positive impact on students' perception of service learning as well as skill development. Specifically, there was a statistically significant difference in MANSLS scores for the four different hours groups, $F(3, 59) = 4.3, p = 0.009$. Post hoc comparisons indicated that students who did not complete any experiential hours expressed significantly less support for mandatory service learning ($M = 3.6, SD = 0.55$) than students who completed 12 or more hours ($M = 2.18, SD = 0.96$). The other groups did not differ significantly from each other.

There was also a statistically significant difference in post-survey LECTREAD scores for the four different hours groups, $F(3, 55) = 2.9, p = 0.045$. As one may expect, post hoc comparisons showed that the group that did not complete any experiential hours was significantly less likely to support that the experiential hours helped them understand the lectures and class readings better ($M = 3.50, SD = 0.58$) compared to students who completed 12 or more hours ($M = 2.10, SD = 0.94$). The other groups did not differ significantly from each other.

The same pattern emerged for the post-survey PROBSOLVE score, where there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level for the four different hours groups, $F(3, 55) = 3.6, p = 0.020$. Post hoc comparisons denoted that the mean score for the group that did not complete any experiential hours ($M = 3.50, SD = 0.58$) was significantly different from students who completed 12 or more hours ($M = 1.90, SD = 0.94$). The other groups did not differ significantly from each other. Taken together, these findings indicate that students who did not complete any experiential hours did not attribute any value or see any benefit to engaging in service learning, nor did they believe that service learning should be made mandatory. This is important in that it demonstrates how students who *do* engage in these kinds of activities believe that they have gained something from them and potentially understand their pedagogical utility.

While the above-mentioned analyses were primarily concerned with general attitudes toward service learning and skill development, the next section focuses on issues directly related to immigration, immigrants, and refugees, the very population the students spent time with and presumably also learned about in their classes. To begin, there were neither statistically significant changes in students' positions about what kind of (positive

Table 5
Students' Attitudes toward Immigration Levels

Immigration level	Start of the semester	End of the semester
Present Level	31%	34%
Increased	50%	58%
Decreased	19%	8%

and negative) contributions immigrants and refugees make to society nor those relating to the prioritization of different groups of foreign-born individuals for legal immigration to the United States (e.g., high skilled, family reunification, refugees). Though there was, as Table 5 shows, a small increase, but not significant, in the percentage of students who favored increasing immigration levels to the United States.

Open-ended questions in the survey revealed the limited changes that occurred are related to the images that students associated with “refugee” and “immigrant” in the pre- and post-survey. Indeed, despite engaging with the West African refugee and immigrant community, the open-ended questions yielded often very similar answers at the two different times in the semester. When there were different answers, they were directly connected to their experiential hours, and there was no observable difference for students of any LC. For example, one student wrote for the “refugee” association in the post-survey, “I think of the people I saw when I volunteered at [name of NGO]” whereas before they wrote, “I think about people that [*sic*] are trying to leave their home country to try and get somewhere better.” In other words, for some students, refugees ceased to be faceless individuals “but real people with whom they had developed personal relationships” (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 18; see also Ludwig, 2016; Tinkler et al., 2017). In this way, these students met expectations expressed by one LC B and both LC C faculty who desired their students to understand that “immigrants . . . [in City] weren’t just stuff in books.” Something similar also occurred when students were asked what they associated with the neighborhood where many of the West African refugees and immigrants live. At the beginning of the semester, almost all students who were not from the city where the college is located left the answer blank whereas residents from the city more or less noted its bad reputation (“the ghetto”; “dangerous”). After students had completed their experiential hours, the overwhelming majority, regardless of their hometowns, connected it with West African refugees and immigrants and their tenacity and eagerness to learn, as well as to the name of the community organization where they did their service-learning hours. Notably, two faculty members, one from LC B and one from LC C, explicitly remarked that they had hoped that the service-learning hours would lead students “to see that the reputation of neighborhoods can be more about bias than reality” and to “challenge misconceptions about a stigmatized neighborhood.”

As mentioned earlier, students were also asked a number of questions pertaining to food waste and food-justice issues; however, there were no significant changes irrespective if students had completed hours with the FRN or not.

Discussion

To interpret these findings, we draw on other available data (faculty survey, syllabi, student essays and reflections, and comments that students entered in the database where they logged their hours). While on some occasions this study confirms what other research (Burnett et al., 2005; Caspersz & Olaru, 2017; Myers-Lipton, 1996) found pertaining to frequency of engagements (that with an increased intensity/exposure students' views and skills change), our findings go beyond that. Indeed, we build on these studies and infer that the LC—and by extension the instructor(s), their commitment to and motivation for service learning, and/or the structure of the LC—can possibly have a greater impact on students' views and perspectives than any other predictor. This is something that has received less attention in the literature. We offer a variety of potential explanations for these findings, which reinforce to some extent previous scholarship but also provide new insights, which, in the end, can serve as suggestions for faculty teaching service-learning classes. To begin, we consider the significance each LC and set of professors gave to experiential learning, and the service-learning hours in particular. Not all faculty were equally enthusiastic about service learning. Faculty from LC A voiced their general preference for a field trip model compared to service learning because they felt that their “[academic] field [does] not lend itself well to service learning” and thus “field trips are a natural fit” for their LC. In the year of the study, however, they were motivated to have their students engage with the local West African refugee and immigrant community so that “students . . . could really offer service to immigrant populations since they were learning about them.” At the same time, LC A faculty expressed hesitation about requiring any form of experiential learning (including field trips) in the first semester, as students have to “do so much adjusting” and often lacked skills to successfully engage in any form of experiential learning. In contrast, LC B faculty saw the benefits of service learning and considered it to be “more meaningful to the students” and potentially “more transformative for students . . . if students get to build relationships and invest their time and energy . . . over time.” However, at the same time, one LC B faculty member felt that the FYP was not the right place because there “is too much happening [requirements]” in the first-year seminar, so “only teach[ing] writing would be plenty.” Finally, both LC C faculty stated a strong preference for service learning over any other form of experiential learning (field trips, community research) arguing, similarly to that faculty member in LC B, that “students get the most out of service learning” and that “consistent long term . . . hands-on experience can . . . greatly impact students . . . [including] the careers they chose.” In contrast to the LC B professor, none of the LC C faculty raised any objections or concerns in implementing service learning.

We further analyzed how well the experiential hours and what students did during that time connected to the content and other assignments in their first-year seminar and what weight in the final grade was allocated to completing the experiential hours. The faculty's responses in the survey, syllabi, and various writing assignments give insight to these questions. Almost all faculty said that the experiential hours were “directly connected” to the different classes (first-year seminar and two content classes) and class materials of the LCs. This is also reflected in the syllabi of all LCs, which include various assignments that aimed to link the service-learning hours to the more “academic aspect” of the LCs. However, we observed that for the most part, for LC A and LC B, the

assignments were a bit vague in how this was supposed to be accomplished. For example, in LC A, students had to write a single short essay where they discussed their personal reaction to the materials studied in class and their experiences working with the West African refugee and immigrant community. While most students noted that they (very much) enjoyed these experiential hours, they predominately focused on their personal feelings and connections they made with West African refugees and immigrants. The majority of the students did not make any references to readings, films, or other supplementary materials. LC A faculty responses provide some insight to why this may have occurred. They discussed that students in their class “reflect[ed] on what problems were faced by [refugees/immigrants] . . . in relation to situations they were reading about” but fell short of gaining in-depth insights, as “the experience did not really teach them much in the field . . . [that one LC A professor is] teaching.” In other words, it was apparent to both faculty and students in LC A that the service-learning component and the class materials did not really align.

Students in LC B had to keep an “experiential learning journal” where they reflected on the hours at the community organization, but there were no written assignments that asked students to directly link the experiential hours and the class readings, which focused on historical accounts about the war that displaced the West African refugees. However, in the classroom, LC B faculty “encouraged [students] to draw connections between their class work . . . and their community work.” Despite these efforts, one LC B faculty member noted that they fell short: “I should have done more. . . . I recently learned about Kolb’s [(2014)] reflective cycle and I wish I had known about that sooner so that I could have made it more effective.”

In contrast, in LC C, there were several written reflective assignments that asked students to specifically link their experiences with the West African refugee and immigrant community to readings (e.g., about individual immigrant and refugee journeys), lectures, and a field trip to a different immigrant neighborhood that required them to think about inclusion and exclusion; for the most part, students did that. For example, several students made the connection between the abstract description of the naturalization process that they read and learned about in one of the content classes and how it actually affects the West African refugee and immigrant women they assisted as they studied for their US citizenship exams. Thus, this outcome reflected what faculty of LC C wanted to achieve, “making materials about factors related to immigration (including . . . refugee[s]) much more accessible.” LC C faculty sought to accomplish this by “explicitly requiring [students] . . . to make . . . [in their] reading responses . . . direct connections between what they are reading and their experiences outside of the classroom.” In addition, the faculty described that in class lectures and discussions, students were asked how a particular issue related to what they had observed during their time spent with the West African refugee and immigrant community.

Another area where the faculty of the different LCs had diverging approaches was the weight and significance given to the service-learning hours per se and any written assignments that either required or encouraged students to reflect on their experiences in the community. In LCs A and B, the above-mentioned writing assignments made up a minimal part of their final grade (between 10 and 20%) and the actual experiential hours were not explicitly part of it. Some faculty of these two LCs rationalized this small(er) percentage by noting that writing was such a large part of the first-year seminar and therefore “there isn’t room for much more” and that

“experiential learning is just a requirement . . . [that was not graded separately].” This indicates that these faculty regarded service learning and any possible reflective writing as separate from any other “writing” (e.g., a research paper), thus signaling the disconnect between experiential learning and the rest of the class and treated it as an “add-on” they were required to include in their class.¹³ Opposed to that, LC C faculty believed that service learning “should be so integrated into the [first-year seminar] that it’s not possible to complete the class without . . . completing the experiential learning [hours].” These views were also reflected in the makeup of the final grade, where the various written reflections made up 20% of the final grade and the experiential hours counted for an additional 20%, which was not graded per se but rather as “completed” or “not completed.” Therefore, faculty in LC C made it clear to students in explicit ways that the hours they spent engaging with the West African refugee and immigrant community were an integral part of their learning experience—something that scholarship has found to be essential for successful service-learning experiences (Burnett et al., 2005; Caspersz & Oлару, 2017; Heuer et al., 2020). There are several other factors that could have potentially contributed to the fact that students in LC C were overall more supportive of service learning and their specific service-learning experience, and also were more likely to agree that they improved or learned new skills. For example, LC C was the only LC that required students to engage with the West African refugee and immigrant community outside of a tutoring aspect, specifically in a way where the students were the learners: they attended a festival where they encountered cultures that most were not familiar with.¹⁴ This allowed them to meet the community members outside the hierarchy found in most tutoring relations (Caspersz & Oлару, 2017; Houshmand et al., 2014; Ludwig, 2016; Traver et al., 2014). In addition, they also witnessed that one of their professors accompanied them and students from other LCs several times during the semester as they tutored members of the West African refugee and immigrant community. This is yet another example of how students experienced that the service-learning hours were something that the LC did together and not something that students did on their own without their professors’ involvement. The literature offers another possible explanation why students in LC C were more likely to have changed perceptions at the end of the semester: the fact that one of LC C content classes was a sociology class. There “is strong evidence that empathy levels are bolstered by exposure to basic sociological understanding” (Rockwell et al., 2019, p. 296). After all, sociology is a discipline that focuses on social structures and inequalities and how they impact different population groups and individuals and by doing so discusses power and privilege, which are essential to creating successful service-learning experiences for students (Lund & Lee, 2015; Tilley-Lubbs, 2009). But being a sociology class or professor is not enough. Faculty in LC C, compared to the other two LCs, appear to have been more purposeful about the above-mentioned issues as it relates to the service-learning component with West African refugees and immigrants. In contrast, LC B faculty idealistically endorsed the benefits of service learning but struggled with its implementation. LC A faculty were from the onset more reluctant to embrace service learning as a useful part of their class and were perhaps also hampered by lack of experience and institutional “logistical” support, as they, themselves, pointed out.

13. The FYP handbook requires faculty to include 30 hours of experiential learning (such as service learning, field trips, and/or community research).

14. Some of the students were born in Africa, but not West Africa, and came to the United States as young children.

While students in LC C, through the very deliberate assignments, readings, and lectures, were able to make connections between their engagement with the West African refugee and immigrant community and issues pertaining to (forced) migration, this was not the case with the other experiential component that was part of the class. None of the students' attitudes shifted as it relates to food waste and food insecurity. Indeed, their views were, despite completing a few hours with the FRN, more or less the same as those of students in the other two LCs who never engaged with any of the food recovery efforts on campus. We conclude that there are three potential reasons for the lack of change in perspectives among LC C students as it pertains to food waste and food insecurity. First, there was very limited engagement; second, there were neither specific readings, nor reflective assignments, nor dedicated class time related to their hours with FRN. And third, the community-resource mapping did not take place.¹⁵ Therefore, the students were neither able to contextualize the work they did as part of the FRN nor engage in any other reflective assignments about food waste and food insecurity; both key elements, as other research shows, that are required to bring about change (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Heuer et al., 2020; Wetzal et al., 2011). We mention this finding about the lack of change in students' views about food waste and insecurity because it indicates that students in LC C were not uniquely different from students in the other LCs (which some may infer based on the earlier analyses), but the significant difference was how and in which ways the service-learning aspect with the West African refugee and immigrant community was intentionally and structurally integrated into the LC. As a matter of fact, when LC C professors discussed the experiential hours in the survey, they tended to focus on this experiential component of their class; they barely mentioned the FRN hours in their answers.

Finally, this study may also support the fact that instructors, at times, should participate alongside their students in experiential-learning hours as this further demonstrates that this is an important part of the class and not something students do on their own without any relevancy to the class. This was also something that most faculty theoretically agreed with but, in reality, did not do. For example, one LC B professor said that "it would be good to go with students [to the placement]" but noted that this was "hard" if the placement is not connected to their research or interests and also due to time constraints, and thus they "[weren't] able to live up to . . . [their] own ideal because it was too overwhelming to try to make it all happen." Other professors echoed the "serious commitment of time and energy on the part of the faculty [that is needed to] . . . do [it] correctly," as one faculty from LC A said. Indeed, students also recognized the effort that went into preparing and facilitating the service-learning opportunity. For instance, one student from LC A acknowledged "the determination and dedication . . . from [name of organization's volunteer coordinator], [name of LC C professor], . . . that plan this program."

There were some limitations in this study that warrant consideration. This study is based on a relatively small group of students, all from one cohort, doing experiential hours with one particular community organization and therefore the sample size of faculty was also very small. In addition, we note that some of the reported

15. Completion of these hours was also part of their final grade.

standard divisions (*SD*) were rather large, indicating that there is a lot of variance in the responses that students gave to specific questions.

Despite the aforementioned limitations of this study, the findings can serve as a point for consideration for instructors who are teaching or planning to teach service-learning classes. Indeed, the result of the faculty survey may prompt faculty who are offering service-learning classes, or aspire to do so, to consider their own motivations and the prerequisites (e.g., institutional and logistical support, time) needed in order to have the intended outcomes for all those involved (students, faculty, and community partners). Further research should investigate what colleges and universities in times of austerity are doing to support faculty and students who want to engage in this type of learning. Additionally, a natural progression of our study would be conducting in-depth interviews with students regarding their perception of faculty teaching service-learning classes.

Overall, this study demonstrates that while frequency of engagement is important to the efficacy of service learning, in order for students to gain full benefits from service learning, their instructors must fully and practically support this type of teaching and learning and choose placements that truly complement the class content, and the experiential-learning hours must be fully integrated into the course through intentional reflections.

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Connie Campbell graduated from Wagner College with a BA in Psychology and a minor in Dance in May 2022. While a student at Wagner College, she was part of the Bonner Leaders Program in which she engaged with different civic issues and community organizations through community service, advocacy, and others. She is currently a case manager at Carson Valley Children's Aid while she prepares to apply to graduate programs.