

# ***DIVERSITY AND SERVICE-LEARNING***

## ***Beyond Individual Gains and Toward Social Change***

**Jenny J. Lee**

*University of Arizona*

**Michelle M. Espino**

*University of Georgia*

The purpose of this study was to understand the ways undergraduate students experience service-learning within the context of college outreach. Interviews from 3 cohorts of undergraduate college students across 2 Research I institutions revealed that the application of classroom learning through service-learning affected the ways in which students contextualized their perspectives on race, ethnicity, and social class. In addition, this study found that service-learning is a valuable approach to developing an educated citizenry and enhancing students' commitment to social change.

Historical and contemporary social issues about race, ethnicity, gender, and social class in the classroom have received considerable attention in both higher education research and practice. "Diversity" is the umbrella term that has loosely encompassed such social differences. Research has demonstrated that interactions with those of dissimilar backgrounds and diversity-related courses benefit all learners and contribute to students' cognitive and affective outcomes (e.g., Chang, 1999; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, 2001; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996). Colleges, in turn, have incorporated diversity course materials and provided opportunities for intercultural engagement in classrooms in efforts to develop students into socially knowledgeable and responsible citi-

zens. Despite such efforts to create an educated citizenry that is committed to creating a just and equitable society, the impact of diversity-related service-learning courses that move beyond individual student gains and toward social change has been underinvestigated.

Few courses integrate learning about diversity with active service participation in the community, which is commonly understood as service-learning. For the past decade, service-learning has been increasingly recognized as an important aspect of the undergraduate experience and has been shown to facilitate students' personal development as active learners and citizens. National research demonstrated the positive effects that service-learning and participation provide for students (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Moreover,

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**Please direct inquiries about this article to:** Jenny J. Lee, [JennyLee@arizona.edu](mailto:JennyLee@arizona.edu)

the benefits were shown to extend even beyond the college years (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999). Despite the fact that students who tend to participate in service-learning are middle-class White students (Coles, 1999), and service-learning opportunities often focus on working with underrepresented and underserved low-income communities and communities of color, the critical intersection between diversity and service-learning has received limited attention.

Although most of the literature has reinforced the benefits of service-learning, and such research has provided a clear case for universities to integrate service-learning into curricula, the outcomes were presented in broad themes without disaggregating by particular ways in which students benefit. Based on previous research and the need for further inquiry on the nexus between diversity and service-learning, the authors sought to explore how students think about social inequities involving race, ethnicity, and social class when they learn about such issues in the classroom and then extend that knowledge to active participation with the community in the form of service-learning.

## ***LITERATURE REVIEW***

### ***Traditional Engagement With Diversity***

While structural diversity, the numeric proportion of ethnically/racially diverse students on college campuses, is essential in creating diverse learning environments (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998), racial/ethnic and social class interactions, both inside and outside the classroom, are even more critical to understanding the effects of race and class on student learning (Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, & Gurin, 2003). Otherwise, students may risk settling into familiar environments that mirror their homogeneous school environments prior to college (Hurtado et al., 2003) while others may enter more homogeneous university environments compared to their high schools. In either case, diversity

scholars have called for students to be actively engaged with all forms of diversity beyond their immediate school environments and to take advantage of the diversity-related opportunities provided by higher education institutions.

Research on student interactions with diversity centered on students enrolled in diversity-related or ethnic-specific studies courses (e.g., Lewis & Altbach, 1997; Tsui, 1999) and informal interactions with racially/ethnically diverse students (e.g., Antonio, 1998; Chang, 1996). National data showed that taking ethnic studies courses was positively related with persistence toward a degree (Chang, 1996), as well as increased cultural awareness and goals of promoting racial understanding (Astin, 1993b; Milem, 1994). While ethnic studies courses tend to remain in the margins of university curricula, they play a vital role in student learning (Astin, 1993b). Quite often, the students who are attracted to and participate in these courses are from underrepresented backgrounds. Such opportunities promote diverse student interactions, which may lead to some of the benefits associated with taking diversity courses (Antonio, 2001).

Interactions with students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds are essential to the positive outcomes associated with diversity. In their review of the research on diversity, Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, and Gurin (2003) warned, "diversity in the curriculum is not the same as (or as a substitute for) interactions with diverse peers in either impact or educational outcomes" (p. 175). While incorporating diverse readings and discussions were significantly related to a range of learning and democratic outcomes, students' interaction with diverse peers provided a significant *independent* contribution to these outcomes (Hurtado et al., 2003). Gurin et al. (2002) found that "informal interactional diversity was influential for all groups and more influential than classroom diversity" (p. 19). In other words, student participation and engagement with peers of diverse backgrounds produced a

greater effect on a range of learning and democratic outcomes than taking diversity courses alone. Such research was consistent with findings that a student's peer group was one of the most important influences on student outcomes (Astin, 1993b). Examples of the outcomes associated with diverse student interactions and academics included "acceptance of people of different races/cultures, cultural awareness, tolerance of people with different beliefs, and leadership ability ... critical thinking and problem solving skills ... and the ability to work cooperatively with others" (Hurtado, 2001, p. 200). As students dialogue on issues concerning different cultures and backgrounds, they develop greater awareness and acceptance of diverse people and ideas as well as increased learning skills.

Research further indicated that promoting diversity on campus was directly connected to civic outcomes and engagement both on and off campus. Emphasizing diversity on campus had been found to produce a positive effect on campus activism, including increased participation in protest activities, political liberalism, cultural awareness, and commitment to promoting racial understanding (Astin, 1993a). When faculty incorporate readings on different racial/ethnic groups and women, students were also more likely to engage in civic duties beyond the institution, such as voting (Astin, 1993b). Such results suggest that increased diversity awareness was not limited to individual gains in knowledge and tolerance for cultural differences, but also directly connected to a greater commitment to social change. Thus, scholars have emphasized the importance of developing and implementing programs that target positive outcomes related to diversity (Hurtado et al., 2003; Springer, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Nora, 1995). In response, many institutions have focused their attention on traditional academic programs (i.e., increasing the number of ethnic studies or diversity-related courses) or student programs (i.e., promoting diversity fairs or isolated cultural events), but few have considered the added benefits of service-learning. While traditional

courses engage students with ideas, service-learning more intentionally ties course ideas to the local context.

### ***Service-Learning to Enhance Diversity-Related Outcomes***

Many national studies have established the benefits of service-learning beyond traditional classroom learning. In contrast to traditional classroom learning, service-learning entails reflective learning combined with service participation (Schwartzman, 2001). Eyler and Giles (1999) studied over 1,500 students in more than 20 institutions and found that service-learning has the greatest effect on students' personal development and interpersonal skills, which include reduced negative stereotypes of groups different from themselves, greater self-knowledge, tolerance for diversity, personal efficacy, desire to include service in their career plans, leadership skills, and feelings of connection with their communities. Eyler and Giles (1999) also uncovered gains in learning, such as an increased motivation to learn, a deeper understanding of the subject matter and the complexity of social issues, and an increased ability to apply course content to real life problems. Similar outcomes were found in an even larger longitudinal sample of 22,236 undergraduates across 4-year colleges and universities nationwide (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000). Astin et al. (2000) found that service-learning positively affected students' academic outcomes (i.e., grade point average, writing skills, critical thinking skills), values (i.e., commitment to activism and promoting racial understanding), self-efficacy, leadership (i.e., leadership activities, self-rated leadership ability, and interpersonal skills), career plans toward service careers, and plans to participate in future service. Clearly, service-learning can play an important role in promoting student development and unlike most traditional courses, service-learning courses especially promote civic engagement and participation.

For low-income students of color, the benefits of service-learning are especially magnified. Service-learning provides opportunities for marginalized students to feel a sense of validation (Enos, 1999). The students who enroll in service-learning courses may often include those who benefited as recipients of previous community or educational outreach. These students may find a “home” in serving communities similar to their own (Lee, 2005). In some cases, students of relatively low socioeconomic status may have an advantage in their service-learning participation because of their familiarity with the populations and communities being served (Lee, 2005). Students from more privileged backgrounds, on the other hand, may face particular challenges associated with access to particular sites, acceptance by the local community, and negative stereotypes (Dunlap, 1998). Such students may not interact respectably or comfortably with students of dissimilar racial and class backgrounds. As an example, in one study, middle- and upper-class students in a civic journalism class indicated feelings of privilege, fear, suspicion, guilt, superiority, and condescension in regards to the service that they conducted or interactions they had with a community different from their own (Novek, 2000). As further evidence, Rhoads (1997) observed that White and upper-middle class students dealt with particular issues related to positionality and confronting generalizations they had of the those outside their racial and class background. Such research demonstrates that racial conflicts may occur and that beyond diverse interactions, instructors play a critical role in helping students reflect upon such experiences. Such opportunities for White and affluent students can provide transformational learning about race and class (Hayes & Cuban, 1997).

## **METHODS**

This study was the first part of an extended longitudinal project that explored the sociocultural context of college access. This installment

examined how the benefits of college outreach in the form of service-learning were not limited to those being served. While the unique benefits of diversity and service-learning have been well established, less is known about the nature of the experiences for students who engage diversity *and* service-learning. Thus, the primary research questions were: What are the benefits for students engaging in diversity and service-learning? How do these outcomes compare to those whose learning was limited to the classroom setting? Secondary questions included: What are the outcomes of service-learning related to a commitment to social change? How do these outcomes compare to those whose learning was limited to the classroom setting?

This study focused on three cohorts of undergraduate college students who enrolled in service-learning courses pertaining to college access and participated in varying degrees of service. The data for the study were collected from service-learning courses offered at two Research I institutions; one in California and one in Arizona. The impetus for the service-learning courses was the need to encourage educational aspirations at under-resourced and low-achieving schools in local communities. Both institutions are situated in close proximity to school districts with high rates of economically disadvantaged students (i.e., 74.8% in the California district and 62.2% in the Arizona district), as well as large enrollment shares of African American and Latina/o students (Arizona Unified School District, 2006; California Unified School District, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). The service-learning courses at both institutions incorporated college outreach to low-income students and students of color at under-resourced high schools as part of the class requirements. Like students in most service-learning courses, the students self-selected to enroll.

Although this study was limited to two institutions, this qualitative study allowed for meaningful comparisons to be made across student cohorts because of the common

instructor and curriculum. One of the authors of this article served as the instructor for both courses, although one cohort of students did not extend their learning to service participation. Examples of course topics and lecture material included a critical examination of education and college access, understanding of the individual's role in creating change, and the role of college access in social justice. Related course activities included exercises on engaging diverse groups, self-reflections, and both small and large group discussions to process the service experiences. The service component of the courses involved mentoring and tutoring underserved middle and high school students in the local community as a way to engage students with service-learning. The students in the courses reflected a range of majors and were recruited to participate through flyers, listservs, announcements in other classes, and word-of-mouth recommendations from friends who had taken the course in the past.

While the vast majority of past research on service-learning outcomes was survey based, this study employed a qualitative approach in order to more fully capture the students' voices and personal stories. The data collection consisted of in-depth interviews, conducted at the end of the class terms with volunteer participants from three cohorts. The interview protocol was comprised of open-ended, semistructured questions that concentrated on students' learning and service-learning experiences, educational outcomes, and long-term goals.

Approximately 37% of the enrolled students participated in the interviews. Based on the amount of time dedicated to serving in the college outreach programs, the participants for this study were grouped into three cohorts, representing varying degrees of service experience. One cohort enrolled in a course that incorporated classroom-learning only (cohort in Arizona) whereas the two other cohorts enrolled in courses that incorporated community service in the form of college outreach into the course requirements (cohorts in

California and Arizona). The "learning-only" cohort consisted of 13 students who participated in the class assignments and discussions but did not incorporate service into their activities. These students did participate in some site observations and obtained first-hand knowledge of the schools that would be served the following term. Thirty-five participants were grouped in the "some service-learning" cohort because they also participated in the same class assignments and discussions but incorporated approximately 15 hours of service or less during the class term. Finally, the "extensive service-learning" cohort of 15 students was engaged in the same classroom activities and discussions as the other two groups, but participated in over 50 hours of service or more during the class term (see Table 1 for student demographic information).

In the sample of 63 students, 75% were women and 49% identified as White/Caucasian. There were some significant differences in the demographic composition of the samples with regard to race/ethnicity. The learning-only cohort was predominantly White/Caucasian whereas the extensive service-learning cohort was predominantly students of color. The racial/ethnic composition of these groups was reflected in the study findings.

Once the data were transcribed, the authors coded for emerging themes based on an initial read of the transcripts, which were then shifted and modified through rereading and rethinking the data (Bogden & Bilken, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). We were cognizant that, while attempting to capture memories of service-learning experiences, there is a gap in time between the actual experience and the remembering so that the past is never fully captured even in the telling and retelling of that experience (Spence, 1991). However, as memories were shared, participants gained insight about themselves and their lives that they did not know before. The knowledge generated by understanding self led to understanding oneself within the context of social relations and the greater society (Gregory, 1995). As the

TABLE 1  
Student Demographics by Cohort

Service-Learning (n = 13)	Some Service-Learning (n = 35)	Learning Only (n = 15)
African American: 1	African American: 2	African American: 0
Asian Pacific American: 4	Asian Pacific American: 0	Asian Pacific American: 0
Caucasian: 1	Caucasian: 15	Caucasian: 13
Latina/o: 2	Latina/o: 7	Latina/o: 0
International: 2	International: 0	International: 0
Biracial: 1	Biracial: 1	Biracial: 2
Unknown: 2	Unknown: 0	Unknown: 0
Female: 8	Female: 26	Female: 13
Male: 5	Male: 9	Male: 2

researcher-interpreters, our role was to (re)present participants' stories and (re)interpretations.

The first set of codes was based on themes that emerged from the literature review, including the different outcomes associated with service-learning. These initial themes included personal awareness, in-class experiences, on-site experiences, civic responsibility, and career/future aspirations. Additional processes involved modifying the codes into two larger categories; *individual gains* and *societal gains*. The students' backgrounds, experiences, and interpretations were examined and compared by the extent of service-learning participation to address the research questions. The data were then interpreted by summarizing the themes that emerged from the data. Given that this is a qualitative study, there was no attempt to "control" for any predisposition to social change but recognized that some of the outcomes were not exclusively an effect of the service-learning courses. The presentation of findings did not attempt to "represent" all of the students but selectively reported the quotes that best exemplified the major themes. Pseudonyms were used.

## FINDINGS

Every student indicated positive gains from the course experience. The extent of gains, however, varied. The findings are organized as

"individual gains" and "societal gains." As a way to best capture the collective voices of this study, the findings are presented with the actual language students used as the primary themes. In addition, quotes that exemplified these themes were selected. Within these themes, the different experiences across the three student cohorts were compared.

For most of the learning-only students, the gains did not extend past the individual. There was very little evidence from the interviews of outcomes that related to others or larger society with limited connection to social change. Common responses were "No, this experience did not change my outlook" or "No, this experience did not change my role as a citizen." There was some inability to articulate how their knowledge could be applied to solving social inequities as some evidence that these students' outcomes were limited to individual gains.

Several of the some service-learning and most of the extensive service-learning students, on the other hand, were not only exposed to theoretical concepts and research through classroom readings and discussions, but were also able to address the issues firsthand through service. The service-learning experience provided the opportunity for students to better understand the inequities of college access through their extensive observations and involvement with the individuals

they served. Such human interactions raised the students' critical consciousness as they viewed themselves as part of a larger struggle to create a more just and equitable society. This raised consciousness then translated to a greater commitment to social change.

### ***Individual Gains***

The two primary themes related to students' individual gains were a clearer understanding of the conditions and needs in the local schools and greater accountability to their own academics.

#### *"It Makes You More Aware"*

The combination of college access reading assignments and related service produced varied learning outcomes, particularly among students who incorporated service and students who did not. Among the students who engaged in service-learning, many emphasized the benefits of the service experience toward their personal growth:

[This program] is personally fulfilling ... and ... learning some things about yourself as you help other people. So I think, overall, [this program was] a maturing experience. (Bryan, Caucasian, some service-learning)

I've always done community service but ... sometimes I wonder, "Why am I doing this?" [This experience has] made me more aware, really care and have more conviction about what I'm doing. (Lucinda, Asian American, extensive service-learning)

I think that everyone should have to do some kind [of] community service ... because it makes you more aware of people and where they're coming from. You're a much more accepting person, much more caring, more sensitive. You're not so quick to judge people because you don't know where they've been. You don't know their story. (Ollie, African American, extensive service-learning)

These interviewees and others described a heightened sense of self-awareness, compassion for others, and improving the social conditions for those they serviced. Subsequently, they expressed a heightened sense of personal satisfaction and fulfillment. The majority of the participants also discussed the connection between the course reading assignments and service as an invaluable dimension to their learning:

That's what I really liked about this class is that you can go out and learn about the community and you're actually learning, you're understanding these people's lives. It's not just reading about them in a book. (Nancy, Caucasian, some service-learning)

If the class had just been ... here at the education building and all we did was discuss articles, I don't think it would have had the impact on me ... but, by going out there to the schools and by actually considering ... what kinds of challenges these kids may have ... that actually helped me out a lot. (Carl, Mexican American, some service-learning)

It's more real when you go, and you experience it, and you see it, than it is just reading it. And I think that's something so valuable when thinking about going into education and teaching. Because so many people just don't even recognize the differences that are there, and the differences that they have to be aware of. (Ollie, African American, extensive service-learning)

While all of the students were taught the same diversity issues related to college access, the some service-learning and extensive service-learning students gained a greater appreciation for diversity because of their first-hand service experience with diverse students. Such growth and increases in awareness were not notably different between the some service-learning and extensive-learning groups.

In contrast, the learning-only cohort felt that their limited service experiences, if any, had little impact on their understanding of col-

lege access issues or feeling that they were making a difference in the local community:

[This program] has not impacted me terribly because everything I've learned about is still theoretical and not practical and I didn't get a chance to actually work with any kids, see what it's like in practice. It's still kind of imaginary. (Jenny, Caucasian, learning-Only)

I don't really think this semester really affected me that much 'cause I didn't really get close to any of the students. I didn't know any of them [and] I didn't really get to feel like I was making a difference in any of their lives. I think if it was a one-on-one that I would've. (Brooke, Caucasian, learning-only)

Several students in the learning-only cohort had the opportunity to visit local high schools during the term and stated that language differences and interactions with students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds negatively affected their service experiences:

I was only able to go there three times and I didn't really enjoy it.... I had a lot of problems with communication barriers between myself and the students and the fact that they were all speaking Spanish to each other and to the advisor and while I understand a little bit of Spanish, I'm not comfortable enough with it to understand everything they were saying or to be able to speak it back to them. I felt really out of place. (Brooke, Caucasian, learning-only)

Within the classroom, I was comfortable ... but, walking to the classroom ... I was extremely uncomfortable. I don't mean to seem snooty, but I don't walk with a limp or yell to my homies.... I didn't know where the classroom was [and] this girl escorted me there and ... she'd talk slang to her friends as she walked by and ... I'm not used to that so I kept walking ... but I just stood out, so that made [the experience] harder. (Patricia, Caucasian, learning-only)

### *“What We Taught the Students, We Learned Ourselves”*

One main aspect of the service experience centered on conveying practical information to the high school students in regards to study skills and preparation for college. Such advising led to an unexpected outcome, particularly for the extensive service-learning cohort:

The first [term] we learned different learning paradigms and ... I used that to apply to my everyday coursework, too. What we taught the students we learned ourselves, and we experienced ourselves. So, obviously if it worked for us, it probably worked for them. By learning those tools, those study habits ... I was able to do well in school. (Kerrie, Asian American, extensive service-learning)

I think the site visits... putting on lesson plans for the kids in terms of how to be a better reader, how to be a better test taker. All of these things can actually apply to me directly at the same time. It's a very close correlation between what I tell them and what I can actually do in my own personal academics. (Cassie, Caucasian, extensive service-learning)

Teaching high school students particular study techniques reinforced the need for the service-learning students themselves to follow their own suggestions. Several commented that their academic performance improved as a result. Many others remarked that they needed to heed their own advice about pursuing higher degrees and applying for graduate school. Without the opportunity to advise high school students, the learning-only cohort did not mention such academic gains.

### *Societal Gains*

The service-learning courses produced benefits beyond the individual level. More specifically, the service-learning courses enabled these students to connect the course material with current policy issues and examples, thereby developing an educated citizenry with

a greater commitment to social change. Students described themselves as part of a larger struggle to change social conditions. The service opportunities provided direct experiences for the students to connect their learning to the local community context. Their commitment to social change, however, was not limited to the local context. Many students expressed plans to continue their involvement with the local schools while others envisioned working in other public institutions. The extent of their commitment however, varied by the extent of their service-learning participation.

*“It’s Not Really as Black and White as a Lot of People May Think”*

In addition to direct personal gains, students gained a greater understanding of social inequities and were able to connect them to current policy issues. Students used examples such as affirmative action, educational reform initiatives, and college admissions policies to illustrate the potential impact of public policy on the educational system and on their immediate families:

I always figured that the person’s initiative was what got them through life more than race or social class ... and ... I still believe that, but ... I didn’t realize how much [of a] difference race and class can have.... I could have the same amount of motivation as someone over here who’s just in a completely disadvantaged position and they might not get as far as I can and that’s not really their fault, and ... it seems like we need to help those people more.... Things like legislative initiatives that give those kinds of people funding aren’t so frustrating to me now as they were before because ... actually looking at the studies and the fact that ... these groups of people have been disadvantaged for so long that that really is the only way that they can make something of themselves. (Erica, Caucasian, some service-learning)

It’s not really as black and white as a lot of people may think it is and I liked this class ‘cause it showed me that there’s a lot of ...

the racial and ethnic issues ... with ... education, and it showed ... a lot of the problems ... especially because of the priorities that education has. We’re focusing too much on accountability and not too much in what we can do to help out ... in that accountability. (Carl, Mexican American, some service-learning)

I’m aware now ... of the policies that the university brings ... that they can affect me and they can affect ... my siblings, and ... my friends still in high school, and so I should be aware of those and ... the state policies that the state comes out with regards to school. I didn’t realize that there are so many that affected schools. (Melinda, Caucasian, some service-learning)

These student reflections illustrated how the students became part of the larger struggle for liberatory education. The extent to which their service contributed to such knowledge is unknown. But as demonstrated by these examples, students became more informed on key political issues related to education and thus, became more informed citizens.

*“You’re More Likely to Make Some Change Happen”*

Students indicated a greater commitment to social change, with indicators such as career and future aspirations and civic responsibility, such as working to rectify social inequities. Some students internalized their commitment by changing their majors to education, applying for programs such as Teach for America, volunteering at nonprofit organizations, committing to the outreach program for the next term, and running for office in the local school board. Other students felt some disconnection between their career choices and the opportunities to become involved in social change. Although all students read the same course material, engaged in classroom discussion with diverse peers, and had some exposure to educational inequities through site observations or service, some students were not

inclined to take a more active role in civic participation nor integrate service into their future goals.

*“Now I’d Like to Be at a School That’s Diverse”*

A majority of students from the extensive service-learning cohort and a few in the some service-learning cohort indicated plans to teach after college. Some indicated a particular commitment to specific populations that they would serve or work with:

When I heard about this class at the end of last semester, I thought that this would definitely be something that could help me when I actually go into, like teaching at schools.... Maybe I won’t be [an outreach] organizer, but I definitely want to keep working with [the outreach advisors] ... knowing them will help me help my students in ... admitting [them] to college. (Carl, Mexican American, some service-learning)

I’ve always planned to go back to the schools in my community, working in an urban setting. I’d rather go to a school that’s not doing as well.... It’s about helping the ones that aren’t already being helped, not the ones that already have it. (Bernardo, Mexican American, extensive service-learning)

One student, who had decided to become a teacher prior to the course, but now committed to teaching underserved populations, admitted to some initial fears and concerns about serving a community that was different from what he knew and experienced as a high school student:

I always pictured [working at] a school that I had been at. Now, I’d like to be at a school that’s diverse.... After taking the class, going through the program, you want to help kids ... that have obstacles.... I don’t want to be rude to say that I want to better their lives ... so they can become more educated....The thing that scares me about it is [that] I have come into contact with some of the issues

they’ve gone going through, but I’d feel like I’d be going into their community and I’d be an outsider, which is a scary feeling. (Kirk, Latino/Caucasian, extensive service-learning)

Despite feeling afraid about being perceived as “an outsider,” Kirk decided to take on the challenge of working with more diverse populations because of his newfound commitment to assist diverse students.

Many other students cited changing their majors, adding education as a minor, or changing career paths because of their service-learning experiences:

[This program] sparked my interest; ... that’s why I took up an education minor after taking this class ... to help provide that link for students, whether it’s...college related, or just trying to help them learn. (Cassie, Caucasian, extensive service-learning)

I think when I first came to class, I just wanted to help community or just community service and learn something and, now that I’m done with it, I can have an impact by teaching and working with less fortunate kids that I have good repertoire with. (Alex, Caucasian, learning-only)

Before [this program,] I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do.... I’ve always been good with ... adolescents or kids, but ... I was always like, “I don’t wanna do that.... It’s too much trouble. It’s too much responsibility....” After taking this [class] and learning all of the different things that we’ve talked about in our class ... it does make me want to work with adolescents [as a school counselor]. (Shayna, Caucasian, some service-learning)

Several students indicated plans to apply for the Teach for America program prior to pursuing graduate degrees. Most recently, a learning-only student and a some service-learning student have already started their Teach for America assignments. Several other students have applied and been admitted to the California university’s graduate programs in education. Such practical changes in student

plans reflect specific ways that students were impacted by their service-learning experience.

*“I Should Be Involved”*

The themes uncovered in the student interviews indicated that some students believed that their civic responsibility should focus on college outreach, while other students broadly described the extended impact they could make in society through a range of social activities. Regardless, students described how they felt compelled to be agents of social change. Connecting to the local community and local nonprofit organizations was an unanticipated shift for several students.

Many students not only expressed urgency for educational change but also perceived themselves as change agents:

[This experience has] confirmed that there’s a lot going on and that you can’t be blind to it and you want to be contributing to a solution...I don’t know how much the other students are saying the same thing, but once you’ve been exposed, you can’t go back. (Jenny, Caucasian, learning-only)

[This program has] showed me that I should be ... involved. It shouldn’t just be sitting somewhere reading ... article, “Wow, this is horrible,” and just put it away and go on, eating my dinner or playing my video games. It showed me that I should go out there and see what I can do and help somebody out and be a mentor to somebody ... and ... give my best back to the community [in] whatever way I can. (Carl, Mexican American, some service-learning)

It’s very easy to talk and to want to change things, but you can’t really say anything unless you’ve actually been in it, and you’ve experienced the system so that’s probably why I want to do a bit of teaching before [going into public policy]. (Denise, Nigerian, extensive service-learning)

All too often, traditional courses can leave students with greater awareness about societal

issues, including its many problems. The service-learning courses enabled the students to not only observe the inequities in education first-hand, but also to play a direct role in ameliorating such problems.

Students expressed a range of ways in which they intended to practice their civic responsibility. Although the long-term effects of service-learning on these cohorts were not measured, students indicated personal commitments to continue their service specifically in college outreach:

I think that’s important to continue [this program] and not just say, “Alright. I’m done with class, peace out, kids. I’ll see you later” because then they’ll know that they matter and it’s not just you getting credits or you getting a résumé booster. (Marisol, Mexican American, some service-learning)

Once I graduate I obviously won’t be able to be in the program anymore, but I think I’m going to retain some type of the ... service component.... [The] going-to-college issue is pretty important to me now because I totally see how people are separated and also their life outcomes are separated from whether they go to college or not. (Minnie, Asian American, extensive service-learning)

In addition, students realized that they could also support local organizations:

Working with the [outreach] program, I have a better appreciation for nonprofit organizations and the work they do.... It sounds like one of those really noble efforts that’s just so out there that you wouldn’t actually do it. You think you’d have to join the Peace Corps to make a difference to anyone.... There’s actually channels that you can work through that I didn’t realize they were so accessible. (Erica, Caucasian, some service-learning)

Active participation in local, state, and national politics and public policy were also considered:

It’s made me want to be more politically active, like going into public policy. I never

would have thought about doing that if it wasn't for the education classes. (Denise, Nigerian, extensive service-learning)

One thing that a lot of people ... do not know is that I'm the [university] freshman that's running for the local school board and reading all these statistics is very helpful.... This helps me a whole lot because I can refer back to these studies that we've been reading or these conversations that we've been having. (Manuel, Mexican American, some service-learning)

Others were less specific on ways they intended to put their civic responsibility into practice, but generally spoke about the importance of "giving back to the community."

I definitely think [this program] makes me want to give back. I'm very fortunate to ... be given everything that I've been given, and so I want to turn around and help all these students that are less fortunate than me or a minority ... [and say] "You can do this." I think that's being a good citizen is you want to turn around and give people information. (Shayna, Caucasian, some service-learning)

[This program has] made me a better person. I feel like it's my duty or my responsibility to give back to the community 'cause ... that's where I came from. I guess this is the vehicle for me to do that and it's also the vehicle that has opened more doors for me to pursue other opportunities ... that I can get involved in. So, it's like a gateway. (Cassie, Caucasian, extensive service-learning)

Clear differences began to emerge among the students who participated in service-learning and those who did not when asked about how their civic responsibility could tie to the local community. Despite the material learned in the classroom, most of the learning-only cohort and a few in the some service-learning cohort did not connect civic responsibility with serving their local communities. Rather, they emphasized a focus on assisting their families, the personal benefits to service (i.e., "resume

experience"), and, for some, not expecting to make any changes:

I think [this experience has] changed my sense of responsibility in terms of my family and also, people I know really well.... I don't feel anything toward people who I wouldn't consider part of my community. (Shellie, Caucasian, some service-learning)

I've always liked helping people, but, this was a good experience for me and I'd probably consider something like this again. If not anything, just for good resume experience. (Bart, Caucasian, some service-learning)

My personal goals aren't exactly community oriented or toward education exactly.... Being a doctor doesn't exactly factor into how I think schools should work. (Gordon, Caucasian, learning-only)

Conversely, students who participated in service-learning explained that direct exposure to the local schools helped them understand and become involved with their local communities:

I don't think I would feel complete.... Your college experience consists of your academic, your social, your extracurricular.... I feel that [this program has] enriched me ... and it's made me have a better connection to the community. (Kerrie, Asian American, extensive service-learning)

I feel [this program] has gotten me more involved in the ... community because I am out there.... Being involved in [the outreach program] not only ties you to the university, but to the university in relation to the community. (Nancy, Caucasian, some service-learning)

[This program] just reminds you that you have to work with the whole community and ... you can't isolate to really affect change, but it's a huge process of involving the whole community. That's important. (Erica, Caucasian, some service-learning)

The following student shared her decision to continue her involvement as a community volunteer:

I grew up in a setting where ... you're supposed to grow up and make money and ... do well. [T]here were always volunteer options, but that should be a ... component of your life no matter what and now I think that it's an important thing and I want it to be a part of mine. (Beth, Caucasian, some service-learning)

In sum, the extensive service-learning and several some service-learning students expressed a greater commitment to their local communities and addressed specific ways they planned to be more involved in social change than the learning-only students and a number of Some service-learning students. The responses among the some service-learning students were split, possibly due to the limited service that was made available to this cohort.

## ***DISCUSSION***

This study explored the qualitative outcomes related to service-learning by interviewing students on their personal experiences and reflections. Interviews conducted with the learning-only, some service-learning, and extensive service-learning cohorts provided insightful reflections regarding the impact of service-learning in students' personal awareness and civic responsibility. Students who enrolled in these courses did not necessarily arrive as empty receptacles, unaware of the limited educational opportunities available to underrepresented students or social inequities that affected the greater community. Many students entered these courses with basic knowledge about college access through personal experiences and/or from other courses they had taken. However, among the students who participated in service, the interviews revealed new understandings about the students they served, their classmates, their roles in the community, and ultimately, their own roles in edu-

cational and social change. Most of the learning-only students described college access in abstract ways, with limited support beyond their personal experiences. Very few of these students commented on the type of impact they could make with their gained classroom knowledge in the future.

The students who participated in service-learning not only articulated their perspectives on diversity and college access, but were able to contextualize these perspectives through their mentoring experiences and thus heighten their commitment to social change. Consequently, many indicated that they changed their future goals to serving the community, giving back to certain underserved populations within the community, and changing their career aspirations. Quite often, the service-learning student responses focused more on the communities they were serving than on themselves. Their concerns were centered on the experiences of the high school students, who were active participants in the process of entering higher education. As the service-learning students interacted with the high school students, most discarded negative assumptions about the students and the students' families and recognized systemic problems that were affecting college access.

Prior to the study, we expected to find that the amount of time dedicated to service-learning would affect the students' commitment to social change and this assumption was confirmed by the profound experiences students in the extensive service-learning cohort shared. Indeed, there appeared a direct relationship between individual and social gains and the hours that students integrated service. However, we also found that, despite only acquiring classroom knowledge, a few members of the learning-only cohort experienced significant personal growth and changed their aspirations, such as applying for the Teach for America program or changing their majors to education.

In summary, this study not only confirms much of what the literature discusses in regards to the impact of diversity courses and

diversity-related service-learning on students' commitment to social change but also extends this discussion to the importance of service-learning that is intentionally directed toward social outcomes. However, it is important to note that students are complex and that the outcomes associated with service-learning are not deterministic. In other words, we do not offer a blanket prescription for social justice and change through service-learning. Regardless of time spent in service, not every student will automatically change their previous beliefs about college access, diversity, or social inequities. As demonstrated in this study, service-learning is a valuable approach to developing an educated citizenry and enhancing students' commitment to social change.

Beyond the findings already outlined in this article, some practical implications for diversity, social justice, and service-learning are offered. As explored in the literature review, previous research has well documented the importance of diverse interactions in the classroom or within the university with far less research on applying classroom learning to the local community. In order for the benefits associated with diversity to extend beyond the institution and the college years, colleges and universities should promote service-learning as a bridge to the larger community. As this study has demonstrated, opportunities for students to engage with diverse individuals without college degrees or to observe disadvantaged communities first-hand would more likely foster critical awareness and social justice than classroom discussions alone. Service-learning provides such an opportunity.

Given the space constraints of this article, another component in our research will explore service-learning as a vehicle for interculturalism as such courses aim to connect learning with field experiences, as well as the forms of resistance that students experience in confronting issues of race and privilege. Not all students readily agreed with the course material or the goals of the outreach. Some students reported negative personal reactions, ranging from feeling apologetic to uncomfort-

able and angry and thus disassociated with addressing social inequalities. Others disassociated themselves by putting up "blind spots" to such concerns. Although delineating students' experiences by race was not the main objective of this particular study, these students tended to come from privileged racial or class backgrounds. Connecting the course literature to one's racial identity was especially challenging for many students in the sample, particularly students of color who did not identify with how their racial or socioeconomic backgrounds were portrayed in the literature. Future research might explore racial identities and how reading about one's race, especially when the race is negatively portrayed, influences one's self-perception.

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