

RESEARCH REPORT

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WHY ENGAGE?

Notre Dame Students' Motivations for Engaging in Service

BY Tara D. Hudson, Ph.D., Mackenzie Buss '15, Krystal Morrison '15, and Jay Brandenberger, Ph.D.

For decades, the University of Notre Dame has fostered an ideology of combined community engagement and scholarship through service learning initiatives. Service learning and community engagement in college have been associated with both short- and long-term effects on prosocial behavior and well-being that persist beyond the college years (Bowman, Brandenberger, Lapsley, Hill, & Quaranto, 2010). At Notre Dame, 79% of respondents to the 2015 Senior Survey reported performing volunteer or community service work in the past year. In addition, according to the most recent data collected by the University of Notre Dame Career Center (2014), 8% of Notre Dame seniors graduating in 2014 entered post-graduate volunteer service. The consistently large portion of Notre Dame students undertaking a commitment to service during college and after raises an important question: What motivates Notre Dame students to engage in service in the first place? Previous research at Notre Dame has focused on demographic trends in service learning participation (Beckman & Trozzolo, 2002) and outcomes of engaged learning (Bowman, Brandenberger, Mick, & Toms Smedley, 2010), but little was known about the reasons why students choose to participate in service.

FRAMEWORKS FOR UNDERSTANDING SERVICE MOTIVATION

Existing theories of service learning and volunteerism have offered a variety of perspectives for understanding the personal and social motivations driving service engagement among college students as well as the general adult population. Existing theories include Frisch and Gerrard (1981), Perry and Wise's (1990) Public Service Motivation framework, Clary and Snyder's (1999) Functional Approach, and Rockenbach, Hudson, and Tuchmayer (2014). These theories identify between two and six factors motivating individuals to serve; motivations might be broadly classified as self-oriented (e.g., professional development, social reward) or other-oriented (e.g., altruism, compassion).

Our goal is to identify the motivational factors that drive Notre Dame students toward service engagement. Specifically, this report examines: (1) What motivational factors influence students to engage in service initiatives? and (2) How might these motivational factors change over the course of a summer service learning experience?

CONTEXT AND SAMPLE

The Summer Service Learning Program (SSLP) at Notre Dame traces its origins to the 1960s. Since 1983, over 5900 students have participated in the domestic program (an additional 924 have participated in the international program since its inception in 1998). The SSLP is a three-credit, pass/fail, community-based learning course housed within the Center for Social Concerns and cross-listed with the Theology department (and occasionally other related departments). The course begins with orientation in the spring semester and concludes in the fall, and students complete structured reflection and written assignments throughout the program. During the summer, students spend 8-10 weeks immersed in various contexts across the United States, including social services, health care, and community-based advocacy. As part of their participation in the program, students are asked before and after the immersion to complete an online questionnaire to allow SSLP staff to collect demographic information, evaluate program components, and assess attitudes, values, and learning outcomes related to service.

The SSLP provides an ideal sample to study because it tends to attract students from diverse backgrounds, interests, and beliefs (Brandenberger, 2008). Previous research has found that over the course of the summer, students generally increased in their endorsement of equality and social responsibility (Bowman et al., 2010). Moreover, compared to more conventional service learning courses in which students complete hours of service as a class requirement, a substantial commitment is required to participate in the SSLP as students are asked to live, work, and become part of a community often unfamiliar to them for an extended period of time. The significant

investment required by the SSLP suggests that participating students are strongly motivated and committed to serving others.

Participants in the current study were drawn from a pool of 880 Notre Dame undergraduates who were engaged in the Center for Social Concerns' domestic SSLP during the summers of 2006, 2007, 2008, or 2012.¹ Of this original participant sample, 611 (69%) completed both the pretest and posttest surveys and were retained for further analyses. Selected demographic characteristics for these students are available in an appendix at the end of this report.

MEASURES AND VARIABLES

Student motivations for service were assessed using a 15-item measure based on a scale originally created for the 1995 College Student Survey of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles (see Astin & Sax, 1998, for the original measure). On both pretest and posttest surveys, students rated the extent to which various factors motivated them to participate in service work on a four-point scale ranging from "not at all important" (1) to "very important" (4).

Overall, "to help other people" had the highest mean rating (3.8) at pretest, with nearly 99% of respondents identifying it as an "important" or "very important" motivation for participating in service; the second most popular motivation was "to learn more about other people and their experiences" (3.5 mean pretest rating; more than 95% of respondents rating it "important" or "very important"). Respondents identified "as a course requirement" as the least important motivation for service participation at pretest

¹ Data on student motivation was not collected from 2009-2011. For students who participated in multiple years, only data from the first year of participation was included.

(1.4 mean pretest rating; 69% rating it “not at all important”), followed by “to enhance my chances of acceptance to medical, law, dental, business, or graduate school” (2.0 mean pretest rating; 39% rating it “not at all important”). Table 1 displays the mean pretest and posttest ratings respondents gave to the top five motivation items as well as the percentage of respondents by rating at both pretest and posttest. The two most stable motivations—that is, those that had the highest correlations between pretest and posttest scores—were “to live out faith or ethical convictions” ($r = 0.528$) and “to enhance my chances of acceptance to medical, law, dental, business, or graduate school” ($r = 0.511$). In other words, students’ belief in the importance of these two motivations was least likely to change compared to the other thirteen motivations (pretest/posttest correlations for these items ranged from 0.286 to 0.491).

In order to better understand the patterns of relationships among variables, a factor analysis was performed to identify the underlying structure of student motivations for service.² The analysis allowed us to categorize twelve of the fifteen motivation survey items into three factor variables representing three motivations

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for engaging in service: learning, helping, and résumé-building (three motivation survey items that didn’t load onto any of these three factors were dropped from analyses). The three factor variables encompass aspects of motivation to serve that are similar to those represented within the existing frameworks discussed previously. However, our motivation variables are also distinct because they pertain specifically to what may have motivated this sample of Notre Dame undergraduate students. For instance, the learning motivation variable was measured by items that suggest

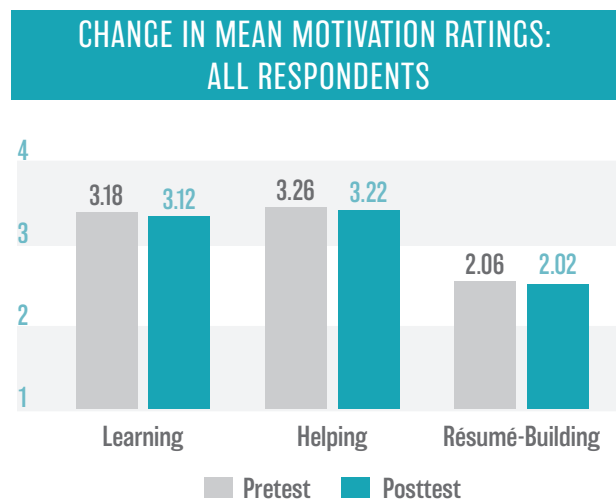
TABLE 1. MEAN RATINGS AND PERCENTAGE RESPONSES FOR STUDENT MOTIVATIONS

ITEM	PRETEST					POSTTEST				
	MEAN	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT (%)	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT (%)	IMPORTANT (%)	VERY IMPORTANT (%)	MEAN	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT (%)	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT (%)	IMPORTANT (%)	VERY IMPORTANT (%)
To help other people	3.8	0.5	0.7	19.6	79.2	3.7	0.5	3.0	23.3	73.3
To learn more about other people and their experiences	3.5	0.8	3.8	37.6	57.8	3.5	1.0	5.3	37.9	55.8
To work with people different from me	3.3	2.5	11.6	41.6	44.4	3.2	1.5	14.3	43.4	40.8
To learn how to be effective in the area of social change	3.3	1.6	13.5	41.1	43.8	3.2	2.6	14.4	41.3	41.6
To improve the community	3.3	1.2	6.6	50.1	42.2	3.3	0.8	10	47.4	41.8

For information on the remaining 10 motivations and other data, refer to the appendix at the end of this report.

² Factor loadings and alphas can be obtained by contacting the authors.

a desire for new knowledge or abilities. The helping motivation variable is based on a sense of personal duty and a desire to effect change for a specific cause. The résumé-building motivation variable is comprised of items that measure interest in career or résumé development.

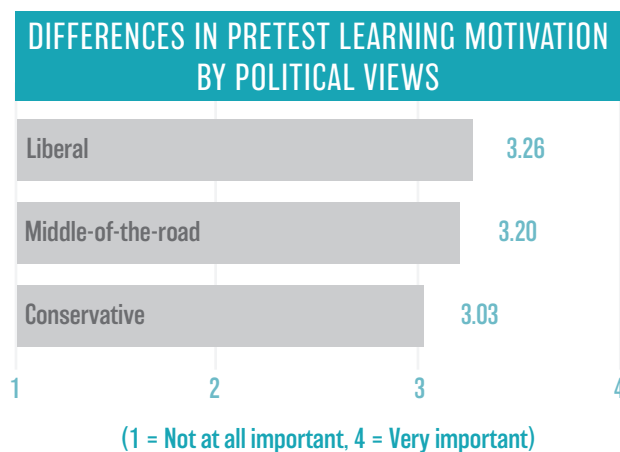
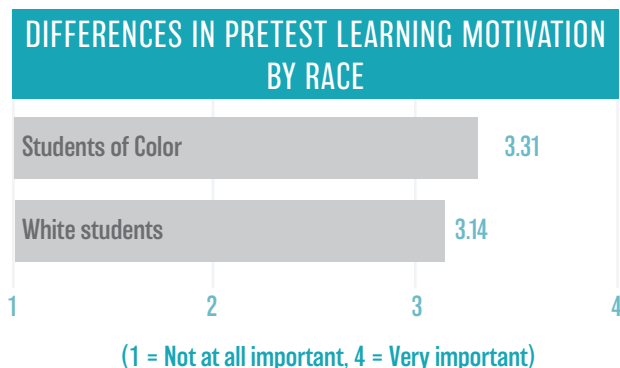
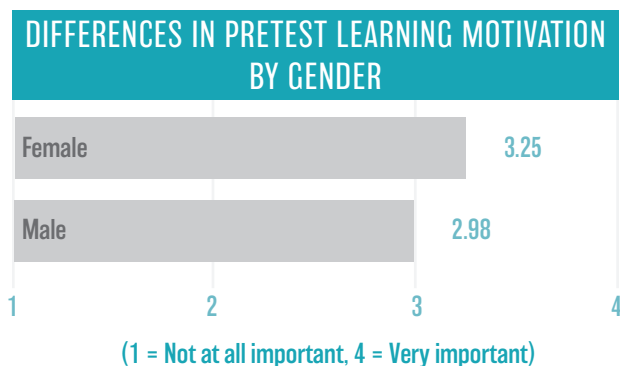


To test whether significant pretest differences in the three motivation scores existed by demographic variables (e.g., gender, race, political views, parental income), we conducted paired t-test and one-way ANOVA analyses. We also conducted paired t-test and one-way ANOVA analyses of posttest data to detect whether these scores changed significantly compared to pretest scores after students' service experiences. We discuss results from these analyses next.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

LEARNING. How does the desire to learn motivate different students to participate in service work? For all respondents, the pretest to posttest change in learning as a motivation for service participation decreased slightly, from a mean of 3.18 at pretest to 3.12 at posttest ($p < .05$), although the effect size was

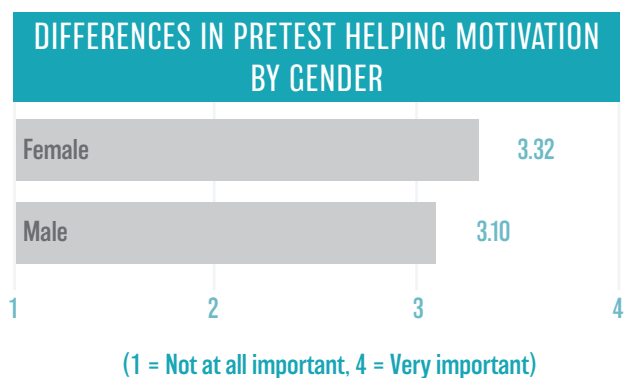
very small (-0.09).³ Students with parental incomes in the \$200,000–\$249,999 income bracket showed significant decreases from pretest (mean = 3.27) to posttest (mean = 3.02) in the importance they placed on learning as a motivation, with a moderate effect size (-0.47 ; $p < .001$). No subgroups of students demonstrated a pretest to posttest increase in the learning motivation.



³ All reported effect sizes are Cohen's d adjusted for dependent samples.

To examine differences among respondents by demographic groups, we performed t-test and ANOVA analyses using students' pretest scores. Results showed that male students were less motivated by learning than female students (coefficient = -0.27, $p < .001$, effect size = -0.48), while students of Color indicated greater learning motivation than White students (coefficient = 0.17, $p < .01$, effect size = 0.30). Additionally, students who identified politically as conservative were less motivated by learning than their politically moderate and liberal peers (coefficient = -0.23, $p < .001$, effect size = -0.40).

HELPING. How does the desire to help motivate different students to become involved in service? The full sample of respondents showed a small, but statistically significant, decrease in means from pretest to posttest, from 3.26 to 3.22 ($p < .05$); however, the effect size was negligible (-0.08). Pretest to posttest mean changes were statistically significant for a few subgroups of students, including White students, politically conservative students, first-year students, and students in the College of Arts and Letters; in all cases, the effect sizes were small (-0.20 or less). As with the learning motivation, no groups of students showed a statistically significant increase from pretest to posttest in the importance they placed on helping as a motivation to serve. Only one difference in pretest helping motivation appeared among demographic subgroups: male students reported being less motivated by a desire to help than female students (coefficient = -0.23, $p < .001$, effect size = -0.48).



RÉSUMÉ-BUILDING. How does the desire to build one's résumé motivate different students to become involved in service? The pretest to posttest importance ratings assigned to this motivation factor did not show a statistically significant change for the full sample of respondents. Students who identified as politically conservative gave lower ratings to this motivation at posttest than at pretest, with the mean decreasing from 2.13 to 1.99 ($p < .05$; effect size = -0.19). Students in the School of Architecture also showed a decrease, from a mean of 2.18 to 1.50 ($p < .05$), with a large effect size (-0.80); at posttest, these students placed less importance on building their résumés as a motivation for service participation. As with the other two motivations, no group of students increased from pretest to posttest.

Examining differences among demographic groups revealed that science students were more motivated by résumé-building than their peers in other colleges (coefficient = 0.32, $p < .001$, effect size = 0.40). In addition, students with family incomes of \$250,000 or higher were more motivated to serve by a desire to enhance their résumés compared to students in other income groups (coefficient = 0.38, $p < .05$, effect size = 0.47).

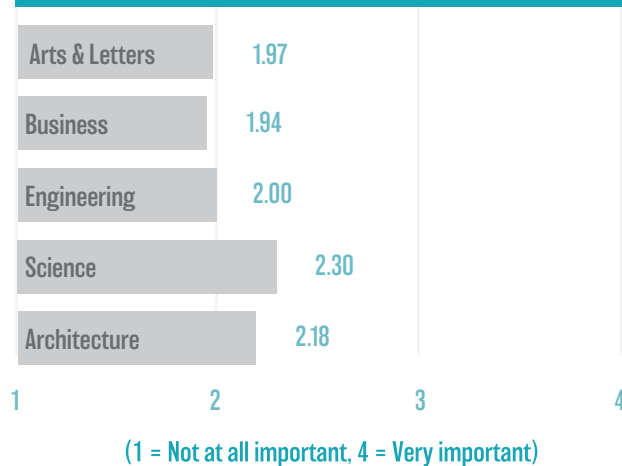
DISCUSSION

Our findings suggest that college students have multiple motivations for participating in service. Moreover, existing research has shown that, no matter the motivation, participating in service during college relates to myriad positive outcomes, including increased well-being (such as personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and life satisfaction; see Bowman et al., 2010) and prosocial engagement (i.e., the desire to help others and improve society; see Bowman et al., 2010; Rockenbach, Hudson, & Tuchmayer, 2014) in adulthood. Given the substantial, enduring benefits of service for individuals as



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DIFFERENCES IN RÉSUMÉ-BUILDING MOTIVATION BY COLLEGE



DIFFERENCES IN RÉSUMÉ-BUILDING MOTIVATION BY INCOME



well as communities, we aim to understand all of the possible motivations college students may have for engaging in service so that educators can encourage service involvement widely by appealing to those varied motivations.

Our results indicated that science students were significantly more motivated by résumé-building than their peers. This could potentially be explained by the many science students who are applying to competitive medical school programs that value applicants with service experience. Yet research shows that any kind of student volunteering, regardless of the motivation behind it, connects to positive future outcomes such as personal growth and sense of purpose (Bowman et al., 2010). Therefore, it could be helpful to encourage science students' participation in service opportunities by emphasizing how volunteering can be an opportunity not just for learning and helping, but also for enhancing graduate school applications and future career development.

We found that the men in our study were less motivated by learning or helping than the women. However, a possible explanation for this trend may be that there exists some alternate motivation, unstudied here, that drives male college students to participate in service. For instance, "social" or "protective" motivations, similar to those proposed in the functional approach, may partly explain why male students participate in service work (Clary & Snyder, 1999). Rockenbach, Tuchmayer, & Hudson (2014), however, found only minor differences between male and female college students in the benefits they perceived to result from service (which indirectly reflect motivations to serve), including vocational advancement and helping others. Further research could examine what might motivate male students to participate in service to the degree that helping and learning motivate female students. This type of research could help service organizations achieve a more balanced volunteering ratio and more holistic community engagement.

Students in our sample from higher-income families were more motivated by résumé-building than lower-income participants. Although the results of this study cannot explain why this difference exists, previous research has established that higher-income students serve more than lower-income students, likely because their families' greater access to financial and social resources facilitates their participation (Clerkin, Paynter, & Taylor, 2009), and higher-income students also tend to receive more vocational benefits from service participation (Rockenbach, Tuchmayer, & Hudson, 2014). These findings suggest that students from higher-income families may be socialized to recognize that the benefits of service accrue to oneself as well as to others. Regardless, as we noted earlier, utilitarian motivations for engaging in service should not be dismissed given the many substantial benefits students gain from service participation (Bowman et al., 2010).

The motivation to learn was significantly lower in our sample's politically conservative students. Previous research on service participation has found conflicting results regarding the connection between political ideology and volunteering among adults (Clerkin et al., 2009). The negative relationship we found between conservative students and learning motivation suggests an opportunity for research to uncover what college students with different political ideologies are looking for in a service program.

Similarly, we found that students of Color were more motivated by learning than their White peers. Those who design service programs might consider emphasizing the learning that can result from service in order to attract racially minoritized students to participate. Nationally, studies of racial differences in service participation have found mixed results; some have found higher participation rates among White people, while others have found higher rates among people of Color or no differences between racial groups (Rockenbach,

Tuchmayer, & Hudson, 2014). Perhaps one explanation for these conflicting findings is that individuals' motivations for engaging in service may be shaped in part by their racial and ethnic identities.

CONCLUSIONS

Our research illuminates some of the motivational trends occurring among college students who engage in service, and it suggests that programs seeking to involve students in service might consider appealing to a range of motivations, including those that are self-oriented. Effective recruitment efforts could highlight the learning and résumé enhancement that can be gained from service participation, in addition to appealing to other-oriented motivations such as altruism and caring, to attract students who may not be inclined to serve for solely altruistic reasons. In a recent letter to the editor published in *The Observer*, a 2011 Notre Dame alumna attested to the role service participation had on shaping the course of her life: until spring of her senior year she had planned on a law career, yet after her spring break service experience, she altered her post-graduation plans and instead pursued two years of full-time service (Hrdlicka, 2016). Congruent with this student's experience, prior research suggests that service participation may be transformative for students regardless of the reason that initially motivates them to participate; this is especially true when service includes opportunities for meaningful encounters across difference and relationship-building with those served (Reinders & Youniss 2006; Rockenbach, Hudson, & Tuchmayer, 2014), which the SSLP provides. Indeed, one goal of the SSLP is to challenge students' self-oriented motivations for service and develop their sense of responsibility for working with and learning from persons who are marginalized in society. However, the suggestion to appeal to motivations other than altruism in recruiting students for service

programs should be balanced with the needs and goals of the program and the service partners, and programs should ensure students are equipped with the knowledge and attitudes conducive to developing relationships of mutuality and reciprocity prior to beginning their service placements.

Future studies might seek to understand how students with different types of motivations reflect on their service experiences in different ways. For example, does a student who is motivated by helping find service to be more rewarding than a student motivated by résumé-building? Also, how are different types of motivations indicative of the students who will continue volunteering in the future and those who will not? These are important questions to ask as the University of Notre Dame seeks to further understand and involve its students during their college years, as well as after graduation, in a collective effort to engage their communities through service.

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To help other people	3.8	0.5	0.7	19.6	79.2	3.7	0.5	3.0	23.3	73.3
To learn more about other people and their experiences	3.5	0.8	3.8	37.6	57.8	3.5	1.0	5.3	37.9	55.8
To work with people different from me	3.3	2.5	11.6	41.6	44.4	3.2	1.5	14.3	43.4	40.8
To learn how to be effective in the area of social change	3.3	1.6	13.5	41.1	43.8	3.2	2.6	14.4	41.3	41.6
To improve the community	3.3	1.2	6.6	50.1	42.2	3.3	0.8	10	47.4	41.8
To improve society as a whole	3.3	1.2	11.8	44.8	42.2	3.2	1.6	14.5	43.7	40.2
To live out faith or ethical convictions	3.2	3.9	14.1	42.6	39.3	3.2	3.0	13.6	45.1	38.4
To develop new skills	3.1	2.3	20.2	43.1	34.4	3.0	2.3	22.8	46.8	28.1
For the feeling of personal satisfaction	2.8	5.4	28.2	46.8	19.6	2.7	7.1	30.8	45.4	16.7
To enhance my academic learning	2.8	6.1	28.2	45.2	20.6	2.8	6.4	30.8	42.5	20.3
To fulfill my civic/social responsibility	2.7	5.9	31.1	47.6	15.4	2.7	9.0	31.2	42.2	17.6
To test out future career plans	2.6	13.0	33.8	36.9	16.4	2.6	11.3	31.4	39.6	17.7
To enhance my résumé	2.2	19.6	49.8	25.3	5.3	2.1	22.5	46.7	26.3	4.4
To enhance my chances of acceptance to medical, law, dental, business, or graduate school	2.0	38.9	33.5	21.2	6.4	1.9	40.9	32.0	21.4	5.8
As a course requirement	1.4	69.0	20.4	9.4	1.3	1.5	63.8	26.1	8.4	1.8

TABLE 2. SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS (N=611)

