

# **Reflections Upon Community Engagement: Service-Learning and Its Effect on Political Participation After College**

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## **Abstract**

This article addresses the gap in our understanding of service-learning and its enduring influence on political engagement by analyzing the results of an alumni survey. Chi-square tests were performed to examine the relationship between 5 curricular and cocurricular undergraduate experiences and 10 types of political engagement after graduating. Analysis demonstrated that organizational involvement, campus leadership, and volunteering had limited influence, whereas service-learning had the greatest impact of the factors studied on political participation after college. Service-learning significantly affected behaviors such as voting and donating money to political candidates as well as forms of political activity that more explicitly reflect social change activism such as social movement organization membership and participation in protests. Notably, classes with merely a service add-on showed no positive effect on any political behaviors under examination. This finding stresses how reflection can heighten awareness and deepen knowledge about community needs and facilitate the attitudinal and identity development that promote lasting activism.

## **Introduction**

Service-learning has developed a strong presence at colleges throughout the United States since the Campus Compact was formed in 1985 by three university presidents to promote this form of pedagogy. As of 2012, the organization's membership numbered 1,120 institutions of higher education, representing about 6 million students. More than 95% of these schools offer service-learning courses (with an average of 66 courses per campus) that require students to address community needs in areas such as poverty, environmental sustainability, education, and health care (*Campus Compact, 2013*). The increasing popularity of service-learning largely reflects the belief that this teaching strategy provides a transformational learning experience that develops civic engagement among students. However, few studies demonstrate whether this intensive form of pedagogy pays real dividends in regard to long-term engagement with the community (*Finley, 2011*;

*National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2005*). In particular, we know very little about the enduring impact of service-learning on specific political activities relevant to civic engagement such as voting, signing petitions, and participating in protests or boycotts. The aim of this study was to address this gap in our understanding.

A survey of alumni at a midsized university in the southeastern United States examined this key question, helping us better understand how undergraduate experiences in service-learning courses influence activism after college. Questionnaires were mailed to all College of Liberal Arts graduates who earned a bachelor's degree 2 or 3 years prior. Alumni responses yielded 50 contingency tables for identification of statistically significant associations between the undergraduate activities and political behaviors after graduating college. Chi-square tests were used to measure the influence of service-learning and four additional curricular or cocurricular experiences on 10 political behaviors.

This article first reviews the literature on service-learning and its effects on civic engagement. Next, it discusses the alumni survey methodology and the analytical techniques applied to the data. It then moves to a presentation of the findings and applies social movements theory to help interpret the results. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of the broader implications of service-learning for the political arena and social movement sector.

## **Service-Learning and Civic Engagement**

As service-learning has gained momentum in secondary and postsecondary education over the past couple of decades, scholarship on this subject has increased substantially. Due to the considerable efforts of researchers in various academic domains, we currently have a much better understanding of best practices in the field and evidence suggestive of its ability to provide a meaningful learning experience for students. However, research concerning the question of service-learning and its impact on civic engagement is limited in several ways. First, most research examines the influence of the service-learning experience on students over the course of a semester in a single class (*Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Huisman, 2010; Kendrick, 1996; Mobley, 2007*). Although it is important to determine the short-term impact of this form of pedagogy on student development, it is also necessary to investigate its long-term effects. This is particularly relevant given the claims of service-learning practitioners that this teaching strategy provides transformative,

enduring changes among students. Unfortunately, this assertion has largely remained untested.

Some studies, however, have addressed this question and explored the influence of service-learning on civic engagement over longer time periods. For instance, Aberle-Grasse (2000) examined the effects of enrollment in the Washington Study-Service Year (WSSY) at Eastern Mennonite University. Students in this program complete two semesters of service while living together in the target community. The author analyzed exit essays completed by every WSSY participant from 1989 to 1998, interviewed 16 alumni at a 1996 reunion, and surveyed 120 of the 230 alumni. Notably, she found short-term and long-term effects of the experience on value development, conceptual understanding, and cognitive and interpersonal skills. However, the conclusions of this study are limited by a focus on only one service-learning course and the lack of a comparison group. Like Aberle-Grasse, Smith-Korfmacher (1999) surveyed alumni to determine how enrollment in a service-learning class completed as an undergraduate affected their later decisions concerning their educations, careers, and tendency to continue with community-based work. However, this study's similar focus on just one class, lack of comparison group, and low response rate diminish the strength of its conclusions.

Another limitation of the scholarly research concerning the impacts of service-learning is a focus on attitudinal measures of civic engagement. Although service-learning practitioners suggest that the experience develops the moral capacity and civic behaviors of students, most studies focus exclusively on the former (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Eyler et al., 1997; Huisman, 2010; Kendrick, 1996; Mobley, 2007). For example, Eyler and her colleagues (1997) surveyed a national sample of 1,544 students from 20 different colleges using a strong pre- and posttest design. The authors found that service-learning significantly influenced the outcome measures, but these only captured changes in student attitudes and beliefs such as feelings of connectedness to the community, ability to see the systemic or political nature of social problems, feeling a need to give priority to greater social justice, and increased perspective-taking capacity. Although important, these findings do not tell us if this progression in attitudes related to civic engagement is accompanied by actual changes in civic behavior among students.

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) spearheaded a large study to address some of the methodological issues previously discussed (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2005). The national survey

of 19,394 former undergraduates from the 1994 freshman cohort examined the influence of service-learning on political participation 6 years after graduation. After controlling for several other factors, the study determined that service-learning has a significant effect on political engagement. Although this research represents an important advancement in our understanding of the connections between service-learning and actual political participation, it has two major limitations.

First, the measure of service-learning in the HERI study consists of a single question on the Cooperative Institutional Research Program College Student Survey (renamed the College Senior Survey in 2006): “Since entering college, indicate how often you performed community service as part of a class.” This question presents a serious validity concern since it fails to fully capture the meaning of the pedagogy, that is, the reflection component integral to service-learning. Unfortunately, this question does not differentiate between service-learning classes and their less academically rigorous cousin, the service add-on. Although it is an important option within an educator’s toolkit, the service add-on asks only that students complete a certain number of volunteer hours for a course—there is little expectation regarding the integration of the service experience with academic content. Due to a lack of specificity in the HERI survey question, we do not know whether respondents have actually taken a service-learning course.

The second drawback of the HERI study concerns its lack of development of the theoretical connections between service-learning and enduring political activism. The researchers explained the enduring influence of service-learning using a theoretical framework that largely draws from political philosophy and developmental psychology. Although instructive, this approach neglects the substantial insight gained over the past few decades within the field of social movements. An understanding of political participation is at the heart of this subdiscipline, but service-learning studies such as the HERI analysis have not taken advantage of the vast body of social movements research. However, incorporating the knowledge gained within the field of social movements is crucial to understanding the impact of service-learning. Social movement studies that examine political awareness and experience as well as efficacy and identity are particularly enlightening, as these are precursors to activism that we can expect to develop through service-learning classes.

The question of political participation is central to an understanding of social movements and therefore has attracted a great

deal of attention as the field has developed over the past few decades. Mass society (Kornhauser, 1959) and collective behavior (Turner & Killian, 1957) approaches, which view participation in relation to disconnected or psychologically troubled individuals, were largely discounted and gave way in the 1970s to more empirically grounded structural explanations, such as resource mobilization and political opportunity, which recognize a rational decision-making process (McAdam, 1982; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Oberschall, 1973). For instance, the resource mobilization model demonstrates the relevance of political knowledge to engagement in social change causes (McAdam, 1988; Van Dyke & Dixon, 2013; Van Dyke, Dixon, & Carlon, 2007; Voss & Sherman, 2000). Familiarity with movement strategies, tactics, and navigation in the political domain allows one to feel less intimidated by the political process and more comfortable using various methods to achieve claims. The strong association between political knowledge and participation helps to explain why prior political engagement is one of the strongest predictors of later activism (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1988).

Social movements research also has found that experience in the political arena influences decisions to engage in politics later on due to feelings of efficacy that develop through participation (Carmin & Balsler, 2002; Diani 1995; McAdam, 1988; Rochon & Meyer, 1997). Political experience acts as a cognitive filter that shapes an understanding of how actions will be effective, and this interpreted sense that one can make a difference facilitates an increase in activism (Carmin & Balsler, 2002). For instance, McAdam (1988) found that White students from northern colleges volunteering for the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project in 1964 achieved social change goals through their participation, and their increased feelings of efficacy led to decisions to join political groups related to the women's, student, and peace movements after the project ended. This study clearly demonstrates how an understanding of accomplishment within the political domain results in further engagement in the legislative and electoral arena.

In response to the resource mobilization perspective and its emphasis on structural processes, other social movement researchers shifted to the new social movements framework that emphasizes cultural processes. These studies examined new movements, such as those aiming for women's rights, peace, and an ecologically sound environment, that stress postmaterialist values of quality of life and self-realization and not just Marxist considerations of structural position (Buechler, 1995; Johnston, Larana, & Gusfield, 1994; Melucci, 1989; Morris & Mueller, 1992). This model con-

tributes substantially to our understanding of political participation by demonstrating the significance of grievances, ideology, and identity.

With regard to grievances and ideology, new social movements research demonstrates that unease with the status quo and the ability to make sense of a problem's source provide bystanders with considerable motivation to become more active and participate in the political arena (Krauss, 1988; Opp & Gern, 1993; Schussman & Soule, 2005; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986; Szasz, 1994). For instance, Walsh and Warland's (1983) study of activism after the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island emphasized how development of a critical awareness of the situation and discontent linked to government inadequacies led to greater political engagement by residents in the affected area.

Research within the area of new social movements also highlights the processes of socialization that create an identity conducive to political involvement (Crossley, 2002; Diani, 1995; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Melucci, 1989). For example, the self-concept of "activist" that develops through interaction with others in the political arena establishes a commitment to this identity that encourages enduring political engagement. Regarding the significance of identity, an in-depth investigation of the women's movement shows that activists within lesbian feminist communities developed boundaries establishing differences between dominant and challenging groups, consciousness affecting interpretation of the situation, and negotiation of social definitions that shaped their political identity (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). This self-understanding subsequently influenced their commitment to further participation in social change activism.

A complete understanding of service-learning and its influence on enduring political participation necessitates the application of social movements theory. The present study helps to remedy this gap in prior research. In addition to addressing this theoretical concern of service-learning scholarship, this study also tackled methodological issues mentioned in this review of the service-learning literature, in large part by using a valid measure of service-learning. In the following section, I discuss in more detail the alumni survey and analytical techniques that incorporate these methodological improvements.

## Data and Methods

In Fall 2012, a questionnaire was mailed to alumni of Herndon University (a pseudonym), a midsized institution in the southeastern United States. Herndon, like many colleges, has made an effort in recent years to promote service-learning. This includes establishing an office staffed by administrators to develop and oversee service-learning. Efforts to advance service-learning by this office include a high-profile program to sponsor Herndon student community service in developing countries and an honors curriculum with a focus on service-learning.

Herndon University is committed to service-learning, but the school is hardly a hotbed of student activism. According to the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey of freshmen entering Herndon in 2005 (roughly the cohort of this study's alumni survey), only 39% considered it "essential" or "very important" to keep up to date with political affairs, and 20% felt this way about influencing the political structure (*Pryor et al., 2005*). Comparatively, 73% reported it "essential" or "very important" to be very well off financially, and 62% thought in this manner about "becoming an authority in my field." Overall, 19% of the freshmen considered themselves liberal (and less than 2% far left), 37% conservative, and 3% far right. Moreover, political protest is a rare occurrence at the university. From 2005 to 2010, there were only two actions organized by Herndon students: a rally for gay rights and a vigil to raise awareness of sexual violence.

The College of Liberal Arts (CLA) is the core of the university's undergraduate program. Reflecting national trends in higher education, CLA emphasizes its ability to prepare students for professions, but holds to its mission of developing critical thinking and character. Reflecting these aims, faculty are encouraged to incorporate service into their classes. This study's alumni survey is limited to this college since it allows for some control over third variables such as age, major, and college mission while supplying enough variation in service-learning experiences. (For instance, all students in some schools within the university must complete a service-learning experience to receive their degree.) Moreover, focusing on this particular college within the university enabled the study to take advantage of a CLA faculty survey completed by this investigator in the year prior. The faculty survey provided important contextual information through analysis of its qualitative data and informed the design of the alumni survey.

The survey was distributed to the 386 CLA students who graduated with a bachelor of arts or bachelor of science degree between May 2009 and December 2010. Although a survey of alumni further removed from college would also help our understanding of the long-term influence of service-learning, the shorter time frame of this study is valuable for several reasons. First, a survey that compares political engagement of alumni 2 or 3 years after graduating provides important information about the impact of service-learning experiences over time and captures the time period covering a significant transition into adulthood (*Hyde & Jaffee, 2000; Niemi & Sobieszek, 1977; Sherkat & Blocker, 1994*). This offers a meaningful contrast to studies that measure changes in student levels of civic engagement over the course of a single semester. Second, a review of student records shows that many of the respondents completed their service-learning classes as freshmen or sophomores, so more than 2 or 3 years had passed since their last service-learning experience (this information was triangulated by the CLA faculty survey). Third, a shorter time frame since graduation controls for other factors of adulthood that could affect the data, while directing us toward the enduring impact of service-learning (*Mortimer & Simmons, 1978*). Finally, Herndon, like many schools, does not maintain accurate records of service-learning classes, so it was necessary to survey recent alumni in order to mitigate recall issues. Although the accuracy of alumni recall leaves room for concern, it is reasonable to assume that these graduates would remember these fairly recent service-learning classes, which reflect a distinctive experience in the curriculum. Memory issues were also limited by designing the questionnaire to include estimation strategies and cognitive recall sets before the service-learning questions (*Bradburn, Sudman, & Wansink, 2004; Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000*).

This study used several strategies to obtain a high response rate, including prenotices, several reminders, emphasis on university administration endorsement, and multiple forms of communication (*Dillman, 2007*). After securing IRB approval, 386 surveys were mailed to alumni; however, 19 questionnaires remained undeliverable despite several attempts to obtain accurate contact information. Alumni completed and returned 150 questionnaires, a 41% response rate. Although this level of response is consistent with other mail surveys, a higher rate was expected due to alumni connectedness to the university and the design strategies employed. Some of the lack of response can be attributed to insufficient records kept by the university regarding alumni contact

information. It became evident that the announcements, surveys, and reminders were mailed to parent or local apartment addresses reflecting undergraduate residence, and the materials were not forwarded to the alumni's new residences. Follow-up phone calls and e-mails to respondents helped somewhat to determine current addresses, but telephone numbers and e-mails were also unreliable. Importantly, however, the data reflect few systematic differences between respondents and nonrespondents.

The questionnaire constructed for this research asked respondents to indicate whether they have engaged (or not) in 10 different political behaviors since graduating from Herndon. These reflect a wide spectrum of activities, from more institutional forms such as voting and donating money to political candidates to involvement more indicative of social change activism such as signing petitions, joining a social movement organization, and participating in boycotts or protests.

In addition to several demographic questions, the survey instrument asked alumni to indicate their participation in a number of curricular and cocurricular activities as college students. In particular, the questionnaire determined the influence of five curricular and cocurricular experiences: (1) service-learning, (2) service add-ons, (3) volunteering, (4) organizational involvement, and (5) campus leadership. Service-learning is the most difficult of these experiences to measure, so careful attention was paid to helping respondents distinguish between service-learning, service add-ons, and volunteering. In order to address potential validity and reliability concerns, cognitive design techniques were applied to the construction of the questionnaire (*Dillman & Tarnai, 1991; Jobe & Mingay, 1989*). In questions that directly preceded the service-learning item, definitions were provided for volunteering and the service add-on, which asks students to volunteer for a class with no graded reflection requirement. By contrast, the service-learning question included a definition emphasizing the obligation to complete service and graded reflection. In addition, thorough pretesting of the questionnaire was conducted to address potential validity or reliability concerns (*Dillman, 2007*). Interviews with analysts and a sample of alumni were used to improve the cognitive aspects of the questions, and a small pilot study confirmed the validity of the service-learning questions.

Chi-square tests were performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the five curricular and cocurricular undergraduate experiences and the 10 forms of political engagement practiced after graduating. This procedure

tested the null hypothesis that there is no association between each pair of row and column variables in the 50 two-by-two tables analyzed in this study. Larger values of  $\chi^2$  provide more evidence against the null hypothesis that service-learning has no enduring influence on activism. Although  $\chi^2$  is the appropriate test of the relationships between the variables, it becomes more accurate as the expected cell counts increase. Due to cell counts less than five accompanying the sample size, it was not possible to reliably introduce control variables into the tests. However, the analytical strategy comparing independent variables in the 50 tables acts to control for additional explanatory variables (Nardi, 2006).

## Findings

Institutional data showed that whites, females, and students of traditional age represent majorities in the College of Liberal Arts at Herndon. Slightly more than 60% of the undergraduates were female during the 2004 to 2010 time frame of the alumni respondents' enrollment, while nearly all students were younger than 25. The population data also reflected a race distribution of approximately 60% non-Hispanic White, 20% Black, and 5% Asian, with even smaller percentages of Hispanic and other races. In comparison to the sample for this study, the alumni respondents somewhat overrepresented females (71% of the respondents) and were slightly older, which likely reflects the increased ability to contact those with a more stable residential pattern (see Table 1). The distribution of alumni race in the sample also included a higher percentage of Whites (85% of respondents) and a lower percentage of Blacks (10%) and races/ethnicities other than Asian.

The distributions of income and education are not too surprising given the aspirations of alumni and how recently they completed their undergraduate degree. Respondents are low earners (41% had an income less than \$20,000 in 2011), but we can expect these individuals to achieve significant monetary gains as they build careers. Nearly one third are enrolled in graduate school, 26% have already earned a master's degree, and 4% earned a more advanced degree.

**Table 1. Alumni Demographics (n=150)**

Gender	Female	71%
	Male	29%
Race	White	85%
	Black	10%
	Asian	5%
Age	24	26%
	25	42%
	26	24%
Income 2011	Less than \$20,000	41%
	\$20,000-\$39,999	37%
	\$40,000-\$59,999	14%
	\$60,000-99,999	6%
	\$100,000 or more	2%
Education	Master's or higher	30%
	Currently enrolled in graduate school	

Herndon alumni, although not yet experiencing high incomes, were mostly raised in middle- and upper-middle-class families that tended to encourage political participation. Consequently, they are likely to display greater political participation than similarly aged peers who were not raised in their class position or who have not obtained their level of education (Paulsen, 1991; Snow & Soule, 2010; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Since graduating from Herndon, over two thirds of alumni have voted in a national, state, or local election (see Table 2); in contrast, analysis of census data indicates that about 25% of young adults voted during the time period covered in the survey (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, 2011). Notably, 23% of Herndon alumni contributed to a political campaign, and slightly more than one fourth contacted or visited a government official. A further indication of their elevated levels of political engagement is reflected in the 35% of respondents who attended a political meeting since graduating, markedly higher than the 2% of non-college graduates of similar age who attended any type of public meeting (Godsay, Kawashima-Ginsberg, Kiesa, & Levin, 2012). Even higher rates of participation were observed in lower cost activities such as signing a petition, completed by nearly two thirds of respondents. Participation in the three activities that reflect a more explicit social change agenda was also relatively high among Herndon alumni. Slightly more than a quarter of Herndon alumni claimed membership in a social

movement organization, and 14% participated in a protest, march, demonstration, or rally since graduating from Herndon. Further indicating pronounced engagement in social movements, half of the respondents boycotted a product due to the social or political values of the company.

**Table 2. Political Participation After Graduation**

Voted in a national or state election	70.1%
Voted in a local election	68.2%
Donated money to a political candidate	23.1%
Became a member of a social movement organization	26.4%
Expressed opinion on a community or political issue <i>by signing a petition</i>	60.5%
Expressed opinion on a community or political issue <i>by contacting a newspaper or magazine</i> (e.g., writing an op-ed article or a letter to the editor)	12.4%
Expressed opinion on a community or political issue <i>by contacting or visiting a public official</i>	26.5%
Attended a political meeting (e.g., town hall or city council meeting)	35.2%
Not bought something or boycotted it because of the social or political values	50.7%
Participated in a protest, march, demonstration, or rally	14.4%

Note. Percentage indicates engagement in the activity since graduating.

Herndon alumni not only have been politically active since graduating, they recall being very involved in the curricular and cocurricular aspects of college while undergraduates (see Table 3). An overwhelming majority (80%) volunteered in the community, independent of class requirements, while attending Herndon. Alumni were very involved in campus organizations; nearly all respondents (96%) had been a member of at least one organization, club, or sports team, with 40% reporting that they participated in “several” or “many.” These figures include the 41% of alumni who indicated they were members of a social fraternity or sorority as Herndon students (not displayed in the table). Remarkably, nearly three fourths of respondents held a leadership position in an organization.

Regarding the key variable of interest, two thirds of alumni reported that they had a service-learning experience as an undergraduate, and nearly three quarters of the alumni in this category completed two or more service-learning courses. Moreover, the hours of service that alumni fulfilled in this type of class added up. Of these respondents, 44% completed between 10 and 29 hours of

community service for these classes over the course of their undergraduate career, and more than one third completed 30 or more hours.

**Table 3. Curricular and Cocurricular Experiences as an Undergraduate**

Service-learning	yes	66.7%
Number of service-learning courses	<i>one</i>	28.6%
	<i>two or three</i>	51%
	<i>four or more</i>	20.4%
Total hours of s-l service component	<i>1-9 hours</i>	21%
	<i>10-29 hours</i>	44%
	<i>30 or more hours</i>	35%
Service add-on	yes	48.3%
Volunteering (not for a class)	yes	80.3%
Organizational involvement	<i>none</i>	4.1%
	<i>just a few</i>	55.8%
	<i>several</i>	19.7%
	<i>many</i>	20.4%
Organization leadership position	yes	72.8%
Student government leadership	yes	12.2%

The extensive campus and community involvement could help explain an association with relatively high levels of political participation among alumni. However, it remains to be seen how each of these undergraduate activities is related to the different forms of political engagement. The chi-square results in Table 4 respond to this central question of the study. Some general findings from the analysis deserve mention. First, there is no political behavior upon which all five undergraduate experiences had a significant effect. Donating money to a political candidate and becoming a member of a social movement organization (SMO), such as the NAACP, Amnesty International, or PETA, shared the most, with each of these political behaviors being associated with three undergraduate experiences. Second, none of the curricular or cocurricular activities had an impact on expressing opinions through print media or by contacting government officials or boycotting products. Interestingly, campus leadership and taking a class with a service add-on had a negative association with the latter political activity.

Comparing the five undergraduate experiences tells us more about their relative importance. Of primary interest for this study was the influence of service-learning. Service-learning had an impact on more of the examined political behaviors (six) than any

other undergraduate experience. Service-learning had a significant effect on donating money to a political candidate and attending a political meeting. Notably, it is the only undergraduate experience that had a significant effect on voting. It also had an influence on two forms of political engagement connected to social movement activity: SMO membership and protest participation. It was the only undergraduate experience to affect the latter. This is especially noteworthy given that protest is the most radical form of political participation identified in the survey. Regarding the more conventional social movement activity of joining an SMO, we found that the political behavior upon which service-learning had the most significant effect was membership in these activist groups.

**Table 4. Influence of Undergraduate Experiences on Political Participation Among Alumni (Chi-Square Test)+**

	Organizational Involvement	Campus Leader	Volunteer	Service Add-on	Service Learning
Voted in a national or state election	.942	---	1.252	---	*4.917
Voted in a local election	.525	---	.087	---	*4.165
Donated money to a political candidate	**8.084	2.114	**10.265	.597	*6.478
Became a member of a social movement organization	*5.432	*5.467	2.768	---	**9.456
Expressed opinion on a community or political issue <i>by signing a petition</i>	**8.086	.218	**7.356	---	2.136
Expressed opinion on a community or political issue <i>by contacting a newspaper or magazine</i>	.129	.791	.166	.004	2.507
Expressed opinion on a community or political issue <i>by contacting or visiting a public official</i>	2.340	.397	1.306	.039	2.214
Attended a political meeting	.992	---	*4.681	.017	*4.727
Not bought something or boycotted it because of the social or political values of the company	1.242	---	.441	---	2.327
Participated in a protest, march, demonstrated, or rally	1.890	2.787	3.310	---	*3.842

Note. +Chi-square values are reported only for those variables that showed a positive effect on the measure of political engagement.

\*Significant at the  $p < .05$  level, \*\*significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

The service add-on did not have an effect on any of the 10 political behaviors, which is interesting since this is the undergraduate experience most similar to service-learning. In fact, it had a negative association with voting, signing a petition, and all three of the more direct forms of social movement activism. Although the

service add-on and service-learning both require student service to the community, the reflection component essential to service-learning apparently results in a high-impact experience with regard to enduring political behavior.

Organizational involvement and volunteering (not for a class) were the other two undergraduate experiences that had a significant effect on more than one political behavior. Both influenced financial contributions to political candidates and petition signing, but they diverged on SMO membership and attendance at political meetings. Organizational involvement, but not volunteering, had an influence on membership in activist groups. Notably, SMO membership was the only political behavior for which campus leadership had an effect.

To summarize the main findings, of the five undergraduate activities, a service-learning experience had the broadest impact on political participation among alumni and also the most influence on the behaviors more directly associated with social change activism. A service add-on experience did not have an influence on any of the 10 political behaviors, which clearly suggests the importance of fully integrating service with class material through reflection if the pedagogical aim is long-term political engagement.

## Discussion

There is a strong tendency by researchers in the field of service-learning to interpret its relevance to political engagement through frameworks central to education, developmental psychology, and political philosophy. Although these approaches are instructive, here we developed a more complete understanding of service-learning and its influence on activism by applying social movements theory. This explanatory direction is exceedingly useful given the depth of scholarship in this field showing how engagement with political causes facilitates greater political participation (*Diani, 1995; McAdam, 1988; McAdam et al., 1988; Snow & Soule, 2010; Taylor, 1989; Van Dyke et al., 2007; Wiltfang & McAdam, 1991*).

Of striking relevance to service-learning, social movements research tells us how the awareness of community needs and increased familiarity with methods for addressing these concerns, in addition to the feelings of efficacy and political identity that develop from encounters within the political arena, increase the likelihood of future involvement. Accordingly, we can expect the experience of working to address community needs through direct service, community-based research, and advocacy in service-

learning classes to provide the context for political socialization that heightens student engagement in politics after the classes end. Herndon courses that ask students to tutor underprivileged school-children or help feed the homeless, study the effects of pollution in less-developed countries and educate those affected regarding the associated health and environmental concerns, or research a social problem and choose social movement tactics to address it as a group provide fertile ground for the cultivation of long-term political engagement. When properly executed, the coursework and related service of this pedagogy have the potential to develop the following attributes that result in enduring political behaviors among students: (a) an awareness of community issues, (b) knowledge of various forms of political engagement, (c) a belief in their ability to accomplish positive change, and (d) a moral-political identity.

First, service-learning raises student awareness of needs within the community (Aberle-Grasse, 2000; Huisman, 2010; Myers-Lipton, 1998). This is accomplished when community concerns are identified in concert among the instructor, students, and community partner, as best practices dictate (Gelman, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001). Although the instructor often strongly guides the process, students should at the very least be required to read background material regarding the community issues they will tackle, a review that increases their knowledge of social concerns. Students also become aware of community needs as they participate in the service activity, an understanding that intensifies when the service is accompanied by interaction with those being helped (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Immersion of students in the community they serve facilitates even greater awareness and sensitivity to the problems at hand, which further develops thinking that challenges the status quo (Aberle-Grasse, 2000). As social movements research demonstrates, this critical awareness of pressing social issues provides a favorable disposition for political involvement later on (Krauss, 1988; Opp & Gern, 1993; Schussman & Soule, 2005; Snow et al., 1986; Szasz, 1994; Taylor & Whittier, 1992; Walsh & Warland, 1983).

Accompanying the greater awareness of community needs provided by service-learning is the opportunity for students to become familiar with methods of community engagement (Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Smith-Korfmacher, 1999; Stokamer, 2013). When students engage in community-based research to advocate for a women's shelter and set up a booth outside a Wal-Mart to distribute the informational materials they produced (Bach & Weinzimmer, 2011); organize a supermarket fair to promote a food stamp enrollment

campaign and enroll the poor in a food stamp program (Porter, Summers, Toton, & Aisenstein, 2008); or work together as a team to create newsletters, brochures, and websites for nonprofit community organizations such as a youth support center (Dubinsky, 2002), they gain practical skills that provide experience with the methods of political engagement. As prior research convincingly has shown, the development of civic skills, including the communication, organizational, and tactical capabilities garnered through service-learning experiences mentioned in the previous examples, helps individuals feel more comfortable with engagement in the political arena, less intimidated with the methods, and more knowledgeable about how to actually employ them (Beeghley, 1986; Hillygus, 2005; Niemi & Sobieszek, 1977; Verba et al., 1995.)

Experience with political engagement through their service-learning courses also breeds confidence and an understanding among students that they can accomplish positive change (Aberle-Grasse, 2000; Eyler et al., 1997; Kendrick, 1996; Mobley, 2007; Myers-Lipton, 1998). For instance, Mobley (2007) found that students who organized events for a homelessness awareness week, including a local restaurant fund raiser, distribution of materials about homelessness at the student unions on campus, and a petition campaign directed at the governor of South Carolina, had significant gains in believing that they can make a difference advocating for social change. As several studies indicate, these feelings of efficacy are key to further political activity (Biggs, 2006; Carmin & Balseer, 2002; Corrigan-Brown, Snow, Smith, & Quist, 2009; Ennis & Schreuer, 1987; Hirsch, 1990; Opp & Gern, 1993; Passy & Giugni, 2001; Paulsen, 1991; Verba et al., 1995; Winston, 2013).

Finally, service-learning has the ability to facilitate enduring political participation by developing a moral-political identity of compassion, justice, and activism among students (Youniss, 2009; Youniss & Yates, 1997). In their study of Black parochial high school students, Youniss and Yates (1997) discussed the process by which this form of pedagogy helps construct a moral-political identity. Through working in a soup kitchen serving the homeless, the privileged students in the course developed compassion and drew connections to the poor living conditions and treatment of other disadvantaged groups. Youniss and Yates referred to the importance of transcendence and how situating oneself in the larger sociohistorical context facilitates the maturation of moral-political identity. They noted, "Transcendence involves recognition that aspects of one's life are shared with the lives of others so that meaning depends on the self's relationship with others, as individuals and

as members of society” (p. 61). Importantly, the transcendence realized through service-learning develops a moral-political identity, which provides a solid foundation for political participation (Buechler, 2000; Johnston et al., 1994; Klandermans, 1994; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; McAdam et al., 2001; Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

Admittedly, other college experiences such as volunteering, community service, and organizational leadership could also help students become aware of community issues and knowledgeable about the various types of political participation. Moreover, through these activities, undergraduates might develop feelings of efficacy and moral-political identity. However, the data of this study show that service-learning is unique in its ability to significantly influence the various forms of political engagement among alumni. To reiterate, service-learning not only had a significant effect on six of the 10 political engagement variables, with the next-closest college experience only having an effect on just three, but it was also the sole undergraduate activity to influence voting and protest, a much more radical form of political participation. What explains the increased capacity of service-learning to promote enduring political engagement?

The answer to this question surfaces when we examine the negligible effects on political development of the community service add-on in contrast to the significant influence of service-learning. This comparison highlights the critical difference between these two pedagogical strategies, which is the addition of a reflection component integral to service-learning. In their reflection through journals, class discussion, essays, and other techniques, students carefully consider their service experience and draw connections to the course material. This thoughtful, intellectual engagement with the service heightens awareness, deepens knowledge, and facilitates attitudinal and identity development (Astin & Vogelgesang, 2006; Youniss & Yates, 1997). When reflection requires higher order critical thinking skills that push students to more fully analyze, question, and evaluate their service in relation to community needs, we can expect even greater gains in these areas (Myers-Lipton, 1998). Service-learning, with its requisite consideration of community service with respect to course material, is uniquely positioned as a college experience to develop a long lasting commitment to political activity.

## Conclusion

This study presses service-learning scholarship further by using insight gained from social movements research to help us better understand the influence of this form of experiential learning on political participation. Of interest to both service-learning and social movements scholars, the findings point toward a potential shift in political engagement as scores of college students with service-learning credits graduate each year. As these more politically active alumni continue to gain in numbers, decision makers in government will need to take notice. In addition to representing a potential source of resources to tap while campaigning, these experienced and motivated alumni will require that politicians acknowledge their support for social change goals. In a similar vein, social movements can expect the pool of potential activists to expand as students complete even more service-learning classes, especially those with a more explicit social justice agenda. These graduates possess civic and organizing skills useful to social movements as well as a burgeoning moral-political identity that encourages activism. The infusion of support from this group of service-learning students (former and current) with elevated levels of commitment and social capital would increase the potential of social movements to achieve their goals (*Amenta, Caren, & Olasky, 2005; Andrews, Ganz, Baggetta, Han, & Lim, 2010; Delgado, 1986; Ganz, 2000*). Moreover, we can expect many of these effects to be amplified as service-learning programs take hold more firmly in primary and secondary education (*Kielsmeier, Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Neal, 2004; Richards et al., 2013*).

A more thorough understanding of the enduring effects of service-learning on political participation would require a much larger sample of college students representative of the various types of higher education institutions. This larger sample will allow for generalization beyond the confines of elite universities such as Herndon and the inclusion of control variables in more sophisticated analyses (see, for example, *McAdam & Brandt, 2009*). A better understanding of the long-term impact of service-learning also necessitates measurement of political participation among alumni with larger and more varied gaps in years since graduation, but as mentioned earlier, this results in complications with the data that would need to be addressed. In addition, future research should account for the number and content of service-learning classes completed by students. This information can determine the increasing gains bestowed by additional hours of service-learning as well as differentiate between the impact of service-learning classes based

on the charity model and those with social justice aims (Lewis, 2004; Marullo & Edwards, 2000; Marullo, Moayed, & Cooke, 2009). With the increasing institutionalization of service-learning as a form of pedagogy and an accompanying development in record-keeping, these research goals can more readily be achieved (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). Indeed, comprehensive records maintained by colleges and universities would address the recall issues that inevitably occur when alumni are asked to remember courses as they are even further removed from their years in college. By analyzing institutional data, researchers will have greater confidence in the accuracy of information regarding enrollment in service-learning classes as well as the amount and type of service.

Admittedly, the research protocol suggested above is quite ambitious given the relatively early stage of service-learning institutionalization. Even arriving at an agreed-upon definition of service-learning among seasoned practitioners of this pedagogy can be a challenge, but a consistent classification is necessary for precise measurement. Research that takes advantage of this type of quality data will have greater capacity to determine the long-term impact of service-learning on political participation. Although this study provides an important step in this direction by utilizing a much more valid measurement of service-learning than previous alumni surveys, considerably more research will be required to fully understand how this curricular experience influences lasting engagement in the political arena.

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