

# **Mechanisms for Institutionalizing Service-Learning and Community Partner Outcomes**

Keely Jones Stater, Eric Fotheringham

## **Abstract**

Using data on service-learning partnerships from 255 universities receiving Learn and Serve America Grants in 2005, we ask (1) how different strategies used to institutionalize service-learning shape the perceived impact of the partnership on community groups, (2) how the level of service-learning program formality affects the perceived impact of service-learning partnerships for community partners, and (3) how community-campus partnership dynamics influence the perceived success of service-learning projects for community groups. We find that the incorporation of greater university resources, such as institutional funding and student time, into service-learning efforts makes substantially positive community group outcomes most likely. This study suggests that a university's choice of strategies to institutionalize service-learning can have different impacts on community groups.

## **Introduction**

Over the past twenty years, many campuses have established service-learning programs. Yet difficulties in obtaining resources for service-learning, trouble establishing incentives that encourage involvement, and struggles building sustainable programs present challenges to program growth. Such difficulties, combined with a desire to expand these programs, have resulted in a push to formalize service-learning and structure it into university systems (Bringle and Hatcher 2002; Fisher, Fabricant, and Simmons 2005; Furco 2002a; Morton and Troppe 1996). Scholars and practitioners argue that building service-learning into university structures will lead to more effective and sustainable community partnerships (Bringle and Hatcher 2000; Enos and Morton 2003; Furco 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Hinck and Brandell 2000; Holland 1997, 1999; Marullo and Edwards 2000). Yet there is little systematic inquiry into which methods used to implement service-learning are most beneficial for *community partners* (Bringle and Hatcher 2002; Bushouse 2005; Cruz and Giles 2000; Edwards, Mooney, and Heald 2001; Furco 2002a; Giles and Eyler 1998; Miron and Moely 2006; Rubin 2000; Sandy and Holland 2006). Instead, most studies focus on student, faculty, and university-specific outcomes (Astin et al. 2000; Bringle, Hatcher, and Games 1997; Morton 1995). In response,

this study explores how different processes for institutionalizing service-learning at universities impact community groups.

We see two main components involved in institutionalizing campus-community service-learning partnerships at the university that may have distinct impacts on community groups: (1) *integrating* service-learning participation into the fabric of the university (e.g., incorporating service-learning into core processes like student graduation requirements or faculty tenure evaluations) and (2) *formalizing* service-learning by creating formal organizational structures and accountability measures to shape participation (e.g., a stand-alone service-learning program office, full-time personnel, and separate accountability structures for service-learning offices). While integration and formalization often go hand in hand (*Bringle and Hatcher 2000; Holland 1997*), research illustrates that many universities separate these processes, choosing to formalize service-learning processes within separate offices or particular departments before (or instead of) integrating service-learning into core university-wide processes (*Furco 2002a, 2002b; Holland 1999*). The different service-learning outcomes and levels of community investment that these various strategies for institutionalization display have important implications for community partners (*Furco 2002a*). We also investigate the influence of partnership dynamics on the impact of service-learning partnerships on community groups, as some studies have found that the elements in this exchange relationship have a stronger influence on partnership outcomes and partnership sustainability than do the structures used to implement collaborations (*Austin 2000; Ostrander 2004*). By partnership dynamics, we mean specifically the distribution of time spent on the project and the project control between the university and the community group. In asking these questions, we hope to understand if different approaches used to incorporate service-learning into the university might have differing impacts on community groups.

## **Literature Review**

Most research, along with practitioner-focused service-learning guides, suggests that integrating service-learning into core university structures and processes increases the benefits of involvement for students and faculty participants and makes service-learning more likely on campus (*Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett 2000; Bringle and Hatcher 2002; Campus Compact 2000; Cox 2000; Furco 2002a; Gelmon et al. 2004; Jacoby 1996; Rubin 2000; Troppe 1996; Walshok 1999; Ward 1996*). For instance, *Hinck and Brandell (2000)* found that the presence of faculty incentives, such as the inclusion of service activity

in promotion and tenure evaluations, encouraged a greater number of campus-community partnerships. Similarly, Ostrander (2004) demonstrated that increased incentives for student participation, such as building service into core curricula or requiring service-learning for graduation, made formal partnerships and sustained partnerships more frequent. Holland (1997) too established that including community service-learning requirements in the core curriculum advanced service-learning institutionalization. In addition, she found that adding service to the university mission, creating support structures for service, and heightening publicity for community engagement also increased university support for community engagement. Such increased investment for faculty and student participants leads to greater attention and interest in service-learning projects and may result in higher quality projects for community groups.

Along with the degree to which service-learning is integrated into core university processes, the organizational structures in which service activities are housed and the processes that are used to implement them are considered equally influential on community group outcomes. For instance, Ostrander (2004) demonstrated that highly successful university-community partnerships were located within an organizational structure separate from the university's main structures that implemented community work. She argued that autonomous organizational structures allow mutual decision-making between service-learning programs and community partners and were crucial in encouraging long-term partnerships in her study. Similarly, Bringle, Hatcher, and Games (1997) and Bringle and Hatcher (2000) found that an autonomous service-learning office or an affiliation with service-focused Campus Compact led to greater service-learning activity on university campuses. Implementing service-learning through autonomous offices or programs allows greater control over and specificity in determining project outcomes for community groups (Ostrander 2004).

In the same way, the formal implementation processes that guide partnerships impact community partners. "Formal processes" are repeated standardized practices approved by official personnel and often include signed documents, standing office policies, standard evaluations, and quality standards for collaborations (Bringle and Hatcher 2002; Ostrander 2004; Walshok 1999). Standardizing the collaboration process in these ways increases predictability and sets clearer expectations for project outcomes. The additional oversight, control, specificity, and standardization

gained in formalizing project practices should have added positive impacts on community groups.

Finally, some scholars assert that partnership dynamics play the most important role in encouraging service-learning success for community groups. Ostrander (2004) found that partnerships involving equal decision-making power were more likely to be sustained and considered successful by both groups. Likewise, Austin (2000) demonstrated that partnerships were considered more sustainable when groups focused more attention on the collaboration by increasing monitoring and investing more organizational resources into the effort. As a result, the dynamics of the partnerships themselves may play the most important role in shaping service-learning project outcomes for community groups.

The distinct community group impacts associated with integrating service-learning into core university processes and formalizing structures used in service-learning become important as universities institutionalize service-learning in stages (Dorado and Giles 2004; Furco 2001, 2002a; Mulroy 2005; Vogelgesang, 2004). For instance, one university may have an office for community partnerships that is externally funded, competitively selects students, and is governed by nonuniversity personnel. A different university may require all students to participate in a service-learning course for graduation but have no university-wide policies or formal office to oversee projects. We suggest that such differences in institutionalization may lead to different impacts on community groups. For instance, community groups working with the first university office might benefit from greater student and faculty investment in projects, more consistent monitoring, and thus higher quality project outcomes. Groups working with the second university may not receive consistent results across classes and may receive fewer resources per project, but would instead benefit from more projects and more volunteers in total.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

We find new institutionalism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Friedland and Alford 1991) a useful framework to understand why there may be distinctions in how integration and formalization of service-learning impact community groups. New institutionalism suggests that an institution's organizational structure is constructed to facilitate smoother action toward the institution's goals and is built upon systems for understanding a participant's action in relation to institutional goals. In this context, service-learning

will be incorporated into organizational structures and processes at the university if or when it is considered to be a primary institutional goal. As more goals and core aspects of the university align with service-learning, it will become a shared goal among all university participants. This should increase the investment in and the understanding of service-learning for each student, faculty member, or other university participant and make successful outcomes for community groups more likely. Indeed, the literature points to differences in community collaboration practices for service-minded universities wherein the organizational structure is distinctly designed to engage in service collaborations (Furco 2001; Timmermans and Bouman 2005).

Given this theoretical link between goals and structure, it is more difficult for universities that do not include service in their primary goals to align the goals of each participant involved in the service project. For example, while students engaged in the project may focus on high grades and graduating, faculty involved in the project may focus on high teaching evaluations, student learning outcomes, and their tenure progress. Likewise community groups may focus on the specific benefits of project participation to the organization itself and reducing time constraints brought on by the project. To this end, community organizations often report that service-learning projects are more beneficial for students' learning than for their own organizations (Basinger and Bartholomew 2006; Edwards, Mooney, and Heald 2001; Marullo and Edwards 2000). In response, many universities create offices dedicated to service-learning project management, whose missions (and goals) specifically relate to community service. They also standardize service-learning processes to limit unpredictability and administrative burdens for community groups. In addition, universities formalize campus-community group relationships to provide clear expectations for project outcomes to community partners. When service-learning is formalized, it takes place in a standardized and routine way, is overseen through formal offices and by professional staff, and has standard procedures to evaluate and structure participation.

---

*“As more goals and core aspects of the university align with service-learning, it will become a shared goal among all university participants.”*

---

New institutional theory suggests that while formalized procedures and structures help to sustain service-learning and provide

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Variables Used in Regression Models**

		Frequency	Percent
<i>Organizational Impact</i>			
Other		77	32.08
Substantially Positive		163	67.92
Total		240	100.00

  

PARTNERSHIP DYNAMICS			
		Frequency	Percent
<i>Partnership Objectives Always Mutual</i>			
No		139	56.5
Yes		107	43.5
Total		246	100.0
<i>Over 40 Service Hours</i>			
Never		24	9.88
Occasionally or Rarely		114	46.91
Always or Frequently		105	43.21
Total		243	100.00

  

CONTROLS			
<i>Years Program Conducted Service-learning</i>			
		Frequency	Percent
One		7	2.92
One to Five		76	31.66
More than Six		157	65.42
Total		240	100.00

  

FORMALITY			
		Frequency	Percent
<i>Quality Standards for Service-learning</i>			
Never		28	12.84
Rarely		26	11.93
Occasionally		44	20.18
Frequently		55	25.23
Always		65	29.82
Total		218	100.00
<i>Full-time staff in S-L Program</i>			
No		177	70.24
Yes		75	29.76
Total		252	100.00
<i>Full-time Staff in S-L Program</i>			
No		78	31.08
Yes		173	68.92
Total		251	100.00
<i>Advisory Board</i>			
No		105	43.03
Yes		139	56.97
Total		244	100.00
<i>Number of Faculty and Staff Participating in S-L</i>			
	Mean	Median	Maximum
	41	27	545

  

	Observations	Mean	Median
<i>Number of Faculty and Staff in Service-learning program</i>	251	40	27
<i>Budget of program (natural log)</i>	249	10.8	10.9
<i>Number of Community Partners</i>	237	8.6	4

Based on frequency tabulations in Learn and Serve America 2005. Continued on facing page.

Table I (continued)

INTEGRATION					
Frequency			Percent		
<i>Service-Learning Incorporated into Evaluations</i>			<i>Service-learning In Development Plans</i>		
Never	51	24.17	Never	12	5.66
Rarely	47	22.27	Rarely	27	12.74
Occasionally	59	27.96	Occasionally	73	34.43
Frequently	37	17.54	Frequently	61	28.77
Always	17	8.06	Always	39	18.40
Total	211	100.00	Total	212	100.00
<i>Service-Learning in a Core Class</i>			<i>Faculty Recognition</i>		
No	125	58.41	Never	35	14.89
Yes	89	41.59	Rarely	34	14.47
Total	214	100.00	Occasionally	63	26.81
<i>Financial Support From University for S-L</i>			<i>Service-Learning in Strategic Plan</i>		
Never	7	2.92	Frequently	36	15.32
Rarely	23	9.58	Always	67	28.51
Occasionally	63	26.25	Total	235	100.00
Frequently	71	29.58	<i>Service-Learning in Strategic Plan</i>		
Always	76	31.67	No	52	23.21
Total	240	100.00	Yes	172	76.79
			Total	224	100.00

clear standards, they may not provide the same alignment with the overall goals of the university and therefore may not provide the same level of incentives to participate for all those involved. However, autonomous service-learning offices with missions more resembling those of community groups as well as clear procedures and expectations for service-learning collaborations may be more helpful to community groups than participation by students who share the same goals as the organization in their work on the project.

## Methods

To systematically explore the relationship between the structure of service-learning implementation and the perceived project outcomes for community groups, we employ data collected from a survey of 255 universities receiving Learn and Serve Grants from the Corporation for National and Community Service in 2005. The

Web-based survey (*Learn and Serve America 2006b*) is required to be completed by Learn and Serve grantees each year they receive funding; it includes questions on project funding, institutional support, service activities, and community partners, among other subjects. The frequency tables of these variables transformed for our analysis can be found in table 1.

Learn and Serve Grants are distributed to primary and secondary schools and colleges and universities around the country to provide training and technical assistance to teachers, administrators, parents, schools, and community groups to improve and sustain service-learning efforts (*Learn and Serve America 2006a*). One limitation of these data is that this sample may not represent all universities engaged in community-university partnerships. Another is the anonymity of the survey, which does not allow us to match additional institutional data on these colleges and universities to these data. In addition, we recognize that as grant recipients, Learn and Serve (LSA) institutions may be predisposed to have greater organizational capacities, receive greater university support, and generate more successful outcomes for community groups by virtue of having successfully competed for grants. Finally, these data are limited to responses provided by LSA-funded program directors and do not contain assessments by community groups themselves of project impact. Yet these data are expansive and provide us with the ability to systematically investigate many aspects of service-learning programs as well as their impact on community groups from the perspective of the LSA director. Moreover, the universities represented in the data do vary in their levels of service-learning formality, service-learning integration, partnership dynamics, and partnership outcomes, allowing us to examine the variable impacts of these different components of institutionalization on partnership outcomes.

We ask three questions: (1) what elements of a university's integration and formality of service-learning collaborations make it more likely that the director of a LSA-granted service-learning effort will report substantially positive impacts on community groups, (2) what is the likelihood that an LSA director-reported impact of service-learning on community groups is mediated by the level of formality of the partnership, and (3) what role do partnership dynamics play in the likelihood that an LSA director will report a service-learning collaboration as having a substantially positive impact on the community partner?

The variables used in this analysis are described in detail in table 1. LSA director-reported community group impact, our

dependent variable, indicates that the director of the office funded by the LSA grant answered the question, “Based on your experience with Learn and Serve funded activities over the past year, assess the impact of these activities and programs on the organizations that were served.” Possible answers were “substantial positive impact,” “moderate positive impact,” “no impact,” “moderate negative impact,” or “substantial negative impact.” Because almost no groups reported negative or null impacts and directors may inflate their success in reports to grantors, we considered a report of a “substantially positive impact” to be the best indicator of a positive impact on the community group, more than reporting a moderately positive or invisible impact. We dichotomize the variable accordingly (0 = not substantial positive effect and 1 = substantial positive effect). We feel that projects for which LSA directors reported substantially positive impacts exemplify a partnership that is more likely to be beneficial to the community partner and more likely to be sustainable.

We acknowledge that reporting by service-learning program directors may not necessarily align with the community partner’s perception of the project’s impact. However, without information from the community partner in the data, we must rely on the program director’s official report. Other studies also utilize outcomes reported by project stakeholders to reflect partnership impacts in a similar absence of data (*Miron and Moely 2006*). Given this limitation, we believe that the directors of LSA-funded projects do have some insight into the real impact of their work on the community groups with whom they partner. Moreover, it is important to understand how directors’ perspectives are shaped by service-learning structures, as LSA grant recipients directing service-learning efforts make important decisions regarding the manner in which service-learning projects are implemented, the resources community groups receive, and the elevation of service as a priority for the university. In essence, directors may serve as a bridge between the community and the university. As a result, their perceptions of community group benefits are among the influences shaping service-learning efforts and should be understood.

Previous research suggests that the integration of service-learning into core university processes will have a strong positive impact on community groups. Elements of integration described in table 1 include the incorporation of service into faculty and staff evaluation and promotion systems, the inclusion of service-learning in the core curricula for at least one major at the university, monetary support from the university for service-learning activity and

**Table 2: Correlations of Reduced Model Variables**

Positive Community Group Impact	1.000										
University Funding	0.277	1.000									
Core Courses	0.253	0.105	1.000								
Faculty Evaluations	0.071	0.309	0.115	1.000							
In Strategic Plan	0.112	0.265	0.265	0.298	1.000						
Goals Set Mutually	0.232	0.229	0.209	0.177	0.111	1.000					
Quality Standards	0.189	0.338	0.298	0.353	0.336	0.332	1.000				
Over 40 Service Hours	0.219	0.181	0.132	0.173	0.263	0.126	0.104	1.000			
Total Budget (natural log)	0.056	0.238	0.206	0.014	0.100	0.222	0.187	0.125	1.000		
Over 6 Years of Service-learning	0.110	0.130	0.007	0.218	0.277	0.116	0.184	0.156	0.309	1.000	
Full-time Staff	0.157	0.208	0.197	0.022	0.221	0.240	0.180	0.102	0.325	0.167	1.000
	Positive Community Group Impact	University Funding	Core Courses	Faculty Evaluations	In Strategic Plan	Goals Set Mutually	Quality Standards	Over 40 Service Hours	Total Budget (natural log)	Over 6 years of Service-learning	Full-time Staff

development, and the mention of service in the university's strategic plan (*Bringle and Hatcher 2000; Furco 2002a; Holland 1997; Walshok 1999*). We anticipate that each of these elements should be linked to more successful partnership outcomes. The variables "inclusion of service-learning in tenure processes" and "inclusion of service-learning in core courses" are dichotomized as they are in the survey design (0 = no and 1 = yes). The variable "receipt of monetary support" was dichotomized by grouping the answers "never or rarely" and "occasionally" receive university funding to represent little or no funding (0) and grouping "frequently" and "always" receive university support to represent the consistent receipt of university support (1). We refrain from using scaling methods to combine conceptual indicators because we are interested in directly observing the relative relationship of each concrete step universities use to implement service-learning. Factor analyses of the integration and formality constructs not reported in this article show similarities behind these conceptual indicators. Yet testing revealed that the collinearity of these items is not strong enough for their combined effect to better predict the likelihood of a successful partnership. These correlations are reported in table 2.

The formality of service-learning projects also plays a major role in shaping outcomes for community groups. Described in table 1, formality is measured by the presence of a full-time staff

member who spends 100 percent of his or her work time on coordination of this office (*Ostrander 2004; Walshok 1999*). This variable is dichotomous. The presence of a full-time 100 percent staff member is represented by a 1 and the lack of such a staff member is represented by a 0. We also use the presence of quality standards for service-learning to indicate higher levels of formality associated with service-learning activity in a university. This too is a dichotomous variable (0 = no, 1 = yes), as it is in the survey questionnaire. Quality standards were defined in the LSA survey as a set of criteria for engaging in service-learning accepted or disseminated by the university (*Learn and Serve America 2005*). These represent the presence of an agreed-upon, or formalized, definition of the components of service-learning. Quality standards are not considered to be evidence that service-learning is integrated into core university functions because their acceptance does not guarantee that service-learning is incorporated into university-wide processes (*Furco 2002a*).

Partnership dynamics can also influence the success and sustainability of service-learning activity and are described in table 1 (*Austin 2000; Ostrander 2004; Sandy and Holland 2006*). In particular, the community partner's level of input into decision making and the amount of resource sharing between partners are found to be important factors in collaboration success and longevity (*Austin 2000; Bringle and Hatcher 2002; Basinger and Bartholomew 2006; Ostrander 2004*). Scholars also note the role of reciprocity, level of attention, and balance of power in facilitating productive collaborative relationships (*Austin 2000; Foster and Meinhard 2002; Gray 1989; Guo and Acar 2005; Miron and Moely 2006; Oliver 1990*) and argue that mutuality is an important factor in fostering sustainability (*Maurasse 2002; Ostrander 2004*). We use the degree to which LSA directors report shared goals with community partners to indicate the mutuality of partnerships. We identify the amount of time the LSA director reported students spent on service-learning projects to indicate the degree of investment in the partnership. These variables are dichotomized (0 = no, 1 = yes) as they appear in the survey. We expect that greater attention to partnership work and shared decision making between the university and community group will be related to a higher likelihood of a report of positive impacts on community groups.

Also exhibited in table 1, we use the size of the service-learning budget as a continuous measure of program or office size, logging this variable to decrease its extreme variability between service-learning programs. Since larger organizations with greater funding

**Table 3: Logistic Regression Results: Likelihood of Substantially Positive Organizational Impact on Community Partner, Reported by LSA Grantees 2005**

(N = 155)	Odds ratio	Standard error	z-score	Significance
University Funding	1.739	0.352	2.730	**
Core Courses	3.149	1.396	2.590	**
Faculty Evaluations	0.830	0.147	-1.050	
In Strategic Plan	0.612	0.305	-0.990	
Quality Standards	2.045	0.876	1.670	~
Goals Set Mutually	1.086	0.181	0.500	
Over 40 Service Hours	1.964	0.601	2.210	*
Total Budget (natural log)	0.765	0.130	-1.580	
Over 6 Years Service-learning	1.702	0.683	1.320	
Full-time Staff	1.386	0.641	0.710	
LR chi2(9)	32.750			***
Log Likelihood	-81.817			
Pseudo R2	0.167			
Marginal effects	dy/dx	Standard error	z-score	Significance
University Funding	0.114	0.042	2.730	**
Core Courses	0.223	0.079	2.800	**
Faculty Evaluations	-0.038	0.036	-1.050	
In Strategic Plan	-0.095	0.090	-1.050	
Quality Standards	0.143	0.083	1.730	~
Goals Set Mutually	0.017	0.034	0.500	
Over 40 Service Hours	0.138	0.062	2.240	*
Total Budget (natural log)	-0.055	0.035	-1.580	
Over 6 Years Service-learning	0.109	0.082	1.330	
Full-time Staff	0.065	0.090	0.720	

Significance: ~p = .10; \*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01; \*\*\*p ≤ .001

are more likely to have formal offices to coordinate activity as well as to exist at universities that have incorporated service-learning into core university processes, controlling for organizational size should account for this possibility. We also include the number of years the university has been engaging in service-learning activity to control for greater potential for successful partnerships based on experience with repeated service activity (*Bringle and Hatcher 2002*). We dichotomize this measure between universities that have engaged in service-learning for over six years and those that have engaged in service-learning for less than six years, adding survey responses “less than one year” and “two to five years” to represent less than six years (0) and using the category “six or more years” to represent more than six years of service (1). While we cannot control for university size due to data limitations, these variables represent important controls that allow us to parse out the effects

of formality and integration from the effects of university size, the amount of service-learning activity, or length of engaging in service-learning at the university (Furco 2002a). Three universities lacked information on our variables of interest, reducing the number of universities in our analysis to 252.

These variables were then incorporated into a series of logistic regressions. We chose logistic regression for this analysis because it allows us to understand how formality and integration contribute to a greater probability of the LSA director reporting a substantially positive community partner outcome (Long 1997). Model one, reported in table 3, represents the cross-section of universities receiving LSA grants in 2005 and presents both odds ratios and marginal effects for this model. Models two and three, reported in table 4, analyze the impact of service integration on community groups separately for formal offices and less formal partnerships. Odds ratios and marginal effects are also reported for these models. A one-unit increase in the independent variable changes the odds that a director will report a substantially positive impact by a proportion equal to the odds ratio minus one. Thus, an increase in the independent variable raises the odds that the outcome will occur if the odds ratio is greater than one, and lowers the odds that the outcome will occur if the odds ratio is less than one. In contrast, the marginal effect measures the effect of a one-unit change in the independent variable on the probability (rather than the odds) that the outcome will occur.

## **Findings**

Looking at the cross-sectional analysis in table 3, we find that when service-learning is more integrated into core university processes and collaborations benefit from better partnership dynamics, the likelihood that an LSA director will report a substantially positive community group impact is significantly greater. As seen in table 3, greater access to institutional funds also increases the likelihood that an LSA director will report a substantially positive impact on the community partner. Likewise, LSA directors working in universities in which service activities are incorporated into the core university curricula are more likely to report a substantially positive outcome for community partners than are LSA directors working in universities in which service is not integrated into core university curricula. However, other elements of service-learning integration have little impact on an LSA director's assessment of community group outcomes. For instance, neither the incorporation of service-learning into faculty tenure evaluations nor the

**Table 4: Logistic Regression: Likelihood of Substantially Positive Impact on Community Partner by Presence of Full-Time Staff, Reported by LSA Grantees 2005**

NO FULL-TIME STAFF (N = 102)	Odds ratio	Standard error	z-score	Significance
University Funding	1.545	0.376	1.790	~
Core Courses	4.052	2.336	2.430	*
Faculty Evaluations	1.096	0.239	0.420	
In Strategic Plan	0.429	0.249	-1.460	
Quality Standards	1.235	0.248	1.050	
Goals Set Mutually	2.885	1.597	1.910	~
Over 40 Service Hours	2.352	0.916	2.200	*
Total Budget (natural log)	0.893	0.183	-0.550	
Over 6 Years Service-learning	1.277	0.587	0.530	
LR chi2(9)	26.410			**
Log Likelihood	-54.647			
Marginal effects	dy/dx	Standard error	z-score	Significance
University Funding	0.097	0.054	1.780	~
Core Courses	0.281	0.100	2.820	**
Faculty Evaluations	0.020	0.048	0.420	
In Strategic Plan	-0.176	0.111	-1.590	
Quality Standards	0.047	0.045	1.060	
Goals Set Mutually	0.220	0.103	2.130	*
Over 40 Service Hours	0.190	0.085	2.250	*
Total Budget (natural log)	-0.025	0.046	-0.550	
Over 6 Years of Service-learning	0.054	0.102	0.530	
FULL-TIME STAFF (N = 53)	Odds ratio	Standard error	z-score	Significance
University Funding	2.642	1.207	2.130	*
Core Courses	3.472	3.042	1.420	
Faculty Evaluations	0.494	0.214	-1.630	
In Strategic Plan	1.105	1.801	0.060	
Quality Standards	0.741	0.336	-0.660	
Goals Set Mutually	1.456	1.270	0.430	
Over 40 Service Hours	1.526	0.962	0.670	
Total Budget (natural log)	0.724	0.260	-0.900	
Over 6 Years of Service-learning	4.477	5.056	1.330	
LR chi2(9)	12.600			
Log Likelihood	-22.050			
Marginal effects	dy/dx	Standard error	z-score	Significance
University Funding	0.136	0.063	2.150	*
Core Courses	0.183	0.129	1.410	
Faculty Evaluations	-0.099	0.060	-1.650	
In Strategic Plan	0.014	0.241	0.060	
Quality Standards	-0.042	0.062	-0.680	
Goals Set Mutually	0.054	0.128	0.420	
Over 40 Service Hours	0.059	0.089	0.670	
Total Budget (natural log)	-0.045	0.051	-0.880	
Over 6 Years Service-learning	0.210	0.157	1.340	

Significance: ~p = .10; \*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01

inclusion of service-learning in the university's strategic plan had significant effects on the likelihood of LSA directors' reporting a substantially positive community group outcome. These findings suggest that when institutionalizing service-learning, funding and student participation may be most critical to community group benefit (as reported by the LSA director).

Considering partnership dynamics, the amount of time spent on projects is the most important predictor of LSA directors' reporting substantially positive impacts for community groups. LSA directors working in service-learning offices or programs in which students spend over forty hours on each service project are also more likely to report substantially positive outcomes for community partners than are those working in service-learning offices that require less than forty hours of service. Contrary to expectations, mutual decision-making between community groups and service-learning program directors did not play a significant role in the likelihood that an LSA director would assess community group outcomes as beneficial. Given these findings, the effect of partnership dynamics on the likelihood of LSA directors' reporting substantially positive community group outcomes does not supersede the impact of integrating service into university processes.

However, the cross-sectional findings also suggest that formality has little to do with the likelihood of a report of substantially positive community group outcomes (by the LSA director). Neither the presence of full-time service-learning staff nor more frequent use of quality standards for service-learning has a significant impact on the LSA director's perception of project influence on the community partner when partnership dynamics and the integration level of service are considered together. In addition, controls for service-learning budget size and a substantial number of years engaging in service-learning at the university have little impact on LSA directors' reporting a substantially positive community group outcome. The presence of quality standards is nearly significant and could prove to be more important in determining LSA directors' assessments that a project has substantially positive impacts on the community partner in a larger sample of universities.

These findings suggest that steps toward the integration of service-learning into university processes as well as attention to the dynamics of the partnerships themselves may have the greatest impact on an LSA director's perception of the influence of service-learning projects on community partners. However, given the mixed impact of elements describing integration and elements describing partnership dynamics, these findings could equally

suggest that resources, such as student time and university funding, are more crucial for predicting an LSA director's perception of community partner benefits than is the method of implementing service-learning.

Yet when we test the impact of service-learning institutionalization methods separately in formal versus informal offices in table 4, we find that there are differences in the impact of the institutionalization method on directors' perceptions based on the program's level of formality. For example, in offices *without* full-time staff, much like the cross-sectional model, measures of service-learning integration and partnership dynamics are most influential in predicting a report of a substantially positive outcome for community groups by the LSA director. For instance, the incorporation of service into core curricula again increases the likelihood that LSA directors will report substantially positive impacts on their community partners. Likewise, as students become more likely to spend over forty hours on service-learning projects, LSA directors working in informal service-learning offices are more likely to report substantially positive outcomes for their community partners. And, marginally significant, LSA directors working in service-learning programs without full-time personnel that enter into partnerships in which mutual goals are set with the community partner are more likely to consider the partnership's impact on community groups substantially positive. Contrary to the cross-sectional findings, university funding is only a marginally significant predictor that an LSA director working in a less formal office will report a substantially positive impact on the community group. The incorporation of service into faculty evaluations or the university's strategic plan also has little impact on the likelihood that LSA directors will assess the benefits of projects for community partners as substantially positive.

For those service-learning programs *with* full-time staff, only greater university funding impacts the likelihood that LSA directors will report the impact of service-learning partnerships as substantially beneficial for community groups. Neither the incorporation of service into the core curricula, the inclusion of service in faculty evaluations, the presence of quality standards for service-learning, nor partnership dynamics have an effect on the likelihood that an LSA director will report a substantially positive outcome for a community partner in offices with full-time staff. These results suggest that formal offices may have working dynamics distinct from those without full-time staff, but may be more dependent on funding to provide benefits to community groups. At the same time, student

participation and partnership dynamics are more influential on the likelihood that an LSA director working in an informal office will report substantially positive community group outcomes.

## Discussion

These results suggest that different methods used to institutionalize service-learning into the university do have different impacts on community partners (as perceived by LSA-funded project directors). Integrating resources for service-learning rather than a more general integration of service-learning practices into core university processes appears to provide the most significant benefits for community groups (as reported by LSA directors). The distribution of resources within partnerships also positively impacts the likelihood of LSA directors' reporting substantially positive community outcomes, particularly in informal programs. However, formality has little impact on benefits to community partners in the LSA director's assessment for the cross-section of universities in our data.

---

*“Integrating resources for service-learning . . . appears to provide the most significant benefits for community groups.”*

---

These results help us understand the mechanisms that may drive community partner benefits in university-community partnerships. More than crafting university systems that increase stakeholder investment or establishing processes that increase predictability and oversight, it is the amount of resources provided to community groups through partnerships that seems to be the most important predictor of an LSA director's perception of partnership success for the community partner. This is evidenced in our finding that components of institutionalization and partnership dynamics most directly related to project resources (student participation, amount of project hours, and institutional funding) have the greatest influence on the likelihood that an LSA director will report substantial positive effects on community groups.

Given these findings, a resource dependence explanation of community partnerships, in which community groups benefit most from resources distributed to them by their partners, provides the most reasonable explanation of the processes that drive community partner benefits (*Pfeffer and Salancik 1978*). This theoretical explanation also supports research on service-learning that finds that cursory participation in service-learning, even when it is well-integrated or overseen, often fails to provide the

intended assistance to community groups (*Basinger and Bartholomew 2006; Edwards, Mooney, and Heald 2001*). It also calls into question a student-centered approach to designing community projects in favor of a more multistakeholder or community justice-focused approach advocated by *Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000)* as well as *Maurasse (2002)*. As *Ostrander (2004)* and others suggest, resources exchanged between the university and community groups should be carefully considered in each collaboration.

However, students can play an important community benefit role in service-learning projects when they have greater investment in projects and spend significant amounts of time working with community groups. This finding resonates with the literature that seeks to build service-learning projects that enrich student participation by providing more substantial and meaningful projects (*Giles and Eyer 1998*). The increased time and greater responsibility

---

*“[U]niversities attempting to implement service-learning programs with greater community benefits should consider the amount of resources they are providing to community groups.”*

---

involved in such projects should allow students to meaningfully contribute to a community partner’s goals as well as their own. Substantial projects should become more likely when student participation in service-learning is a part of core university functions.

Our findings also suggest that offices with full-time staff may approach community partnerships differently than do service-learning centers that engage in service work primarily through faculty, volun-

teers, or part-time staff. Full-time staff may provide additional time and expertise to manage service partnerships, making the amount of student hours and continued mutual goal-setting less crucial in shaping outcomes than when full-time staff are lacking. This confirms the importance of focused oversight, planning, and predictability in ensuring beneficial outcomes for community groups. However, university funding continues to be most vital for staffed offices.

Given these findings, universities attempting to implement service-learning programs with greater community benefits should consider the amount of resources they are providing to community groups. In particular, they should prioritize institutional funding and also work to create more meaningful projects by distributing course credits for service-learning and increasing time requirements.

While the immediacy of the impact of course credit on community outcomes overshadows the impact of faculty rewards and administrative attention to service-learning, integrating these latter aspects of service into the university as well may provide important support structures that indirectly improve community outcomes.

Yet the presence of predictable, official processes or of project oversight by autonomous offices seems to make little difference, as long as the appropriate resources are in place to support the work being done. Universities considering formal offices and standardized procedures should continue to play an active supportive role in projects rather than leaving the work to the project office alone. Again, administrative support may indirectly enhance community group outcomes. Likewise, universities with little centralized oversight in place should work to ensure that the appropriate time is given to community group projects and that partnership dynamics are intentionally designed and monitored.

In turn, if LSA directors' assessments of community group benefits closely match community groups' own assessments of project outcomes, community groups can expect better results from service-learning partnerships that receive more university resources. Choosing to partner with universities that distribute resources to service-learning efforts through core university systems (like promotion and tenure and advancement to graduation) should lead to more successful outcomes for community groups as the goals of service and education are more closely matched. Such campuses may be more effective in linking students to community life, creating greater participant investment, and allaying some of the concerns linked to taking on student volunteers (*Basinger and Bartholomew 2006; Edwards, Mooney, and Heald 2001; Marullo and Edwards 2000*). Partnership dynamics are also an important consideration (*Miron and Moely 2006*). Although the degree of positive impact may be overstated by LSA directors, community groups should experience more positive outcomes when both community groups and university participants are involved in setting goals and more time is spent on projects.

Along with the implications of this study, we also consider its limitations and avenues for future research. These results predict the impact of integration, formality, and partnership dynamics on the likelihood that an LSA director will report a substantially positive outcome for community groups in community-university partnerships. We realize that there are serious limitations when depending on service-learning directors' assessments of project outcomes on community groups rather than groups' own assessments.

We also expect that data based on self-reporting to grantors may inflate the actual degree of impact on the community groups. Future studies could seek out more objective measures of partnership impact for each set of stakeholders: students, community groups, and universities. Similarly, these data are collected from programs or offices already implementing service-learning initiatives, so that formality and integration of service are more likely. Additional research could include a larger sample of universities with a more variable distribution of formality, integration, and general capacity. Finally, the impacts of partnerships often unfold over time. As a result, future work could trace the impact and success of these partnerships over multiyear periods, especially as institutions integrate service into their core functions (*Furco 2002a*).

## **Conclusion**

Maurasse (2002) argues that an era of social responsibility is driving many universities' interests in service and service-learning. As a result, university-community partnerships, including service-learning, are seen as avenues not only for students to learn but for the university to help the community in tangible and sustainable ways (*Marullo and Edwards 2000*). Our study finds that the approaches to service-learning that most influence community groups (from the perspective of service-learning directors) are the integration of resources for service-learning into the university fabric and attention to partnership dynamics. The strongest predictors of LSA directors' reporting substantially positive impacts on community partners were linked to university resources, such as funding streams and the incorporation of service-learning into core courses, as well as larger blocks of time dedicated to projects. We also find partnership dynamics to be more influential factors in predicting the likelihood that an LSA director working in more informal service-learning efforts will assess community group outcomes to be substantially positive. Based on these results, we suggest that institutional funding and course credit are important priorities for universities and that community groups should expect to benefit most from university partnerships that are institutionally supported.

## **References**

- Astin, A., L. Vogelgesang, E. Ikeda, and J. Lee. 2000. *How service learning affects students*. Los Angeles: University of California Higher Education Research Institute.

- Austin, J. E. 2000. Strategic collaboration between nonprofits and businesses. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 29 (1): 69–97.
- Basinger, N., and K. Bartholomew. 2006. Service-learning in nonprofit organizations. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 12 (2): 15–26.
- Benson, L., I. Harkavy, and J. Puckett. 2000. An implementation revolution as a strategy for fulfilling the democratic promise of university-community partnerships. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 29:24–45.
- Bringle, R., and J. Hatcher. 2000. Institutionalization of service-learning in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education* 71 (3): 273–290.
- Bringle, R., and J. Hatcher. 2002. Campus-community partnerships: The terms of engagement. *Journal of Social Issues* 58 (3): 503–516.
- Bringle, R., J. Hatcher, and R. Games. 1997. Engaging and supporting faculty in service-learning. *Journal of Public Service and Outreach* 2:43–51.
- Bringle, R., J. Hatcher, and R. McIntosh. 2006. Analyzing Morton's Typology of Service Paradigms and Integrity. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 13(1): 5–15.
- Bushouse, B. 2005. Community nonprofit organizations and service-learning: Resource constraints to building partnerships in universities. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 12 (1): 32–40.
- Campus Compact. 2000. *Benchmarks for campus/community partnerships*. Providence: Campus Compact.
- Cox, D. 2000. Developing a framework for understanding university-community partnerships. *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research* 5 (1): 9–26.
- Cruz, N., and D. E. Giles. 2000. Where's the community in service-learning research? *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Fall (special issue): 28–34.
- DiMaggio, P., and W. Powell. 1991. The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality. In *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*, ed. Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio, 63–83. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dorado, S., and D. E. Giles. 2004. Service-learning partnerships: Paths to engagement. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 11 (1): 25–37.
- Edwards, B., L. Mooney, and C. Heald. 2001. Who is being served? The impact of student volunteering on local community organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 30 (3): 444–61.
- Enos, S., and K. Morton. 2003. Developing a theory and practice of campus-community partnerships. In *Building partnerships for service-learning*, ed. Jacoby and Associates, 20–41. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fisher, R., M. Fabricant, and L. Simmons. 2005. Understanding contemporary university-community connections. In *University-community partnerships: Universities in civic engagement*, ed. T. Soska and A. Johnson Butterfield, 13–34. Binghamton: Hawthorne Press.
- Foster, M. K., and A. G. Meinhard. 2002. A regression model explaining predisposition to collaborate. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 31 (4): 549–64.

- Friedland, R., and R. Alford. 1991. Bringing society back in: Symbols, practices, and institutional contradictions. In *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*, ed. Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio, 232–66. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Furco, A. 2001. Advancing service-learning at research universities. In *Developing and implementing service-learning programs: New directions for higher education*, ed. M. Carada and B. W. Speck, 67–68. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Furco, A. 2002a. Institutionalizing service-learning in higher education. *Journal of Public Affairs* 6:39–47.
- Furco, A. 2002b. *Self-assessment rubric for the institutionalization of service-learning in higher education*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Gelmon, S., A. Sherman, M. Gaudet, C. Mitchell, and K. Trotter. 2004. Institutionalizing service-learning across the university: International comparisons. In *New perspectives in service-learning: Research to advance the field*, ed. M. Welch and S. Billig, 195–217. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Giles, D., and J. Eyler. 1998. A service-learning research agenda for the next five years. In *Academic service-learning: A pedagogy of action and reflection*, ed. R. Rhoads and J. Howard, 65–72. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gray, B. 1989. *Collaborating: Finding common ground for multiparty problems*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gray, M. J., E. H. Ondaatje, R. D. Fricker, Jr., and S. A. Geschwind. 2000. Assessing service-learning: Results for a survey of Learn and Serve America, Higher Education. *Change* 32 (2): 30–39.
- Guo, C., and M. Acar. 2005. Understanding collaboration among nonprofit organizations: Combining resource dependency, institutional, and network perspectives. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 34 (3): 340–61.
- Hinck, S. S., and M. E. Brandell. 2000. The relationship between institutional support and campus acceptance of academic service-learning. *American Behavioral Scientist* 43:868–81.
- Holland, B. 1997. Analyzing institutional commitment to service. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 4:30–41.
- Holland, B. 1999. From murky to meaningful: The role of mission in institutional change. In *Colleges and universities as citizens*, ed. R. Bringle, R. Games, and E. Malloy, 99–133. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Jacoby, B. 1996. *Service-learning in higher education: Concepts and practices*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Learn and Serve America (LASSIE). 2005. Public use report data. Learn and Serve America. <http://lsareports.org/publicreports.aspx> (accessed October 2006).
- Learn and Serve America. 2006a. About Learn and Serve America. <http://www.learnandserve.gov/about/lisa/index.asp> (accessed October 2006).
- Learn and Serve America. 2006b. Printable higher education program report [Grantee survey]. [http://lsareports.org/Documents/HED\\_PrintSurvey\\_06.pdf](http://lsareports.org/Documents/HED_PrintSurvey_06.pdf) (accessed October 2006).

- Long, S. 1997. *Regression models for categorical and limited dependent variables*. California: Sage Publications.
- Maurasse, D. 2002. Higher education–community partnerships: Assessing progress in the field. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 31 (1): 131–39.
- Marullo, S., and B. Edwards. 2000. From charity to justice: The potential of university-community collaboration for social change. *American Behavioral Scientist* 43:895–912.
- Miron, D., and B. Moely. 2006. Community agency voice and benefit in service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 12 (2): 27–37.
- Morton, K. 1995. The irony of service: Charity, project and social change in service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 2:19–32.
- Morton, K., and M. Troppe. 1996. From the margin to the mainstream: Campus Compact's project on integrating service with academic study. *Journal of Business Ethics* 15:21–32.
- Mulroy, E. 2005. University civic engagement with community-based organizations: Dispersed or coordinated models? In *University-community partnerships: Universities in civic engagement*, ed. T. Soska and A. Johnson Butterfield, 35–52. Binghamton: Hawthorne Press.
- Oliver, C. 1990. Determinants of inter-organizational relationships: Integration and future directions. *Academy of Management Review* 15 (2): 241–65.
- Ostrander, S. 2004. Democracy, civic participation, and the university: A comparative study of civic engagement on five campuses. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 33 (1): 74–93.
- Pfeffer, J., and G. Salancik. 1978. *The external control of organizations*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Rubin, V. 2000. Evaluating university-community partnership: An examination of the evolution of questions and approaches. *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research* 5:1219–30.
- Sandy, M., and B. Holland. 2006. Different worlds and common ground: Community partner perspectives in campus-community partnerships. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 13 (1): 30–43.
- Timmermans, S., and J. Bouman. 2005. Seven ways of teaching and learning: University-community partnerships at baccalaureate institutions. In *University-community partnerships: Universities in civic engagement*, ed. T. Soska and A. Johnson Butterfield, 89–102. Binghamton: Hawthorne Press.
- Troppe, M. 1996. *Two cases of institutionalizing service-learning: How campus climate affects the change process*. Providence: Campus Compact.
- Vogelgesang, K. 2004. Diversity work and service-learning: Understanding campus dynamics. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 10 (2): 34–43.
- Walshock, M. L. 1999. Strategies for building the infrastructure that supports the engaged campus. In *Colleges and universities as citizens*, ed. R. Bringle, R. Games, and E. Malloy, 74–95. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

- Ward, K. 1996. Service-learning and student volunteerism: Reflections on institutional commitment. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 3:55–65.
- Ward, K., and L. Wolf-Wendel. 2000. Community-centered service learning. *American Behavioral Scientist* 43 (5): 767–80.

### **About the Authors**

- Keely Jones Stater is an adjunct lecturer in nonprofit studies in the Department of Public Policy at the University of Connecticut and a research analyst in legislative affairs at the Housing Authority Insurance Group. Her research interests include nonprofit collaboration and the dynamics of service-learning partnerships, as well as civic engagement and issues related to public and affordable housing. She taught service-learning courses and received several grants to engage in further study of service partnerships while an assistant professor at the University of Georgia.
- Eric Fotheringham recently received his master's of public administration from the University of Georgia. His research interests include service-learning, volunteerism, nonprofit employment, and immigration. While at UGA, he coordinated multiple service-learning projects and was active in the University of Georgia's Service-learning Office. He currently is a graduate student at North Carolina State University.