

Service-learning in a Tourism, Hospitality, and Event Management Program

Kevin Naaman
Indiana University Bloomington

Weixuan Wang
Indiana University Bloomington

Chengming Hu
Southeast Missouri State University

Brandon Howell
Indiana University Bloomington



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Abstract

If faculty do not monitor students' perceptions of their service-learning experience, then they may end up harming the community that the students serve. Specifically, negative perceptions such as students' prejudices and biases can harm community members. This study, therefore, measured one hundred and twenty-three Tourism, Hospitality, and Event Management (THEM) students' perceptions and barriers of their service-learning experience. Results from the questionnaire indicated that, on average, students perceived the service-learning experience and the community favorably. Time and inconvenient locations were the most common barriers to service-learning participation. THEM faculty are provided an instrument to monitor their students' service-learning perceptions.

Keywords: Service-Learning, Undergraduate Curriculum, Personal Development, Tourism and Hospitality, Barriers

Introduction

Faculty have been found to perceive service-learning's effects favorably, indicating positive outcomes such as increasing students' awareness of societal challenges and enhancing educational outcomes (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002). Though, faculty can find it difficult to implement service-learning in their curriculum. Hou & Wilder (2015) learned that faculty face the following barriers with implementing service-learning into their courses: (1) inadequate incentives, (2) lack of resources (i.e., time and funding), and (3) logistics (i.e., scheduling, transportation, and communication). These barriers have been documented since the turn of the century (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000), yet many institutions still find it difficult to implement this pedagogical framework.

Moreover, faculty must be aware of another contemporary issue if they decide to instruct a service-learning course. If service-learning programs are not implemented well, then they "may result in unanticipated outcomes, such as increased prejudice and bias" (Conner & Erickson, 2017, p. 53; Erickson, & O'Connor, 2000). Faculty can implement reflective writing in their service-learning courses to: (1) gather qualitative data, and (2) help students overcome their negative perceptions, such as their biases of the community they serve (Hobbs, 2007).

However, research on quantitative measurements of students' service-learning perceptions is needed (Conner et al., 2017) so that faculty may monitor how their students perceive service-learning activities and their interactions with the community (Caspersz & Oлару, 2017; Cecil, 2012; Holsapple, 2012). Research has traditionally focused on students' positive outcomes of service-learning (Conner et al., 2017), so this gap was addressed by also researching students' negative perceptions (i.e., biases) and their barriers (i.e., lack of time) to service-learning participation.

The purpose of this article is to, therefore, assess students' perceptions of their service-learning experiences from a Tourism, Hospitality, and Event Management (THEM) program. The questionnaire can be used by other THEM faculty to identify if: (1) their students face any

barriers to service-learning participation, and (2) their students' perceptions pose the risk of negatively affecting the community. The implication from this study is that a questionnaire is provided to THEM faculty so that they can monitor students' positive perceptions, negative perceptions, and barriers to service-learning participation. Strategies for using these data are discussed.

Literature Review

Service-learning is a pedagogical tool where students learn how to translate classroom content to practice through engagement with community organizations that relate to their academic degree (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Three recent meta-analyses have indicated that students can benefit from service-learning in the following ways: (1) student development (i.e., academic performance; Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011), (2) social intelligence (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Yorio & Ye, 2012), and (3) enhanced learning outcomes (Warren, 2012). THEM programs have been recognized as professional disciplines (Jamal, Taillon, & Dredge, 2011; McIntosh, 1983; Van Weenen & Shafer, 1983), which are befitting venues for implementing service-learning experiences (Reising, Allen, & Hall, 2006).

However, service-learning should not be conceptualized as only benefiting student participants. Service-learning is rooted in a social justice framework, which is intended to provide mutual benefits for both the community partners and students (d'Arlach, Sánchez, & Feuer, 2009; Hammersley, 2012; Morton & Bergbauer, 2015). Service-learning's foundations in equity and community engagement are threatened if faculty do not identify and assuage students' negative perceptions towards their community members.

For instance, students that serve low-income community members may end up blaming those affected for their predispositions (Hollis, 2004). Another study found that some students' negative stereotypes were strengthened after their service-learning experience (Jones, 2002). Take this excerpt as an example: "I think people with AIDS deserve what they got because it's the consequence of their own bad behavior" (Jones, 2002, p. 11). Faculty must be careful if they decide to implement a service-learning course because there is the possibility that the students' perceptions can negatively affect the community partners (Giles, 2014). Because service-learning can pose a risk to the community, it is important that faculty monitor their students' perceptions of the community and service-learning activities.

However, faculty must also recognize that their students face barriers to engaging in service-learning activities. Researchers have outlined many barriers that students face and some of the examples include (1) time, (2) inconvenient locations, (3) perceiving service-learning to be uninteresting, and (4) perceiving service-learning as not useful (Burke & Bush, 2013; McKinney, Medvedeva, Vacca, & Malak, 2004). Even if students do not have serious prejudices or biases, their service for the community will be insignificant if they are neither able nor willing to participate due to the barriers they face. It is therefore important, to provide a way to measure THEM students' positive perceptions, negative perceptions, and barriers of service-learning. This is so that THEM faculty receives the necessary information to change their pedagogical practices so that they do not harm the community or students. This study provides a questionnaire that other faculty members may use to monitor their students' perceptions.

Methodology

Sample and Participant Selection

A convenience sample of one hundred and twenty-three undergraduate students participated in this study during March 2017. The students were from three Tourism, Hospitality, and Event Management (THEM) courses at a Midwestern University. Each course included a service-learning project. Internships were not included in this study. Each service-learning course mandated that all students: (1) were assigned to a THEM organization in the community, (2) assisted with operations during the semester, and (3) prepared both a written and oral report with their recommendations on how to improve their partnering agency's operations. The partnering agencies were given these recommendations. The survey was administered by one of the researchers in each of the three classrooms. This survey was voluntary and completed as an in-person, pen-and-paper format.

Instrumentation

The administered questionnaire contained the following sections: (1) demographics, (2) perceptions of service-learning, and (3) service-learning barriers. Two different questionnaires were used to measure students' perceptions of service-learning. The first was a fourteen-item questionnaire from Burke et al. (2013). The second questionnaire was also from Burke et al. (2013), and it also measured the barriers to service-learning participation. McKinney et al. (2004) is the primary source of these questionnaires. Data were gathered from a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented Strongly Disagree, 2 represented Disagree, 3 represented Neutral, 4 represented Agree, and 5 represented Strongly Agree.

Data Analysis

All data exploration and analysis were conducted through the statistical softwares, IBM SPSS 25 and RStudio. These data were investigated for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk's test. The results from the service-learning perceptions and barriers were normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$). An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) reduced the dimensions of the fourteen-item questionnaire to see if the resultant factors would be consistent with the literature. The suitability of EFA was assessed prior to analysis. The overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.897 with individual KMO measures all greater than 0.7 (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($p < .0005$), indicating that the data were factorizable. The number of factors was decided upon using varimax rotation and factors that had eigenvalues above the value of one (Cattell, 1966). Next, a series of bivariate correlations were conducted to test whether the barriers would be negatively correlated with the three factors from the fourteen-item questionnaire. Lastly, descriptive statistics were calculated from the questionnaire to gauge how students perceived the service-learning activities, engagement with the community, and their barriers.

Results and Discussion

Results from the demographics indicated the sample was mainly female ($n = 97$, 78%), Caucasian ($n = 99$, 80%), and primarily between the ages of 20-21 ($n = 91$, 74%). Table 1 provides the sample's demographic information.

Table 1. Demographic distribution of participants

Demographic Characteristics	Total
	123
Gender	
Male	26 (21%)
Female	97 (78%)
Age	
18	0 (0%)
19	4 (3%)
20	44 (36%)
21	47 (38%)
22-25	27 (22%)
26-30	1 (1%)
31 - older	0 (0%)
GPA	
Below 1.0	0 (0%)
1.0-1.9	0 (0%)
2.0-2.9	24 (20%)
3.0-3.9	97 (78%)
4.0	2 (2%)
Race	
African American	5 (4%)
American Indian	0 (0%)
Asian	7 (6%)
Caucasian	99 (80%)
Hispanic	8 (7%)
Native Hawaiian	0 (0%)
Other	4 (3%)

The results from the EFA generated three factors: (1) student development, (2) social values, and (3) learning outcomes. The three factors explained 66.01% of the total variance and were consistent with the literature. The first factor (student development) included items that measured a students': (1) ability and interest to interact with the community (Caspersz, et al., 2017), and (2) career preparation (Causin & Runnels, 2018). Secondly, social values measured

items regarding a students': (1) stereotypes, and (2) ability to reflect (Conner et al. 2017; Levesque-Bristol, Knapp, & Fisher, 2011). Lastly, learning outcomes measured items regarding interpersonal relations and applying course content to real-world problems (Warren, 2012).

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis of Perceived Service-Learning Benefits

Perceptions	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	Variance
Student Development – Factor 1			
		6.97	49.81
1. I feel more connected to the community after having service-learning experience.	.791		
2. I am able to solve problems in my community after having service-learning experience.	.696		
3. Service-learning experience impacts my career goal.	.661		
4. Service learning is helpful to your major.	.636		
5. I would recommend service-learning course to other students.	.643		
6. I can be more inclined to be involved in my community after having service-learning experience.	.657		
7. Service-learning experience empowered you.	.586		
8. Service-learning experience is helpful to your overall undergraduate experience.	.542		
		1.24	8.86
Social Values – Factor 2			
9. Service learning decreases any stereotype that you may have had.	.825		
10. Service learning increases your appreciation for different cultures.	.707		
11. Service learning helps you view yourself differently.	.711		
		1.03	7.34
Learning Outcomes - Factor 3			
12. Service learning helps you work well with others.	.843		
13. You can apply classroom materials to your service-learning activities.	.636		
14. Service-learning experience helps you challenge the material you learned in the classroom.	.618		
Total Variance			66.017

Note. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index = .897 Bartlett's test of sphericity = 950.085, df = 91 (p = .000). The Cronbach's Alpha = .92 for the 14-item questionnaire, demonstrating high reliability (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Table 3 outlines the descriptive statistics of the students' perceptions of their service-learning activities and barriers. The results indicated that, on average, the students agreed the service-learning activities were beneficial for their development, social values, and learning outcomes. Only one of the fourteen service-learning perceptions was below 3.0. This result indicated that, on average, the students did not agree that they were able to apply classroom content to the service-learning activities. Information such as this can be useful for THEM faculty because they can adapt their teaching strategies to ensure the students are able to apply classroom content to the service-learning experience.

Moreover, questions 1, 2, 6, 9, and 10 reflected items measuring a students' perceptions of the community. None of these questions was below 3.0, which demonstrated that they did not perceive the community negatively (e.g., scores below a 3.0 are negative and scores above 3.0 are positive). Lastly, students also agreed, on average, that they experienced two barriers: (1) time, and (2) inconvenient locations.

THEM faculty can use this instrument to check in with students throughout the service-learning process. If this instrument were administered at the end of the semester, then the faculty would not have enough time to change their pedagogical practices. Additionally, these results should not be used to solely determine whether the students' perceptions pose a risk of negatively affecting the community. These questions are generalized and do not ask about specific facets of their interactions with the community. As a result of these limitations, faculty should be continuously engaged with the community partners and create an open atmosphere so that the community partners feel free to express any of their concerns with the students or service-learning process.

Table 3. Summary statistics of students positive and negative perceptions of service-learning

	Mean	Median	s	n
Composite Score for Student Development	3.51	3.63	0.66	123
1. I feel more connected to the community after having service-learning experience.	3.46	4.00	0.91	123
2. I am able to solve problems in my community after having service-learning experience.	3.23	3.00	0.91	123
3. Service-learning experience impacts my career goal.	4.02	4.00	0.61	123
4. Service learning is helpful to your major.	3.25	3.00	1.02	123
5. I would recommend service-learning course to other students.	3.45	4.00	0.99	123
6. I can be more inclined to be involved in my community after having service-learning experience.	3.59	4.00	0.90	123
7. Service-learning experience empowered you.	3.43	4.00	0.91	123
8. Service-learning experience is helpful to your overall undergraduate experience.	3.66	4.00	0.94	123
	3.45	3.67	0.77	123
Composite Score for Social Values				
9. Service learning decreases any stereotype that you may have had.	3.60	4.00	0.97	123

10. Service learning increases your appreciation for different cultures.	3.28	3.00	0.98	123
11. Service learning helps you view yourself differently.	3.48	4.00	0.83	123
	3.27	3.33	0.84	123
Composite Score for Learning Outcomes				
12. Service learning helps you work well with others.	3.38	4.00	0.99	123
13. You can apply classroom materials to your service-learning activities.	2.94	3.00	1.10	123
14. Service-learning experience helps you challenge the material you learned in the classroom.	3.48	4.00	0.98	123
	2.81	2.75	0.63	123
Composite Score for Service-learning Barriers				
1. The service-learning activities are time-consuming.	3.80	4.00	0.84	123
2. The service-learning collaboration agency is inconveniently located.	3.06	3.00	0.91	123
3. Service-learning activities are not interesting.	2.46	2.00	0.97	123
4. I do not believe service-learning activities are useful or beneficial to my education.	1.91	2.00	0.87	123

Note. *s* = standard deviation. The Cronbach's alpha = 0.83 for the two combined instruments, indicating good reliability of the instrument as a whole (Gliem et al., 2003).

All bivariate correlations between the service-learning barriers and perceptions were negatively related. This is important to demonstrate so that faculty members realize the importance of identifying and subsequently removing barriers so that the students' perceptions of service-learning are not hindered. Table 4 provides the results of the bivariate correlations and quantifies the negative relationships between these factors and barriers.

Table 4. Relationship between students' perceived barriers and benefits of service-learning

	Time-Consuming	Locations	Uninteresting	Not Useful
Student Development	-.208*	-.172	-.352**	-.506**
Social Awareness	-.086	-.274**	-.128	-.357**
Learning Outcomes	-.205*	-.133	-.250**	-.362**

Note. * = Pearson Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** = Pearson Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Conclusion and Implications

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to provide Tourism, Hospitality, and Event Management (THEM) faculty a way to quickly and reliably monitor their students' perceptions of their service-learning experiences, perceptions of the community, and barriers to service-learning participation. This study used a questionnaire to monitor three THEM service-learning courses and found that, on average, the students perceived the community and their service-learning

experience favorably. The faculty who taught these three courses were provided with data to improve their instruction and facilitation of their service-learning courses. Namely, these data are to be used to make sure faculty successfully implement service-learning in their curriculum.

Implications

Jamal et al. (2011) noted THEM instructors are presented with the opportunity to steward the next generation of THEM professionals to handle complicated cultural and sociological issues in the field. Service-learning in THEM programs is argued to be important because the experiences expose students to the profession, which enhances their ability to address complicated issues in the field (Boyer, 1994; Cecil, 2012). Therefore, it is important that service-learning faculty monitor their students' perceptions of service-learning experiences. This study argues that a lot is at stake—for the community and the students—so it is important that faculty diligently monitor their students' service-learning perceptions and barriers. Service-learning is a deliberate process and may “do more harm than good” (Conner et al., 2017, p. 53) if the faculty do not monitor the relationships between the students and faculty members.

Recommendations

THEM faculty can use this instrument to monitor their students' perceptions and barriers throughout the semester. Faculty should use this instrument no later than halfway through the service-learning experience so there is enough time to collect the data, analyze them, and implement changes in the service-learning experience. Lastly, faculty can pair these data from the instrument with qualitative data from reflective writing exercises. However, Hobbs (2007) argues that mandatory writing can be harmful to student success; this article provides recommendations for implementing reflective writing.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that the authors did not utilize a random sampling method or control group. A different insight into the data might have been achieved if the researchers looked at additional populations such as service-learning courses outside the department or across universities, and comparing it with courses without service-learning activities. The researchers did not measure the students' perceptions and barriers at the end of the semester to see if the results had changed.

Future Directions

Additional research needs to be completed in community partnership involvement on the academic side of the service-learning partnership. Involvement in the development of the academic curriculum between the community and academic institutions could be of great interest.

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