

During and Post-COVID-19 Community Engagement Expectations and Attitudes Among College Students

Audryanna G. Reed¹ and Dustin K. Grabsch¹

¹ Southern Methodist University

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Abstract

Numerous studies emphasize the impact of community service on college students by pointing out its positive correlations to establishing a sense of belonging among 1st-year students. However, despite many colleges' best efforts, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 disrupted the normal college experience. In this study, we utilized a post-positivist worldview and employed a cross-sectional survey research study to explore how undergraduate students' attitudes, behaviors, and intended skill development through community service changed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Our study focuses on three distinct themes: measuring student-level community service outcomes, community service and belonging on campus, and during and post-COVID service. We found a statistically significant decrease in all community service attitudes and behaviors, and no change in intended skill development during and post-COVID. Our findings have implications for service-learning faculty and higher education professionals working in community engagement functional areas, particularly based on how they can tailor and reimagine their current service-learning curricula and programming to meet the needs of the evolving college student, with respect to the changes experienced by COVID-19.

Keywords: survey research, COVID-19, community service, 1st-year students

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Introduction

As higher education has grown in scope and societal significance, questions have emerged regarding its role in the civic development of students. In addition to a high-quality academic experience, stakeholders expect higher education institutions to produce socially responsible students (Coelho & Menezes, 2021), a task often accomplished through community engagement initiatives. Numerous studies emphasize the impact of community service on college students, pointing out its positive correlation to establishing a sense of belonging among 1st-year students (Pichon, 2021) and its positive influence on later graduation rates for both 1st-year first-year and undergraduate transfer students (Yue & Hart, 2017). Residence life programs have leveraged this research and contributed to the civic engagement conversation with service-based, living-learning programs (Adams et al., 2014; Jessup-Ander et al., 2012; Petracchi et al., 2010). Indeed, participating in high-impact curriculum practices during one's undergraduate years has been significantly associated with civic engagement in adulthood (Myers et al., 2019), which suggests that community engagement initiatives can contribute to the fulfillment of universities' mission to produce civically-minded students.

However, despite many colleges' best efforts, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 caused disruption to the college experience, including the way students behaved, learned, and pursued social connections. The pandemic also impacted students' self-perception and understanding of their locus of control. Because of the forced transitions that resulted from the sudden government and university responses to the pandemic, many students grappled with not having as much control over their lives as they had once perceived (Mucci-Ferris et al., 2023). Students also begin to practice positive, new habits for mental and physical health. In contrast, other students struggled with mental health and experienced a domino effect of other challenges, ranging from a lack of motivation to a lack of social and emotional support (Gerowitz et al., 2022). With the forced transitions in the external environment and the resulting internal transitions, community service experiences on college campuses were also significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic—not just because of the larger forced transitions but also as a result of the changes taking place in the lives of the college students participating in those services. To better understand how these disruptions have shaped student engagement and skill development, it is essential to situate our study within the existing scholarship on community service in higher education, with particular attention to how outcomes, belonging, and service practices have evolved during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

Community service has been a longstanding tenet on college campuses, but over the years, it has evolved as the student body has evolved. While there are ongoing conversations about the various ways that students engage in community service, this literature review will talk more in

detail about the ways that higher education institutions evaluate the impact of service, why these institutions find value in community service, and more specifically about the way that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted how students engage in service and what student expectations of community service are. The review is organized around three primary themes: measuring student-level community service outcomes, community service and belonging on campus, and during and post-COVID service. There is an emphasis on how community service has been leveraged as a tool for building a sense of belonging among college students and how it continues to forge social connections during a time of immense isolation.

Measuring Student-Level Community Service Outcomes

Along with changing the format of community service initiatives, higher education institutions have sought to reevaluate the methods they use to measure student-level community service outcomes. As community engagement became more centralized and bureaucratized within the realm of higher education in the late 20th century, a culture of measurement and accountability emerged, partly spurred by desires to legitimize the investments of these institutions (Rosing, 2015). Rather than track the amount of time students spent performing service, institutions increasingly sought to quantify the impacts of performing service, both on their students and the community, and use this information to manage programming (Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013). By ensuring that students receive transformative benefits from the community service they perform, institutions can better fulfill their mission to produce civically engaged alums. Indeed, students who perform community service work during their college years are more likely to participate in service after graduation (Rockenbach et al., 2014). Such findings underscore the importance of studying and systematically measuring the impacts of community service on college students while they remain enrolled in school.

Community Service and Belonging on Campus

Institutions of higher education can prioritize employing community service to improve the experiences of students living in residential communities. Since the early 20th century, American institutions of higher education have sought to emulate the organizational patterns of the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge, aiming to more fully integrate both students and faculty into the campus community (Duke, 1996). In recent years, residential systems on college campuses have become increasingly essential in fostering a sense of community and belonging among undergraduate students (Hoffman, 2012; Spanierman et al., 2013). Reflecting on this development, students often cite meeting peers with something in common as a primary motivation for living in residential learning communities (Smith, 2018). As universities focus on the goal of increasing a sense of belonging within residential communities, they have increasingly incorporated community service and intercultural engagement initiatives. Indeed, the presence of culturally engaging campus environments has

been found to possess a strong relationship to students' sense of belonging (Museus, 2017). Additionally, service-learning courses have been shown to be positively correlated with a sense of belonging among transfer students (York & Fernandez, 2018). Because of the strength of evidence connecting community service initiatives and positive outcomes to students' sense of belonging, universities intent on building engaged student communities should work to integrate culturally-focused community service programs within residential communities.

During and Post-COVID Service

Due to the global impact of COVID-19, all the stakeholders who support community engagement efforts in higher education were affected—students, administrators, and community partners. As many changes were forced upon the students, their perception of the world and the agency they have in it shifted quickly during the onset of the pandemic, crippling the perceived freedom to which many had recently become accustomed. Some students used that time to reevaluate their values, question what they really want to do in the future, express their identity, and readjust their priorities (Mucci-Ferris et al., 2021), while others found themselves feeling less motivated and energetic due to the shutdown and home confinement. Importantly, however, values, priorities, and motivation all impact the way that students engage with community service. A study found a correlation between civic engagement and transferable capabilities such as critical thinking, oral presentation, data analysis, personal values, and active citizenship; unfortunately, despite the positive correlation between community service and skill development, community service during COVID was impacted by several factors among college students, including their academic major/coursework, government regulations, and vaccination status (Chang et al., 2021). The pandemic also yielded swift changes with community partners. Many nonprofit organizations were unable to support remote volunteers. In contrast, others made the shift to address immediate concerns such as food insecurity (Dempsey, 2023), which created opportunities for some college students to join the frontline and continue serving. Although in the minority, some students served out of a need for social connection when they could not return home because of the pandemic, while others returned to their communities and served at their parents' nonprofits.

Relevance and Importance

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted college students and affected their learning and social interactions. This research aimed to understand, from student-reported data, how attitudes, behaviors, and intended skill development related to community service have evolved. Therefore, the two primary research questions for this study were as follows: (1) How did undergraduate students' attitudes and behaviors toward community service change during and after the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) Has the intended skill development through community service altered during and after the pandemic?

Higher education institutions often require community service, and this study provides insights into how the pandemic has affected students' service-learning experiences. The findings will aid those who plan and facilitate community service programs by helping them determine better learning outcomes, tailor reflections, and develop curricula. This research informs higher education best practices for creating service-learning opportunities that meet both student and community needs. With respect to the themes identified here, the data and results to follow are contextualized based on a university's actual student service-learning requirements and report out on student pre- and post-service responses to the four subscales, *civic participation*, *self-efficacy toward service*, *attitude toward helping others*, and *college's role in addressing social issues* derived from J. E. Weber et al. (2010) in *Measuring Service Learning Outcomes: Test-retest Reliability of Four Scales*.

Method

We utilized a post-positivist worldview (Creswell, 2013) and employed a cross-sectional survey research study (Fraenkel et al., 1993; Singleton & Straits, 2009). *Post-positivism* emphasizes empirical evidence and the scientific method, thereby making it suitable for collecting and analyzing quantifiable data on students' attitudes and expectations. The Institutional Review Board at the research site approved the study protocol.

Place-Based Community Engagement Program

All undergraduate students at the university research site are required to complete a community engagement proficiency and experience course to graduate. The community engagement experience aims to achieve the following student learning outcome: "Students will demonstrate the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation necessary to contribute to the civic life of communities" ([research site], n.d., para. 1). The university requires students to complete at least 15 hours of engagement, "including planning, work toward the engagement project, support of the engagement project, and direct engagement with the community, with a minimum of 10 hours of direct engagement with the community" ([research site], n.d., p. 2). The place-based community engagement program (Yamamura & Koth, 2018, 2019) is one of the primary methods for students to fulfill this graduation requirement.

According to the university website, the place-based community engagement program (Yamamura & Koth, 2018, 2019) is operationalized through the university's residential life program. Each residential building employs a student director who coordinates monthly service opportunities at vetted community partner organizations. The monthly service experiences are the primary mechanisms through which students serve the designated geographic location in the city. All undergraduate students at the university are automatically enrolled in a Learning

Management System course. The course contains an overview of the program, an initial overview video, foundational training for being helpful and not harmful during service, quizzes to assess learning, and—at expected points—pre-, mid-, and posttests.

Data Collection and Instrument

The key variables in this study were measured by survey data obtained via *Qualtrics*. This study used data from the pretest before participants began participation in the university's place-based community engagement program. Data were collected between October 2020 and May 2024. The survey required a participant to log in via the university's Single Sign On. The sign-on process attached existing institutional demographic data related to gender, age, ethnicity, first-generation college student status, year in school, and so forth. Dependent variables were individual survey items or subscales formed using valid and reliable instruments previously used to assess college student learning while engaged in community service. The next few paragraphs provide an overview of the study instruments.

We utilized the four subscales posited by J. E. Weber et al. (2010) in "*Measuring Service Learning Outcomes: Test-Retest Reliability of Four Scales*." The four subscales are *civic participation*, *self-efficacy toward service*, *attitude toward helping others*, and *college's role in addressing social issues*. Each subscale utilizes a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The first subscale, civic participation, "relates to participating in community and supporting the disadvantaged" (P. S. Weber et al., 2004, p. 366) and contains six items, such as "I am concerned about local community issues." Self-efficacy toward service, the second subscale, seeks to determine the "self-efficacy toward service with item content related to helping those who are socially and physically disadvantaged" (P. S. Weber et al., 2004, p. 366). This subscale contained five items, such as "I can have a positive impact on social problems." The third subscale, attitude toward helping others, is a 4-item subscale that measures a student's attitude toward whether people should help others (Webb et al., 2000). An example item posed to participants was "people in need should receive support from others." Finally, the fourth subscale, college education's role in addressing social issues, is described as measuring a student's attitudes about the role a college should play in addressing community service, community, social change, and helping the disadvantaged (J. E. Weber et al., 2008). One sample item this six-item subscale contained was "colleges must prepare students to be civic leaders after they graduate." Values of Cronbach's alpha for all scales and both administrations were also acceptable (.82–.88; J. E. Weber et al., 2008).

Finally, we adapted items from an instrument used in a dissertation study exploring how community service impacted undergraduate students' intention to graduate (Jensen, 2014). The Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership inspired Jensen's instrument, and we utilized eight individual items whose nominal and ordinal scales varied. Example of included items for this

study were, “what is one (1) skill/ability you want to learn more about during your time in [initiative name],” and (asked individually by constituent group but combined for ease) “in the past semester, how often has (faculty members, peers, staff) encouraged you to participate in or attend community engagement opportunities outside the classroom?”

A total of 1,286 undergraduate students completed the survey during the study period. To minimize erroneous responses to this required program questionnaire, we added a survey item instructing participants to select neutral to a single survey item to indicate they were reading the question. In total, 943, or 73% of the accessible population, responded correctly and were included in the analysis. Table 1 presents demographic details of the during and post-COVID-19 pandemic timeframe.

TABLE 1. Population and sample

	During		Post-		Total Sample	
	<i>n</i> = 616	65%	<i>n</i> = 327	35%	<i>N</i> = 943	100%
Sex						
Male	222	36%	133	41%	355	38%
Female	396	64%	193	59%	589	62%
Race & Ethnicity						
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	0.3%	0	0%	2	0.01%
Asian	74	12%	40	12%	114	12%
Black or African American	44	7%	32	10%	76	8%
Hispanic of Any Race	117	19%	67	20%	184	20%
Native Hawaii/Other PacIslander	0	0%	1	0.01%	1	0.01%
Non-Resident Alien (Any Race)	21	3%	14	4%	35	4%
Race & Ethnicity Unknown	7	1%	8	2%	15	2%
Two or More Races	32	5%	16	5%	48	5%
White	321	52%	148	45%	469	50%

First-Generation	72	11%	47	14%	119	13%
Transfer	73	11%	40	12%	113	12%
Pell-Eligible	112	18%	78	23%	190	20%

Data Analysis

The independent variable during the COVID-19 pandemic was considered to be from the beginning of data collection to May 2023. The post-COVID-19 pandemic was considered to have started in June 2023 and was determined by the World Health Organization's declaration of the end of the pandemic as a public health emergency on May 11, 2023 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). The dependent variables were continuous variables (e.g., means of service-learning subscales, civic participant, self-efficacy toward service, attitude toward helping others, and college's role in addressing social issues) as well as nominal variables (e.g., intended skill development).

We utilized descriptive statistics, independent samples' t-tests, and a chi-square test for homogeneity to answer our two research questions. Independent samples' t-tests are statistical hypothesis tests that compare the means of two unrelated groups to determine if they are significantly different (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). We hypothesized that post-COVID-19 means would be lower than during the pandemic in attitudes and behaviors (e.g., civic participation, attitude toward helping).

A chi-square test for homogeneity was used to determine whether there was a difference in three or more multinomial distributions. That is, it tests whether the multinomial distributions are the same in three or more groups of the independent variable (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). It will determine whether these differences in distributions are statistically significant. We hypothesized there was a difference in the desired primary skill or ability students intended to develop through community engagement.

Results

The purpose of this study was to answer the two primary research questions: (1) How did undergraduate students' attitudes and behaviors toward community service change during and after the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) Has the intended skill development through community service altered during and after the pandemic? We next present the results gathered from the exploration of those two research questions by examining several factors that impact a student's overall service experience, from who influences them to do service, their responses to the *Test-retest Reliability of Four Scales*, as well as their intended skill development based on their

service experience. The data below adds context to student-level community service outcomes, affirms how community service is a pathway for building community among students, particularly those undergoing significant change or transition, and provides an overview of the ways that COVID-19 impacted the student service experience from an introspective assessment.

Attitudes and Behaviors

Our first research question was to determine how undergraduate students' attitudes and behaviors toward community service changed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 2 displays results from an independent t-test comparing how often participants were encouraged to participate in opportunities outside the classroom during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and who encouraged their participation.

TABLE 2. Comparing encouragement for co-curricular engagement during and post-COVID-19

	During		Post-		<i>t</i> (650)	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Faculty	3.53	1.22	3.49	1.21	0.33	.740
Staff	3.30	1.25	3.49	1.16	-1.87	.062
Peers	3.50	1.17	3.31	1.19	1.90	.058

After confirming the appropriate assumptions (e.g., normal distribution, homogeneity) for the t-test, the result approached a statistically significant difference ($p = .058$) in peer encouragement during ($M = 3.50$) and after ($M = 3.31$) the pandemic. All other encouragement did not reveal a statistically significant or approaching statistically significant change in self-reported encouragement.

Next, we used independent samples t-tests to analyze the four attitudinal subscales, including civic participation, self-efficacy toward service, attitude toward helping others, and the college's role in addressing social issues. Table 3 presents these results along with each scale's practical significance.

TABLE 3. During and post-COVID-19 t-test of student expectations and attitudes toward service

	During		Post-		<i>t</i> (941)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Civic participation	4.32	0.57	4.21	0.59	2.87	.004	0.57
Self-efficacy toward service	4.26	0.62	4.14	0.65	2.79	.005	0.63
Attitude toward helping others	4.26	0.66	4.17	0.62	2.17	.030	0.62
College education's role in addressing social issues	4.19	0.66	4.10	0.67	1.96	.050	0.67

An independent sample t-test was run on 943 cases to determine if there were differences in civic participation of undergraduate students during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. There were outliers in the data, as was determined by inspection of a boxplot. Engagement scores for included participants were normally distributed based on the Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$), and variances were homogeneous, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .964$). Civic participation was more important to students during the pandemic ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.57$) than to students after the pandemic ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.59$) by a statistically significant difference— $M = 0.11$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.19], $t(941) = 2.874$, $p = .004$.

Another independent-sample t-test was run to determine if there were differences in self-efficacy toward service for undergraduate students during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. There were outliers in the data, as was again determined by inspection of a boxplot. Engagement scores for students were normally distributed, as assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p > .05$), and there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .923$). Self-efficacy was greater for students engaging in community service during the pandemic ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.62$) than for students engaging after the pandemic ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.65$) by a statistically significant difference— $M = 0.12$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.20], $t(941) = 2.788$, $p = .005$.

A third independent-sample t-test was run to determine if there were differences in attitudes of undergraduate students toward helping others during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. There were no outliers in the data, as determined by inspection of a boxplot. Engagement scores for students were normally distributed, as assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p > .05$), and variances

were homogeneous, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .585$). Attitudes toward helping others were greater for students engaging in community service during the pandemic ($M = 4.26, SD = 0.66$) than for students engaging after the pandemic ($M = 4.17, SD = 0.62$) by a statistically significant difference— $M = 0.09, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.01, 0.18], t(941) = 2.169, p = .030$.

A fourth independent-sample t-test was run to determine if there were differences in undergraduate students' expectations of college education's role in addressing social issues during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. There were no outliers in the data, as revealed by inspection of a boxplot. Engagement scores for students were normally distributed, as assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p > .05$), and variances were homogeneous, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .639$). Expectations were higher for students engaging in community service during the pandemic ($M = 4.19, SD = 0.66$) than for students engaging after the pandemic ($M = 4.10, SD = 0.67$) by a statistically significant difference— $M = 0.09, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.00, 0.18], t(941) = 1.964, p = .050$.

Intended Skill Development

Our second research question was to see if the intended skill development through community service was altered during and after the pandemic. Table 4 presents the crosstabs of self-reported skill development during and post-COVID-19.

TABLE 4. Self-reported intended skill development during and post-COVID-19

	During		Post-		Sample	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Effective communication	61	10%	42	13%	103	11%
Critical thinking and analytical skills	27	4%	18	6%	45	5%
Citizenship and community building	122	20%	70	21%	192	20%
Self-confidence	47	8%	25	8%	72	8%
Awareness of multicultural issues	81	13%	43	13%	124	13%
Teamwork	41	7%	31	10%	72	8%
Understanding of leadership and management styles	42	7%	22	7%	64	7%
Authenticity and acting consistent with your values	32	5%	8	2%	40	4%
Ability to plan and implement programs and activities	41	7%	11	3%	52	6%
People skills	58	9%	35	11%	93	10%
Business of technical skills	14	2%	5	2%	19	2%
Healthy living skills	50	8%	17	5%	67	7%

All of our 943 participants had selected one skill or ability from a list of 12 they wished to develop through the community engagement initiative. 13% of participants post-COVID

demonstrated an interest in developing effective communication, compared to 10% during COVID. Similarly, a higher percentage of post-COVID participants (11%) desired to develop people skills than 9% during COVID. In contrast, students during COVID-19 demonstrated a greater interest (7%) in developing event planning skills versus 3% post-COVID. Additionally, during COVID, participants expressed a higher desire (8%) to develop healthy living skills, while only 5% of students post-COVID. Students in both groups remained consistent, at 13%, in their desire to develop awareness of multicultural issues.

A chi-square test of homogeneity was run, with an adequate sample size established according to Cochran (1954). This test was conducted to determine if the proportions of intended skills development were statistically different during and after COVID-19. The two multinomial probability distributions were equal in the population: $\chi^2(11) = 16.265, p = .132$.

Discussion

We sought to answer two primary research questions: (1) How did undergraduate students' attitudes and behaviors toward community service change during and after the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) Has the intended skill development through community service altered during and after the pandemic? Our results offer several points for discussion, and they have implications for practice and future research. We organized the discussion by research questions below and integrated our recommendations.

Attitudes and Behaviors

Our analysis revealed statistically significant differences between J. E. Weber et al.'s (2010) four attitude and behavior scales of community service during and post-pandemic. To explore these differences, we analyzed composite survey items for each scale to identify the greatest change in the mean score; these item changes can highlight important self-reported attitudes and behavioral changes relevant to community engagement offices and higher education professionals.

Within the Civic Participation Attitude Scale, the item with the greatest delta in the mean score was "I want to work toward equal opportunity for all." The mean score decreased by 0.13 from pre- to post-COVID-19. Within the attitude toward helping others category, two survey items experienced a 0.10 decrease in their mean during and post-COVID-19. Specifically, "People should be willing to help others who are disadvantaged" and "Helping people with their challenges is very important to me."

The cocurricular college experience offers great value to the student experience. The findings of this study can help inform and reimagine some of the cocurricular experiences led by student affairs professionals. For example, how might a specific residence hall adopt a community

service project to support monthly or create a new living-learning community centered around community service? Many universities require annual training for their student organizations. Training of student leaders can be restructured to include inclusivity training, an enhanced leadership focus, and community resources in which organizations can volunteer to participate in together.

Additionally, this information may provide an opportunity to enhance some of the traditional experiences that college students typically encounter, such as living on campus, dining in the dining hall, or attending sporting events. The residence halls can implement community practices such as “How’s Your Neighbor?” or a random acts of kindness campaign to cultivate a sense of community awareness and support on each floor, while dining halls can implement sustainable compost practices that allow students to see how their food waste is being leveraged for the environment. Outcomes such as these lend themselves to a culture shift on college campuses and are best accomplished by a series of small practices and changes.

Within the self-efficacy section, the survey item “I can have a positive impact on social problems” decreased 0.15 in the mean from during to post-COVID. There was a tie for the greatest change in mean score, a decrease of 0.11 within the role of college education in addressing the social issues scales of “College education should encourage students to help people who are disadvantaged in their communities,” and “college should offer opportunities for students to increase their understanding of community issues.”

Because there is a burden of responsibility on colleges to produce socially responsible students, it creates an opportunity for administrators and faculty to consider how the curriculum requirements at the university and individual course levels are being implemented and how service learning can be embedded. One study on college student civic engagement found that students who major in social sciences demonstrated stronger civic engagement than business majors (Chang et al., 2021). Although business is usually a top academic major at many universities, it may be valuable to assess how students are learning about all aspects of business, including topics such as corporate social responsibility and social entrepreneurship. Administrators and faculty may consider adding additional practicum courses to provide students with more hands-on experience in the field or community related to their coursework. Co-taught courses between faculty and community or nonprofit leaders also impact how students understand community issues and ways that they are empowered to help.

Even though participants’ civic participation attitudes experienced the sharpest decline, all attitudes surveyed declined in self-reported importance between during and post-pandemic. Differences in the COVID-19 cohort versus the students post-COVID-19 may also be attributed to context (e.g., world events, college experience, program changes) and the timing of the survey administration rather than differences in the participants themselves. Future research should

include a post-service assessment of attitudes and beliefs or a pre-post community service experience delta in attitudes and beliefs, as well as segmentation of community service attitudes and behaviors by demographic groups.

It is documented that first-generation college students demonstrate higher concern for the school community than their continuing-generation peers (Williams & Ferarri, 2015). Future research should also consider the specific demographic makeup of the respondents (e.g., transfers, PELL-eligible, first-generation) to assess further and understand how different community service attitudes and behaviors may be held by specific demographic groups based on their group identity characteristics, which may differ from those of the larger or majority-student sample.

Understanding variances by demographic group will enable higher education professionals to create defined and intentional experiences that better serve all students, including those who may represent minority populations on campus. It may also help community engagement professionals understand why particular demographic groups may be more motivated to serve than others based on their underlying civic attitudes and behaviors. Campus administrators who lead and facilitate community service experiences often have a wide range of programmatic customization options. Understanding the attitudes and behaviors of subpopulations can enhance experiential learning experiences, increase a sense of belonging, and promote socially responsible students (Coelho & Menezes, 2021) beyond their college years.

Intended Skill Development

Our analysis indicates that students' intended skill development through community service programs remained stable during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the enduring importance of community service in cultivating transferable skills, such as active citizenship, multicultural awareness, and communication (Rockenbach et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2021). While prior studies have highlighted how the pandemic disrupted service modalities and affected student motivation (Mucci-Ferris et al., 2021; Dempsey, 2023), our results suggest that the skills students hoped to gain—citizenship (20%), awareness of multicultural issues (13%), and effective communication (11%)—were consistent with expectations during the pandemic.

This continuity may be due, in part, to the heightened sense of community and belonging that community service fosters, which the literature identifies as essential to the student experience, particularly during times of isolation (Museus, 2017; York & Fernandez, 2018). Moreover, the finding reinforces the importance of pedagogical approaches that emphasize pre-flection and reflection, which have been shown to deepen students' skill development and long-term civic engagement (Falk, 1995; Singh, 2020). Service-learning faculty and engagement professionals

can therefore continue to leverage these strategies without significant shifts in programming, even post-pandemic.

Limitations

Though we believe this study to be sound, we note three limitations. First, our study relies on self-reported attitudes and behaviors. Behaviors, in theory, can be observed or measured through direct measures. Therefore, there may be response or social desirability bias in how participants responded to this study. Respondents, for instance, might not want to express a lack of desire to help others. Our second limitation, which relates to the intended skill development, is also a self-reported desire to develop the identified skill originally used by Jensen (2014). Students may expect to develop the skill, but may have little to no understanding of the community service program as a whole and what it can likely develop. Plus, the skill list used by Jensen may not have reflected all possible or desired skills participants were hoping to develop. Finally, our sample is skewed in its representation, favoring respondents during COVID-19 (65%) over those after the pandemic (35%). This representation, along with the demographic breakdown between male and female respondents, may have influenced the results. We also acknowledge that our study did not control for previous involvement in community service.

Conclusion

Our research explored the ways that undergraduate students' attitudes, behaviors, and intended skill development through community service changed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The data showed that students' attitudes and behaviors toward community service decreased in all assessed categories post-COVID. There was no statistically significant change in the intended skill development of undergraduate students during and post-COVID-19. Attitudes and behaviors towards community service were higher during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was a time of great change, transition, and uncertainty. However, it was also a time when peer-to-peer engagement in service reached its highest level. The data may encourage university administrators and community engagement practitioners to consider the ways that emphasizing service during the first year of college, a time of great change and transition for students, may impact students' sense of belonging and improve their connection to the community, both on- and off-campus. We hope that this research offers insight and sparks discussion among community engagement practitioners in higher education and faculty who teach service-learning courses, with an emphasis on student-intended learning outcomes and the shift in their attitudes and behaviors toward service following the COVID-19 pandemic. This research may also prove helpful to university administrators as they determine curricular requirements and consider new pathways to achieve intended learning and development outcomes for students. The data indicate that faculty consistently have the greatest influence on student participation in service. Therefore, it is worth considering ways to forge the most effective academic pathways that introduce

students to service, with opportunities for supplemental programming and an emphasis on service by staff through co-curricular activities. Finally, we reaffirm the notion that this study can be contextualized for other campuses and repeated with a larger sample size and responses segmented by demographics to understand better how to tailor service experiences for different student groups and to gain a deeper understanding of the behaviors and attitudes related to service among different groups. Service is often not one size fits all, but instead provides a unique opportunity for tailored experiences based on student needs, interests, and current and desired skill sets.

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