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2017-18 Student Success and Service-Learning Report

Lynn Pelco

Division of Community Engagement

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2017-18 Student Success and Service-Learning Report

Abstract

Institutional data across multiple academic years were used to assess the impact of undergraduate service-learning class participation on three critical student success metrics: Inclusive excellence, Degree completion, and Quality of learning. Results indicate that traditionally underrepresented student groups participated in VCU service-learning classes at expected rates given their proportion in the overall student population. Thirty-seven percent of undergraduate service-learning students were from underrepresented minority groups and 30% were Pell grant recipients. The average three-year retention rate across four matriculating cohorts of first-time, full-time undergraduate students was 84% for service-learning students compared to 70% for non-service-learning students. Seventy-two percent of undergraduate service-learning students graduated in five years or less compared to 62% for non-service-learning students. Finally, on the 2017 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) VCU seniors who had passed at least one service-learning class during their undergraduate career reported significantly higher levels of faculty-student interaction and integrative learning than did VCU seniors who took no service-learning classes.

Keywords

Service-learning, student success, high impact practice, experiential education, institutional data, retention, graduation, quality of learning, impact assessment

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement | Community-Based Learning | Higher Education

STUDENT SUCCESS AND SERVICE- LEARNING



VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH
UNIVERSITY
2017-18

Prepared by Lynn E. Pelco, July 2018.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Service-learning at Virginia Commonwealth University is a real-world, high-impact educational practice that enrolls more than 3,900 graduate and undergraduate students each year in over 200 Banner-designated classes. Each student in a service-learning class provides a minimum of 20 hours of service to address a community-identified need, applies what they are learning in the classroom to address complex societal problems, and reflects on their community-based experiences.

Institutional data were used to assess the impact of service-learning class participation on three critical student success metrics: Inclusive Excellence (i.e., the degree to which diverse and underrepresented students participate in service-learning classes), Degree Completion (i.e., whether participating in a service-learning class increases students' retention and graduation rates), and Quality of Learning (i.e., the relationship between students' participation in service-learning and student learning and development).

Results for the 2017-18 academic year indicate that traditionally underrepresented student groups participated in VCU service-learning classes at expected rates. Thirty-seven percent of undergraduate service-learning students were from underrepresented minority groups and 30% were Pell recipients. The average 3-year retention rate for undergraduate service-learning students across four matriculating cohorts was 83% compared to 70% for non-service-learning students. Seventy-two percent of undergraduate service-learning students graduated in 5 years or less compared with 62% of non-service-learning students. Finally, on the 2017 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), VCU seniors who passed at least one service-learning class during their undergraduate years reported significantly higher levels of faculty-student interaction and integrative learning than did VCU seniors who do not take a service-learning class; and these findings were consistent with VCU's 2014 NSSE data.

INTRODUCTION

A growing body of research supports the notion that where students attend college is not as important as what they do while they are there. In particular, participation in experiential, high-impact educational practices during the undergraduate years has been consistently shown to correlate with higher levels of student engagement and increased graduation rates (Kuh, 2008; Center for Postsecondary Research, 2014). Service-learning is a high-impact educational practice that actively engages students in learning and links their learning to their personal and work lives.

VCU enrolls more than 3,900 graduate and undergraduate students each year in over 200 Banner-designated classes; and service-learning classes are offered in every college/school across both campuses. Each student in a service-learning class provides a minimum of 20 hours of service to address a community-identified need, applies what they are learning in the classroom to address complex societal problems, and reflects on their community-based experiences. More information about VCU service-learning, including the class designation process and faculty development opportunities, is available at <http://servicelearning.vcu.edu>.

In 2015-16 a comprehensive student success assessment framework was developed and piloted by representatives from the VCU Division of Community Engagement and Office of Planning and Decision Support. The framework and pilot assessment results are presented in an open-access online report by Pelco (2016). The current report applies this framework to assess the impact of service-learning class participation on undergraduate student success in three categories: Inclusive excellence (i.e., which undergraduates are participating in service-learning and which are not?), Degree completion (i.e., what is the relationship between participation in service-learning and student persistence and degree completion?), and Quality of learning (i.e., what levels of learning and development do service-learning students report?).

RESULTS

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE.

Institutional data from Banner were analyzed to determine whether undergraduates who participate in service-learning classes match the institution's undergraduate population on key demographic variables. These analyses provide important information related to VCU's inclusive excellence objective. Specifically, do students from underrepresented and diverse student groups participate in service-learning to the same degree as do other students? Significantly low levels of service-learning participation in specific student subgroups, especially across multiple years, can alert program administrators to the need for targeted recruitment efforts.

Service-learning 'participants' were defined as any undergraduate student who was enrolled in at least one designated service-learning class at Census 2* in each semester of the academic year. 'Nonparticipants' were defined as any undergraduate student who took no designated service-learning classes during the academic year. Demographic category comparisons for service-learning class enrollment during 2012-2018 period included: gender, ethnicity, full-time/part-time, Pell vs. non-Pell recipients, high school GPA, ACT and SAT scores.

Table 1 at the end of this report demonstrates that undergraduate students from underrepresented and diverse groups are represented in service-learning classes at expected levels given the proportion of these groups in the overall VCU undergraduate population. For example, in 2017-18 20% of undergraduate service-learning students were African-American compared to 19% in the overall undergraduate student population. For low-income students, 31% of undergraduate service-learning students were Pell recipients in 2017-18, compared to 29% in the overall undergraduate student population. Male students and part-time students are less likely to take service-learning classes than would be expected given the percentage of students in these groups in the general VCU undergraduate population.

*At VCU, Census 2 is the enrollment and admissions data snapshot taken on October 15 and March 15. Census 2 is the university's official reporting date for enrollment and admissions data.



37%

UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITIES

In 2017-18, 37% of VCU service-learning undergraduate students were from underrepresented minority groups.

31%

PELL RECIPIENTS

In 2017-18, 31% of VCU service-learning undergraduate students were Pell recipients.

RESULTS

DEGREE COMPLETION.

Institutional data from Banner were analyzed to determine whether undergraduates who participate in service-learning are being retained and graduated at higher rates than undergraduate students who have not participated service-learning. Service-learning 'participants' were defined as any first-time, full-time degree seeking undergraduate student who enrolled in at least one designated service-learning class during their first two years at VCU. 'Nonparticipants' were defined as any first-time, full-time degree seeking undergraduate student who took no designated service-learning classes during their first two years at VCU.

Table 2 at the end of this report shows that across five matriculating cohorts (2011-2015), the two-year retention rate for service-learning students was on average 16 percentage points higher than for non-service-learning students (91% vs. 75%). For four matriculating cohorts (2011-2014), the three-year retention rate for service-learning students was on average 14 percentage points higher than for non-service-learning students (84% vs. 70%). For the 2012 matriculating cohort, 72% of service-learning students graduated in five years or less compared with 62% of non-service-learning students.

These retention and graduation rate advantages for service-learning students over non-service-learning students consistently hold across cohorts even when the data are disaggregated into gender and underrepresented minority student subgroups. For example, the five-year graduation rates for the 2012 cohort are: 67% for male service-learning students vs. 54% for male non-service-learning students; 72% for underrepresented minority service-learning students vs. 63% for underrepresented minority non-service-learning students; and 68% for underrepresented minority male service-learning students vs. 52% for underrepresented minority male non-service-learning students.

These findings corroborate published research that shows service-learning students are retained and graduated at higher rates than non-service-learning students (Bringle, Hatcher & Muthiah, 2010; Lockeman & Pelco, 2013). Explanations for these findings may relate to an increased quality of the learning experience for service-learning students (see Quality of Learning on page 9).



84%

SERVICE-LEARNING RETENTION

Average 3-year retention rate for VCU service-learning undergraduate students

72%

SERVICE-LEARNING GRADUATION RATE

'Graduated < 5 years' rate for VCU undergraduate service-learning students.

QUALITY OF LEARNING.

According to Kuh's (2008) research, high-impact educational practices foster increased student success when they require student effort and engagement, help students build substantive relationships, provide students with rich and frequent feedback, enable students to integrate and apply what they are learning, and encourage reflection. Using these quality indicators as guides, we used institutional data to answer the following questions: Do service-learning participants report higher levels of reflective and integrative learning than do nonparticipants? Do service-learning participants report strong faculty-student relationships? The 2017 VCU National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results for seniors and the 2017-18 VCU Service-Learning Impact Measure (SLIM, Service-Learning Office, 2018) results were used to assess the relationship between service-learning and student engagement and learning.

Banner data was used to identify which of the 1,381 VCU seniors who responded to the 2017 NSSE had passed at least one designated service-learning class during their VCU undergraduate education. The number of VCU seniors who responded to the 2017 NSSE and who had passed at least one designated service-learning class was 367. The SLIM is a course evaluation survey administered each year by the VCU Service-Learning Office to all students enrolled in designated service-learning classes. During 2017-18, 1,154 service-learning students submitted the SLIM.

REFLECTIVE AND INTEGRATIVE LEARNING. The 2017 NSSE data indicate that VCU seniors who took a service-learning class reported significantly higher scores on the NSSE Reflective and Integrative Learning Engagement Indicator than did seniors who had not taken a service-learning class as an undergraduate (see Table 3 at the end of this report). This finding is supported by SLIM data that shows students who were enrolled in service-learning courses during the 2017-18 academic year report high ratings on questions related to reflective and integrated learning (see Table 4 at the end of this report).

QUALITY OF LEARNING.

FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTION was selected as an educationally purposeful activity to evaluate for service-learning because meaningful interactions with faculty impact a student's college experience in a multitude of ways (Kuh & Hu, 2001). Faculty-student interactions appear to have a positive influence on student development, retention, and cognitive growth (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The NSSE Student-Faculty Interaction Engagement Indicator and the faculty-student interaction question from the SLIM were used to assess the quality and quantity of student-faculty interactions.

The 2017 NSSE and the 2017-18 SLIM data both indicate that service-learning classes provide a venue for students to connect with faculty members in ways that are beneficial to learning. The mean NSSE Student-Faculty Interaction Engagement Indicator score for service-learning students was significantly higher than the mean score for seniors who took no service-learning classes (see Table 5 at the end of this report). Additionally, service-learning students rated their interactions with service-learning instructors as being beneficial to their learning (see Table 6 at the end of this report).



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Data from the 2017-18 academic year indicate that service-learning is succeeding as a high-impact experiential educational practice at Virginia Commonwealth University. Underrepresented and diverse student groups are well represented as participants, and participating students are retained and graduate at consistently higher rates than are undergraduates who have not participated. Male and part-time students appear to be under-represented in service-learning classes. Data also indicate that students who take service-learning classes are benefiting from faculty-student interactions and perceive themselves as having more undergraduate opportunities for integrative and reflective learning than their non-service-learning classmates. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Conduct follow-up investigations to help understand why males and part-time students are under-represented in service-learning classes. Collaborate with key campus administrative offices to develop strategies to address these disparities.
2. Continue to use institutional data to evaluate the impact of service-learning as a VCU high-impact educational practice and continue to use these evaluation results to inform academic programming.



TABLE 1

**Virginia Commonwealth University
Demographic Information of Undergraduate Students
Service Learning Comparison**

	2011-2012		2012-2013		2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017		2017-2018	
	Service Learning	Non Service Learning	Service Learning	Non Service Learning	Service Learning	Non Service Learning	Service Learning	Non Service Learning	Service Learning	Non Service Learning	Service Learning	Non Service Learning	Service Learning	Non Service Learning
Gender														
Female	68.2%	55.4%	67.4%	55.2%	67.2%	55.5%	71.4%	55.3%	70.9%	55.9%	68.6%	57.2%	69.6%	57.8%
Male	31.6%	44.2%	32.4%	44.5%	32.7%	44.1%	28.5%	44.4%	29.0%	43.8%	31.2%	42.5%	30.0%	41.8%
Not Reported	0.2%	0.4%	0.2%	0.4%	0.1%	0.4%	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%
Race/Ethnicity														
American Indian/Alaskan	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.6%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%
Asian	9.2%	11.6%	10.4%	11.9%	9.9%	12.1%	10.3%	12.4%	11.3%	12.7%	11.6%	12.6%	11.2%	13.0%
Black/African American	25.2%	18.5%	22.6%	18.1%	23.6%	17.8%	22.6%	17.5%	22.2%	17.8%	21.7%	18.6%	20.1%	19.1%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Hispanic/Latino	7.3%	6.3%	7.2%	7.1%	8.0%	7.5%	8.7%	7.9%	8.6%	8.4%	9.5%	8.7%	9.7%	9.2%
International	4.0%	2.8%	2.6%	2.9%	2.8%	3.0%	1.7%	3.6%	1.8%	3.7%	4.3%	3.4%	3.6%	3.4%
Two or More Races	3.4%	3.8%	4.3%	4.1%	4.7%	4.6%	5.5%	5.0%	6.5%	5.3%	5.7%	5.9%	6.7%	6.4%
Unknown	2.0%	3.4%	3.1%	3.4%	2.1%	3.4%	2.0%	2.9%	1.3%	2.6%	1.2%	2.7%	1.1%	3.0%
White	48.3%	52.9%	49.3%	51.8%	48.5%	51.2%	48.4%	50.4%	47.9%	49.0%	45.4%	47.8%	47.3%	45.5%
Student Status														
Full-Time	94.0%	85.9%	93.7%	86.2%	94.4%	86.4%	95.0%	86.2%	94.4%	86.5%	94.8%	86.3%	95.8%	86.4%
Part-Time	6.0%	14.1%	6.4%	13.9%	5.6%	13.6%	5.0%	13.8%	5.6%	13.5%	5.2%	13.3%	4.2%	13.6%
Pell														
Pell Recipient	34.1%	29.6%	34.5%	29.3%	35.8%	29.2%	32.5%	29.5%	32.7%	29.0%	30.7%	29.1%	30.5%	29.3%
Not Pell Recipient	65.9%	70.4%	65.6%	70.7%	64.3%	70.8%	67.5%	70.5%	67.3%	71.0%	69.3%	70.9%	69.5%	70.7%
High School GPA														
Q1	3.09	3.13	3.18	3.18	3.22	3.22	3.24	3.25	3.32	3.27	3.31	3.29	3.32	3.3
Median	3.34	3.41	3.45	3.46	3.49	3.5	3.51	3.54	3.59	3.56	3.57	3.59	3.6	3.6
Q3	3.65	3.75	3.77	3.81	3.82	3.84	3.84	3.87	3.91	3.9	3.9	3.93	3.94	3.95
ACT Composite Score														
Q1	19	20	20	20	20	21	20	21	21	21	20	21	21	21
Median	21	22	22	23	22	23	22	23	23	23	23	24	23	24
Q3	24	26	25	26	24	26	25	26	26	27	26	27	26	27
SAT Combined Score														
Q1	960	990	970	1000	970	1000	990	1010	990	1010	1000	1010	1010	1020
Median	1040	1080	1050	1080	1050	1090	1070	1090	1070	1090	1090	1090	1100	1110
Q3	1140	1180	1150	1190	1150	1190	1160	1190	1180	1190	1180	1190	1200	1210

Source: VCU Office of Planning and Decision Support

NOTE: Percentages provided in the table above include only undergraduate students; and, therefore, do not match exactly the percentages provided in the table on page 7 of the 2015-16 Pilot Assessment Report (Pelco, 2016), which included both undergraduate and graduate students for each academic year.

TABLE 2

Cohort Start	Group	N	Retained 1yr		Retained 2yrs		Graduated within 3yrs		Retained 3yrs		Graduated within 4yrs		Retained 4yrs		Graduated within 5yrs		Retained 5yrs		Graduated within 6yrs		Retained 6yrs	
			%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Fall 2011	Service-Learning	357	97.48	90.2	4.76	82.63	46.78	26.61	68.91	6.16	78.15	3.64										
	Not Service-Learning	3411	84.11	72.94	1.23	68.1	39.2	27.12	56.82	7.94	61.3	3.22										
	All VCU	3768	85.38	74.58	1.57	69.48	39.92	27.07	57.96	7.78	62.9	3.26										
Fall 2012	Service-Learning	325	95.69	89.23	2.77	82.15	52.31	22.46	71.08	6.46												
	Not Service-Learning	3269	85.87	76.84	1.9	71.8	44.14	26.06	62.4	6.42												
	All VCU	3594	86.76	77.96	1.98	72.73	44.88	25.74	63.19	6.43												
Fall 2013	Service-Learning	415	98.55	90.6	4.1	84.58	51.08	28.67														
	Not Service-Learning	3155	84.88	75.69	1.81	70.02	44.53	24.09														
	All VCU	3570	86.47	77.42	2.07	71.71	45.29	24.62														
Fall 2014	Service-Learning	522	97.7	91.76	6.13	83.52																
	Not Service-Learning	3037	83.8	73.07	2.7	67.27																
	All VCU	3559	85.84	75.81	3.2	69.65																
Fall 2015	Service-Learning	653	97.4	92.04																		
	Not Service-Learning	3401	84.3	74.24																		
	All VCU	4054	86.41	77.11																		
Fall 2016	Service-Learning	632	95.73																			
	Not Service-Learning	3571	80.73																			
	All VCU	4203	82.99																			

Source: Office of Planning and Decision Support

TABLE 3**2017 NSSE Reflective and Integrative Learning Engagement Indicator mean scores for service-learning and non-service-learning seniors**

Non-SL Seniors		SL Seniors	
N	Mean Score	N	Mean Score
968	37.7	353	42.2

Cohen's d < .5

TABLE 4**2014-2015 SLIM mean scores for reflection and integrative learning questions**

SLIM Question	N	Mean Score ¹	Standard Deviation
How beneficial to your learning were the reflection activities/ assignments of this class?	890	5.16	1.81
As a result of this service-learning class, I am better able to connect my learning to societal problems or issues.	869	5.71	1.57
As a result of this service-learning class, I am better able to consider different cultural perspectives when evaluating social problems.	867	5.63	1.67
As a result of this service-learning class, I am better able to examine the strengths and weaknesses of my own views on a topic or issue	868	5.63	1.58

¹Scores range from 1= Not at All/Not Beneficial at All to 7=Very Much/Very Beneficial**TABLE 5****2017 NSSE Student-Faculty Interaction Engagement Indicator mean scores for service-learning and non-service-learning seniors**

Non-SL Seniors		SL Seniors	
N	Mean Score	N	Mean Score
1,112	22.0**	353	24.9**

**p<.01

TABLE 6**2017-18 SLIM mean scores for faculty-student interaction questions**

SLIM Question	Mean Score ¹	Standard Deviation
How beneficial to your learning were your interactions with the instructor of the class?	5.54	1.75

¹Scores range from 1= Not at All/Not Beneficial at All to 7=Very Much/Very Beneficial

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