Journal of Educational Research and Innovation

2014

Incorporating Service Learners in Community Engaged Research: Experiential Application of Social Science Perspectives and Research Methods

Christine Marston

Kyle Ann Nelson

Follow this and additional works at: http://digscholarship.unco.edu/jeri

Part of the Education Commons

Incorporating Service Learners in Community-Engaged Research: Experiential Application of Social Science Perspectives and Research Methods

Christine Marston
Kyle Anne Nelson

University of Northern Colorado

Community-engaged scholarship and service learning pedagogy are increasing trends in higher education (Campus Compact, 2013a; Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, and Swanson, 2012; Fuller, 2013; Reardon, 1998). These endeavors bring faculty and students off campus and into their communities where academic principles and approaches can be applied in the real world (Cashman and Seifer, 2008; Klein, Fatima, McEwen, Moser, Schmidt, and Zupan, 2011; Stanton, 2012). As such, they yield synergistic value to the three-pronged mission of higher education of teaching, service and research (Boyer, 1990; Fitzgerald et al., 2012; Furco, 2010; Stanton, 2012). The social sciences—broadly defined as the studies of human behavior, and including disciplines such as economics, sociology, political science, and geography—have a natural connection with community-engaged scholarship as well as service learning pedagogy (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2007; Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences [CHSS], 2013). The work of engaged social science faculty offers meaningful contributions to address community needs, and serves to enhance university-community partnerships (Furco,

2010; Klein et al., 2011; Stanton, 2012). Students participating in service learning can "acquire first-hand knowledge" as well as develop social science skills and perspectives through structured interaction with the community (NCSS, 2007, p. 1). While ample literature presents student outcomes in service learning, few studies specifically address student outcomes related to participation in community-engaged research (Reardon, 1994; Schaffer and Peterson, 1998). Across two social science courses, undergraduate students participated with faculty in community-engaged research. This paper presents student perceptions and assesses student performance on assignments related to service learning.

Author One (Economics and Social Science) and Author Two (Sociology), share a research interest in examining immigrant and refugee integration issues. We pursue this interest not only in our research, but also strive to share and apply this expertise in the classroom. We have each received Campus Compact[1] and university-sponsored training and professional development in service learning pedagogy. In the spring of 2013, we employed community-engaged service

learning research in two distinct courses related to immigration and global issues. These courses shared the purpose of imbuing students with core social science concepts and research methods related to migration through participation in data collection and analysis with a local community organization. In evaluating student experiences in the service learning project, the following questions guided our work:

1. Are students successful in applying social science course themes to the service learning research project?
2. Are there differences in student perceptions or outcomes of the service learning experience across the two courses?
3. Based on their own written reflections, what are students' perceptions of the service learning experience?

Our findings reveal that students effectively connected course themes to the service learning research project in the community. The experience is highly valued by students, faculty, and the community. Evidence presented here of students' transformative experiences in service learning can inform future efforts in higher education to bridge faculty research with innovative pedagogy and meaningful community collaboration.

Community-Engaged Scholarship and Experiential Transformative Learning

Community-engaged scholarship connects higher education with research activities that address community-identified needs (Driscoll, 2009; Furco, 2010; Sandmann, Thornton, and Jaeger, 2009).

Partnerships between higher education and the community advance the research accomplishments of faculty, allow faculty to teach in innovative ways, deepen students' academic and civic learning, and provide service to the community (Boyer, 1996; Carnegie Foundation, 2013; Klein et al., 2011; Stall, 2010). In Campus Compact's (2013a) annual report, 96% of members had formal centers focused on community engagement and they contributed a collective $9.7 billion dollars in service to their communities. Among the 557 members that responded to this survey, 44% of their students participated in some form of community engagement during the 2011-2012 academic year.

As depicted in Figure 1, derived from figures by Furco (2010), the sweet spot in higher education lies at the intersection of the three missions of teaching, research, and service. At this juncture, faculty and students have the opportunity to experience transformative learning, or "a deep shift in perspective and noticeable changes in actions as a result of the shift" (Cranton, 2011, p. 76). Given the opportunity to participate in community-engaged social science research and interact with the community to address specific needs, students can deepen their understanding of course themes and in turn deepen their own awareness of social issues (Kolb, 1984). As Cashman and Seifer (2008) point out, "experiential learning differs from more traditional education…. Immersed in action, students make discoveries and experiment with knowledge themselves instead of hearing or reading about others' experiences" (p. 274).
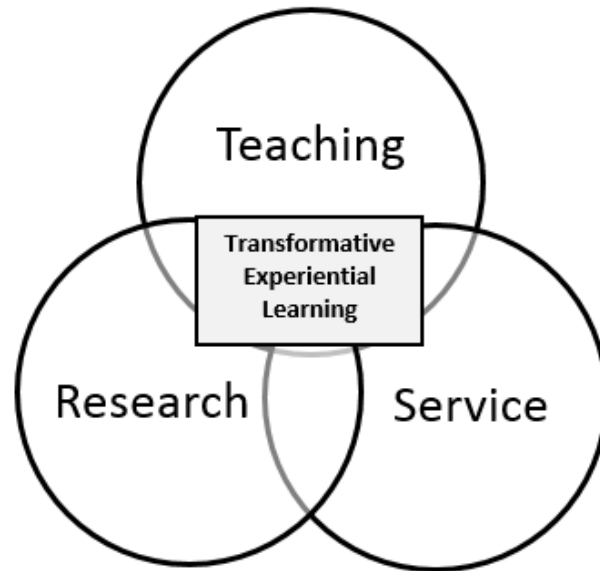
Figure 1. Transformative Experiential Learning and the Tripartite Mission of Higher Education (Furco, 2010).

The potential for transformative learning is especially great in the social sciences (CHSS, 2013; Fitzpatrick, 2013; NCSS, 2007). The Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences (2013) asserts:

> As we strive to create a more civil public discourse, a more adaptable and creative workforce, and a more secure nation, the humanities and social sciences are the heart of the matter, the keeper of the republic—a source of national memory and civic vigor, cultural understanding and communication, individual fulfillment and the ideals we hold in common… Together, they help us understand what it means to be human and connect us with our global community (p. 9).

Service learning facilitates transformative education by providing learners with the opportunity to become aware and critical of their own and others' assumptions (Mezirow, 1997); as a result, integrating service learning with traditional course content can bolster student learning and make lasting impressions (Cashman and Seifer, 2008; Kolb, 1984).

Incorporating Service Learners in Community-Engaged Research

Service learning involves students in meaningful, organized community service that addresses identified community needs (Boyer, 1996; Klein et al., 2011; Stall, 2010). At its core, however, community engagement must be scholarly in order to serve the tripartite mission of higher education (Bringle and Hatcher, 2011; Fitzgerald et al., 2012). Service learning differs tangibly from traditional extracurricular voluntary service as well as practica and internships (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996) because the community interaction is coordinated with academic course themes that are discussed and synthesized in the classroom.
Although volunteerism in itself is important

3

to our communities and can be valuable for students, what differentiates volunteerism from service learning in terms of pedagogy is the purposeful application of the service experience to academic course content. For example, a student may volunteer at an organization by babysitting children or organizing files. These types of volunteer experiences become service learning if they are connected to an academic course wherein the student reflects on her time spent at the organization and applies the experience in a focused and scholarly way. Service learning courses directly connect real-world experiences in the classroom. Service learning appeals to today's millennial students (Furco, 2010) who appreciate the opportunity to make contributions to society while also enhancing their understanding of academic concepts and approaches.

Building from Boyer's (1996) landmark work establishing the value of service learning pedagogy, a growing body of literature reports evidence of the positive impact of service learning on student outcomes (Bringle and Hatcher, 2011; Celio, Durlak, and Dymnicki, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2013; Levesque-Bristol, Knapp, and Fisher, 2010; Molee, Henry, Sessa, and McKinney-Prupis, 2010). However, few studies provide in-depth discussion of student perceptions. In addition, few studies report findings based on service learning projects where students are engaged in research. Reardon (1994) points out, "A frequently overlooked form of service learning is the work being carried out by students serving as community researchers" (p. 44). Schaffer and Peterson (1998) posit, "teaching research as 'doing research as service' is not only an effective way to promote learning the research process,

but is also rewarding to students, faculty, and community partners" (p. 161). Schaffer and Peterson (1998) and Reardon (1994; 1998) incorporated students in hands-on research activities, but did not report details of students' experiences and perceptions. This study adds to the literature by presenting details of students' experiential transformative learning in community-engaged service learning research.

Method

During the Spring 2013 15-week academic semester, we incorporated undergraduate students within two distinct academic courses (one in Social Science and one in Sociology) in our community-engaged scholarship as service learners. The purpose of this study is to evaluate student perceptions and outcomes from their service learning experiences across the two courses. The courses are Author One's "Social Science: A Global Perspective," a university general education elective and Social Science major requirement offered at the freshman level, and Author Two's "Global Immigration," an upper division Sociology elective. In this section, we describe our two courses, our community partner, the research project students participated in as service learners, and our method of evaluating student outcomes from the service learning research project.

Service Learning Courses

Both the Social Science and Sociology courses focus on migration and global issues from a multidisciplinary social science perspective. In alignment with the three overlapping missions of higher education to make advances in teaching, service, and research (Furco, 2010), these courses were designed specifically to bring about

experiential transformative learning through community-engaged research. In order to facilitate students' learning of course themes and research methods, we integrated service learning with traditional academic content. In both courses, the service learning project was interwoven with course material, assignments, and class discussion.

We incorporated students as service learners in our own community-engaged refugee integration research. There were two common components to the service learning project which we discuss in more detail below: a) conducting interviews with clients of a local refugee service organization, and b) completing a structured critical reflection assignment after each interview. In the Social Science course, the service learning project comprised 20% of the final course grade, while these activities comprised 30% of the final course grade in the Sociology course.

The objectives of the service learning project were similar across the two courses. In the Social Science course, the objective was to provide students the opportunity to explore how the disciplines of history,

economics, geography, and political science may be integrated to better understand other countries and cultures. The focus of the Sociology course is to enable students to critically and sociologically analyze trends, causes, and consequences of global immigration. Thus, the service learning experience allowed students to apply course-related knowledge of global immigration and expand their perspectives on citizenship, as well as immigrant and refugee experiences. Interviews with local refugees helped students to learn about other cultures, connect with others, apply course themes and terminology, and participate first-hand in social science research.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the students in the Social Science and Sociology courses. The Social Science course was larger than the Sociology course and included a majority of freshman and sophomore students (18/30) from a range of majors. The Sociology course was predominantly juniors and seniors (16/19) and mostly Sociology majors (12/19).

5

Table 1

Service Learning Student Characteristics

Characteristic	Social Science Spring 2013	Sociology Spring 2013	Total
# students	30	19	49
# male	12	10	22
# female	18	9	27
Year in school	3 senior	12 senior	15 senior
	8 junior	4 junior	12 junior
	5 sophomore	3 sophomore	8 sophomore
	13 freshman	0 freshman	13 freshman
Major	6 Social Science	0 Social Science	6 Social Science
	0 Sociology	12 Sociology	12 Sociology
	6 other social sci.	2 other social sci.	8 other social sci.
	7 humanities	3 humanities	10 humanities
	3 health sci.	2 health sci.	5 health sci.
	8 undeclared	0 undeclared	8 undeclared

Community-Engaged Research with Service Learners

Since 2011, we have collaborated with a non-profit partner[2], a community-based organization which serves the local refugee and immigrant community, providing case management, English language and citizenship education, as well as referrals to other services and benefits in the area. The agency's mission is to work with the refugee population to improve their quality of life by implementing programs in Education, Health, Finance, Culture, and Civil and Human Rights that lead to self-sufficiency and self-reliance. Our collaboration with the community partner is a mutually-beneficial partnership through which we apply our social science expertise to assist them to build capacity, and gather and analyze information about its clientele.

Theory and research focused on immigrant assimilation and integration is abundant in the social sciences. At the same time, there is a paucity of work specifically examining the experiences of refugees (Bollinger and Hagstrom, 2011). Foreign born refugee populations originating from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe are continuing to grow as a proportion of the immigrant population nationwide and in Colorado. The Colorado Department of Human Services (2012) reports that from 1980-2012, more than 44,000 refugees and asylees settled in Colorado as the first point of entry to the U.S.; local estimates suggest that there are now approximately 2,500 in the area. Based on a database we created for the agency through compilation of their paper and electronic files, we estimate that since its foundation in in 2008, the agency has served at least 600 refugee adults from over

25 countries. Some of the local refugee population is new to the United States, while others are coming to the community after initial resettlement elsewhere in Colorado or the U.S. Understanding the processes of integration into the U.S. and within local communities has become an issue of increasing importance for both the growing number of refugees themselves and for the communities where refugees are settling.

Prior to the start of the semester-long project, we applied for and received approval from our university's Institutional Review Board to allow our service-learning students to conduct interviews with their clients. At this time, we created a 22-question survey instrument asking refugees for basic demographic information such as age and country of origin, as well as for their international and intra-U.S. movement. Our research goal for the interview data is to advance knowledge about the migration patterns among refugees living in the U.S. Interview questions include:

- Before coming to the U.S., did you live anywhere else? Where and for how long?
- Did you ever spend time in a refugee camp? Where and for how long?
- When did you first arrive in the U.S.?
- Where did you first arrive in the U.S.? (State? City?)
- How long did you stay there?
- Did you come to the U.S. with anyone else? If so, with whom?

Service learning students helped us and the local non-profit to conduct and analyze migration history interviews with their clients. Students in both the Social Science and Sociology courses were informed of the service learning project as part of the course requirements at the beginning of the semester, and were trained in informed consent procedures and interview techniques. The community partner staff provided informational sessions in both classes and we spent time discussing proper interview etiquette and professionalism. Students also conducted mock interviews with refugee volunteers in order to have practice asking the questions and taking notes of responses. Students reported that the practice interviews were instructive and reduced their anxiety about conducting the interviews.

The students worked in groups of two or three and were always under the supervision of on-site staff. Each student was responsible for participating in two migration history interviews (conducted on two separate occasions with at least one partner) and writing up the responses. In total, the service learners interviewed 50 refugee clients of our community partner. As a new organization with growing demands for its services, they were eager to see the formal collection of migration history information from its client population. Information from the interviews will help the non-profit to better know its population, guide case management and education services, provide information to the greater community about local refugees, and adhere to grant reporting requirements. Thus, this project reflects the literature on community-engaged scholarship and service learning by providing tangible benefits to the community partner, learning opportunities for the students, and research and scholarship activities for the faculty and students alike.

Evaluation of Service Learners

The key method for developing and assessing student outcomes in service learning pedagogy is critical reflection (Boyer, 1996; Cashman and Seifer, 2008; Celio, Durlak, and Dymnicki, 2011; Dubinsky, 2006; Fitzpatrick, 2013; Furco, 2010; Hatcher and Bringle, 1997; Levesque-Bristol et al., 2010; Molee et al., 2010). Critical reflection deepens understanding of course content, the academic discipline, and civic responsibility (Boyer, 1996; Furco, 2010; Hatcher and Bringle, 1997). Across both courses, students completed very similar structured reflection assignments after each round of interviews. In these assignments, students were required to discuss their opinions and experiences of the service learning research project, and make connections to course themes.

In the Social Sciences course, students answered the following prompt for the reflection assignment:

Reflection – write a two-page, typed reflection of this service learning experience.
Questions to address include:

- What did you learn from this interview?
- Did you have any fears or concerns about this project? Were they resolved?
- What did you learn about yourself from this project?
- What connections can you describe between the service learning project and the classroom experience (text, discussions, videos, etc.)? How does this relate to our four disciplines?

- Did you feel prepared to engage in this project? If not, what would have made you feel more prepared?
- Other reflections?

In the Sociology course, students answered the following prompts for their reflection assignment:

A. Reflect on the experience.
Follow your own thought process, addressing the following types of questions:

- What were your expectations of the experience? Were these accurate?
- What were your overall impressions of the experience?
- What did you learn?
- Did you feel prepared to engage in this project?
- What might you have done differently?
- What next steps would you like to take? (With this interview, in this class, or in general?)

B. What connections can you identify between this experience and our classroom discussions/course material? Try to brainstorm at least two direct linkages to the reading or theories or themes or videos.

To analyze student reflection assignments, we first read and systematically coded their comments about the service learning experience. Broad themes emerged and are discussed below. Next, we used a common rubric to assess student connections to course themes and use of course-related terminology. We rated students' written assignments on a three-level scale: students' reflections were rated as "Exceeds Expectations (A)" when their

remarks established original thoughts and insights connecting course themes to the service learning experiences and used extensive terminology from course material; a rating of "Meets Expectations (B & C)" was given for remarks which had clear connections between course concepts and service learning and some use of terminology from course material; and, a "Below Expectations (D & F)" was given for remarks that only vaguely linked course concepts to their service learning experiences, and showed little evidence of terminology from course material. Lastly, we compared students' perceptions of service learning as well as their outcomes in connecting service learning to course themes across the two courses.

Results

Based on evaluation of student reports and assessment of student outcomes from the service learning research project with the local community partner, we find that students were highly satisfied with the project. Overall, 47 of 49 students (96%) reported that the service learning project was a valuable course experience. It is important to note that the two students who did not report being highly satisfied (one from each course) were not negative about the experience, but did not express any positive impressions of the service learning project. We present our findings in order of the guiding questions presented above.

Table 2 summarizes the results from reflection assignments assessing students' ability to connect the service learning research project with key course themes and concepts. For the Social Science students, this included direct mention of the fields of history, economics, geography, and political science in the study of

migration, as well as incorporation of relevant terms such as "primary sources," "resource allocation," "ecology," or "government persecution." For the Sociology course, applying course themes and terminology meant discussion of causes and consequences of migration and related theories, with incorporation of terms such as "assimilation," "network theory," "push-pull factors," or "multiculturalism." Overall, students were fairly successful in integrating the service learning experience with academic learning. Across both classes, 39 of 49 students (80%) met or exceeded expectations, with 37% meriting "Exceeds Expectations." In these cases, students used an extensive amount of course-related terminology while applying their service learning experiences to course themes.

For example, one graduating Social Science major in the Social Science class observed:

> History, political science, economics, and particularly geography help to explain why these two refugees I interviewed shared more similarities than differences. Their shared history of Somalis as a birth place, the political system of the U.S. that allows the settlement of refugees, and economic security through a large employer like [the local meatpacking plant], were large determinants of lifetime experiences for [the refugees I interviewed].

Another observation that exceeded expectations was written by a Junior Sociology major in the Sociology class. The student wrote:

> The second connection that I made with [my interview subject] is how aware she was of how to avoid straight-line assimilation….She pointed

9

out in the interview how she saw a lot of Somalis dressing up like they were raised in the U.S. their whole lives. She was confused by this and made clear that she will still continue to wear her traditional clothing and religion and normal practices like she would do if she were back home in Somalia. Since [she] is so new to the U.S., I wonder if she is not used to the customs in the U.S. and therefore wants to keep her normal ways of life for the time being?

Another Junior Sociology major in the Sociology course observed:

I connect transnationalism to what is happening at the [non-profit organization] and what we are studying in class… The [non-profit organization] acts as the link between the refugees' countries and to the U.S. [Refugees] are around people who can speak their language and understand their cultural practices, while they are also taught about the U.S. So, social fields are built and being built in each of their countries.

Table 2

Integrating Service Learning Experiences with Course Themes and Terminology

	Spring 2013 Social Science N = 30 students	Spring 2013 Sociology N = 19 students
BELOW EXPECTATIONS (D & F) Vaguely linked concepts to experiences; little evidence of terminology from course material	9 (30%)	1 (5%)
MEETS EXPECTATIONS (B & C) Clarity in making connections between concepts and experiences; adequate use of terminology from course material	12 (40%)	12 (63%)
EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS (A) Establishes original thoughts and insights about the connections; extensive use of terminology from course material	9 (30%)	6 (32%)

Comparing outcomes of student connections across the Social Science and Sociology courses reveals predictable differences. In the upper division Sociology course where the majority of students were seniors and there were no first-year students, Table 2 shows that 18 of 19 students (95%) met or exceeded expectations. However, in the introductory Social Science course where the majority of students were first-year students and sophomores, 21 of 30 students (70%) met or exceeded expectations. While we find that the

10

students in the Sociology course were more likely to meet or exceed expectations for connecting the service learning activities with course themes, all students across both courses completed the migration history interviews and conducted themselves professionally during our interactions.

Turning to the evaluation of student reports in their structured reflection assignments, there were no observable differences in the perceptions of the service learning experience across the two courses. Students reported positive perceptions of the experience across both courses; overall, three central themes emerged from our coding of student reflections: a) Students valued the opportunity to participate in social science research methods in an actual study; b) Students felt the project enhanced participation and discussion in the classroom; and c) Students enjoyed the first-hand exposure to refugees in our community, gained new perspectives, and felt transformed by the project. We discuss these themes in more detail, below, including a sampling of student reflections in their own words.

Student Reflections on the Application of Social Science Research Methods

As stated above, a key student learning objective was to engage students' methodological skills directly, echoing findings from Schaffer and Peterson (1998). Students appreciated being able to participate in applied social science research. This sentiment is highlighted by several quotes from student reflections in both classes. A student in the Sociology class, a Junior Sociology major, stated, "It is great to be able to learn interview techniques in a hands-on environment." Another Junior Sociology major in the same class noted:

In this interview we are placed in a potentially uncomfortable situation in which we either have to overcome it by adjusting to what is given to us or fail trying, and that it not a bad thing either. We learn just as much by failing as we do with succeeding. I also believe talking to someone who has walked a different path in life can enrich life, and make us more aware of the world around us.

A Sophomore History major in the Social Science course noted, "This is totally different from a regular social science course. Going out into the community and gathering information is something social scientists do, so it was a great learning experience." A Junior English major in the same course exclaimed in her reflection, "This is social science at work! It's great idea to have projects like this in an intro class."

As additional evidence of their incorporation in applied research, students discussed ways of making the interview process go more smoothly during the debriefing sessions before and after both rounds of interviews. Students in both courses made valuable suggestions for improving the informed consent procedures with the refugees and contributed to edits to two of the interview questions. Specifically, the original interview guide asked, "Do you live alone?" Students found this to be an awkward question for respondents who did in fact reported living alone, especially if the interviewees were female. Therefore, we changed the question to read, "Do you live with anyone?" Another edit of the interview guide resulting from student input was the question, "What is your nationality or ethnic origin?" which we changed to "What is your ethnic origin or ethnic

11

identity?" since students reported that the concept of nationality was confusing to interviewees.

Student Reflections of Enhanced Participation in the Classroom

The second theme we observed from student reflections involved classroom peer interaction. Students report having increased participation in class participation and more meaningful engagement with their peers in our classes given their shared experience of service learning. This theme is consistent with findings from Levesque-Bristol et al. (2010) and Kiely (2005). One junior Sociology major in the Sociology course stated, "With assigning readings… not all students will participate, making discussion less beneficial. Because we've all participated in the interviews, we've all had similar yet unique experiences that we can share with each other and compare our understandings." A sophomore Political Science major in the Social Science course noted:

> When it comes to the Social Sciences, I think there are more interpretations of issues than any text book could explain. Learning views and ideas from other students is the best way to explore the knowledge set forth in this class.

Student Reflections of Experiential Transformative Learning

Students report having had little to no outside-the-classroom experience at college and expressed their support of these opportunities. The experiential transformative learning process was evident in their reflections (represented in the quotes, below) as they described how personally impactful the service learning project was to their own learning and to their understanding of the experiences of refugees and the work of non-profit organizations. One Sophomore Social Science major in the Social Science course commented, "Sitting down with a refugee and listening to them talk was such an incredible experience." Another student who is an undeclared Freshman in the course stated:

> As I have been progressing through my first year of college, I have been enduring many changes in my life. I have learned patience, diversity, and not to be so closed minded... I liked having interaction with people who have had to change their life to start a new path. They have many stories to tell and they are just waiting to be heard. This experience was very enlightening.

An additional student comment that supported how students valued the service learning project was made by a Graduating Senior Criminal Justice major in the Sociology course, "To be honest, most 'book learning' goes out the door after the class is over. The hands on personal style, has much more of a lasting effect." This concept was reiterated by a Graduating Senior Psychology major in the same course:

> I do think this is a valuable experience that more people should go through. We can learn and read stories about immigrants coming here but being able to actually speak to that person and put a face to the story makes it that much more powerful. It puts a lot into perspective, and makes you appreciate all the small things in life that could be so much harder... I am actually thinking about volunteering…over the summer and trying to help more people.

In the Social Science course, an undeclared Freshman said, "I loved doing these interviews. It provided a

hands-on activity that was very informative. It also gave me a look into the life of a refugee."

Students also gleaned the importance of their work to the community partner. A Sophomore in the Social Science course stated:

> [The interviews] made me mentally try to imagine myself engaging on their journeys…I gained an appreciation for the mission of the [non-profit].
> For one organization to be able to serve such a broad group is incredible. Supporting and recognizing organizations like this one in a person's community is part of assuming a person's civic duty. These interviews introduced me to this organization and opened a door for future volunteer opportunities.

As the faculty who developed the service learning projects for these two courses, we found the student comments above to provide support of the transformative learning that occurred for our students as is further discussed in the next section.

Discussion

Our findings demonstrate that the service learning research project was a positive experience for students and brought about deep transformative learning. Students not only valued the experience, but demonstrated competence in applying their experience to academic course themes. This adds to the small but growing body of work highlighting the value of incorporating students in hands-on community-engaged research.
Reardon (1994) explains:

> Students participating in such efforts have the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and understanding of urban

communities, social problems, research methods, and group process techniques while providing critically needed… assistance to financially strapped non-profit organizations… struggling to solve important social problems" (p. 44).

Consistent with other studies (Fitzpatrick, 2013; Reardon, 1994; Schaffer and Peterson, 1998), our findings confirm the value of service learning with the contribution to the field of detailed evidence of student outcomes and detailed student accounts.

Our finding that the mostly upper-division students in the Sociology course were better able to connect the service learning activities with course themes echoes similar findings from Molee et al. (2010) that lower-division students are not as well-equipped to make the connections. This suggests that the structure of the critical reflection activities in the Social Science course could be modified to enhance the ability of lower-class students to identify those linkages and thus learn more.

The service learning project was also beneficial to our community partner. The interview data has informed the organization about the migration patterns of its clientele, and provides a professional and scholarly analysis which is suitable for sharing with other community providers, government agencies, and grant funders. In addition, the agency has a goal of outreach with the community and values the interactions with the local university's students and faculty. Our students were introduced to the agency, know about their mission and services, and are more culturally informed from their interactions with local refugees.

13

Lessons Learned

We conclude with a discussion of the lessons we learned through implementation of the service learning project, and presentation of our own reflections on the experience. Looking back on the design of the service learning activities, there are lessons we learned that may prove informative for others embarking on integrating community-engaged research and service learning. We designed these courses independently, as they were the first of their kind in both the Social Science and Sociology departments. The initial implementation of service learning as well as this evaluation of the project presented logistical challenges, especially without the institutional resources which have been found to expedite and enhance service learning implementation in other higher education settings (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996; Fuller, 2013; Furco, 2010; Stanton, 2012). Building the relationship and trust with the community partner, working with them in the design of the community-based research, drafting service learning contracts for students, integrating service learning assignments with course content, developing the schedules for the interactions and interviews was all very time-consuming. In addition to building and implementing the service learning project, we independently developed the informed consent procedures for our students so that we could conduct this evaluation. Without having already established a rapport with the local non-profit, this work may not have been possible within this timeframe. As expressed in the literature (Cashman and Seifer, 2008), careful planning and collaboration with the community partner is the key to successful implementation of service learning, as well as other community-engaged research.

We also found that working together helped to ease some of the heavy logistical burdens.

As the semester was ongoing, facilitating the service learning research project presented other challenges that required a good deal of energy to resolve. Working with community partners and their clients requires patience from faculty, students, the community partner, and their clients in terms of negotiating schedules and managing competing demands on everyone's time. In the end, everyone was highly satisfied with the experience, but the reality that the interviews were outside of the normal responsibilities for our students and for the staff was something we were sensitive to throughout the project. Though we tried to keep the migration history interviews simple and structured, the formality of the survey instrument and the need for oral translation to and from numerous languages during the interviews was a challenge to the staff, the refugees and our students. We spent more class time than anticipated on assuaging student fears and concerns about going to the non-profit and conducting the interviews. While the service learners and staff made useful suggestions which ultimately improved the interview process, it would be ideal to allow the service learners to have more influence on the nature and format of the community-engaged research alongside faculty members and the community partner in advance of data collection. Increased institutional support for service learning might bring more visibility to these types of projects for students and enhance student confidence in the process as well.

For us as researchers, implementing service learners in our data collection meant slowing our timeline and giving up

14

some control over research activities. The benefits of the students' participation far outweighed the drawbacks; however, we certainly learned that accomplishing a synergy between teaching, research, and service means occasional compromises in one area or another along the way. Our service learning students were professional and engaged participants in our social science research, they reflected that service learning enhanced their understanding of global issues, and they reported feeling transformed by the experience. These findings demonstrate the value of community-engaged scholarship.

As social science faculty who dedicate much of our professional time to undergraduate instruction, we were also transformed by the experience and have found the connections between teaching, research, and service to be meaningful and worthwhile. Applying social science perspectives and methods through community-engaged teaching and research was personally rewarding as we facilitated and witnessed the transformative learning that our students achieved in our courses. We will utilize the students' reflections (as well as the community partner's input not reported here) to strengthen the service learning components for our courses in subsequent semesters. We look forward to expanding our own service learning and community-engaged research activities, and hope to see more development of the pedagogy of community-engaged scholarship in higher education.

Christine Marston *is an associate professor in the Department of Economics at the University of Northern Colorado. She can be contacted at christine.marston@unco.edu.*

Kyle Anne Nelson *is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Northern Colorado. She can be contacted at kyle.nelson@unco.edu.*

Authors are listed in alphabetical order, with commensurate contributions by each author to the article.

References

Bollinger, C. R., & Hagstrom, P. (2011). The poverty reduction success of public transfers for working age immigrants and refugees in the United States. *Contemporary Economic Policy*, *29*(2), 191-206.

Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities for the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Boyer, E. L. (1996). The scholarship of engagement. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 49*(7), 18-33.

Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (1996). Implementing service learning in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 221-239.

Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (2011). Student engagement trends over time. In H. E. Fitzgerald, C. Burack, & S. D. Seifer (Eds.), *Handbook of engaged scholarship: Contemporary landscapes, future directions: Vol.2. Community-campus partnerships* (411–430). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

15

Campus Compact (2013a). *Creating a culture of assessment: 2012 campus compact annual member survey*. Boston, MA: Campus Compact. Retrieved from http://www.compact.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Campus-Compact-2012-Statistics.pdf

Campus Compact. (2013b). *Who we are*. Retrieved from http://www.compact.org/about/history-mission-vision/

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (2013*). Classification description: community engagement elective classification*. Retrieved from http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php

Cashman, S. B., & Seifer, S. D. (2008). Service-learning: an integral part of undergraduate public health. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 35*(3), 273-278.

Celio, C. I., Durlak, J., & Dymnicki, A. (2011). A meta-analysis of the impact of service-learning on students. *Journal of Experiential Education, 34*(2), 164-181. doi:10.5193/JEE34.2.164

Colorado Department of Human Services. (2012). *About Refugees* [Data File]. Retrieved from http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CDHS-SelfSuff/CBON/1251581469402

Commission Humanities and Social Sciences. (2013). *The heart of the matter*. American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Retrieved from http://www.humanitiescommission.org/_pdf/HSS_Report.pdf

Cranton, P. (2011). A transformative perspective on the scholarship of teaching and learning. *Higher Education Research & Development, 30*(1), 75-86.

Driscoll, A. (2009). Carnegie's new community engagement classification: Affirming higher education's role in community. *New Directions for Higher Education, 2009*(147), 5-12.

Dubinsky, J. (2006). The role of reflection in service learning. *Business Communication Quarterly, 69*(3), 306-311.

Fitzgerald, H. E., Bruns, K., Sonka, S. T., Furco, A., & Swanson, L. (2012). The centrality of engagement in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 16*(3), 7-27.

Fitzpatrick, J. (2013). The utilization of a service learning assignment in an undergraduate public policy course. *PRISM: A Journal of Regional Engagement, 2*(1), 6.

Fuller, D. S. (2012). Service-learning and civic engagement: A return to our roots. *Engaged: The Journal of Tennessee State University, 1*(1), 8.

Furco, A. (2010). The engaged campus: Toward a comprehensive approach to public engagement. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 58*(4), 375-390.

Hatcher, J. A., & Bringle, R. G. (1997). Reflection: Bridging the gap between service and learning. *College Teaching, 45*(4), 153-158.

Kiely, R. (2005). A transformative learning model for service-learning: A longitudinal case study. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 12*(1).

16

Klein, P., Fatima, M., McEwen, L., Moser, S. C., Schmidt, D., & Zupan, S. (2011). Dismantling the ivory tower: Engaging geographers in university–community partnerships. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 35*(3), 425-444.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development (Vol. 1).* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Levesque-Bristol, C., Knapp, T. D., & Fisher, B. J. (2010). The effectiveness of service-learning: It's not always what you think. *Journal of Experiential Education, 33*(3), 208-224.

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New directions for adult and continuing education, 1997*(74), 5-12.

Molee, L. M., Henry, M. E., Sessa, V. I., & McKinney-Prupis, E. R. (2010). Assessing learning in service-learning courses through critical reflection. *Journal of Experiential Education, 33*(3), 239-257.

National Council for the Social Studies. (2007). Service-learning: An essential component of citizenship education. Retrieved from http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/servicelearning

Reardon, K. M. (1994). Undergraduate research in distressed urban communities: An undervalued form of service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 1*(1), 44-54.

Reardon, K. M. (1998). Participatory action research as service learning. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 73*, 57-64.

Sandmann, L. R., Thornton, C. H., & Jaeger, A. J. (2009). The first wave of community-engaged institutions. *New Directions for Higher Education, 2009*(147).

Schaffer, M. A., & Peterson, S. (1998). Service learning as a strategy for teaching undergraduate research. *The Journal of Experiential Education, 21*(3), 154-161.

Stall, S. (2010). CIVIC SOCIOLOGY. *The Sociological Quarterly*, *51*(4), 537-549.

Stanton, T. K. (2012). New times demand new scholarship II: Research universities and civic engagement: Opportunities and challenges. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 16*(4), 271-303.

Endnotes

[1] Campus Compact is a higher education association dedicated to campus-based civic engagement. Working with public and private universities nationwide, Campus Compact promotes public and community service that develops students' citizenship and service skills, helps campuses build effective community partnerships, and provides resources and training for faculty to integrate community-based learning into the curriculum (Campus Compact, 2013b).

[2] Author Two joined the organization's Board of Directors in 2013.