



IUPUI Solution Center Impact Evaluation Study: Lessons Learned

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abstract

In 2012 an evaluation was conducted to measure the effect of experiential learning activities (class projects, research projects, internships, community-based projects, independent study, or other) coordinated by the IUPUI Solution Center had on: 1) IUPUI students' academic and future career development, 2) IUPUI faculty members' opportunities for networking and collaboration, and improving their academic productivity; and 3) community partners' organizational capacities and productivity. Results are based on the perceptions of the populations involved in these experiences.

The IUPUI Solution Center facilitates engagement opportunities between IUPUI's community of scholars, researchers, and students and Indiana's business, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations to get involved in internships, class projects, volunteering and research projects which create, for students, improved conditions for experiential learning.

The Center intends to positively impact on:

- Students' academic and future career development, by increasing student's possibilities to experience professional opportunities while studying.
- Faculty members' academic practices, by increasing their opportunities to develop new connections with the community and collaborations with IUPUI faculty
- Partners' organizational capacities and productivity, by increasing their opportunities to build new internal capacities and strengthen human resources, and develop new programs, products, and relationships.

methodology

The evaluation design was Mixed Sequential Explanatory (Creswell, 2008), combining the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data, and then triangulation.

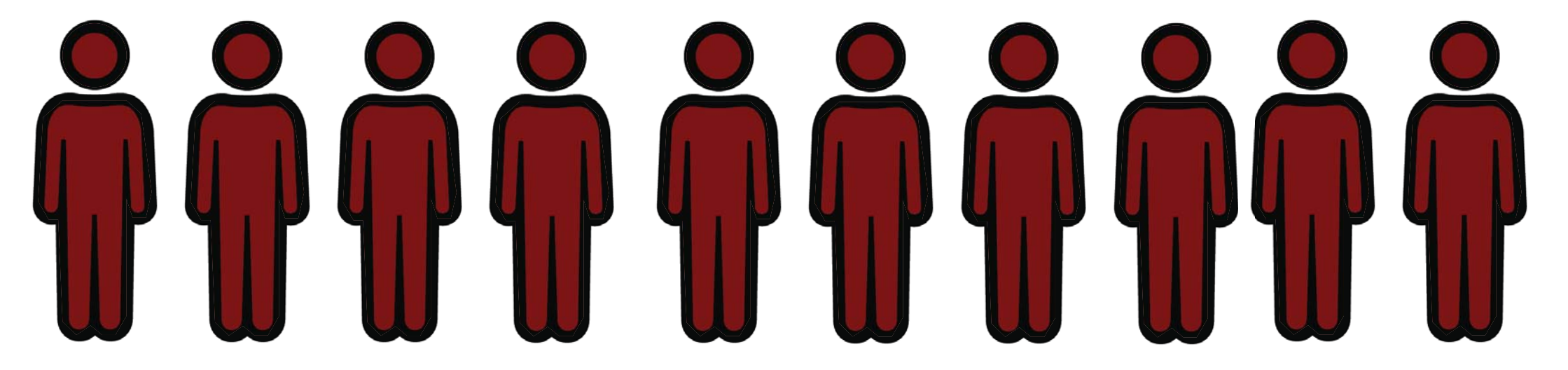
Quantitative data was collected through online surveys to Faculty Members, Students, Community Partners, and IUPUITalent.net users.

Qualitative information was collected through open ended questions included in the aforementioned surveys, and focus groups with students, faculty members and community partners.



"Of the people who partook in the study, 90% declared that their experience facilitated by the IUPUISC provided them with opportunities to develop leadership skills"

student's academic development & employability



academic development

Students expressed that the experience facilitated by the Solution Center:

Helped them develop *job skills (85%)*, and check their expectations about their careers **(85%)**.

Helped them to get *introduced to career-related people (60%)*, and to increase their ability to serve the community (80%).

Was useful to understand the importance of *networking with employers (80%)* and to effectively *make professional contacts* to support their career goals **(60%)**

Helped them strengthen their professional skills and gain *work experience (95%)*.

Provided them with opportunities to develop *leadership skills (90%)*, and connect theoretical learning to their practice during the internship.

Helped them to better define their vocational interests and understand what they want or not to be as professionals.

None of the students considered that these experiences affected their decision to seek a higher degree.

faculty networking

Faculty members participating in experiences coordinated by the Solution Center believe that these experiences increase their opportunities to strengthen connections with community organizations, to meet other IUPUI faculty members, and add value to their academic productivity. However, collaboration with peers is not directly affected by their participation in projects with the Solution Center.

They also believe that collaborating in community projects with the Solution Center might increase their community awareness, allowing them to learn about community organizations' specific needs that they could address and did not know about. Faculty members also expressed that what they learn from these projects which might positively affect their teaching.

community development

Community partners agree that getting involved in these experiences help them better meet their goals (91.8%).

77% think that interns bring a creative perspective to their organization, and 73% believe that these experiences improve the organization's productivity. Assumptions can be made that a positive effect on organizations might eventually have a positive impact on the local economy.

employability

Students believed that after the experience they are *better prepared for a job (80.6%)*, and that they can get a *good job reference (76.7%)*.

finding a job

16% said to have been *offered a job at the organization* where they interned, and **19%** said they had been *offered a job at another organization*.

employability (employer's opinion)

64.2% of community partners where students do their projects or internships *agreed that they would be more likely to hire applicants* who have internship experience

80.4% responded that they *agreed that internship experience was desirable* in a new graduate resume.

Partners who gave a good rating to internship performances were the most likely to hire applicants with internship experience.

references

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lessons learned

1. The study served to understand how individuals and organizations are particularly impacted by their participation in the experiential learning program coordinated by the Solution Center. It also yielded information about the beneficial value participants found in these experiences.

2. Results are consistent with studies about the impact that community-based research projects and internships are expected to have on students' cognitive, academic, civic and career development (Bach & Weinzimmer, 2011; Gault; Leach and Duey, 2010; Walker II, 2011; Keen & Baldwin, 2004; Nyden, 2003, Henry, 1979).

3. Results were also consistent with studies about how these experiences open opportunities:

- For faculty members, to build relationships with external agencies, (Keen & Baldwin, 2004; Nyden, 2003);

- For community partners, to access useful information, build networks, and bring new perspectives into their organizations, promoting organizational development and the development of new products and services (Keen & Baldwin, 2004).

4. The mixed methodology used in the study allowed to:

- Identify intended, as well as unintended, indirect, and intangible effects; which are difficult to identify using only quantitative techniques.

- Identify best practices and areas for improvement, based on the information of the major and minor areas of impact of the program.

- Promote reflection and discussion among respondents about the real benefits of these experiences.

5. Further evaluation should lead to:

- Develop models for evaluating student learning outcomes for experiential learning that support the data collected.

- Share evaluation practices with IUPUI Career Services Council and determine data usage to improve services.

- Explore possibilities for reciprocal evaluation with community partners.

- Partner with peer institutions to assess the impact of student internships on urban and metropolitan areas.



"Faculty members participating in experiences coordinated [...] also believe that collaborating in community projects with the Solution Center might increase their community awareness..."

