

What is the value of short?

Exploring the benefits of episodic volunteer experiences for college students

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Introduction

College students are busy. In addition to studying, exercising, working, and keeping up with all forms of their networked lives, college students are actively engaged in their communities. These trends are much different than prior generations and have implications for how volunteer programs are designed to best align with student needs. Work alone accounts for far more hours in the week than in prior generations as college students, and their families, carry the increasing financial burden of funding their degrees (American Student Assistance, 2012). At the same time, today's college students have a more heightened interest to be engaged in the community than their peers a decade ago (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Paluki, Blake, & Tran, 2009). Perhaps short-term episodic volunteer events, such as a "Day of Service", are a reasonable and effective way to support both the current and future involvement of college graduates in the community.

Over the past decade, colleges and universities use a "Day of Service" approach as a co-curricular strategy to involve students in short-term volunteer experiences (Campus Compact, 2012; Griffith 2011), yet little is known about the civic outcomes of such volunteer engagement. During this same period of time, non-profit organizations have needed to depend more heavily and frequently upon episodic volunteers (EVs) to assist in achieving their mission and service delivery (Hyde, Dunn, Bax & Chambers, 2015). Due in large part to shifting demographics of volunteers, this newly recognized form of volunteering is described as short-term, task-specific, and with clearly defined boundaries and responsibilities for the volunteer. Understanding the experience of college students as EVs will add to this emerging area of study. This exploratory

study is designed to understand the civic outcomes (e.g., civic-mindedness, intentions to volunteer in the future, and intentions to donate money in the future) for college students who participate in a “Day of Service”. Understanding civic outcomes for college student EVs helps to justify the investment of staff time devoted to planning and implementing short-term volunteer events by both campus and community-based organizations.

Literature Review

College Students and Community Engagement

Community engagement is valued for its role in cultivating and sustaining civic outcomes of college graduates (Reich, 2014; Sponsler & Hartley, 2013). There has been steady growth in community engagement during the college years as evidenced by the increase in service learning courses, the amount of volunteer hours contributed by college students, and the number of centralized offices that support community engagement (Campus Compact, 2012).

Volunteer rates during the college years vary, based on reporting methods, but across all indicators there is an increase in student participation. College students’ rate of volunteering is twice that of individuals of the same age who are not enrolled in college, 30.2% and 15.1%, respectively (Dote, Cramer, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006). Additionally, the breakdown of college student volunteerism among gender and race mirrors the national trend; female students (33%) volunteer at a higher rate than their male peers (27%), and White students (32%) volunteer at a higher rate than students of other races and ethnicities (24%) (Dote et al., 2006). The Higher Education Research Institute reports that 26% of current students and 31% of college graduates volunteer their time with community organizations, a rate that is at a thirty-year high (Pryor et

al., 2009). The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study indicates that between 1996 and 2008, proportionately more college students participated in volunteer activities, with a reported increase from 39% to 47%, indicating that nearly half of all students volunteer (Griffith, 2011). This increase is even more significant in terms of participation in one-time service events, with a reported increase from 9% in 2000 to 25% of all college students participated in a one-time service event in 2008 (Griffith, 2011).

College Students and Civic Outcomes

College student volunteering coincides with a renewed emphasis on the democratic and public purposes of higher education in developing personal and social responsibility (Reason & Hemer, 2015; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). In 2012, The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement challenged colleges and universities to adopt strategies to become “civic-minded institutions” by fostering a civic ethos on campus, making civic literacy a core component of the curriculum, and practicing civic action as a lifelong pattern in both personal and professional life. Cultivating a civic ethos on campus has implications for both curricular and co-curricular programming (Sponsler & Hartley, 2013).

Civic outcomes for students include a wide range of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behaviors related to political engagement, social justice, and voluntary action (Hatcher, 2011). Civic-mindedness (Hatcher, 2008; Sullivan, 2004) is one way to describe a complex set of these civic outcomes. Civic-mindedness is defined as “a person’s inclination or disposition to be knowledgeable of and involved in the community, and to have a commitment to act upon a sense of responsibility as a member of that community (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010, p. 429).” Civic-

mindfulness is comprised of knowledge (e.g., volunteer opportunities, contemporary social issues), skills (e.g., listening, diversity, consensus building), dispositions (e.g., valuing community engagement, efficacy) and behavioral intentions to be actively involved with others to work towards the common good (Steinberg, Hatcher & Bringle, 2011).

There are a variety of disciplinary and programmatic approaches to cultivate civic outcomes in higher education (Hatcher, 2011; Musil, 2009; Reich, 2014). As a curricular strategy, service learning is often equated with best practice for developing civic outcomes (Finley, 2011; The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). In terms of short-term involvement, an experimental study found that when compared to non-participating matched counterparts, undergraduates who participated in a very short-term (8-10 hours) service learning experience reported maintenance of their sense of social responsibility, an increased sense of the meaningfulness of college, and an increased likelihood of choosing a service-related occupation (Reed, Jernstedt, Hawley, Reber, & DuBois, 2005).

In addition to service learning courses, co-curricular volunteer experiences play an important role in creating a campus ethos to support civic engagement. The NASPA Lead Initiative on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement is comprised of 92 member campuses dedicated to developing “civic-minded campuses” by strengthening co-curricular experiences to support civic learning as an intentional aspect of every student’s college education (NASPA, 2015). Additionally, The Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education has developed standards and guidelines for quality implementation and assessment of co-curricular civic engagement programs. These standards state that one-time short-term volunteer

experiences should be designed to achieve a variety of student learning outcomes (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2015).

College Students and Nonprofit Organizations

Many community and nonprofit organizations depend upon the generosity of others through financial donations as well as the voluntary contribution of time and talent. With the increased emphasis in higher education on community engagement, nonprofit leaders are working far more closely with college students than they did a decade ago (Sandy, Ikeda, Cruz, & Holland, 2007). College student volunteers not only assist with direct service delivery but, perhaps more importantly, contribute to the external reputational ties the organization can develop with the campus and with the larger community (Gazley, Littlepage & Bennett, 2012). In addition, hosting college student volunteers is an important way for nonprofits to cultivate their future donor base as there is a close tie between giving of time and giving of money. In terms of charitable giving, volunteers donate significantly more money to nonprofits than non-volunteers, they tend to donate to the same charities where they volunteer, and they are more likely to increase their charitable contributions in the future as a result of volunteering (Fidelity Charitable, 2015).

From a nonprofit perspective, the traditional volunteer is described as one who provides regular, intensive service to an organization. A newer type of volunteer, described as an episodic volunteer (EV), is one who participates fewer than two weeks per year. This type of volunteer is increasingly more prevalent. Macduff (2005) describes three different types of episodic volunteering based on the frequency and duration of involvement, and a “Day of Service” event

would be described as a *temporary* episodic volunteer experience because it is short in duration, usually for a few hours or for a day at most.

Hosting college students as EVs is an emerging trend, yet nonprofits often lack program specific strategies to attract and retain EVs and little is known about how motivations of EVs influence ongoing participation (Hyde et al., 2015). To date, research on EVs has focused primarily on the adult population (Hyde et al, 2015; Hustinx, Haski-Leventhal, Handy, 2008) and how nonprofits are adapting in terms of volunteer management (Macduff, 2005). Additional research is warranted to understand the benefits of college student participation in a short-term volunteer experience, particularly since episodic volunteering is increasing among this population (Griffith, 2011).

Thus, we are curious if short-term volunteer events are worth all the effort. Specifically, we are interested in understanding the relationship between college student EVs and their sense of civic-mindedness and the likelihood that they will volunteer or donate money in the future. The benefits associated with EVs need to be investigated to optimally structure such experiences for positive student learning and philanthropic outcomes that can benefit community organizations in both the short and long run.

Current Study

This exploratory study is designed to understand how college student participation in a short-term volunteer experience is associated with civic-mindedness and intentions to volunteer or donate money to community organizations in the future. To explore this question, we surveyed participants in the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service (MLK Day of Service)

on the Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis campus. In 1994, Congress designated this federal holiday as a national day of service to honor the legacy of Dr. King; it is the only federal holiday with an explicit emphasis on service (see <http://www.nationalservice.gov/mlkday2015>). This tradition began on our campus with a seed grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service, and now in its 14th year, the MLK Day of Service is the largest campus volunteer event (further details can be found at <http://csl.iupui.edu/doc/teaching-research-assessment/outcomes-planning-mlk.pdf>.) Students are invited to participate in the MLK Day of Service through newsletters, email blasts, student organizations, courses, and scholarship programs. Staff at community organizations identify the volunteer activity and provide an orientation as well as background on the social issue that they primarily address.

The following questions were addressed in this exploratory study of college students as episodic volunteers:

1. To what extent does participation in an episodic volunteer experience contribute to a college student's sense of civic-mindedness?
2. How well does participation in an episodic volunteer experience predict intentions of college students to volunteer at a community organization in the future?
3. How well does participation in an episodic volunteer experience predict intentions of college students to donate money to a community organization in the future?
4. Does perceived value of the service experience have any influence on college students' intentions to volunteer at a community organization in the future?

5. Does perceived value of the service experience have any influence on college students' intentions to donate money to a community organization in the future?

Method

To understand the experience of college students as EVs, a convenience sample was comprised of students on our campus who participated in the MLK Day of Service in January 2014. An online-survey asked students about their experience and attitudes after participating in the short-term volunteer experience (Institutional Review Board, Indiana University, #1301010409). For the purposes and context of this study, our intent was to keep the survey very brief. Student volunteers are used to completing a post-event evaluation form, and we intentionally designed this survey to be similar in length to this type of program evaluation.

A 32-item post-survey gathered information on demographics, motivations to volunteer, prior volunteer experiences, civic-mindedness, appreciation of social movements, perceived value of the service provided, and intended likelihood to volunteer (e.g., at a community organization, at another campus Day of Service) or donate money to a community organization in the future. Immediately following the event, an email was sent inviting participation in the study, including the hotlink to access the online survey through Qualtrics Survey Software. A reminder email was sent three days later.

Participant Sample

Five hundred and sixty-two college students participated in the 2014 MLK Day of Service. The online-survey response rate was 44% ($n = 249$). Respondents included White (58%), African-American (18%), Hispanic/Latino (8%), Mixed Race (7%), Asian American

(5%), and International (4%) students. The total of minority student participation in the MLK Day of Service (38%) was higher than the campus minority student population (22%). Among college students nationally, minority students tend to volunteer less than White students, however among this sample the minority student volunteer rate was higher than the national average (24%) (Dote, et al., 2006). Among college students, females tend to volunteer more than males (Dote, et al., 2006) and this was the also the case with the MLK Day of Service (68% female and 32% male).

Further information on the sample indicated that participants represented 20 of the 23 schools on campus and a variety of disciplines and majors. Among this sample, only 3 students indicated that this was their first time to volunteer. When asked to describe the reason that best explains why they participated, students indicated that they participated in MLK Day of Service as part of a program requirement for an academic scholarship (40.4%), fraternity/sorority (26.5%), a course (16.9%), or student organization (10.2%). This pattern of participation is consistent with prior research as students who are members of college student organizations are more likely to volunteer (Marks & Jones, 2004). Our campus has a comprehensive service-based scholarship program, and in addition many of our campus scholarships ask that students contribute back to the campus and community through service (Hatcher, Bringle, Brown & Fleischhaker, 2006).

To understand the overall satisfaction with the experience, participants were asked “*As a result of participating in today’s service event, how likely are you to participate in another (campus) service event in the future?*” Using a 6-point Likert type response format (1 = Very

Unlikely, 6 = Very Likely), a large majority of the participants in the MLK Day of Service indicated they were very likely (66.7%) or likely (19.3%) to participate in a campus service event the future.

Survey and Measures

To explore student civic outcomes from participation in the event, we measured each of the following constructs.

Civic-Mindedness. The Civic-Minded Graduate (CMG) scale is a 30-item measure developed to evaluate civic-mindedness during the college years (Steinberg et al., 2011). The CMG scale is comprised of items that represent the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behavioral intentions of civic-minded graduates. The CMG scale has been found to demonstrate evidence of validity and reliability through prior research (Steinberg, et al., 2011). Construct validation of CMG scale has found it to correlate with prior volunteer experience, prior participation in service learning courses, and intentions to volunteer in the future (Steinberg et al., 2011). In addition, further construct validation of CMG scale has found it to correlate with a number of measures including openness to diversity, self-efficacy, social change and charity orientations to service, a principle of caring, as well as non-prejudicial attitudes, social behaviors, and satisfaction with life (Bingle, Hatcher, & Hahn, 2015).

For the purposes and context of this study, we elected to create a short form measure from the CMG scale. Administering shortened versions of original scales is a common strategy in survey research. While the use of a short form is likely to lessen the psychometric properties of the long form it is derived from (Widaman, Little, Preacher, & Sanalani, 2011), a short form

was preferred for the purposes of this study. The structure of the CMG-SF scale was informed, in part, by the face validity of the 7 items as well as the learning outcomes identified for the event. A principal components analysis (PCA) was run on the 7 items comprising CMG-SF. The PCA revealed one component with an eigenvalue greater than one and which explained 77.4% of the variance. Consistent with previous research on the CMG scale, (Steinberg et al., 2011), the CMG-SF is unidimensional. Additionally, the CMG-SF ($\alpha = .95$) demonstrated internal consistency comparable to the entire CMG 30-item scale used by Steinberg et al. ($\alpha = .96$).

The CMG-SF scale was administered to assess students' civic-mindedness. Using a 6-point Likert-type response format (1 = Strongly Disagree; 6 = Strongly Agree), respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they disagreed or agreed with the following statements: *As a result of participating in today's service activities (i.e., orientation, service, reflection):*

- *I have a better understanding of how organizations are working to improve societal issues.*
- *I am more confident that I can contribute to improving life in my community.*
- *I have gained more knowledge to plan or help implement an initiative that improves the community.*
- *I am more knowledgeable about opportunities to get involved in the community.*
- *I have a better sense of who I am, which now includes a sincere desire to be of service to others.*
- *I am more aware of a number of community issues that need to be addressed.*
- *I have a better understanding of how I can use my education to serve the community.*

Responses to these 7 items generated a CMG-SF average score to represent a participants' level of civic-mindedness.

Prior volunteer experience. This composite index ($\alpha = .70$) of prior volunteer experience (Steinberg et al., 2011) consisted of the aggregate of five questions respondents were asked to

“Please indicate the extent to which you have participated in the following types of activities”

using a 3-point response scale (1 = Never; 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Frequently):

- *Volunteered in high school*
- *Volunteered in a previous day of service at (this university)*
- *Completed service as part of a course at (this university)*
- *Volunteered through a campus student organization*
- *Volunteered through an organization outside of (this university)*

Likelihood to volunteer in the future. This single-item measure asked respondents to answer using a 6-point response scale (1 = Very Unlikely; 6 = Very Likely): *As a result of participation in today’s service event, how likely are you to volunteer at a community organization in the future?*

Likelihood to donate money in the future. This single-item measure asked respondents to answer using a 6-point response scale (1 = Very Unlikely; 6 = Very Likely): *As a result of participation in today’s service event, how likely are you to donate money to a community organization in the future?*

Perceived value of the service contribution. This single-item measure asked respondents to answer using a 3-point response scale (1 = Not Valuable; 2 = Somewhat Valuable; 3 = Very Valuable): *How valuable do you think your service was to the organization?*

Control Variables. Demographic characteristics were dummy coded to control for their influence in the analysis. Gender was coded 0 = Female and 1 = Male. Race was coded 0 = Other and 1 = White.

Results and Discussion

High levels of civic-mindedness were reported by participants in the MLK Day of Service, indicating that the short-term experience contributed to their perceptions about how they can be active in the community. These outcomes were more significant for minority students. The majority of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with each of the seven questions in the CMG-SF scale ($M = 5.02, SD = .93$). We were curious if there were differences between how male and female students described themselves after volunteering. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare CMG-SF average scores by gender, and there was no significant difference in the scores for males ($M = 4.9, SD = .91$) and females ($M = 5.1, SD = .94$); $t(247) = -1.77, p = 0.08$. Thus, both males and females reported similar levels of civic-mindedness after participation in the short-term volunteer event.

We then conducted a one-way between subjects ANOVA to compare scores on the CMG-SF by race (i.e., Hispanic/Latino, African-American, White, Mixed Race). There was a significant difference in CMG-SF for these four groups, $F(4, 244) = 4.41, p = 0.002, \eta^2 = .07$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean CMG-SF score for African-Americans ($M = 5.42, SD = .70$) was significantly different than for Whites ($M = 4.86, SD = .96$). This finding could be due to the nature of the event and its focus on civil rights and equality, topics which may resonate more with African-American students. This difference should be explored in future research. The means, standard deviations, and correlations between all of the variables analyzed in the study appear in Table 1.

(Insert Table 1 here)

Multiple regression analyses were done to explore the extent to which gender, race, civic-mindedness, prior volunteer experience in high school and college, and perceived value of the service to the community organization predicted intentions to volunteer and donate money to a community organization in the future.

The control variables (i.e., gender, race) did not have a significant relationship with intentions to volunteer in the future. Thus, both males and females were equally likely to indicate that they would volunteer in the future as a result of this short-term volunteer experience; and college students, regardless of their race were equally likely to indicate that they would volunteer or donate money in the future. Prior volunteer experiences, in high school and college, and scores on the CMG-SF did not significantly relate to intentions to volunteer in the future. The perceived value of service to the organization was significantly related to intentions to volunteer in the future. Gender (being male), civic-mindedness, and perceived value of service to the organization were each significantly related to intentions to donate money in the future. See Table 2 for details of the regression analyses.

(Insert Table 2 here)

Perceived value of the service being the only variable to significantly predict intention to volunteer in the future could be indicative of college students associating future volunteering with the quality of their experience during the event. When designing volunteer events for college students, there are likely more long term gains to community organizations if participants feel that their time was effectively used (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2015).

Conversely, multiple variables including civic-mindedness, perceived value of the service, and gender (being male) all were independent predictors of intentions to donate money in the future. In other words, factors other than individuals' perceptions of the value of the service they provided that day determined their likelihood to donate money in the future. This may indicate that the decision point to donate money to a community organization in the future is more complex than the decision to volunteer.

The gender difference for intention to donate money deserves further exploration. Why would males be more likely to donate money to a community organization in the future after a short-term experience?

Unlike in previous studies (Tomkovick, Lester, Flunker & Wells 2008), among this sample prior volunteer experience was not associated with intentions to volunteer or donate money in the future. This may be reflective of the singular influence of the events of the MLK Day of Service. This finding may be attributable to the intentional program design to maximize the day's events and service experience to honor Dr. King's legacy. In order for EV experiences to yield civic outcomes for participants, college students need to feel like they are making a difference through a meaningful contribution to the community organization.

Limitations

When interpreting the results of this study, there are a number of limitations. There is no comparison group and therefore no causality can be inferred from these results. In addition, with the lack of a pre-post design, it is not known if college students were attracted to participate in the MLK Day of Service because they were civic-minded or if the event in and of itself

contributed to the development of civic-mindedness. Additionally, the sample was derived from only one campus, and therefore the campus ethos for civic engagement (Sponsler & Hartley, 2013), rather than the volunteer event itself, may have contributed to these outcomes. Without further information on aspects of the program design (e.g., learning outcomes, reflection, orientation and interaction with community site supervisor) we lack the ability to understand how the quality of the Day of Service may have different outcomes for participants. Finally, this study evaluated future intentions to volunteer and donate money to a community organization, not actual behavior. Understanding any long term outcomes of college students as EVs requires a different study design.

Future Research

The findings from this exploratory study lay important groundwork for subsequent multi-campus research on the MLK Day of Service and other episodic volunteer events. In particular, we are interested in the extent to which campus context and program design makes a difference on the civic-mindedness and the intentions of college students to volunteer and donate money to community organizations in the future. Because MLK Day of Service is a national event, it provides an opportunity for further study on episodic volunteers.

Conclusion

Undergraduate student participation in voluntary service is related to an increased commitment to the community, helping others in need, promoting racial tolerance, and influencing social values (Astin & Sax, 1998). Yet due to cost, time, and resource constraints, not all volunteer experiences can be intense and of long duration (Reed, Jernstedt, Hawley,

Reber, & DuBois, 2005). With the increase in college students as episodic volunteers, it is helpful to know if this type of co-curricular engagement contributes to civic outcomes for college students and philanthropic outcomes for nonprofit organizations.

The present study suggests that student participation even in short-term volunteer events contributes to civic-mindedness and intentions to volunteer and donate money to a community organization in the future. Many college students have competing time commitments that may limit their ability to make intensive volunteering a routine occurrence. Episodic volunteering may best suit their present circumstances, and the campus and community are well-served by making these experiences available throughout the academic year.

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Tables

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceived Value	2.72	.52	-				
2. Future Vol.	5.34	1.0	.32**	-			
3. Future Donate	4.2	1.3	.30**	.36**	-		
4. Prior Vol. Exp.	2.4	.69	-.01	-.05	.07	-	
5. CMG-SF	5.0	.93	.48**	.23**	.30**	.06	-

N = 249, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2

The Relationships Between CMG-SF, Prior Volunteer Experience, Perceived Value of the Service and Intention to Volunteer and Donate Money in the Future.

Variables	<u>Future Volunteer</u>			<u>Future Donate Money</u>		
	B	Beta	Sig.	B	Beta	Sig.
Gender	-.153	-.068		.350	.124	*
Race	.012	.006		-.152	-.057	
Prior Vol. Exp.	-.064	-.042		.097	.051	
CMG-SF	.110	.098		.288	.203	**
Perceived Value	.537	.269	***	.516	.204	***
R^2	.100			.127		

Note: N=249, *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05.