

Exploring the Effects of Service-Learning: Student Voices from CHCH101.

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Abstract

The present study is part of an on-going Grants-in-Aid Scientific Research project entitled “*Creating a research-driven collaborative framework for global citizenship and international service-learning studies.*” In a previous study, the development and implementation of the research project was introduced and discussed (O'Connell & O'Steen, 2020). This study, which is also part of the first stage of the project, investigates the effect of service-learning studies on students enrolled in CHCH101, a service-learning and community engagement course offered at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. An analysis of CHCH101 student voices obtained through two types of questionnaires and focus group interviews is provided in the findings to shed light on the positive effects of this service-learning pedagogical approach at tertiary institutions. In conclusion, implications of the findings are discussed in terms of their research significance for further development of the Grants-in-Aid research project.

Keywords: service-learning, critical thinking, experiential education, empowerment, leadership skills

1. Introduction: The Big Picture

In the late 1960s, academics in the United States (hereafter referred to as the U.S.) believed that universities had a role to play in the social justice movements of the time and that they needed to encourage students to engage in these issues at the community level. One outcome was the creation of service-learning whereby students and academics would do service activities in the community and then combine such activities with academic content and critical reflection back on campus. This three-part format has continued to this day as the typical way to do service-learning.

In its fifty years of existence, the field of service-learning (also referred to as community engagement) has become robust with both ample research establishing its effectiveness and myriad teaching methods. Additionally, there are several well-regarded academic journals devoted to the area as well as a plethora of guidebooks on how to do it which show its popularity as a pedagogical approach (Butin, 2005).

The work conducted at university-level in the U.S. has eventually trickled down into service

requirements at high schools with awards like the Duke of Edinburgh, and favorably viewed additions to university applications. In one instance, Tulane University in New Orleans completely remade itself after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 to become the most community-engaged university in the U.S. by requiring its students to complete two service-learning courses related to the rebuild of the city. The university has seen a dramatic increase in the number of applications and are convinced that their desirability among civically minded and academically talented students was due to their community engagement focus. In other words, they proved that service-learning sells (Tulane University, 2021).

While service-learning pedagogy is well developed in the U.S. with most universities having a dedicated department for it, it is still an emerging pedagogy in Australia and New Zealand. Saying that, however, the University of Canterbury (UC), located in Christchurch, New Zealand, is recognized as a leader in the Pacific region by having a specific service-learning course—CHCH101: Rebuilding Christchurch—as well as community engagement as one of its four university-wide Graduate Profile attributes (University of Canterbury, 2021).

The leadership in this space has led to scores of visitors such as Prince Harry, Dr Jane Goodall, Dr Maya Soetoro-Ng (former U.S. President Obama's sister), and hundreds of international university students (e.g., Nanzan University, Oxford University, University of San Diego, Earlham College, University of Alabama, etc.) and high school students from Riverdale County School in New York City, Punahou School in Honolulu, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Further, UC is the only non-Australian university to be a member of Engagement Australia, the peak body for community engagement in the Pacific region (O'Connell & O'Steen, 2020, University of Canterbury, 2021).

Considering the commitment and investment made by UC to provide the opportunity for students to take part in service-learning, this paper will focus on describing the positive outcomes of the CHCH101 service-learning course through student voices. It will begin by first looking at the course from the past to the present. Following that, an explanation will be given regarding the present study, including the methodology used and participants involved. After a thorough description of findings from student voices is provided, the paper will conclude by clarifying its implications for the above-mentioned Grants-in-Aid Research project (Grant No. 20K02978) currently being undertaken by the authors.

2. Situating the Research: CHCH 101 Past & Present

In 2010 and 2011, Christchurch, New Zealand was hit with two devastating earthquakes that destroyed over 80% of the buildings in the CBD, rendered 11,000 houses uninhabitable, and killed 185 people. More than 10,000 UC students responded to both quakes by forming the Student Volunteer Army and providing help across the city in cleaning up debris and distributing necessary supplies (O'Steen & Perry, 2012).

As the students were volunteering, it was noted by a television news anchor that “isn't it great that these students have put aside their learning to help out in the community?” The second author of this paper, a lecturer at UC, Billy Osteen, accepted this statement as a

challenge to determine how students could link up their service with learning. Through consultation with colleagues at Tulane University and North Carolina State University in the U.S., he created a class—CHCH101: Rebuilding Christchurch—that would be offered in the semester following the quakes in 2011. The speed at which this became a course was unprecedented and occurred through adamant support by the Vice Chancellor and Pro Vice Chancellor for the College of Education at UC. As a result, the service-learning course was launched in July of 2011 with the innovative design of crediting students' service as having already completed one-third of the course. Then, in small tutorial groups, they would reflect on their experiences and connect those to relevant academic content about post-disaster response and volunteerism (O'Steen & Perry, 2012).

Since its inception ten years ago, the course has evolved to resemble a more classic service-learning course where all three components (service, academic learning and critical reflection) occur within it. Two pieces of assessment have been established: (1) a Healing Proposal and (2) a Team Project. In the Healing Proposal, students are asked to create a proposal that will positively impact a particular community. In the Team Project, students work in small teams in which they have five weeks to design, implement, and evaluate a community-based project. Another noteworthy point is that the course has also served as the impetus for the creation of a new degree—the Bachelor of Youth and Community Leadership (BYCL)—which was launched in 2020 (University of Canterbury, 2021). Building upon CHCH101's model of hands-on, experiential education and learning, the degree is designed to have students engaged in community projects throughout.

While the immediate Christchurch community has been the focus of CHCH101, the students who have taken the course have come from farther afield. Soon after the earthquakes, UC's International Relationships Office began to receive inquiries from U.S. students asking if there were any service-learning courses related to the earthquakes that resembled what thousands of students had done by traveling to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and volunteering. These students were welcomed and they began to take CHCH101 in early 2012 as they contributed to a dynamic mixture of international and domestic students.

Because of its 100-level designation, at this time, many UC students who took CHCH101 were in their first year of study. Conversely, most U.S. study abroad students were in the third-year of their degrees and came into the course with more experience of being a university student. This proved to be a real benefit for all involved as the domestic students learned about engaging with lecturers and content from the older students. In addition to attracting a steady stream of U.S. students, the course has attracted students from Australia, China, Europe, Japan, and the U.K. Furthermore, it has also been offered in a variety of formats including summer school, mini-courses, and one-day experiences to over 1,000 international students to date.

The intercultural dynamic has always been a stimulating feature of the course for the past nine years. However, and unfortunately, due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, the 2020 version of CHCH101 had no international students. Consequently, it was observed by both authors that this version lacked that rich mixture of ideas or perspectives that had been present with the older, international students. This was particularly noticed with the Team Projects where the input from those missing students may have been impactful, particularly given that most of

the study abroad students are already well traveled and confident in sharing their ideas. As a result, several mature non-traditional students stepped into leadership positions for the Team Projects.

The 2020 cohort consisted of forty students with thirty-five being on campus and five taking it from a distance. It is important to note that as of 2020, CHCH101 was no longer just an elective course and was now compulsory for the BYCL degree. Of the forty students taking the course, three were mature/non-traditional.

3. Methodology

This section will explain the methodology used to focus on student voices from past and present CHCH101 participants. For the first five years of CHCH101 from 2011–2016, data was collected from students before and after the course. Kember et al.’s Critical Thinking Questionnaire (2000) and Moely et al.’s Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ) (2002) were chosen as the instruments because the key learning outcomes of the course focus on critical thinking and community service, aspects that both instruments purport to measure. The results of the data collected are expressed in Fig. 1 below:

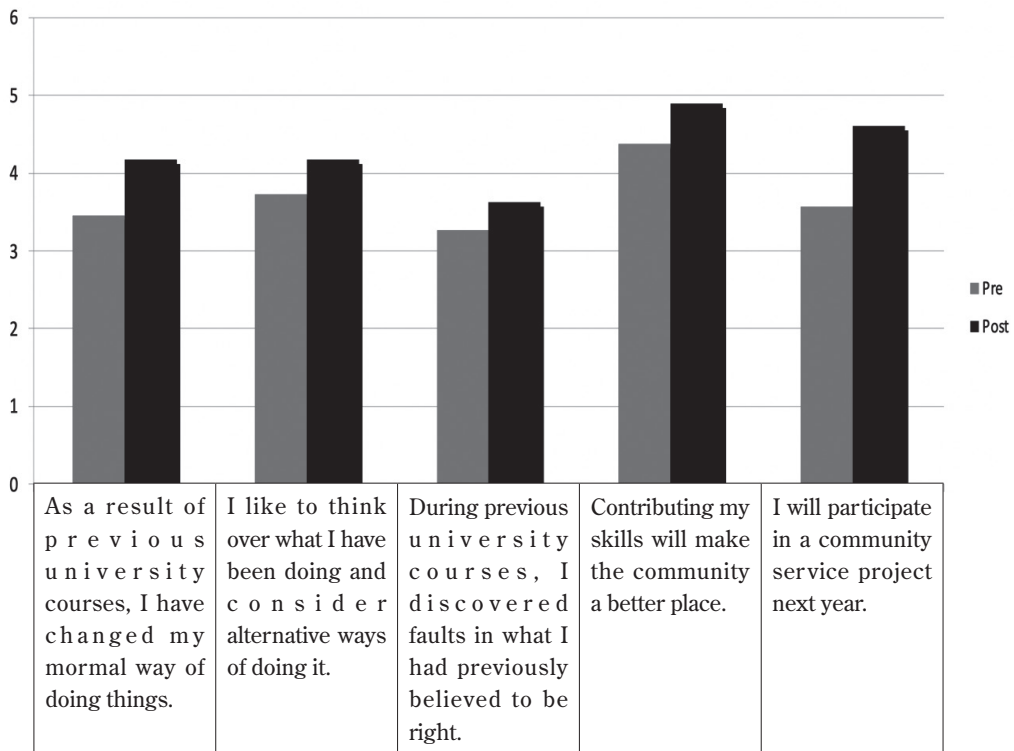


Fig. 1 2011–2016 CHCH101 Critical Thinking & Community Service Sample Data Results

As shown by these results, students' post-course scores on several items from these instruments were significantly higher than pre-course. To further examine the benefits and effects of the CHCH101 and also the Bachelor's degree, a postdoctoral fellow position was created in 2020 to make it possible to increase the amount and variety of data collected. As the CHCH101 course is now situated within the BYCL, data was collected from students in it as well as from the other compulsory class for the degree—'YACL101: Introduction to Youth Leadership: Leading the Self'.

A research project was developed by the BYCL lecturer team in late 2019 with an intention to use data collected for programme development, conference presentations, and peer-reviewed publications. The research design and methodologies were approved by the institutional ethics committee at UC prior to the arrival of the post-doctoral fellow so that research could commence at the beginning of Semester 1.

The project was based on a multiple-methods design with an intention to capture the experiences of students in the BYCL using qualitative and quantitative measures. This resulted in data collection through focus groups and reflective course assignments, as well as surveys to track their growth in key areas across the year" (Dutton, 2021). For the surveys, the CASQ instrument was chosen again and, as with the CHCH101 research, all BYCL students were invited to take part.

With both the qualitative and quantitative data, the findings section will discuss the data-analysis from an open-ended and grounded theory perspective. This approach makes it possible to follow the data in developing themes and implications. As the findings section will reveal, in general it can be said that students have responded favorably to their service-learning experiences in CHCH101 and have exited the course in a more positive stature with regard to community engagement and personal reflection.

4. Findings

Similar to the results from data collected between 2011 and 2016 shown in the previous section, the 2020 data has also provided interesting information regarding CHCH101 and its impact on students both during the course and after it. As shown below in Fig. 2, data from the CASQ instrument, students in the 2020 version of CHCH101 reported strong gains in pre- to post-course comparisons

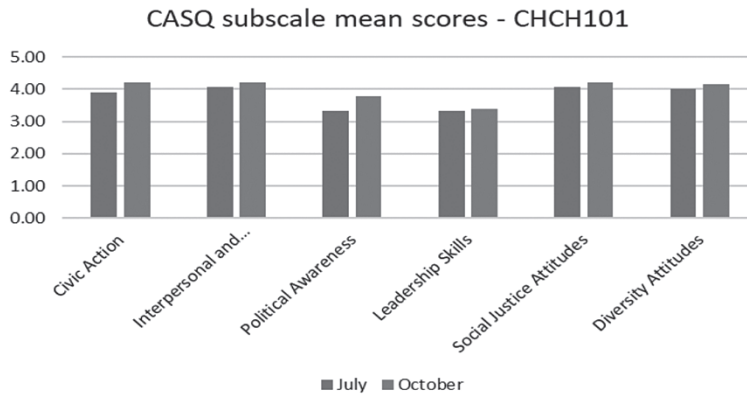


Fig. 2 CASQ sub scale mean scores-CHCH101

It is important to note that CHCH101 students come into the class with a fairly low level of previous experience in the community shown below in Table 1. Thus, as the data above in Fig. 2 shows, their appreciation for volunteering and desire to do it beyond the class appears to align with their participation in the course.

Table 1 Previous experience in the community

Response option	CHCH101 (n = 15)
Never	13.3% (2 students)
Once a year	53.3% (8 students)
Once a month	20.0% (3 students)
Once a week	13.3% (2 students)

Beyond the convincing numbers that CHCH101 has had, it is clear that the content has had an immediate impact on how students see themselves, how they regard the community, and how they anticipate serving in the community after the course. Several key anecdotes gained through focus-group interviews over the past ten years further illustrate what students have the confidence to do after the class. Accordingly, the remainder of this section will provide two key anecdotes that are representative of student development.

In Semester 1 (February-June) of 2014, a study-abroad student from the University of Illinois in the U.S. took CHCH101. For her final assignment, which was a Healing Proposal where students propose to improve a certain aspect of a community, she wanted to create a Student Volunteer Army for her university. She had been particularly inspired by a guest talk by one of the UC Student Volunteer Army founders. At the end of the class, the student and CHCH101 teachers pledged to stay in touch and UC agreed to support her efforts in any way possible. Soon after returning to Illinois for the new academic year, her hometown of Washington, Illinois was struck by a massive tornado that left many homeless. The U.S. student quickly got in

touch with fellow students through her networks and organized a “fill the truck” campaign where needed items are donated and loaded onto trucks. Within two days, she had enough to fill two trucks and they were immediately dispatched to her town. She credits CHCH101 for her actions as follows:

“CHCH101 gave me the urgency and empowerment to do something to help my hometown when disaster struck. I walked away from CHCH101 a better person for many reasons. I fully understood the power young adults could have in their communities and in disaster relief efforts. I understood how to take my talents and passions and contribute them to a greater cause.”

Closer to home, there was a Fine Arts major at UC who took CHCH101 in 2013. For her Healing Proposal, she photoshopped a mural onto the bare wall of a building in central Christchurch that had been left exposed when its neighboring building had been demolished because of earthquake damage. Both her visual and written parts of the proposal were so fantastic and convincing that UC suggested that she approach the building owner with them for consideration. Due to student’s passion and professionalism in her approach, the owner enthusiastically embraced the idea, agreed to have it done, and offered to help get the necessary equipment (paints, brushes, scaffolding). Local paint and scaffolding companies readily agreed to get behind the project and within a couple of months of her assignment submission, she and friends were painting her mural. Throughout the city’s long recovery phase, her mural has been a constant source of life and colour and has remained visible for the last 8 years. Similar to the U.S. student anecdote introduced above, this student also credits the achievements made in this project to the skills and knowledge she was able to gain from the CHCH101 course. Critical reflection, clear communication and sound planning were three



Illustration 1 CHCH101 Student Mural Project

particular skills that stood out for her from this project, which have always been some of the key learning goals of the course.

As can be seen from the findings presented in this paper, the steady development of CHCH101 as a service-learning course has led to boundless opportunities for students to develop their leadership and critical-thinking skills, as well as see first-hand how their service can enhance community engagement relationships between Christchurch residents, public-service institutions and UC.

In relation to the Grants-in-Aid Research project, these findings provide significant reference points to use in creating a collaborative framework that focuses on global citizenship and research-driven service-learning for Japanese university students and researchers in Japan.

5. Conclusion

The first objective of this paper was to shed light on the development and success of the CHCH101 course over the past decade. Secondly, it sought to elucidate the positive effect of service-learning on the CHCH101 students.

The findings obtained throughout mixed-method designed questionnaires and focus-group interviews confirmed a number of encouraging outcomes this particular pedagogical approach can offer. Firstly, the majority of student responses suggest that through the regular community engagement such as the Healing Proposal and Team Project tasks introduced in this paper, students are able to gain more hands-on experience and exposure to the importance of teamwork. This, in turn, can be said to lead to enhanced communication and leadership skills among the participating students as they have to work together and also communicate with the community outside of university.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from these findings centers on the theme of empowerment. As was shown in the student comments, the use of experiential education by way of service-learning combined with the academic content and critical-reflection components in the classroom has clearly helped students understand the personal development benefits of taking CHCH101. The two anecdotes provided in the findings are clear evidence of this.

Nevertheless, the present study does have limitations. The small participation population is one limitation that must be recognised. The data and anecdotes discussed in this paper are not large enough to provide generalisations regarding positive learning outcomes of service-learning. Saying that, however, one major conclusion that can be drawn is that the design and implementation of CHCH101 is successfully stimulating critical reflection and awareness of an individual's role in society among the students enrolled. On that point alone, it provides an ideal framework to use as a reference in the Grants in Aid Research project being conducted.

In conclusion, the findings presented in this paper will now to be used to formulate a framework by which the current situation of service-learning among Japanese tertiary students can be investigated. In future investigations in Japan, particular focus will be placed on well-established service-learning programs currently run by Japanese universities such as the University of Fukushima with which collaborative relationships and research can be further

fostered and developed.

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Appendices

I. Pre-Course Critical Reflection Questionnaire (Kember et al., 2000)

Name: _____

Please circle the number to indicate your level of agreement with statements about your actions and thinking in this course.

		Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
1	When I am working on some activities, I can do them without thinking about what I am doing.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Previous courses require us to understand concepts taught by the teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I sometimes question the way others do something and try to think of a better way.	1	2	3	4	5
4	As a result of previous courses, I have changed the way I look at myself.	1	2	3	4	5
5	In other courses we do things so many times that I started doing them without thinking about it.	1	2	3	4	5
6	To pass other courses you need to understand the content.	1	2	3	4	5

7	I like to think over what I have been doing and consider alternative ways of doing it.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Other courses have challenged some of my firmly held ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
9	As long as I can remember handout material for examinations, I do not have to think too much.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I need to understand the material taught by the teacher in order to perform practical tasks.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I often reflect on my actions to see whether I could have improved on what I did.	1	2	3	4	5
12	As a result of other courses I have changed my normal way of doing things.	1	2	3	4	5
13	If I follow what the teacher says, I have not to think too much on other courses.	1	2	3	4	5
14	In other courses you have to continually think about the material you are being taught.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I often re-appraise my experience so I can learn from it and improve for my next performance.	1	2	3	4	5
16	During other courses I discovered faults in what I had previously believed to be right.	1	2	3	4	5

II. Post-Course Critical Reflection Questionnaire (Kember et al., 2000)

Name: _____

Please circle the number to indicate your level of agreement with statements about your actions and thinking in this course.

		Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
1	When I am working on some activities, I can do them without thinking about what I am doing.	1	2	3	4	5
2	This course required us to understand concepts taught by the teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I sometimes question the way others do something and try to think of a better way.	1	2	3	4	5
4	As a result of this course, I have changed the way I look at myself.	1	2	3	4	5
5	In this course, we did things so many times that I started doing them without thinking about it.	1	2	3	4	5
6	To pass this course you need to understand the content.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I like to think over what I have been doing and consider alternative ways of doing it.	1	2	3	4	5
8	This course challenged some of my firmly held ideas.	1	2	3	4	5

9	As long as I can remember handout material for examinations, I do not have to think too much in this course.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I needed to understand the material taught by the teacher of this course in order to perform practical tasks.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I often reflect on my actions to see whether I could have improved on what I did.	1	2	3	4	5
12	As a result of this course, I have changed my normal way of doing things.	1	2	3	4	5
13	If I follow what the teacher says, I didn't have to think too much on this course.	1	2	3	4	5
14	In this course, you had to continually think about the material you are being taught.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I often re-appraise my experience so I can learn from it and improve for my next performance.	1	2	3	4	5
16	During this course I discovered faults in what I had previously believed to be right.	1	2	3	4	5

III. CHCH101 Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire

This survey is adapted from the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire by Moely, Mercer, Illustre, Miron, and McFarland (Moely et al., 2002).

44 items total/6 factors/reverse-scored items indicated with (R)

Factor 1: Civic Action (8)

I plan to do some volunteer work.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **Strongly agree**

I plan to become involved in my community

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **Strongly agree**

I plan to participate in a community action program

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **Strongly agree**

I plan to become an active member of my community

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **Strongly agree**

In the future, I plan to participate in a community service organisation

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **Strongly agree**

I plan to help others who are in difficulty

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **Strongly agree**

I am committed to making a positive difference

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **Strongly agree**

I plan to become involved in programmes to help clean up the environment

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **Strongly agree**

Factor 2: Interpersonal and Problem-Solving Skills (12)

I can listen to other people's opinions

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **Strongly agree**

I can work cooperatively with a group of people

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **Strongly agree**

I can think logically in solving problems

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **Strongly agree**

I can communicate well with others

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **Strongly agree**

I can successfully resolve conflicts with others						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
I can easily get along with people						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
I try to find effective ways of solving problems						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
When trying to understand the position of others, I try to place myself in their position						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
I find it easy to make friends						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
I can think analytically in solving problems						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
I try to place myself in the place of others in trying to assess their current situation						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
I tend to solve problems by talking them out						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Factor 3: Political Awareness (6)						
I am aware of current events						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
I understand the issues facing this nation						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
I am knowledgeable of the issues facing the world						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
I am aware of the events happening in my local community						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
I plan to be involved in the political process						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
I understand the issues facing Christchurch's community						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

Factor 4: Leadership skills (5)

I am a better follower than a leader (R)						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

I am a good leader						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

I have the ability to lead a group of people						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

I would rather have somebody else take the lead in formulating a solution (R)						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

I feel that I can make a difference in the world						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

Factor 5: Social Justice Attitudes (8)

I don't understand why some people are poor when there are boundless opportunities available to them (R)						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

People are poor because they choose to be poor (R)						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

Individuals are responsible for their own misfortunes (R)						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

We need to look no further than the individual in assessing their problems (R)						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

In order for problems to be solved, we need to change public policy						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

We need to institute reforms within the current system to change our communities						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

We need to change people's attitudes in order to solve social problems						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

It is important that equal opportunity be available to all people						
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>

Factor 6: Diversity Attitudes (5)

It is hard for a group to function effectively when the people involved come from very diverse backgrounds (R)

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly agree*

I prefer the company of people who are very similar to me in background and expressions (R)

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly agree*

I find it difficult to relate to people from a different race or culture (R)

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly agree*

I enjoy meeting people who come from backgrounds very different from my own

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly agree*

Cultural diversity within a group makes the group more interesting and effective

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly agree*
