

Abstract

Service-Learning is a form of applied learning that engages students in solving social problems within community-based settings. It is rooted in the social and educational philosophy of John Dewey's Pragmatism. As a pedagogy, service-learning presents students with opportunities for social and intellectual growth by complementing classroom learning with community-based experiential learning. This research aims to improve our understanding of the academic and social impacts of service-learning participation in higher education. This study incorporates a mixed methodological design comprised of a primary quantitative study that meets a gap in the service-learning research, and a complementary qualitative study that allows for additional themes to emerge and illustrate findings of the primary study.

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County is an ideal location for this research because of its history of service-learning leadership. Through rigorous, quasi-experimental, longitudinal analysis of a robust data set, the quantitative analysis investigates the relationship between service-learning participation and diverse measures of student academic development. A fixed effects design limits the potential bias stemming from non-random selection into service-learning. Qualitative research complements the quantitative study and provides an in-depth understanding of students' development, with a particular focus upon analyzing academic and pro-social growth through service-learning (e.g., "voluntary behavior intended to benefit another" such as altruism [Eisenberg, et al., 2006, p. 646]). The qualitative study consists of a non-probability, purposive sample of students (Singleton & Straits,

2005) participating in semi-structured interviews (Singleton & Straits, 2005), followed by thematic analysis (Marks & Yardley, 2004).

This research makes methodological contributions and strengthens our understanding of applied and service-learning, particularly as implemented through the innovative institutional practices at the studied university. The quantitative study is strengthened by modeling that addresses threats to internal validity from students' self-selection (i.e., endogenous bias; Meyer, 1995) and allows for significant analytical conclusions. Additionally, the mixed methodological design illustrates student pro-social growth through a number of emergent themes (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The scale and design of this study increases our understanding of the impact of service-learning and the conclusions suggest it deserves further institutional attention as a core pedagogy in higher education.