



# Post-Graduation Community Engagement Habits of Service-learning Course Participants

*D. Knauft, Professor, Department of Horticulture, University of Georgia;  
S. Brackmann, Director of Civic Engagement, Southwestern University;  
S. Wilder, Director, Office of Service-Learning, University of Georgia; D.  
Berle, Associate Professor, Department of Horticulture, University of  
Georgia;*

# Academic service-learning

- “A course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to **gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.**”  
- Bringle and Hatcher, 1996

# Evaluation of service learning

- Impacts can include improved content knowledge, learning skills, and better attitudes toward civic engagement
  - Celio, C. I., Durlak, J., and Dymnick, A. (2011) A Meta-analysis of the Impact of Service-Learning on Students. *J. Experiential Educ.* 34(2):164-181;
- Overall Learning Outcomes of Service-Learning point to long-term effects (e.g., critical thinking skills, citizenship, personal and interpersonal development, understanding and applying knowledge)
  - Eyler, J., and Giles, D. E. (1999). *Where's the learning in service-learning?*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Little research on long-term effects of SL
  - Astin, A. W., Sax, L. J., and Avalos, J. (1999). The Long-Term Effects of Volunteerism During the Undergraduate Years. *Rev. Higher Educ.* 21(2): 187-202
  - Misa, K., Anderson, J., and Yamamura, E. (2005). *The lasting impact of college on young adults' civic and political engagement*. Unpublished manuscript.

# Some previous studies point to . . .

- Positive effects on career development in service-related careers
  - Fenzel, M., and Peyrot, M. (2005). Comparing college community participation and future service behaviors and attitudes. *Michigan Journal of Community Service and Service-Learning*, 12(1): 23-31.
- Positive effects on civic engagement
  - Astin, A., Vogelgesang, L. J., Misa, K., Anderson, J., Denson, N. and Jayakumar, U. (2006). *Understanding the effects of service-learning: A study of students and faculty*. Final Report to the Atlantic Philanthropies, U.S.A.

# Study Framework

- Astin and associates (2006) studied the effects of service-learning on post-graduation civic beliefs and behaviors, specifically studying:
- **Community/civic engagement:** civic leadership, working with communities, volunteerism, charitable giving and involvement with alma mater
- **Political engagement:** general political engagement and its four subfactors: political activism, political expression, commitment to political/ social change, and voting behavior
- **Civic values/goals:** pluralistic orientation, self-efficacy, and the goal of promoting racial understanding

# Study Parameters

- Their national study surveyed students from different universities and colleges with a range of service-learning experiences of varying intensities in a range of disciplines
- There are few, if any, published studies on long-term effects of service-learning that control these variables
- We have a service-learning course at the University of Georgia that has been taught in the same manner since established in fall 2002. The course has been taught every fall and spring semester since inception.

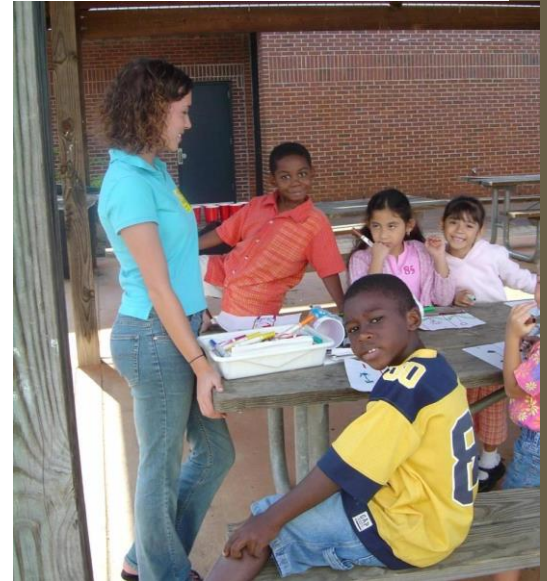
# Course Overview

## **AESC(FCID) 4920S/6920S - FOCUS (Fostering Our Community's Understanding of Science): Service-Learning Experience**

- 3-hour (A-F graded)
- Partnership with elementary schools (currently 8) in our local school district
- Course is designed for science majors, but is open to any student with at least 12 hours of college science credit and 2.5 GPA
- Students paired with school teacher and teach science for 3 hours/week (40 hours total)
- Weekly reflection journals as well as reflection/discussion section
- Total enrollment through spring 2013 has been 1,065

# Course Goals

- Improving the science experiences and science content knowledge of elementary school students
- Increasing awareness among these students about career opportunities related to the sciences
- Provide support to K-5 teachers to enhance science instruction
- Developing a sense of community involvement for UGA students that will continue after graduation
- Enhancing the communication and leadership skills of UGA students





# Purpose of Our Study

- How does participation in Project FOCUS affect civic engagement behaviors and beliefs in the years following graduation?
- Is there a difference in civic engagement behaviors and beliefs between university graduates who participated in Project FOCUS and graduates who did not?

# Methodology

- Sample Selection
  - All undergraduate enrollees in Project FOCUS from 2004-2011 who had graduated at least one year previously
  - $n=475$  unique individuals with contact information
- Comparison Group
  - Sample of alumni who graduated with similar majors as the Project FOCUS sample, and who graduated during the same time period

# Survey Instrument

- *Life After College: A Survey of Former Undergraduates (LAC)*
- Developed by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA
- Designed to study post-graduate values, opinions, and activities, particularly related to involvement in their communities
- Used by Astin et al. in their research



# Survey Administration, Data Collection and Analysis

- Administered using the Qualtrics survey research suite
- 187 alumni finished the survey (87=FOCUS Sample, 100=Control Sample)
- 23% response rate from Project FOCUS alumni
- Used t-test to determine significant differences





## Life After College: A Survey of Alumni

Thank you for taking a few minutes to complete the following survey. We ask you to think about your experience at the University of Georgia. Your thoughtful responses on this survey will help us generate an accurate view of the impact of course-based service.

1. While a student at the University of Georgia, did you take AESC 4920/6920 (Project FOCUS)?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Remember

### Academic Service-Learning

2. Service-learning is the application of academic skills and knowledge to address a community need, issue, or problem, and to enhance student learning. While at UGA, were you involved in service-learning, or did you take courses with a service-learning component?

- Yes
- No

0%  100%



# Results

- Levels and types of political engagement were similar in both groups
- There were no differences in civic values and goals as variously defined in the survey
- There were statistically significant differences in a range of measures of community and civic engagement

## Community & Civic Engagement: *Working with Communities 1*

Working with Communities 1	Mean FOCUS	Mean Comp.	t	Sig
Worked on a community project with government agency/program	1.84	1.53	2.054*	.042
Worked with others to solve a community problem	1.97	1.60	2.475*	.014
Played a leadership role in improving community	1.96	1.52	3.150**	.002

\*\*p < .01

\* p < .05

## Community & Civic Engagement: *Working with Communities 2*

<b>Working with Communities 2</b>	<b>Mean FOCUS</b>	<b>Mean Comp.</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig</b>
Participated in community/neighborhood group	3.57	3.16	3.298**	.001

\*\*p < .01

\* p < .05



## Community & Civic Engagement: *Working with Communities 3*

Working with Communities 3	Mean FOCUS	Mean Comp.	t	Sig
Participating in a community action program	2.46	1.98	3.581**	.001
Becoming a community leader	2.40	1.88	3.410**	.001

\*\*p < .01

\* p < .05

## Community & Civic Engagement: *Volunteer Work 1 and 2*

<b>Volunteer Work 1</b>	<b>Mean FOCUS</b>	<b>Mean Comp.</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig</b>
Frequency of volunteer work in past year	2.33	1.91	4.464**	.001

<b>Volunteer Work 2</b>	<b>Mean FOCUS</b>	<b>Mean Comp.</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig</b>
Hours per week volunteering	2.88	2.27	2.463*	.015

\*\*p < .01

\* p < .05

## Community & Civic Engagement: *Charitable*

<b>Charitable</b>	<b>Mean FOCUS</b>	<b>Mean Comp.</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig</b>
Donated money to an education organization	1.98	1.63	2.348*	.018

\*\*p < .01

\* p < .05

## **Community & Civic Engagement: *Involvement with Alma Mater***

<b>Involvement with Alma Mater</b>	<b>Mean FOCUS</b>	<b>Mean Comp.</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig</b>
Attended an alumni event	1.48	1.29	2.121*	.036
Used an alumni association service	1.46	1.28	2.009*	.046
Recruited new students to college	1.64	1.38	2.709**	.008

\*\*p < .01

\* p < .05

# Results Summary

**Unlike Astin's research, we found similar levels of political engagement and civic values**

**Similar to their findings with a broadly defined group of SL-engaged alumni, we found former participants in this one SL-course were more likely to continue with a range of civic and community activities after graduation. They were also more likely to:**

- Attend alumni events
- Engage the university's alumni association for professional and social support
- Recruit others to attend UGA
- Donate money to an educational organization



# Limitations

- 23% response rate from FOCUS students
- FOCUS is 100% SL course; would results be similar with courses that have a smaller SL component?
- What other factors might contribute to future civic engagement?
- Civic engagement was defined by the survey instrument as working with communities, volunteering, charitable work, and involvement with alma mater. What if definition had been different?
- FOCUS is an elective; self-selection bias of participants?

# Future Research

- Work to increase response rate
- Expand to other courses (if similar alumni numbers are available) and compare effect of level of SL integration as well as service activity performed
- Through our state's Board of Regents, Project FOCUS has been developed at other state institutions – comparison?
- Include interviews, focus groups and other qualitative research in future studies
- Share results and work with alumni associations