Assessing Service-Learning’s Impacts on Post-Graduation Employment Outcomes

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How does taking part in service-learning impact graduates’ employment?

Introduction: Service-learning (SL) has been shown to influence career choices (Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005; Smedick, 1996; Smith Korfmacher, 1999; Warchal & Ruiz, 2005), and is hypothesized to help with job-related outcomes (Overby, 2011) due to enhanced professional skills and direct experiences that might make them more competitive candidates (Duncan & Taylor, 2013; Sternberg, 2013). However, no prior studies have directly assessed if SL actually impacts how quickly graduates get jobs or salary differences vs. peers without SL.

Data and Sample: From a 2013 online survey sent to graduates (n=1994) of a single large, public land-grant university in the Southeast US who graduated in 2010; completed by 447, including 276 who sought employment after undergraduate degree completion (198 who had taken SL, 78 who had not); then, created 44 unique pairs (representing 20 majors) matched on graduation date, undergraduate major, gender, academic performance (GPA, SAT) and ethnicity, but differing on whether they had taken SL coursework. Participants were mostly White (92%) and female (57%). Respondents self-reported time to first employment, starting salaries, subsequent raises and promotions, and other information. 3 with SL experience, and 2 without SL, reported no job; and significantly fewer respondents with SL (3/44, vs. 6 with no SL) reported that their employment was part-time.

Research Questions: Do graduates with SL experience receive jobs faster, or have higher starting salaries, than matched graduates without SL?

Analysis & Findings: Means, standard deviation, degrees of freedom, and t-tests (1-tailed) of responses across matched pairs on self-reported initial salary and months from graduation to first employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Investigated</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>t Statistic (df)</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starting salary (in dollars)</td>
<td>SL</td>
<td>$40,518 (18,468)</td>
<td>t = 2.21 (38)</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No SL</td>
<td>$33,987 (13,908)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting salary, ONLY those with full-time</td>
<td>SL</td>
<td>$43,552 (18,278)</td>
<td>t = 1.39 (30)</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No SL</td>
<td>$38,952 (10,673)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to first job (in months)</td>
<td>SL</td>
<td>2.92 (5.85)</td>
<td>t = -1.24 (38)</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No SL</td>
<td>4.92 (7.45)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Discussion: Those with SL reported significantly higher initial earnings; effect size, d=2.26 (including both full- and part-time wages) or d=1.48 (full-time wages only). While graduates with SL experience averaged about 2 months sooner to finding their first job, this was highly variable and not statistically significant. Graduates with SL also more likely to report full-time employment. Findings could be due to job candidates with SL being considered higher quality applicants due to practical experiences and superior development of particular skills desired by employers; future research on employer attitudes and decision-making would help clarify how/why these SL experiences translate into higher salaries.

References:


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