Service-learning (SL) can influence students’ career choices (Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005; Smedick, 1996; Smith Korfmacher, K., 1999; Warchal & Ruiz, 2005), and SL is hypothesized to help with job-related outcomes (Overyby, 2011) due to enhanced professional skills and direct experiences that might make them more competitive candidates (Duncan & Taylor, 2013; Sternberg, 2013). However, little is known about how SL influences job-related outcomes post-graduation. Our related research (Dorfman, Matthews, & Wu, 2014) has investigated outcomes for salary and job timing in matched pairs of graduates with and without SL experience, finding significantly higher starting salaries and significantly shorter time to first raise for graduates with SL experience, though no difference in time to employment or to first promotion.

Here, we consider to what extent the graduates themselves think that their SL experiences impacted their subsequent employment. Do they perceive or believe that SL courses made a difference in their employment outcomes?

**Methodology:** From our larger 2013 online surveys (sent to >2,000 graduates; completed by >500), this study’s sample includes 239 graduates from one large public land-grant institution in the Southeast US who took SL courses (based on self-report and review of course registrations).

**Results:** Participants felt that their undergraduate service-learning coursework...

- Helped them decide on their choice of field: 41.0% (98/239 respondents)
- Helped them get a job: 27.2% (65 respondents)
- Helped them get promoted faster: 3.3% (8 respondents)
- Helped them get a higher starting salary: 2.5% (6 respondents; no comments)

**Discussion:** Consistent with earlier studies, the largest perceived benefit of taking SL was in terms of helping students determine their field of interest. While nearly half of the respondents felt their SL coursework did not directly impact subsequent employment, many did identify benefits, with over 1 in 4 attesting it helped in getting their first job. Their comments also suggested more global benefits from these courses, which may have had indirect impacts on their job skills, competitiveness, and performance. Interestingly, though few respondents believed SL helped them with salary or promotion, related research from this same data set did find significant salary-related benefits for graduates with SL experience; so, in some cases, graduates may actually receive employment-related boosts without attributing them to SL. Further research on employer perspectives, as well as the interplay between graduates’ perceptions and their actual salaries, may help clarify these issues.

**References:**