

Service-Learning Course Survey

Fall 2009-Fall 2011 Summary of Results

Background

The Office of Service-Learning (OSL) was founded in 2005 to promote and support the development of quality academic service-learning experiences in response to critical community needs through a range of faculty and instructional development programs, services, and funding opportunities. Since its founding, the OSL has worked to develop an assessment tool for measuring the impact of service-learning experiences on academic, personal, and civic dimensions of student learning.

Measuring the Impact of Service-Learning

The *Service-Learning Course Survey (SLCS)* was designed in 2006-07 by the Service-Learning Curriculum Committee and piloted in Fall 2007 with support from the Office of Academic Planning. This survey is offered online and in paper form at the end of each semester. Currently, faculty teaching SL courses participate on a voluntary basis. The OSL uses the aggregate data collected for research and information purposes and offers individual course reports to all participating faculty. The most current iteration of the Survey has been administered each semester since Fall 2009, with some modifications beginning Summer 2011.

The SLCS is designed to provide course- and institution-level data to aid faculty teaching SL courses and inform the OSL's faculty development programs. The instrument assesses student demographics, the time and type of service and in-class activities, and students' perceptions of the impacts of the academic service-learning, including factors based on the Service Learning Benefit scale (Toncar et al., 2006). These factors also correspond with UGA's General Education Abilities of critical thinking, communication, and moral reasoning.

Participants

Since Fall 2009, 1290 students from 84 course sections (54 unique courses) in 26 departments have participated in the survey. Descriptive analysis of the survey results reveal that the majority of respondents are female (66.5%), white (73.4%), and have no previous experience in service-learning (55.5%). Their median age was 20, and most respondents (44.7%) were seniors; 21.7% juniors, 10.2% sophomores, 7.2% freshmen; 10.8% were in masters programs, 0.8% in doctoral programs, and 4.3% in professional programs.

The most common service activities reported were educational activities (24.3%), tutoring (34.7%), and consultation (9.3%). While there were substantial differences across participants, respondents reported that they averaged 45.0% of class time for service-learning (range 0-100%; SD=34.2), and spent an average of 33.5 hours (range 0-499 hours; SD=37.1) outside of class on the service-learning activity.

Results

The results of the survey demonstrate that students are gaining valuable learning experiences through the service-learning courses. The percentage of students responding favorably ("Strongly Agree" or "Agree" on a five-point scale) are reported below. Students were also invited to share "final thoughts or suggestions about service-learning at UGA" as an open-ended response. These comments were overwhelmingly (81.6%) favorable; some are included below.

The service activities increased students' ability to apply and understand the course's **academic content**:

- "The service-learning project in this course helped me see how the material covered in this course can be useful in everyday life or in other situations." **86.9%**
- "The service-learning project... helped me better understand the subject matter of this course." **79.2%**
- Students' free-response comments also supported this perspective:
 - "I think there should be more of an emphasis in service learning in more classes. This is where the 'real world' experience comes from that I believe is more valuable than pure lecture style classes."
 - "I really enjoyed this part of the class and it made this class more meaningful."
 - "A [service-learning] component lends real-life experience to the activity. Applying what you learn helps 'cement' the activity in your mind. Very valuable on many fronts."
 - "The service-learning projects help you to better understand the subject being taught."

Students also saw the value of service-learning for the **community** through the work they did:

- "Service-learning courses like this one can provide real benefits to people in the community." **94.4%**
- "The work I did in this course benefited some segment of the community." **93.1%**
- "The service-learning project... provided opportunities to communicate things I learned in class to people in the community." **84.3%**
- Student comments reinforcing this focus on the community included:
 - "UGA should give back to the community through service-learning as much as possible."
 - "I believe all students should be required to take at least one service-learning class. It would open the eyes of many to the needs of the community and how they can become involved in giving back the gifts that they have been given."
 - "This class is a good idea. Getting involved in the community has inspired me to seek out a more active role in volunteer and charitable opportunities. It has helped me feel more connected with this town and the community, even after five years here."

Students' **critical thinking** benefited from taking part in service-learning. "The service-learning project..."

- "encouraged me to consider perspectives other than my own." **87.1%**
- "helped me define my personal strengths and weaknesses." **83.7%**
- "required me to make judgments about how to behave in new social situations." **77.9%**
- "helped me reconsider some of my former attitudes about social problems." **70.1%**
- Sample student comments reinforcing this learning outcome included:
 - "It is a great experience. Not only was I giving to the community, but the community was giving back to me by teaching me more about myself."
 - "I enjoyed [this] course. It has truly changed my perspective on immigration..."
 - "I enjoyed the service-learning experience at UGA so much. It helped me learn things about a different culture and myself."

Students' **moral reasoning** was also impacted. "The service-learning project..."

- "helped me better understand people of different ages, abilities, cultures, or economic backgrounds." **87.2%**
- "encouraged me to seek additional opportunities to learn about people of different ages, abilities, cultures, or economic backgrounds." **79.7%**
- "made me aware of some of my own biases and prejudices." **70.0%**
- "helped me clarify my personal values." **69.1%**
- Student comments also demonstrated these learning outcomes:
 - "Service-Learning is an essential component to fully understand oneself. I have truly enjoyed all that this class has offered me, both in education and experiences."
 - "As a student at UGA, I often get caught up in the business of bettering myself. But, working with young children and making a huge impact on their lives has enhanced my college experience. Community service not only helps others, but builds character when you help and give."
 - "Great course- [I] grew as a student, teacher, and member of society."

Students found the service activities beneficial to their own development of **professional skills and knowledge**:

- "Through the service-learning project in this course, I enhanced my ability to...
 - work as a member of a team." **80.5%**
 - plan a project." **77.0%**
 - review my work and evaluate my success at attaining my goals." **78.3%**
 - manage my time efficiently." **68.2%**
- "Through this course, I developed a greater sense of personal responsibility for my own learning." **78.7%**
- "The knowledge I gained in this course has made me more marketable in my chosen profession." **75.3%**
- Student comments further showed participants' perspectives on these outcomes:
 - "I really enjoyed the class. Helped me develop interpersonal skills and leadership skills."
 - "Great course. I have learned how to effectively communicate with students with different learning styles and backgrounds. It has been very fulfilling."
 - "This class prepares you for life."
 - "I think that service learning projects give students the opportunity to get their feet wet in their current career choice and it definitely helped me make a decision concerning where I want my career path to lead."

Additionally, students were in favor of **increasing the availability of service-learning** coursework. They agreed:

- "UGA should offer service-learning courses for all students who are interested." **92.7%**
- "I would be interested in participating in other courses with a service-learning component." **85.0%**
- In their comments, students also included explicit recommendations for offering more service-learning courses at UGA, and even for requiring service-learning of all students:
 - "I wish that more of my courses incorporated MEANINGFUL service-learning into their curriculums. Service-learning should be made a graduation requirement to some degree... Is there a certificate program of some sort for service learning? If not, there should be."
 - "Service Learning courses should be a requirement for all students."
 - "It was great! Best class I've taken as an elective... WOULD HIGHLY RECOMMEND!"

- “This is a good class. I enjoyed every minute of it, and there should be opportunities like this in all majors.”
- “I absolutely love this service learning course and I believe more people should join and that there should be more service learning courses available.”

Finally, students identified the service-learning experience as a **transformative part of their education** at UGA that also **improved their relationship with their course instructor**:

- “My relationship with the course instructor or teaching assistant was more positive as a result of the service-learning activity.” **72.5%**
- Student comments further showed how much they valued their participation in service-learning:
 - “I loved my experience with service learning this semester. Not only did I build positive and lasting relationships with my precious tutees, but I also feel closer to my professor.”
 - “Keep up the good work and please offer more service-learning opportunities. This has been my favorite and most rewarding class at UGA!!!”
 - “It has made a huge impact on my college career and the relationships I've built. I feel so fortunate to go to a University that extends me this opportunity!”