

## Changes in Involvement Preferences as Measured by the Community Service Involvement Preference Inventory

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*This study represents evolving research focused on the use of the Community Service Involvement Preference Inventory (CSIPI) to measure changes in involvement preferences for undergraduate students enrolled in a core course with a service-learning component. Results of the study revealed coefficients of internal consistency increased for the Exploration ( $r = .6383$ ) and Affiliation ( $r = .7001$ ) involvement preferences. Coefficients for Experimentation ( $r = .7414$ ) and Assimilation ( $r = .7062$ ) involvement preferences remained relatively constant. When comparing mean scores for the repeated measures portion of the study, preferences involving initial experience with community service (Exploration) were higher on the first administration of the instrument [ $t(1,52) = 2.86, p < .01$ ]. The propensity for service to become a life-long commitment (Assimilation) was higher on the second administration of the instrument [ $t(1,51) = -1.63, p < .10$ ]. The study resonates with recent service-learning literature and suggests that the CSIPI may be a valuable assessment for measuring how preferences may change based on learning influences.*

Previous research has confirmed that involvement in activities outside the classroom has positive effects on student learning and success (Astin, 1984; Astin, 1996; Cooper, Healy, & Simpson, 1994; Pascerella & Terrenzini, 1991). Furthermore, learning that is specific to increased social awareness and civic responsibility has been documented when participation involves community service (Astin & Sax, 1998). The qualities of active learning and student involvement characterize the service experience. More recently, these qualities are also common themes identified as precursors to achieving learning outcomes when combining community service and classroom learning.

Learning outcomes of academic service-learning are as unique and diverse as the definition of service-learning itself (Weigert, 1998). It appears that students' motives for involvement as well as the actual learning outcomes differ between academic service-learning and co-curricular community service activities. Although the existence of these differences serves as the premise for this study, this study does not purport to resolve these differences. Instead, the emphasis here is on changes in students' involvement preferences that can be influenced by attitudes, values, and beliefs, thereby allowing any combination of learning outcomes to occur.

With roots in experiential learning, service-learning can be defined as the process of integrating "structured, intentional learning with public and community service" (Stanton, 1990, p. 345). Delve, Mintz, and Stewart (1990) proposed the Service Learning Model as a way to understand students' values development as a result of involvement in

community service. The phases of development, including *Exploration, Clarification, Realization, Activation, and Internalization*, help to describe the learning and values development that may occur as students become invested in helping others. The authors also identified the variables of intervention (quality of interaction between the service provider and recipient), commitment (frequency and duration of experience), behavior (motives for involvement), and balance (appropriate challenge and support necessary for growth) as having the ability to influencing the quality of the service effort.

The Community Service Involvement Preference Inventory (CSIPI) (formerly the Service Learning Inventory) was developed to investigate if differences exist in how students prefer to become involved in community service (Payne, 1993). Based on the Service Learning Model (Delve, Mintz, and Stewart, 1990) the CSIPI suggests that service-learning can influence students' involvement preferences. The initial research revealed that differences in involvement preferences existed between students involved in community service and those who were not involved (Payne, 1993). Another study using the CSIPI suggested that involvement preferences changed as a result of enrollment in a service-learning course (Payne & Bennett, 1999).

Several items for the CSIPI were revised in 1998. Item revisions were based on results of previous administrations of the instrument and the flood of research conducted since the instrument was developed. New coefficients of internal reliability were established for the Inventory as a result.

The purpose of this study was to administer the

revised Inventory and investigate if involvement preferences changed during a ten-week term as a result of participating in a service-learning course at a private university in the West. To ascertain whether change occurred, a total of four null hypotheses were established—one for each of the involvement preferences described in the following section. Each hypothesis posited that there would be no difference in mean scores between the first and second administration of the inventory for each involvement preference.

## Method

### *Participants*

Undergraduate students enrolled in four sections of a service-learning course offered as an elective in the core curriculum were invited to participate in the study. Students met for three hours each week over a ten-week term. Course requirements included undertaking a minimum of 20 hours of service in local service agencies, maintaining a journal recording the service experience, and completing a final paper or project integrating the service experience and analysis of readings, videos, and classroom discussions.

A total of 83 students participated in the first administration of the test and a total of 53 (64%) were retained for the final sample. Reasons for the difference between the first and second administration of the Inventory include students not completing both administrations of the inventory and the researcher discarding incomplete data. Students who did not complete both administrations of the Inventory were not included in the final analysis. Missing data were coded to identify data sets to be removed when comparing scores from the two administrations of the CSUPI.

### *Procedure*

The procedures of this study involved a repeated measure design in which the inventory was administered to students during the first class period and again to the same students at the end of the term. The use of the last four digits of the students' social security numbers allowed for anonymity while facilitating the pairing of scores. A paired *t* test was performed for each involvement preference using the service-learning experience as the independent variable. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the alpha level for a two-tailed test of significance was set at  $p < .10$ .

### *Instrumentation*

The CSUPI is a paper-and-pencil inventory designed to assess how students prefer to become

involved in community service. The assessment requires approximately 15 minutes to complete and explores a total of 48 questions about involvement in community service and helping others. Twelve items for each involvement preference were designed to evoke four unique ways that students prefer to become involved in community service according to the assumptions of the Service Learning Model (Delve, Mintz and Stewart, 1990). A five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) serves as the scoring format; therefore, scores for each involvement preference can range from 12 to 60. The total score for each involvement preference serves as an indicator for how the student prefers to become involved in community service. The inventory also includes general questions about personal demographics and allows students to report the nature and scope of their involvement in community service over the prior year.

The CSUPI combines the contributions of research, observation, and discussion to measure the experience and involvement unique to each preference. Items also reflect the qualities of feelings, behaving, and thinking that, when used in combination, establish the basic structure for cognitive and psychosocial theories of student development (Rodgers, 1980). Service-learning experts evaluated items on the initial Inventory, and internal reliability was established (Payne, 1993).

Based on initial reliability coefficients and subsequent research (Payne, 1997; Payne & Bennett, 1999), it was evident that items could be strengthened for the Exploration and Affiliation involvement preferences, and several items were revised as a result. For example, one item for the Exploration involvement preference was changed from, "I am aware of different groups and/or individuals in the local community that need help" ( $r = .1761$ ) to, "I think most people in need rely too heavily on the social service system" ( $r = .3064$ ). Another example, for the Affiliation involvement preference was changed from, "There are many ways to help people overcome social issues and concerns" ( $r = .1430$ ) to, "I select agencies or causes for involvement based on the interests of my friends or peer group" ( $r = .3633$ ). Several items were also revised for the Experimentation and Assimilation involvement preferences.

The balance of affective, behavioral, and cognitive items was maintained throughout each involvement preference. A new Chronbach alpha was calculated for each involvement preference and revealed an increase in internal reliability for the Exploration ( $r = .6383$ ) and Affiliation ( $r = .7001$ ) involvement preferences. A slight decrease in internal reliability

TABLE 1

Mean Scores for the First and Second Administration of the Community Service Involvement Preference Inventory and Paired *t*-Test Results for Each Involvement Preference

	Number of Pairs	1st Test		2nd Test		t	p
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Exploration	53	35.40	4.58	33.19	5.03	2.86	.01**
Affiliation	48	34.77	6.07	33.85	5.99	1.04	.31
Experimentation	42	46.07	4.10	46.02	5.30	0.07	.95
Assimilation	52	37.86	5.87	39.13	4.74	-1.63	.10*

\*  $p < .10$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

was recorded for the Experimentation ( $r = .7414$ ) and Assimilation ( $r = .7062$ ) involvement preferences. A brief description of each involvement preference will inform the interpretation of the results.

*Exploration Involvement Preference.* The Exploration score reflects the affective nature of apprehension common in new experiences. Students are unsure how best to help others and tend to become involved because of the self-satisfaction associated with helping others. From a behavioral perspective, the commitment is short term and is usually at the convenience of the helper.

*Affiliation Involvement Preference.* Items for this involvement preference elicit an inclination for participating in community service in a group or with peers. Recognition is a common behavioral motivation for involvement, and commitments tend to be infrequent and shorter in duration. Interpersonal interactions provide a safe environment in which the impact of social issues encountered during the service effort can be shared and explored.

*Experimentation Involvement Preference.* Items written for the Experimentation preference focus on the personal challenge of becoming involved in community service. Making a difference in the lives of others and wanting to learn about the needs of the individual or community served are dominant. As the student begins to spend more time with a specific issue or concern, he/she gains insight into the needs of the individual or community served.

*Assimilation Involvement Preference.* The preference for Assimilation reflects a feeling of lifelong commitment and frequent contact with the individual or community served. A deeper understanding of the needs of those served parallels a personal investment in long-term commitments. Cognitively, the student begins to make career and lifestyle decisions based on the service experience as a way to understand what it means to be a responsible citizen.

## Results

A demographic profile of the students who participated in both administrations of the inventory ( $n=58$ ) revealed that the majority of respondents were Caucasian (72.4%), female (51.7%), second

year students (46.6%) between 18-25 years of age (93.1%). Demographic information collected from the first administration of the test included involvement in community service over the previous year. The involvement profile revealed that most students participated in community service an average of one time per month (43.1%) and were involved for at least one hour (32.8%); however, 22.4% indicated they were not involved in community service activities during the prior year. The profiles also revealed the majority of the service contacts were in-person (58.6%).

The primary objective of the study was to investigate changes in involvement preferences for students enrolled in a service-learning course. Table 1 summarizes the results of the paired *t* test for each involvement preference. The paired *t* test accounted for missing data by removing the entire entry for both administrations of the inventory; therefore, the number of pairs represents only complete data sets for each involvement preference.

Significant differences in mean scores were found for the Exploration [ $t(1,52) = 2.86, p < .01$ ] and Assimilation [ $t(1,51) = -1.63, p < .10$ ] involvement preferences. No significant differences were found between mean scores for the Affiliation and Experimentation involvement preferences.

## Discussion

The null hypothesis was rejected for the Exploration involvement preference [ $t(1,52) = 2.86, p < .01$ ]. Given the course content and intensive service experience, it is to be expected that students would tend to shift away from the egoistic qualities that define this involvement preference. Furthermore, motives for involvement probably differ between students involved in academic service-learning and those involved in community service efforts that lack an intentional learning component (Winniford, Carpenter, & Grider, 1997). The change in this involvement preference might be attributed to a better understanding of the issues related to diversity, citizenship, and democracy as stated in the course objectives.

The null hypothesis for the Affiliation involve-

ment preference was retained [ $t(1,47) = 1.40, p < .31$ ] Since the course did not necessarily promote learning in student groups, results for this involvement preference are not surprising. An earlier study by Payne (1997) suggested that some students enjoy sharing common experiences with peers and reinforced interpersonal interactions as an important influence for learning outcomes. Although not a factor in this study, interactive learning in peer groups and structured group experiences is a powerful teaching and learning style that should not be overlooked (Cross, 1998). A preference for involvement in groups or with peers might inform one's teaching methods so as to accommodate different student learning styles.

The null hypothesis for the Experimentation involvement preference [ $t(1,41) = 0.07, p < .95$ ] was also retained. Mean scores for both the pre- and post-test were significantly higher than the mean scores for the other involvement preferences. The demographic data confirmed that most students had at least some experience helping others prior to enrolling in the course; therefore, prior involvement could be a confounding source. Given the nature of this preference toward community-based learning and making a difference, perhaps the propensity for change in this involvement preference was not as prevalent as with the other preferences. Future studies controlling for prior involvement may minimize this possible source of error.

Finally, the null hypothesis for the Assimilation involvement preference was rejected [ $t(1,51) = -1.63, p < .10$ ]. According to the assumptions of the CSIPI, results for the Assimilation involvement preference suggest that students developed a propensity to become involved in future service efforts. Given the close association between responsible citizenship and the desired learning outcomes of the course, the results support the idea that when community service is integrated in the curriculum it achieves deeper learning.

#### *Limitations*

While the results of this research are promising, the study is not without its limitations. It is important to note that some of these limitations exist due to the evolving nature of the CSIPI, while the more prominent methodological limitations include the loss of subjects as a result of pairing, the nature of repeated measure designs, and general demographic influences. Keppel (1991) cautioned that a loss of subjects might result in a loss of randomness. Comparing demographic profiles between the first and second administration of the Inventory suggests that demographic differences between the two test administrations are negligible. It can be reasonably

assumed that the loss of subjects was not related to treatment conditions, and the loss of subjects may largely be attributed to chance.

Keppel (1991) also suggested that repetitive measure designs are subject to errors such as oversimplification and practice effects. Caution is therefore advised when attributing a causal effect to the independent variable alone. Practice effects in this study are considered to be negligible, since at least seven weeks elapsed between the first and second administration of the test. Perhaps more influential would be a halo effect, whereby, as a result of the course, students understood the philosophy of service-learning and responded more favorably to those items on the inventory (Borg & Gall, 1989).

Suggesting that involvement preferences could change over a ten-week period is another source of concern. Recent research has revealed that change over such a short period of time is possible (Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997). More dramatic changes in involvement preferences might have occurred if the experience were longer in duration (Astin & Sax, 1998).

Finally, the nonrandom assignment of students involved in the study might raise questions about the generalizability of the results. Differences in motives and characteristics between students who participate in community service and those who do not, combined with the esoteric variables inherent in decisions concerning course selection, were not controlled. Therefore, the interpretation of results to the larger population should be applied with caution.

### **Conclusion**

This study contributes to the growing body of service-learning literature by investigating changes in how students prefer to become involved in community service as a result of academic service-learning. It resonates with recent service-learning literature and suggests the CSIPI may be a valuable assessment for measuring how preferences may change based on learning influences. Understanding the implications of *why* one should act transcends learning about *how* to become involved in community service. As expectations for outcomes assessment and demands for accountability continue to increase, institutions of higher education must embrace the qualities of active learning and community involvement as precursors to changing the landscape of undergraduate education.

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