

17

SUNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' COMMUNITY SERVICE EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED STATES AND THEIR IMPACTS

EXPERIENCIAS DE SERVICIOS COMUNITARIOS DE ESTUDIANTES INTERNACIONALES EN LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS Y SUS IMPACTOS

Ed. D. Elaine Hozdik¹

E-mail: ehozdik@fgcu.edu

¹Florida Gulf Coast University, United States of America.

Suggested citation (APA, sixth edition)

Hozdik, E. (2017). Sunderstading international students' community service experiences in the United States and their impacts. *Revista Conrado*, 13(57), 120-125. Retrieved from <http://conrado.ucf.edu/cu/index.php/conrado>

ABSTRACT

Community service, a high-impact educational practice is well-established in the United States (U.S.) higher education institutions (HEIs) and offers multiple positive benefits for students. Higher education is an opportunity for students from diverse cultures to learn together and interact with host communities, and to become globally conscious citizens. Extensive literature on community service in higher education lacks the perspective and experience of international students pursuing studies in U.S. HEIs. This mixed methods study sought to understand international students' community service experiences in the US and their impacts. What were their experiences? What did they learn? How were they impacted? What future community service engagement did they anticipate, especially on return to their home countries? Findings showed that international students had diverse, positive experiences with multiple impacts. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors influenced engagement in community service. Most international students intended to engage in future community service. Their suggestions and the researcher's insight can guide international students and higher education practitioners in supporting international students' engagement in community service in U.S. HEIs.

Keywords:

Students' community service, international students, higher education.

RESUMEN

El servicio comunitario, es una práctica educativa de alto impacto bien establecida en las instituciones de educación superior de los Estados Unidos (EE. UU.) Y ofrece múltiples beneficios positivos para los estudiantes. La educación superior es una oportunidad para que los estudiantes de diversas culturas aprendan juntos e interactúen con las comunidades de acogida y se conviertan en ciudadanos globalmente conscientes. La extensa literatura sobre el servicio comunitario en la educación superior carece de la perspectiva y la experiencia de los estudiantes internacionales que estudian en las EE. UU. Este estudio de métodos mixtos buscó comprender las experiencias de los estudiantes internacionales en servicios comunitarios en los Estados Unidos y sus impactos. ¿Cuáles fueron sus experiencias? ¿Qué aprendieron? ¿Cómo fueron impactados? ¿Qué compromiso futuro de servicio comunitario esperaban, especialmente al regresar a sus países de origen? Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes internacionales tenían experiencias diversas y positivas con múltiples impactos. Los factores intrínsecos y extrínsecos influyeron en la participación en el servicio comunitario. La mayoría de los estudiantes internacionales tenían la intención de participar en futuros servicios comunitarios. Sus sugerencias y la visión del investigador pueden guiar a los estudiantes internacionales ya los profesionales de la educación superior en el apoyo a la participación de los estudiantes internacionales en el servicio comunitario en las instituciones de educación superior de los Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave:

Servicios comunitarios de estudiantes, estudiantes internacionales, educación superior.

INTRODUCTION

Three trends that impact higher education in the US today converge to provide a rationale for this study: higher education's role in promoting social responsibility, globalization and higher education's need to prepare students with 21st century skills and, an increase in the number of international students studying in the U.S. Higher education institutions in the US embrace the role of teaching students to be socially responsible citizens (Bok, 1982; Boyer, 1987; Greenleaf, 1977) able to improve their local and global communities through socially constructed solutions (Astin, 1999; Campus Compact, 2013). Higher education worldwide must promote social responsibility (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009) and both global and local perspectives are necessary to prepare students for the 21st century (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2011; Renn, Brazelton & Holmes, 2014). Skelly declared that *"international educators, more than other professionals, should see that they are part of a worldwide movement to create a viable, tolerant, and open global civil society"*. (Skelly, 2009, p. 31). Many HEIs offer or require community service as part of the educational curriculum believing it teaches social responsibility and develops civic-minded citizens who are prepared to solve social problems. Higher education has been impacted by, and is responding to, globalization (Altbach, et al., 2009; Ibrahim, 2011). HEIs now must think and act beyond local and national communities to include the global community in their engagements, both competitively and collaboratively, on the world stage (Wildavsky, 2010). Internationalization serves to connect HEIs and fosters opportunities to develop graduates who are globally conscious citizens ready to be civically engaged (Hudzik, 2011). Integrative learning through application of knowledge, skills and responsibilities in new settings and with complex problems is one educational practice responding to globalization and preparing students for the 21st century (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2011). The U.S. hosts the largest percent of any one country of the world's globally mobile students and those numbers are increasing (Institute of International Education, 2013). International students' successful adjustment and integration into the HEI and community is promoted when HEI educators are well informed about the experiences, needs and goals of international students and can provide appropriate

opportunities, preparation, and guidance to support them. Educators should not assume that international students' engagement in community service, or resulting impacts, are similar to those of U.S. students. Without knowing what meaning or relevance international students associate with their community service experiences it is difficult to know how best to support them and encourage community service as a sustainable practice in their futures. Thus an inquiry into international students' community service experiences in the U.S. and their impacts was relevant. The purpose of this study was to obtain information for better knowledge and understanding of the community service experiences and the impact of those experiences on international students in the U.S.

DEVELOPMENT

Higher education institutions in the US embrace the role of teaching students to be socially responsible citizens (Bok, 1982; Boyer, 1987; Greenleaf, 1977) with the goal of developing civic-minded citizens able to improve their local and global communities through socially constructed solutions (Astin, 1999; Campus Compact, 2013). Boyer (1987), noted a distinct gap between higher education and the larger world and suggested that HEIs create model communities using curricular and co-curricular experiences to prepare students for social and civic obligations. Community service is one approach to facilitate students' development of social responsibility. It is described as experiential, community based, serving a need of the community and benefiting the student, can be connected to academics (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby & Associates, 2009; Kuh, 2008) and has no monetary compensation (Brownell & Swaner, 2010). Community service may include volunteer activity, civic engagement and service learning. Extensive literature on community service touts its multiple positive benefits (Astin, 1999; Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and connections to students' personal and interpersonal development, academic and cognitive development, perspective transformation and the development of citizenship skills and values (Eyler & Giles, 1999). This high-impact educational practice (Kuh, 2008) also promotes and supports student interactions with diverse people (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Community service is well established in many HEIs in the U.S. with service-learning courses offered in virtually all colleges and universities and almost every

discipline (Colby et al., 2000). More than six million students are engaged in civic and community service at over 1,100 member institutions of a national coalition of higher education institutions (Campus Compact, 2013). A majority of the research on service learning or community service is from the perspective of U.S. students serving either in the US or abroad. Ibrahim (2011), noted that literature on international service is essentially one directional, from developed nation to less developed nation and not inclusive of the reverse. International students studying in U.S. HEI's were rarely mentioned in the literature on community service. Limited research suggested that while community service may increase international students' learning and development they may not engage in community service in the same way or extent as American students or may not be familiar with community service as a learning strategy (Glass, 2012) and they may or may not understand community service and its purpose (Zhao, Kuh & Carini (2005). Scholars have recommended new research be undertaken as the concept of community service has now entered the worldwide context and little literature is available to guide us (Bringle, Hatcher & Jones, 2011; Ibrahim, 2011). Hatcher & Bringle (2012), stressed a need to widen service learning research to include qualitative, quantitative and comparative projects that intentionally cross national and cultural boundaries.

The prevalence of community service in U.S. HEIs, increasing numbers of international students studying in the US, HEIs role to support and guide international students toward meaningful and successful higher education experiences and the lack of literature available to guide educators on this topic presented a compelling argument to conduct new research. U.S. HEIs and educators need to be prepared to assist international students for effective community service experiences that might transcend cross-cultural landscapes, increase their sense of social responsibility, understanding of complex local and global issues and encourage a sustainable commitment to service.

The study, conducted in two phases, used a mixed methods explanatory sequential design to understand international students' community service experiences in the U.S. and their impacts. The overarching research question for this study was what are the community service experiences and the impact of those experiences on international students in the US? The research sub

questions were: 1) what are the community services experiences of international students? 2) what have international students learned from their community service experiences? 3) how have international students been personally impacted by their community service experiences? and 4) what are international students' anticipated future involvements in community service in the US and on return to their home countries? The study used a convenience sample of international students enrolled at one public university in a southeastern state of the U.S who had completed a minimum of ten hours of community service and were at least 18 years of age. In Phase I, participants ($n = 24$) completed a survey, developed by the researcher from previously validated instruments, that included demographic, quantitative and several qualitative items related to types of community service, number of hours served, learning, personal impact resulting from the service and future plans to serve. Data collected from the survey provided foundational information about international students and their community service. Analysis of this data produced a portrait of the participants' characteristics, their community service experiences, personal impacts of these experiences, and their possible future intentions to serve. Further explanation was pursued in Phase II through qualitative individual interviews with eight ($n = 8$) participants selected by the researcher through purposeful sampling. Supporting research questions that formed the basis of qualitative individual interviews in Phase II emerged from Phase I results. Interviews were videotaped and transcribed verbatim. Member checking and review of transcripts and data analysis by an independent expert increased validity and verisimilitude. Coding of transcripts drew out themes, key concepts, patterns and relationships in the data. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data with literature developed depth of understanding and offered explanations about participants' community service experiences and impacts.

This study found that participants came from a variety of home countries and about half had engaged in community service prior to coming to the US. They represented many academic majors, were engaged in diverse community service activities in the U.S., completed from 22 to 300 service hours and 45.8% had completed over 80 hours. They had varied reasons for engaging in their service activities and noted university faculty, friends and organizations motivated their

engagement. Community service facilitated their exposure to Americans, American culture and U.S. based community engagement. Some experienced changes in their perceptions of the U.S. Participants viewed their community service experiences positively and anticipated future involvement in service. Outcomes from their service included academic learning, personal growth and development and learning about American culture. However, their ability to apply concepts from courses to real situations was inconsistent among participants. Themes underscoring the participants' community service experiences in the US and their impacts included learning and personal growth, appreciation of diversity, exposure to the U.S. culture and community, having a sense of community, being motivated to serve, and changed perceptions of the U.S. and Americans. All participants encouraged other international students to engage in community service, advising engagement on- and off-campus, be open-minded, and consider the purpose of the community service experience for both the students and the community hosts. One expressed that service can be done in any country. A lack of transportation to engage off-campus was noted as a challenge for some participants. The participants suggested HEIs support international student engagement in community service through early introduction, provide good initial and on-going promotion of opportunities, prepare them for the community service experience and assist them to engage in service outside of a required class. One participant appreciated that community service was a requirement, otherwise may not have done it. Eight themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data, including engagement in U.S. community service, learning from community service with subthemes of academic learning and personal growth and learning, American culture, American community service, factors contributing to service outcomes, future community service intentions and what was memorable. Gaining a sense of place and belonging in their new community was a personal impact mentioned by several participants. There were mixed experiences among the participants in relating their community service to academic learning.

CONCLUSIONS

Many findings in this study align with previous research on U.S. students' community service experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Sax & Astin, 1997) including personal and interpersonal development, academic and cognitive development, perspective transformation and the development of citizenship skills and values (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Participants felt strongly about following their heart, responding to community causes, pursuing their passion, satisfaction of serving and making a difference in the world (Eyler & Giles, 1999). The study's findings suggest community service was a high-impact educational experience, that some outcomes were potentially universal across cultural and geographical differences thus community service across national boundaries may develop global understanding and citizenship. U.S. HEIs must recognize and respond to international students' unique and diverse attributes, stress and challenges encountered when engaging in community service (Bringle, Hatcher & Jones, 2011). They should readily promote community service opportunities and prepare international students to engage in their US service experiences, assist on initial contact with host service sites, procure transportation, affiliate with other students (teams, organizations, friends or roommates) who can make the international students' entre into the community easier, preferably in partnership with domestic U.S. students. Some evidence showed that faculty influenced participants' engagement in service however, HEIs should be cognizant of the inconsistencies in participants' ability to apply concepts from their courses to real situations through the community service. Reflection opportunities to process their community service experiences could enhance learning. Further research should include larger numbers of international students in a variety of HEIs, longitudinal studies, and faculty roles with international students related to community service.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- Altbach, P.G., Reisberg, L., & Rumbley, L. E. (2009). *Trends in global higher education: Tracking an academic revolution*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001831/183168e.pdf>
- Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2011). *The LEAP vision for learning: Outcomes, practices, impact, and employers' views*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Astin, A. W. (1999). Involvement in learning revisited: Lessons we have learned. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 587-598. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.fgcu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/195177490?accountid=10919>
- Bok, D. C. (1982). *Beyond the ivory tower: Social responsibilities of the modern university*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Boyer, E. L. (1987). *College: The undergraduate experience in America (1st ed.)*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Bringle, R. G., Hatcher, J. A., & Jones, S. G. (Eds.). (2011). *International Service Learning: Conceptual frameworks and research* (Vol. 1: IUPUI Series on Service Learning Research). Sterling: Stylus.
- Brownell, J. E., & Swaner, L. E. (2010). *Five high-impact practices*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Campus Compact. (2013). *Who we are*. Retrieved from <http://www.compact.org/about/history-mission-vision/>
- Colby, A., Ehrlich, T., Beaumont, E., Rosner, J., & Stephens, J. (2000). Higher education and the development of civic responsibility. In Ehrlich, T. (Ed.), *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education* (pp. xxi-xliii). Phoenix: The American Council on Education and The Oryx Press.
- Eyler, J., & Giles, D. E. (1999). *Where's the learning in service-learning?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Glass, C. (2012). Educational experiences associated with international students' learning, development, and positive perceptions of campus climate. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 228-251.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Mahwah: Paulist Press.
- Hatcher, J. A., & Bringle, R. G. (2012). Introduction: Exploring similarities and differences through cross-cultural comparative research. In Hatcher, J. A., & Bringle, R. G. (Ed.), *Understanding service-learning and community engagement: Crossing boundaries through research*. (pp. ix-xxii). Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- Hudzik, J. K. (2011). *Comprehensive Internationalization: From Concept to Action*. Washington, D. C.: NAFSA Association of International Educators. Retrieved from https://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/NAFSA_Home/Resource_Library_Assets/Publications_Library/2011_Comprehen_Internationalization.pdf
- Ibrahim, B. L. (2011). International service-learning as a path to global citizenship. In Hatcher, J. A., & Bringle, R. B. (Eds.), *Understanding service-learning and community engagement* (pp. 11-21). Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- Institute of International Education. (2013). *Project Atlas: Trends and global data 2013*. New York: Institute of International Education. Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Project-Atlas>
- Jacoby, B. and Associates. (2009). *Civic engagement in higher education: Concepts and practices*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: Volume 2: A third decade of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Renn, K. A., Brazelton, G. B., & Holmes, J. M. (2014). At the margins of internationalization: An analysis of journal articles on college student development, learning, and experiences, 1998-2011. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(3), 278-294. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.fgcu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1526121991?accountid=10919>
- Sax, L.J. & Astin, A. W. (1997). The benefits of service: Evidence from undergraduates. *The Educational Record*, 78(3-4), 25-32. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.fgcu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.fgcu.edu/docview/225292466?accountid=10919>

- Skelly, J. M. (2009). Fostering engagement: The role of international education in the development of global civil society. In Lewin, R. (Ed.), *The Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad: Higher education and the quest for global citizenship* (pp. 21-32). New York: Routledge.
- Wildavsky, B. (2010). *The great brain race: How global universities are reshaping the world*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Zhao, C.-M, Kuh, G.D., & Carini, R.M. (2005). A comparison of international student and American student engagement in effective educational practices. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76((2)), 209-231. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.fgcu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/205341377?accountid=10919>