

**RESEARCH SERVICE-LEARNING:
MAKING THE ACADEMY RELEVANT AGAIN**

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ABSTRACT

For at least 20 years, American universities, political scientists, and college students have each been criticized for holding themselves aloof from public life. This article introduces a pedagogical method – research service-learning (RSL) – and examines whether it can provide a means of integrating scholarly theory with civic practice to enhance student outcomes. In particular, we examine whether a modest dose of RSL in the form of an optional course add-on (the “RSL gateway option”) is associated with higher scores on 12 educational and civic measures. We find that the RSL gateway option did not have effects on some important outcomes – such as intellectual engagement, problem solving, and knowledge retention – but it did appear to open students’ eyes to future opportunities in academic research and nonprofit and public sector work. The RSL add-on also appears to have helped students make the intellectual link between scholarly theory and the challenges facing volunteers and voluntary organizations. We argue that RSL, in its gateway option formulation, is an administratively feasible pedagogy that can simultaneously help to resolve the relevancy dilemmas facing research universities, political scientists, and students seeking connections between the classroom and public policy.

KEYWORDS: Civic Engagement, Experiential Learning, Service-Learning, Community-Based Research

For at least 20 years, American universities have drawn criticism for holding themselves aloof from public life, thereby failing to fulfill what critics see as higher education's civic mission to serve democracy and humanity (Checkoway 2001; Boyer 1994; Campus Compact and Tufts University 2005). The detachment critique takes many forms. University professors are said to produce research without regard for its practical applications (Boyer 1994; Boyer 1990). Incentive structures governing faculty promotion and tenure are said to isolate professors from their students and communities (Boyer 1990). Students are said to be uninspired and unable to connect their academic studies to the world around them (Colby et al. 2003). And the universities themselves are accused of being timid about creating model partnerships with community organizations (Maurrasse 2001). As Maurrasse concedes, "Many residents of communities in close proximity to these universities would argue that their powerful neighbors have done more harm than good" (2001, 12-13). Research universities have been especially vulnerable to these critiques.

As a disciplinary microcosm of American higher education, political science has been subject to a similar set of critiques. Critics, including many prominent political scientists themselves, charge that the discipline has prioritized abstract formal theory (i.e., mathematical modeling) at the expense of empirical investigations of political reality (Shapiro 2002; Miller 2001; Kasza 2001; Cohn 1999; Green and Shapiro 1994). Political scientists are said to have abandoned their hallowed tradition of public service and engagement with the policy-making process (Cohn 1999) and turned away from important questions of democracy and public policy (Hacker and Pierson 2009; Shapiro 2002; Green and Shapiro 1994; Cohn 1999).

Considering academia's ambivalence about its public mission, it is perhaps not surprising that many college students see public affairs as largely irrelevant to their lives. To be sure, young

people are exceptionally committed to volunteer service (Dalton 2009; Zukin et al. 2006; Goss 1999), but they are relatively uninterested in politics (Bennett 1997; Zukin et al. 2006).

Compared to their elders, members of the DotNet generation—those born after 1975—are less knowledgeable about politics, less convinced of their ability to make a difference through politics, less attentive to politics, and less willing to identify as partisans (Zukin et al 2006). As Cliff Zukin and his colleagues report: “*young people have not so much dropped out as they have never tuned in*” (Zukin et al. 2006, 93; italics in original).

Research universities, the political science discipline, and college students are all grappling with profound questions about how to bridge intellectual engagement with public engagement in ways that are socially useful and consistent with the scholarly enterprise. Two forms of experiential education, increasingly embraced by colleges and universities, offer potential approaches to these dilemmas of relevance. These pedagogies are service-learning and community-based research. In both approaches, course curricula require students to work with community organizations – usually nonprofits; less commonly government agencies – to supplement and ideally enhance the classroom experience. Service-learning typically requires students to provide assistance to the organization or its clientele in the form of unpaid program-related labor; in community-based research, students typically work with an organization to formulate and answer a question of mutual interest. Such approaches simultaneously engage the university in the broader community, force faculty members to draw curricular links between theory and practice, and allow students to apply intellectual and moral resources to public work.

However, incorporating service-learning into political science courses poses several problems. First, faculty members risk criticism that these programs are a distraction from the core academic mission (Fish 2004) or that they are thinly veiled efforts by liberal professors to

indoctrinate students into a left-wing ideology (Butin 2006). Second, faculty members may be reluctant to embrace these alternative teaching methods because professional rewards lie in publishing, not pedagogical innovation. Integrating outside service and/or research requires time and effort (e.g., in designing, arranging, overseeing, and grading the components) that faculty members might feel are overly burdensome or better spent on their own research and publishing (Kravetz 2004; Strand et al. 2003).

This article introduces and evaluates a pedagogical method, the research service-learning (RSL) gateway option, which combines positive elements of service-learning and community-based research, while offering a potential solution to some of the ideological and resource challenges common to each. Like traditional service-learning programs, the RSL gateway option requires students to provide volunteer time to a nonprofit or government agency and to reflect on their experiences. Like most community-based research programs, the RSL gateway option asks students to work with a community “partner” in undertaking a collaborative research project that will benefit both the organization and the student (Strand et al. 2003).¹ However, unlike traditional service-learning and community-based research programs, the RSL gateway option is a modest introduction to both pedagogies that is hypothesized to deliver some benefits of each and encourage students’ future engagement in both. In sum, the RSL gateway option engages students in rigorous research, grounded in a hands-on service experience and traditional methods of scientific inquiry, to explore important community questions. In the process, the RSL gateway option provides the university with a public presence in surrounding neighborhoods, potentially affords faculty members research ideas and teaching material, and, our evidence suggests, enhances students’ educational outcomes. Broadly speaking, we argue that the RSL gateway option is an administratively feasible pedagogy that can simultaneously help to resolve the

relevancy dilemmas facing research universities, political scientists, and students seeking connections between the classroom and public policy. Our hypothesis is that adding research to service intensifies the intervention to yield desirable educational and civic outcomes.

This article unfolds as follows. First, we set up the question by reviewing the RSL program, paying particular attention to the ways in which it is designed to address the relevancy and resource dilemmas facing administrators and professors. Next, we briefly review the outcomes that have been robustly associated with traditional service-learning and community-based research projects, outlining our a priori expectations for the RSL program in light of those findings. Third, we describe the data and methods used to examine our research questions, which revolve around the impact of RSL on students. We then present our findings from post-semester surveys in which we examined the effects of RSL on various civic and educational outcomes identified in prior studies of service-learning programs. Finally, we offer an argument for why RSL offers an alternative to either service-learning or community-based research alone in producing desirable outcomes for research universities, faculty members, and students.

THE RSL GATEWAY OPTION

Research service-learning is a pedagogical approach pioneered at Duke University under the aegis of the Hart Leadership Program (HLP) in the Sanford School of Public Policy. RSL requires students to provide service to a community-based organization while conducting original field research on a question typically worked out with the community partner. Here, we report on a variation – the RSL “gateway option.” The gateway option preserves the core components – volunteer service and a research undertaking – but requires less time from students, administrators, and professors. The RSL gateway option has been pioneered in a large

lecture course, “Political Analysis for Public Policy,” a core requirement for all Duke public policy studies (PPS) majors. We report on three semesters’ experience.

To lay the groundwork for each semester’s program, an HLP staff member met with the professor before classes began to formulate ideas for a community-based project that would serve the faculty member’s course goals and respect his or her resource and time limitations. The staff member then researched and set up a self-contained project revolving around a specific theme (or set of themes) that were of mutual interest to the professor and the selected community partners. Whenever possible, community partners with differing views (i.e., different stakeholders) were selected in order to provide students with insight into the range of perspectives on the issue(s) of concern. At the beginning of the semester, the staff member then conducted a short presentation to the students on RSL and the proposed community-based project. Students were encouraged to apply and were promised a one-third increase in their course grade (e.g., a change from a B to a B+) for successful completion of the service and research requirements. The staff member read applications and made preliminary selections that were then approved by the professor. During the semester, the staff member managed the logistics, while the professor advised on the research, met with the students for a one-hour reflection session, and graded the research product. Professors were allowed to be as involved as they deemed fit.

While the professors in all three semesters benefited from the HLP’s infrastructure, the RSL gateway option is administratively feasible for a professor without such resources. Once an issue area for the community-based project has been decided on, identifying potential community partners and selecting a small number of additional readings is relatively straightforward. Awaiting responses to exploratory phone messages and emails has proven to be

the most time-consuming part of the process; it is therefore more important to start the process early than to spend a lot of time on it. In our experience, once contact has been established with an organization, partnership soon follows. Teaching assistants or work-study students can competently handle most logistical requirements, such as preparing informational handouts and application forms; going through applications and selecting participants; having students complete risk management paperwork; dividing participants into groups and assigning them to community partners; and setting up orientation meetings. If the professor does not have access to assistance, he can have the RSL students assume responsibility for organizing their projects. These tasks represent start-up costs; once the project is under way, only minimal oversight is needed.

In all three semesters examined here, students were assigned to work in teams with a community partner. The projects involved (1) working with a local credit union serving Latinos to determine financial education needs and to produce educational video clips addressing those needs; (2) working with three local animal shelters, each with different perspectives on the “no kill” effort, to develop recommendations on reducing the euthanasia of healthy cats and dogs; and (3) working with a community association and nonprofit social services organizations involved in a community land dispute to determine how their disparate priorities and perspectives could best be reconciled. All three projects were designed to be nonpartisan, thereby accommodating students of all political ideologies and muting the criticism that service-learning and related experiential pedagogies serve a left-wing agenda.

Each student was required to complete 10-14 hours of direct service. During this time, students were asked to speak with those who worked at their assigned community partner, as well as members of the population(s) it served, as part of their investigation into the issue(s) at

hand. The direct service requirement thus provided students with an entrée into the community(ies) in which they would be working, as well as an opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge of, and experience with, the issues and actors that would inform their research. Furthermore, by serving and learning alongside community members, students avoided the accusation – frequently leveled at academics – of conducting research that is uninformed by practical knowledge of, and experience with, the community. Effectively, the direct service component allowed students to attain a dual insider/outsider status vis-à-vis their community partners, which afforded them greater confidence and credibility in negotiating and completing their assignments.

The service component furthered another important goal. In some cases, it lured community-based organizations into agreeing to a partnership. Organizations that were initially skeptical about the benefits of partnership with students warmed to the idea when informed of the direct service dimension. In post-service “debriefing” conversations with community partners, several admitted to being pleasantly surprised at the insights provided by the students’ research, saying that they had expected to benefit from the service, but not necessarily from the research. It is important to note, however, that this study does not evaluate the very important question of how, if at all, the students’ work contributed to the goals and mission of the community-based partners. Our evaluative measures center on student outcomes only.

From the vantage point of the university and of faculty members, the gateway option offers a certain appeal. It promises, at least in theory, to further the university’s civic mission and advance faculty members’ civic and educational goals, all with minimal additional effort. In the three projects, Duke deployed talented young people to under-resourced local nonprofits, thereby helping to soften the stereotype of elite universities as insufficiently helpful in solving

community problems. Setting up the projects required a Duke staff member to visit with nonprofit leaders and assess their needs, building another important bridge to the community. To the faculty members, the gateway option offered the prospect of students' seeing political science theory – particularly theories of collective action – play out in tangible ways, thereby increasing students' understanding and retention of course material. Likewise, the RSL gateway option provided a way for the political scientists teaching the course to make a civic contribution, with minimal effort, while at the same time using the students' research projects as teaching material in present and future iterations of the course.

RSL'S PLACE IN SERVICE-LEARNING AND COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

Numerous studies have found positive outcomes for more intensive service-learning and community-based research programs. For service and service-learning, studies have found robust effects on personal and civic development, such as increased tolerance and understanding; spiritual and social growth; sense of personal efficacy; and commitment to public service, engaged citizenship, and social justice (Warchal and Ruiz 2004; Hunter and Brisbin 2000; Astin, Sax, and Avalos 1999; Eyler and Giles 1999; Gray et al. 1998; Osborne, Hammerich, and Hensley 1998; Giles and Eyler 1994; Markus, Howard and King 1993). Studies also have found that service-learning enhances students' educational experience, for example, by helping them to understand social problems in all their dimensions, apply academic theory to real-world contexts, sharpen critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, and deepen their understanding of concepts learned in the classroom (Eyler and Giles 1999; Osborne, Hammerich, and Hensley 1998; Batchelder and Root 1994; Boss 1994; Markus, Howard, and King 1993).

Fewer studies have examined the effects of community-based research (Cutforth and Lichtenstein 2009). However, in general, this pedagogical method is postulated to have many of

the same effects as service-learning – for example, allowing students to see the relevance of academic theory to real-world issues, to gain knowledge of their communities and a deeper understanding of social problems, to acquire career skills, and to develop a sense of personal efficacy and commitment to public service (Cutforth and Lichtenstein 2009; Willis, Peresie, Waldref, and Stockmann 2003). Community-based research also has been found to enhance students’ research, writing, organization, and communication skills (Cutforth and Lichtenstein 2009).

Duke’s more intensive research service-learning programs (such as the year-long Service Opportunities in Leadership Program) have been shown to produce a wide array of educational, civic, and psychological outcomes consistent with the findings outlined above (Colby et al. 2007). However, the RSL gateway option differs from these successful, optimally designed programs in one critical respect. Instead of being formulated to incorporate “best practices,” the RSL gateway option was designed to be a simple “quick hit” potentially to interest students in a more elaborate community-based research and service trajectory offered at Duke. Because of its limitations in both design and aspirations, the RSL gateway option provides a strong test of whether a modest intervention – administratively feasible for faculty members managing large lecture courses – can enhance civically and educationally relevant outcomes for participating students.

In light of prior studies of optimal service-learning and community-based research programs, there were several reasons to be skeptical that the RSL gateway option would be associated with many, if any, civic and educational outcomes. First, most studies of service-learning have found that “more is better” – that is, there is a positive correlation between volunteer hours and student outcomes (Eyler and Giles 1999; Gray, Ondaatje, and Zakaras

1999). These time-sensitive outcomes include a sense of citizen efficacy (Marks 1994), and degree of social responsibility (Williams 1993). These positive relationships are not universal, however. Mabry (1998) failed to find a relationship between hours of service and change in social values, and in only one group (those volunteering 15-19 hours) did she find a significant increase in civic attitudes. Billig, Root, and Jesse (2005) found that academic and civic benefits to high school students – such as valuing school; enjoying math, science, reading, and social studies; and having civic knowledge – increased up to the point of one semester's service, after which there was no further time effect. Our students spent, on average, just 11.4 hours over 14 weeks interacting directly with their community partners and the populations they served.²

Second, studies have found a positive correlation between time spent in structured reflection and several civic and academic outcomes (Billig, Root, and Jesse 2005; Eyler and Giles 1999; Mabry 1998). In our course, students were not required to maintain a journal of their reflections, nor were they assigned a significant amount of reading on deeper issues of social justice, ethics, or other themes relevant to their service. As noted, in the first two semesters, students participated in just one hour-long reflection session; in the third semester, students also posted a brief, mid-semester reflection to the course website.

Third, studies have found that the more the faculty member integrates the service experience into classroom instruction, the more the student benefits (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee 2000; Mabry 1998). In our large lecture courses, the RSL component students constituted a small minority (roughly 15%) of all students; thus, the instructors did not formally incorporate RSL subject matter into class lectures or discussion.³

Finally, our RSL gateway option may not have benefited students to the same extent as pure service-learning courses. Often service-learning courses can capitalize on a selection effect,

wherein already civic-minded students opt in and benefit in the expected ways. In our case, the incentive of a grade boost meant that the RSL component attracted a diversity of students, not just those who were already predisposed toward service. In sum, there was reason to expect less of an impact on our students than on those who opt in for more purely altruistic reasons.

Thus, there were at least four reasons – involving the time commitment, reflection, integration, and participant selection – why we might expect the RSL gateway option to produce little of value. Except for the required research product, this option had modest expectations of typical students and faculty members. Because many of the key components of successful programs were lacking, our program poses a hard test for the promise of RSL. To our knowledge, only one other study has examined whether a modest service component can produce results (Reed et al. 2005). That study found that 8-10 hours in a hospice was associated with a significant increase in students' interest in pursuing nonprofit work and in their belief that college was meaningful; however, there was no significant effect on students' sense of social responsibility.

Thus, while the RSL gateway option offers a promising, practical method for reengaging universities and political scientists in public life, whether it in fact delivers civic and educational benefits to students remains an open empirical question.

DATA & METHODS

To answer that question, we administered electronic surveys to all students who had enrolled in the three semesters of “Political Analysis for Public Policy” in which RSL was an option (n=289). The survey questions were designed to measure outcomes that prior studies have found to be associated with service-learning, community-based research, or both. (See Appendix for a copy of the survey.) Three versions of the survey were constructed, one for each of three

groups of students: RSL students (n=44); students who applied for RSL but were not admitted (n=34); and students who neither participated nor applied to participate in RSL (n=211). All three groups were asked the same battery of questions about their experience in the course and their community service work (if any) outside the classroom; the RSL participants were asked additional questions about their experience in the RSL gateway option.

We received 72 completed surveys, for a response rate of 25%. Response rates for each of the three customized surveys were as follows: RSL participants (54%); applicant-nonparticipants (24%); and nonapplicant-nonparticipants (19%). We use variation across these student groups to evaluate the effect of the RSL gateway option on students' educational and civic outcomes. In addition to the surveys, we emailed requests to students who had participated in the second semester (animal welfare project) to provide anonymous qualitative input on the experience.

We analyzed the results using descriptive statistics, two-tailed difference-of-means tests, and multivariate regression. The regression models examine whether participation in the RSL gateway option is associated with civic and educational outcomes identified in prior studies of service-learning and community-based research.

The dependent variables were 12 measures of educational and civic engagement, each measured on a five-point Likert scale. Each model included three independent variables capturing the semester in which the student participated in RSL (*partic_credit*, *partic_animal*; and *partic_land*), as well as controls for the semester in which the student took the course to capture class fixed effects (*sem2*; *sem3*; with semester 1 as the omitted category). We also included one of two variables measuring the students' prior propensity toward community service. The propensity variable was necessary because students who opted to participate in RSL

may have differed from non-participants in ways that might be correlated with our outcome variables, thereby biasing our results. We ran two models using different measures of propensity. In Model 1, we used a variable capturing the students' involvement in community service prior to the semester in question, measured on a self-reported, 1-5 Likert scale (*inv_bef*). Model 2 used a dummy variable capturing whether the student applied to, but was not accepted into, the RSL track (*applied*).⁴ The results in both model specifications were nearly identical, as demonstrated by comparing Tables 2 and 3, and Tables 4 and 5, below.

DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS

Descriptive statistics reveal moderate to high levels of satisfaction with the RSL gateway option. Table 1 summarizes the average scores on five key outcome measures.⁵ As the Table indicates, there was considerable variation across projects, with some producing stronger assessments of civic outcomes and others stronger educational outcomes.

[Table 1 Here]

According to students, the most valuable contribution of RSL lay in enhancing their appreciation of the complexity or importance of the social issue with which they were engaged (consistent with the findings of Eyler and Giles 1999; Batchelder and Root 1994). This was particularly true for the projects involving immigration and community land use. The animal welfare project scored particularly well on the core educational outcomes – understanding and retention of course material. This finding may be due to the design of the project: a five-page consulting memo that explicitly asked the students to apply course readings and lecture material to analyzing and recommending approaches to a real public policy problem (euthanasia of healthy animals).

The weakest outcome was students' continued engagement with the issue after the semester's end. We speculate that this drop-off stemmed from a number of factors, including transportation barriers, the availability of service opportunities on campus, the difficulty of knowing how to serve the organization in an individual capacity, and the possibility that some students who participated in the RSL component went abroad the following year. Overall, the students appear to have had a positive experience, though the outcomes should not be overstated. Half of the outcome measures in Table 1 fell in the range of 3.5-4.2, while the other half were in the 1.4-3.4 range. We should note that the second and third semesters had higher average scores on most outcomes than the trial semester, reflecting HLP's learning and adaptation over time.

The descriptive statistics give us some reason to believe that the RSL component added value to participants' course experience. We explore this hypothesis using multivariate regression models that examine the independent effect of RSL participation on civic and educational outcomes, controlling for students' propensity for community service and fixed course effects. The regression results are reported in Tables 2 and 3 (Educational Outcomes) and Tables 4 and 5 (Civic Outcomes).

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

For educational outcomes, we found the animal welfare and land use projects to be associated with students' motivation to pursue future research (e.g., a senior thesis), particularly among juniors. This finding mirrors the finding of Vogelgesang and O'Byrne (2003) from an intensive summer research-service-learning institute and of Cutforth and Lichtenstein's (2009) review of community-based research projects. We also found that the land-use group perceived a heightened ability to learn from their peers, probably because of the collaborative nature of their team-based research project. Finally, consistent with studies of service-learning and community-

based research (Eyler and Giles 1999; Willis et al. 2003), students in all three projects were significantly more likely than other students to apply concepts from the Political Analysis course to their community service both during and after the semester.⁶ Tables 2 & 3 summarize the educational outcomes associated with the RSL gateway option.

[Tables 2 & 3 Here]

As the Tables show, compared to their peers, RSL participants were not significantly more likely than other students to retain what they learned. However, on the retention outcome, we did find a modestly significant effect for RSL participants who took the course in their sophomore year. When the regressions are run substituting an interaction term of sophomore*RSL participation for the simple RSL participation variable, the interaction term is significant at the .10 level.⁷ RSL appears to have had a greater effect on those who had had the fewest public policy courses.

CIVIC OUTCOMES

In terms of civic outcomes, we found several significant effects. In both models, participation in the animal welfare or land use project was associated with increased motivation to become civically or politically engaged in the local community (Willis et al. 2003; Eyler and Giles 1999).⁸ We also found that the animal project was associated with students' considering a job with a nonprofit or public sector agency after graduation. The increased interest in nonprofit work is consistent with the finding of the Reed et al. (2005) study, which also examined the effects of a short-term service program, and of Cutforth and Lichtenstein (2009), who examined community-based research projects at six institutions. Tables 4 & 5 summarize the civic outcomes associated with the RSL gateway option.

[Tables 4 & 5 Here]

Taken together, these findings provide support for the proposition that a modest, non-time-intensive RSL add-on can enhance students' college experience in limited ways. The program did not have effects on several important outcomes, such as intellectual engagement, problem solving, and knowledge retention. However, consistent with findings from other studies, RSL did appear to open students' eyes to future opportunities in academic research and nonprofit and public sector work. The RSL gateway also appears to have helped students make the intellectual link between scholarly theory and the challenges facing volunteers and voluntary organizations (Cutforth and Lichtenstein 2009).

In light of the extensive literature on the benefits of service-learning and community-based research, these findings would be unremarkable but for two intriguing reasons. First, in the case of our courses – unlike many others – the students who opted to take part in the RSL component may not have been especially civic-minded at the outset. The selection effect that plagues many studies of service-learning was minimal or nonexistent in the case of the RSL add-on: The surveys show that the RSL group was actually *less* engaged in community service before the course than were their classroom peers. What is more, the majority of the students involved in RSL – 78% – cited the desire for a course grade enhancement as a factor motivating their participation. Thus, there is some evidence that the RSL gateway option yielded results within a group of students not primed to produce them.

Second, the data provide some support for the proposition that students need not be especially interested in a specific RSL project to benefit from the experience. Of the three projects, students in the animal welfare project reported particularly low prior interest, an average of 1.9 on a 1-5 scale (compared to averages of 2.8 and 3.1 for the other projects). Yet, of the three RSL groups, the animal-welfare students reported the highest mean scores on four of

the six outcome measures: changing perception of the Durham community, applying lessons from RSL to new contexts, understanding course material, and retaining course material. In the eight difference-of-means tests (examining the animal-welfare group against each of the two other groups along the four outcome measures), two differences were highly significant – understanding course material ($p < .01$) and retaining course material ($p < .01$).⁹ Given the small sample sizes (ranging from 5-11 respondents per group), finding any statistically significant differences would be surprising. The other six tests did not yield statistically significant differences, but in each case the mean scores for the animal-welfare group were substantively larger than for the other two groups.

Simple bivariate correlations underscore these findings. Using individual data across the three groups, we found a statistically significant negative relationship between prior interest in the project's subject matter and understanding course material ($p < .10$) and retaining course material ($p < .05$). There was also a small, statistically insignificant, negative relationship with interest in and appreciation for the complexity/importance of the issue and application of lessons to new contexts. Thus, our data suggest that lack of interest in the project at minimum is not a hindrance to positive student outcomes and may actually facilitate them.

Our data do not allow us to unravel this paradox in any definitive way. But we speculate that the intellectual process required to approach a novel issue is important. When students approach a policy question without issue-specific heuristics or biases (Tversky and Kahneman 1974), they are forced to rely instead on analytic tools learned in the classroom. The process of using general theories to work through a fresh issue may deepen their understanding not only of the issue itself, but also of the theories. Informal feedback from students in the animal-welfare group lends some support to that interpretation. Said one student: "It's so easy to learn

something, apply it to a case that the professor hands us and make it ‘work’ because it was probably chosen so that it would ‘work.’ But taking the information outside the classroom to apply it to a problem that no one has any control over gives us [the students] more ownership in the project” (Student 1 2007). One student suggested professors not limit RSL to “popular issues”; she said that she had no prior interest in animal welfare but left “with a real passion about the issue” (Student 2 2007).

These two findings – on the surprising success of the animal welfare project and the motivations of the students who opted into the RSL track – provide some evidence that the RSL gateway option might be most useful in the unlikeliest conditions. Our findings suggest that the RSL add-on inspires students who might not otherwise be interested in a particular issue, public service, or academic research and helps them think about these possibilities in new ways. From the faculty member’s perspective, our findings suggest that one need not devote enormous thought and energy to finding the “right” project, nor to creating an intensive course that will attract the most civically motivated students. There is some evidence that modest interventions can have modest, but important, effects.

ANALYSIS

We began this study by asking whether the RSL gateway option, formulated as a “quick-hit” pedagogy combining volunteerism and scholarly research, could resolve the relevancy dilemmas facing research universities, political scientists, and students. Our hypothesis is that a manageable dose of this hybrid intervention can provide at least some of the documented effects of each of its components – service-learning and community-based research. We find some evidence to support this hypothesis. Why does a small intervention, one that did not incorporate much of what is known to be effective, produce positive outcomes with relatively little effort?

We believe that the answer lies in the research component. Studies of service-learning have found that greater integration of academic theory and practical application increases the impact on students' intellectual and moral development (Eyler and Giles 1999, 166). Research provides a bridge to integrate theory and practice. As Strand et al. (2003, 11) note, community-based research "values equally ... both the experiential (or local) knowledge of community people and the specialized knowledge and skills of university faculty and students." Through RSL, students brought their academic knowledge and skills to bear while acquiring local knowledge through interviews with community-organization staff members and volunteers, as well as everyday citizens. Based on faculty observation and student responses, we speculate that the synergy of combining research with service works through three mechanisms: (1) by intensifying the process of theory-practice integration; (2) by enhancing "placement quality" (Eyler and Giles 1999) through a balance of immersion and autonomy within the partner organization; and (3) by exposing students to the structural challenges facing civil society groups and students' capacity to help ameliorate those problems.

First, RSL intensifies students' educational experience by forcing them to integrate "on-the-job" learning (such as observations through volunteer work and interviews with key informants) with classroom learning (such as theories of collective action). Students quickly learn that they are two-way translators between the community partner, which will benefit from their research, and the faculty member, who will grade it according to academic standards. For the community partner, students use academic theory to construct a tangible product – such as an educational video or a consulting memo – that will offer the organization a new way of understanding its work. For the faculty member, students must demonstrate that they can recognize and apply classroom lessons in a new setting – what cognitive scientists see as the key

to learning (Eyler and Giles 1999). Forced to deliver a tangible work product, students also must demonstrate skills in analysis and problem solving – highly valued in social science courses.

Inclusion of a research component may explain why RSL students applied political analysis theory to their service during and after the semester to a significantly greater extent than did other civically engaged students in the political analysis course. One student addressed the imperative of service-research integration: “In my work, I paid a lot of attention to details of the way the organization operated and the issues they faced because I was looking for evidence of the many aspects of the political landscape that we discussed in class. In this way I gained much more from the research than I would have otherwise. But in doing this, I also gained a more concrete understanding of the core concepts in the course and I retained them better because I associate them with aspects of work at the [animal shelter]” (Student 3 2008). Although we did not measure engagement with the course directly, this student reports that RSL “got me to spend more time on my academic materials and readings than I would have – by making one component of a course more interesting, you immediately made the rest of the course more interesting” (Student 3 2008). Delli Carpini and Keeter (2000, 636) argue that service-learning can further traditional educational goals by exposing students to “political facts” as they “bump into and actively seek out information about politics that is relevant to their activities.” The research component requires students to bump into issue-based information.

The second mechanism through which we believe the research-service synergy operates is “placement quality.” Eyler and Giles (199: 169) argue that high quality placements demand that students “exercise initiative, take responsibility, and work as peers with practitioners and community members,” and these qualities in turn predict positive student outcomes. The direct service component allows students to observe the community partner’s internal dynamics and

programmatic activities closely and to become part of the community (even if only in a peripheral sense), thus lending the students the ‘street cred’ needed to engage in research-related activities. The research component compels initiative and collaboration, as students must reach out to the organization’s staff members and volunteers for a variety of purposes – interviews, advice and feedback, and so forth. The research project also encourages responsibility because students know that they must submit a tangible work product to their community “client” (Strand et al. 2003). Working alongside the volunteers and staff of the organization, students develop an allegiance to those individuals. This sense of interpersonal responsibility, as well as the grade boost for excellent work, compels students to produce a well-researched, professional product. In short, more than with other course assignments, students come to feel that their work matters.

We believe that the placement-quality mechanism explains the finding that RSL increased students’ appreciation of the complexity and/or importance of the issue and changed their perceptions of the local community. As one participant in the animal welfare project noted: “I also really liked the close proximity in which we got to relate to the shelter workers. They took us seriously and devoted a lot of time to just talking to us about their jobs. I don’t feel like I learned a ton from the actual service – which in our case was a lot of dog walking – but being at the shelter and especially talking to employees gave me a much better sense of the operation” (Student 3 2008). Likewise, students in the land use project frequently commented that their community partners, like many neighborhood associations, seemed disorganized. While the disorganization frustrated some students, several said it gave them a window into the complexity of politics and policymaking.

Finally, RSL gave students an appreciation for the problems facing civil society and their capacity, as political and policy analysts, to ameliorate those problems. The capacity mechanism,

we believe, underlies the finding that RSL was correlated with heightened interest in further research and nonprofit or public service. In particular, students saw how small nonprofits struggle to secure voluntary contributions of time and money when theories of rational choice (Olson 1965) would predict non-participation. As one animal-welfare group participant noted, “I spent a lot of time thinking about how low-budget nonprofits overcome the collective action failures that form many barriers, which we also discussed a bit in class” (Student 3 2008). Another group participant said the experience “showed that it doesn’t take much to make a difference. We found a little bit of money and time spent on awareness could go a long way to solve the euthanasia problem” (Student 4 2007). Yet another participant stated: “I was able to see how the memos I was writing could actually be applied to my own research and experiences and used to benefit organizations” (Student 5 2007).

Taken as a whole, this study’s findings provide evidence that a modest, short-term project combining research and community service can enhance students’ educational and service experiences and whet their appetite for further research and volunteerism. It is important, however, not to oversell the RSL gateway option. Many of the outcomes we had hoped to achieve did not materialize. In particular, once students’ preexisting civic impulses were statistically controlled, our “quick hit” did not appear to deepen students’ understanding or retention of the course material, to sharpen their professional skills, or to deepen their capacity to solve social problems. That is not to say that individual students did not benefit in these ways. RSL participants, for example, reported in surveys and qualitative feedback that they had gained valuable skills and a deeper appreciation of how academic theory applies to real-world issues. And some students – particularly those with little knowledge of their issue going into the project – reported that the experience did enhance their ability to understand and retain the course

material. In evaluations conducted immediately after the project, students frequently said they wished they had had greater interaction with local residents and that they had been able to make a greater contribution to their organizations.

We also note potential limitations regarding administrative feasibility and university relevancy. Our assessment of administrative feasibility is derived from our experience, in which professors relied on the infrastructure of the Hart Leadership Program. While our familiarity with the responsibilities leads us to believe that these would not unduly burden faculty members who have no assistance, this is a subjective assessment. We also base our contention that RSL helps address the relevancy dilemmas facing research universities on anecdotal evidence from conversations with community partners.

Looking across the mixed findings, we conclude that the RSL gateway option accomplished more than might have been expected given its modest aspirations and simple design. The option was intended as a relatively low-cost way to expose students in a large required lecture course – including students not particularly inclined toward civic engagement – to community-based research and service-learning; to allow faculty members to make political science relevant without imposing an undue administrative or time burden on them; and to enhance an elite research university's contributions to the local community. Although RSL is a cutting-edge pedagogy, our gateway option did not incorporate state-of-the-art design elements, such as frequent reflection sessions, a high degree of course integration, or a large volume of service. In essence, we sacrificed intensity for expediency and produced tangible results. To rephrase Barry Goldwater, our experience leads us to conclude that moderation in pursuit of pedagogy is no vice, and for overburdened faculty members and students may in fact be a virtue.

Table 1: Students' Average Rating of the RSL Experience

	Semester 1: Immigrants & Credit (n=5)	Semester 2: Animal Shelters (n=7)	Semester 3: Community Land Use (n=11)	Overall (n=23)
<i>Civic Outcomes</i>				
Enhanced appreciation of complexity/importance of issue	4.20	3.86	4.18	4.09
Continued engagement w/ issue since semester?	1.40	2.29	2.64	2.26
Changed perceptions of Durham community?	3.20	3.71	3.64	3.57
<i>Educational Outcomes</i>				
Applied RSL lessons to new contexts?	3.20	3.57	3.36	3.39
Improved understanding of course material?	2.40	4.14	3.82	3.61
Improved retention of course material?	2.40	4.14	3.45	3.43

Measured on 1-5 scale, with 1 being “not at all”; 3 being “somewhat”; and 5 being “very much so”

Table 2: RSL Effects on Educational Outcomes (Model 1)

	partic credit	partic animal	Partic land	sem2	sem3	inv bef	RSq
Helped see real-world applications	-.599 (.508)	.677 (.444)	.392 (.350)	-.576 (.368)	-.610* (.364)	.001 (.106)	.088
Motivated to do research	.933 (.675)	1.927*** (.590)	.887* (.464)	-.173 (.489)	.203 (.483)	.066 (.141)	.214
Deepened intellectual engagement w/ PPS	-.009 (.751)	.341 (.657)	.187 (.517)	.044 (.544)	.024 (.538)	-.018 (.157)	.009
Encouraged to learn from peers	.305 (.678)	.614 (.593)	1.406*** (.467)	-.240 (.491)	-.612 (.485)	.009 (.142)	.149
Retained course material	-.536 (.622)	.676 (.544)	.587 (.428)	-.570 (.451)	-.480 (.445)	-.073 (.130)	.076
Applied concepts to service during semester	.931*** (.343)	1.053*** (.317)	1.409*** (.243)	.263 (.267)	.329 (.267)	-.074 (.075)	.567
Applied concepts to service after semester	.745* (.390)	1.270*** (.372)	.663** (.302)	-.108 (.293)	-.316 (.293)	-.089 (.090)	.307

Cells represent unstandardized B (SE); * p<.10; ** p<.05; *** p<.01; model controls for prior engagement in service

Table 3: RSL Effects on Educational Outcomes (Model 2)

	partic_credit	partic_animal	partic_land	sem2	sem3	applied	Rsq
Helped see real-world applications	-.371 (.517)	.624 (.399)	.496 (.347)	-.224 (.384)	-.486 (.358)	.571 (.381)	.116
Motivated to do research	1.029 (.688)	1.895*** (.531)	.928** (.462)	.067 (.511)	.264 (.476)	.321 (.507)	.228
Deepened intellectual engagement w/ PPS	.129 (.765)	.459 (.590)	.182 (.514)	.213 (.568)	.164 (.529)	.321 (.564)	.018
Encouraged to learn from peers	.529 (.682)	.609 (.526)	1.555*** (.458)	.034 (.507)	.536 (.472)	.571 (.503)	.174
Retained course material	-.529 (.637)	.714 (.490)	.545 (.426)	-.322 (.401)	-.230 (.380)	.043 (.448)	.067
Applied concepts to service during semester	.973** (.369)	1.167*** (.286)	1.409*** (.244)	.273 (.295)	.364 (.275)	.045 (.284)	.560
Applied concepts to service after semester	.767* (.403)	1.250*** (.334)	.722** (.301)	-.083 (.309)	-.333 (.292)	.167 (.318)	.326

Cells represent unstandardized B (SE); * p<.10; ** p<.05; *** p<.01; control is those who applied but did not participate in RSL

Table 4: RSL Effects on Civic Engagement (Model 1)

	partic_credit	partic_animal	partic_land	sem2	sem3	inv_bef	RSq
Motivated civic engagement	.128 (.428)	1.568*** (.374)	2.234*** (.294)	-.621** (.310)	-.275 (.306)	.256** (.089)	.602
Consider job in nonprofit/public sector	.297 (.628)	1.359** (.549)	.407 (.432)	.170 (.455)	.382 (.450)	-.006 (.131)	.130
Increased capacity to understand, solve social problems	-.086 (.640)	.372 (.559)	.473 (.440)	.151 (.463)	.039 (.458)	.028 (.134)	.035
Provided professional skills	-.064 (.677)	.579 (.592)	.002 (.466)	-.219 (.490)	-.036 (.484)	.072 (.141)	.018
Involved in service since semester	-.808* (.438)	.067 (.383)	.097 (.301)	-1.014*** (.317)	-1.049*** (.313)	.584** * (.091)	.505

* p<.10; ** p<.05; *** p<.01; controls for prior engagement in service

Table 5: RSL Effects on Civic Engagement (Model 2)

	partic_credit	partic_animal	partic_land	sem2	sem3	applied	RSq
Motivated civic engagement	.043 (.474)	1.338*** (.365)	2.226*** (.318)	-.610* (.352)	-.329 (.328)	.107 (.349)	.536
Consider job in nonprofit/public sector	.386 (.643)	1.489** (.496)	.484 (.432)	.154 (.477)	.393 (.445)	.214 (.474)	.156
Increased capacity to understand, solve social problems	.100 (.661)	.511 (.510)	.550 (.440)	.332 (.491)	.150 (.457)	.500 (.488)	.056
Provided professional skills	.171 (.695)	.669 (.536)	.172 (.467)	.045 (.516)	.036 (.481)	.679 (.513)	.049
Involved in service since semester	-1.071* (.579)	-2.30 (.450)	.123 (.389)	-1.127** (.434)	-1.286*** (.401)	.071 (.427)	.171

* p<.10; ** p<.05; *** p<.01; control is those who applied but did not participate in RSL

SURVEY: RSL PARTICIPANTS

- 1 * When did you take PPS 114?
- Fall 2006 [Hamilton]
Spring 2006 [Goss]
Fall 2007 [Rogerson]
- 2 * Do you feel that the overall PPS 114 experience [PPS 114 course including research service-learning]:
- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|------------|---|----------|---|--------------|
| | Not at all | | Somewhat | | Very Much So |
| Helped you to see real-world applications of political analysis? | | | | | |
| Motivated you to become civically [active with community organizations] or politically engaged [active with politics or political organizations] in the Durham community? | | | | | |
| Prompted you to consider taking a job after graduation in the nonprofit or public sector? | | | | | |
| Motivated you to pursue research opportunities [either independent study, honors thesis, or community-based research project]? | | | | | |
| Deepened your intellectual engagement with the public policy curriculum? | | | | | |
| Increased your capacity to understand and solve complex problems in society? | | | | | |
| Helped you develop practical skills useful in your future professional life? | | | | | |
| Encouraged you to engage and learn from your peers? | | | | | |
- 3 * Why did you choose to participate in the RSL experience? [Check all that apply]
- Enjoyed previous service-learning or RSL experiences
Interested in specific RSL project
Wanted to become active in the local community
The grade boost incentive
Opportunity to get to know faculty and peers better
Other, please specify
- 4 * Did you participate in service-learning opportunities [community service linked with formal academic coursework] prior to your RSL experience in PPS 114? If so, how do you feel your RSL experience in PPS 114 differed from those other opportunities, if at all?
- 5 * Prior to the semester in which you were enrolled in PPS 114, how actively involved were in community service - either paid or volunteer - in Durham? *Please do not include your service hours for the RSL gateway options*
- Uninvolved (0 hours/week)
Somewhat Involved (1-2 hours/week)
Involved (3-5 hours/week)
Very Involved (6-8 hours/week)
Extremely Involved (9+ hours/week)
- 6 * During the semester in which you were enrolled in PPS 114, how actively involved were in community service - either paid or volunteer - in Durham. *Please do not include your service hours for the RSL gateway options*
- Uninvolved (0 hours/week)
Somewhat Involved (1-2 hours/week)
Involved (3-5 hours/week)
Very Involved (6-8 hours/week)
Extremely Involved (9+ hours/week)
- 7 * In the time since you were enrolled in PPS 114, how actively involved have you been in community service - either paid or volunteer - in Durham?
- Uninvolved (0 hours/week)
Somewhat Involved (1-2 hours/week)
Involved (3-5 hours/week)
Very Involved (6-8 hours/week)
Extremely Involved (9+ hours/week)
- 8 * How often did you apply the skills and/or concepts from PPS 114 to your work in the community [both RSL and non-RSL activities] DURING the PPS 114 semester [during RSL and non-RSL activities]?
- Not at all
Infrequently
Frequently
All the time
[Not applicable: I did not participate in community service]
- 9 * How often did you apply the skills or concepts from PPS 114 to your work in the community SINCE the PPS 114 semester?
- Not at all
Infrequently
Frequently
All the time
[Not applicable: I do not participate in community service]
- 10 * How would you compare your retention of the PPS 114 course material to that of other PPS courses you took around the same time?
- Much Less
Somewhat Less
About the Same
Somewhat More
Much More
- 11 RSL Experience
- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|------------|---|----------|---|--------------|
| | Not at all | | Somewhat | | Very Much So |
| Before participating in the RSL gateway, were you interested in the specific social issue that was the focus of your RSL experience? | | | | | |
| Did the RSL experience enhance your appreciation for the complexity and importance of the social issue? | | | | | |
| Have you continued your engagement with the social issue [e.g. through service, research, activism etc.] since your RSL experience? | | | | | |
| Did the RSL experience help to change your perceptions of the Durham community? | | | | | |
| Have you applied lessons learned from the RSL experience to new context [e.g. using principles of collective action on different social issue?] | | | | | |
| Do you feel that the RSL experience improved your understanding of PPS 114 course material? | | | | | |
| Do you feel that the RSL experience improved your retention of PPS 114 course material? | | | | | |
- 12 Is there anything further you would like to share with us about your PPS 114 RSL gateway experience?
- 13 We would like to hold brief [45 min] interviews with former PPS 114 w/ RSL course participants. **Students will be compensated with a \$10 Target gift card.** Would you be willing to do so? If so, please write your name below. All information in this survey will remain confidential and your contact information will remain separate from your survey responses.

SURVEY: APPLICANT- NONPARTICIPANTS

Research Service-Learning

- 1 * When did you take PPS 114?
- Fall 2006 [Hamilton]
Spring 2006 [Goss]
Fall 2007 [Rogerson]
- 2 * Do you feel that the overall PPS 114 experience [PPS 114 course including research service-learning]:
- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|------------|---|----------|---|--------------|
| | Not at all | | Somewhat | | Very Much So |
| Helped you to see real-world applications of political analysis? | | | | | |
| Motivated you to become civically [active with community organizations] or politically engaged [active with politics or political organizations] in the Durham community? | | | | | |
| Prompted you to consider taking a job after graduation in the nonprofit or public sector? | | | | | |
| Motivated you to pursue research opportunities [either independent study, honors thesis, or community-based research project]? | | | | | |
| Deepened your intellectual engagement with the public policy curriculum? | | | | | |
| Increased your capacity to understand and solve complex problems in society? | | | | | |
| Helped you develop practical skills useful in your future professional life? | | | | | |
| Encouraged you to engage and learn from your peers? | | | | | |
- 3 * Did you participate in service-learning opportunities [community service linked with formal academic coursework] prior to - or during - your PPS 114 semester?
- No
Yes
- 4 Why were you interested in participating in RSL? [Check all that apply]
- Enjoyed previous service-learning or RSL experiences
Interested in specific RSL project
Wanted to become active in the local community
The grade boost incentive
Opportunity to get to know faculty and peers better
Other, please specify
- 5 * Prior to the semester in which you were enrolled in PPS 114, how actively involved were in community service - either paid or volunteer - in Durham?
- Uninvolved (0 hours/week)
Somewhat Involved (1-2 hours/week)
Involved (3-5 hours/week)
Very Involved (6-8 hours/week)
Extremely Involved (9+ hours/week)
- 6 * During the semester in which you were enrolled in PPS 114, how actively involved were in community service - either paid or volunteer - in Durham?
- Uninvolved (0 hours/week)
Somewhat Involved (1-2 hours/week)
Involved (3-5 hours/week)
Very Involved (6-8 hours/week)
Extremely Involved (9+ hours/week)
- 7 * In the time since you were enrolled in PPS 114, how actively involved have you been in community service - either paid or volunteer - in Durham?
- Uninvolved (0 hours/week)
Somewhat Involved (1-2 hours/week)
Involved (3-5 hours/week)
Very Involved (6-8 hours/week)
Extremely Involved (9+ hours/week)
- 8 * How often did you apply the skills and/or concepts from PPS 114 to your work in the community DURING the PPS 114 semester?
- Not at all
Infrequently
Frequently
All the time
[Not applicable: I did not participate in community service]
- 9 * How often did you apply the skills or concepts from PPS 114 to your work in the community SINCE the PPS 114 semester?
- Not at all
Infrequently
Frequently
All the time
[Not applicable: I do not participate in community service]
- 10 * How would you compare your retention of the PPS 114 course material to that of other PPS courses you took around the same time?
- Much Less
Somewhat Less
About the Same
Somewhat More
Much More
- 11 * How valuable was the RSL group presentation to you?
- Not valuable
Slightly valuable
Valuable
Very valuable
Extremely valuable
- 12 Is there anything further you would like to share with us about your PPS 114 experience?

SURVEY: NONAPPLICANT- NONPARTICIPANTS

Research Service-Learning

- 1 * When did you take PPS 114?
- Fall 2006 [Hamilton]
Spring 2006 [Goss]
Fall 2007 [Rogerson]
- 2 * Do you feel that the overall PPS 114 experience [PPS 114 course including research service-learning]:
- | | | | | |
|------------|---|----------|---|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not at all | | Somewhat | | Very Much So |
- Helped you to see real-world applications of political analysis?
- Motivated you to become civically [active with community organizations] or politically engaged [active with politics or political organizations] in the Durham community?
- Prompted you to consider taking a job after graduation in the nonprofit or public sector?
- Motivated you to pursue research opportunities [either independent study, honors thesis, or community-based research project]?
- Deepened your intellectual engagement with the public policy curriculum?
- Increased your capacity to understand and solve complex problems in society?
- Helped you develop practical skills useful in your future professional life?
- Encouraged you to engage and learn from your peers?
- 3 * What was the main reason you did not participate in the optional RSL [research service-learning] project in PPS 114?
- Too big of a time commitment
Not interested in RSL project
Already active in community and/or political activities in Durham
Incentive not sufficiently enticing
Program requirements and/or benefits unclear
Other, please specify
- 4 * Did you participate in service-learning opportunities [community service linked with formal academic coursework] prior to your RSL experience in PPS 114? If so, how do you feel your RSL experience in PPS 114 differed from those other opportunities, if at all?
- 5 * Prior to the semester in which you were enrolled in PPS 114, how actively involved were in community service - either paid or volunteer - in Durham? *Please do not include your service hours for the RSL gateway options*
- Uninvolved (0 hours/week)
Somewhat Involved (1-2 hours/week)
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[Not applicable: I did not participate in community service]
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[Not applicable: I do not participate in community service]
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Somewhat Less
About the Same
Somewhat More
Much More
- 11 * How valuable was the RSL group presentation to you?
- Not valuable
Slightly valuable
Valuable
Very valuable
Extremely valuable
- 12 Is there anything further you would like to share with us about your PPS 114 experience?

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¹ Community-based research also goes by the name of action research, participatory research, popular education, and participatory action research (Strand et al. 2003).

² This average is based on the animal welfare and land use projects. The credit union project involved more research than direct service, so the 11-hour average is a high estimate.

³ In the third semester, the RSL gateway option project (focusing on social services and land use) fit with the broad theme of the course syllabus, which stressed issues of welfare and low-income housing.

⁴ A word about the selection of students is in order. Applicants were required to submit a 500-word statement explaining why they wanted to take part in the RSL gateway option. HLP staff members then selected participants based on that essay, while factoring in the need to have enough participants with cars and to have representation across class years. In many cases, applicants who adopted an “I can save the world” attitude in their essays were rejected; successful essays emphasized the student’s desire both to contribute to, and learn from, the community partner. Thus, several factors (the need for cars, representation across classes, and rejection of overly confident students) mitigated the potential for selecting a creamed sample of the class as a whole. Indeed, the survey data suggest that there were no meaningful differences between the students who applied but were not accepted and the successful applicants. The not-accepted students were only slightly less engaged in community service than were successful applicants, both before the course (2.0 vs. 2.18, on a scale of 1-5) and during the course (2.0 vs. 2.17). On the other hand, the not-accepted group was *more* engaged in community service after the course (2.5 vs. 2.0). The two groups scored virtually identically on the retention of course material (3.25 for the not-accepted group vs. 3.26 for the participants). None of these differences was even close to being statistically significant.

⁵ These means should be viewed in context. They are based on relatively small numbers of respondents. However, these respondents represent a sizable *proportion* of the population of RSL participants in any given semester, with proportions being relevant in small populations.

⁶ Paradoxically, RSL students were not significantly more likely than other students to be engaged with the course material or to see its real-world applications. One possible explanation for this set of conflicting findings – that RSL students reported applying the course concepts in real-world community service, but were not more likely than their peers to see real-world applications – is that students conceived of the “real world” as the national political realm, rather than local nonprofits. A reflection session would have helped us to understand and interpret this finding.

⁷ In this model, we pooled all RSL students before adding the interaction term but retained the course-semester and propensity controls.

⁸ We report this finding cautiously, as it is possible that students misinterpreted the question and simply reported the obvious – that RSL deepened their engagement in Durham by virtue of its required service hours.

⁹ The animal-welfare group was, on average, 1.74 points (on 1-5 scale) more likely than the immigrant-credit group to believe that the RSL experience increased their understanding of the course material, and 1.74 points more likely to believe that the RSL experience increased their retention of course material. The standard errors for the difference of those means were .36 and .57, respectively.