

## Sustained Immersion Courses and Student Orientations to Equality, Justice, and Social Responsibility: The Role of Short-Term Service-Learning

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*Previous research has established numerous outcomes associated with taking service-learning coursework during college. However, most studies have examined the impact of three- or four-credit courses involving engagement of several hours per week, and other research has suggested that the gains associated with service-learning are directly related to the amount of time spent engaging with the community. This study explored whether one-credit courses employing a single, sustained community immersion experience (2-7 days) are capable of improving college student outcomes. A total of 354 students who participated in one-credit service-learning courses, along with 115 students who participated in three-credit summer service-learning courses with longer immersions (8-10 weeks), completed surveys gauging orientations toward equality, justice, and social responsibility. Students in the one-credit courses gained significantly on the majority of outcomes, and these increases were generally comparable to those of students taking longer three-credit courses. Implications for practice are discussed.*

Research on service-learning has confirmed its potentials and identified important practices. Yet what is labeled service-learning comes in many forms—from introductory one-time experiences to semester-long engagements—as colleges design initiatives in light of student demand, time constraints, and community contexts. A typical model of service-learning engages students in the community a few hours per week as part of an ongoing semester-long course, and there is evidence that this approach contributes to numerous college student outcomes (e.g., Eyler & Giles, 1999).

However, less attention has been paid to alternative models of service-learning characterized by a brief (yet intense) community immersion. Such opportunities may draw students unable to participate in other forms of service-learning, and it may provide a powerful means for them to engage with community concerns in a sustained manner. The educational efficacy of this approach is currently unclear. Can such courses foster learning and shifts in student attitudes toward issues of equality, justice, and social responsibility? The current study explores this issue using data from a series of one- and three-credit immersion courses ranging in duration from two days to eight weeks.

### Immersion Characteristics and Student Development

Conventional wisdom points to the intensity and duration of community immersion as predictors of positive service-learning outcomes. In their seminal work on service-learning and higher education, Eyler and Giles (1999) found that courses that involved community immersions in concentrated blocks of time provide a greater opportunity for students to make important decisions, develop a sense of ownership, and make contributions to the community than do service-learning courses with less intense immersions. Similarly, the amount of time spent performing community service is positively related to subsequent civic responsibility, life skills, and post-college service activities (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999).

Research on duration and outcomes in K-12 contexts is consistent with these results. In early research, Conrad and Hedin (1981) found that greater intensity (at least several hours of service per week) and duration (engaging in service for a number of months) of service were positively related to intellectual development, and Moore (1981) found that the duration of school-based community service was positively linked with students' understanding of complex tasks. Subsequent studies confirmed that

more intense periods of time helped to reduce risky behavior in youth, increase social responsibility, and fuel learning commitment (Blyth, Saito, & Berkas, 1997; Melchior & Orr, 1995; Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2006). The belief that sustained and direct service contact is necessary for successful learning is reflected in standards for quality practices in service-learning (Alliance for Service-Learning in Educational Reform, 1995; Corporation for National and Community Service, 2002).

Based on the preceding findings, one might wonder whether short-term service-learning can have any meaningful impact on students' learning and development. However, a closer review of the literature reveals a more nuanced story. Billig, Root, and Jesse (2005) demonstrated that service-learning experiences were more effective when the community engagement lasts for at least a month (as opposed to less than a month), but the effects are mixed for durations of more than 1-2 months. Specifically, students who participated in one semester of service generally had better outcomes than those who participated in an entire year; further, students' academic engagement, valuing of school, and enjoyment of subject matter were greater among students whose community service experiences lasted 1-2 months than among students whose programs lasted a full semester. Furthermore, according to an evaluation of Learn and Serve America, performing community service outside of service-learning and opting not to participate in direct service during a course were both positively related to academic and life outcomes (Gray et al., 1999). In short, a longer service duration does *not* necessarily lead to greater learning and development.

Furthermore, some limited evidence exists for the educational benefits of short-term service trips. Rhoades & Neururer (1998) interviewed students who returned from an alternative spring break, and these students reported an increased understanding of others, the community, and themselves. However, the self-report nature of this study implies that these findings should be interpreted cautiously. In a quasi-experimental study, Plante, Lackey, and Hwang (2009) administered pre- and post-trip questionnaires to students who engaged in a week-long service trip and to a control group of students who did not participate. The results indicated a positive effect of the immersion trip on students' compassion. It is worth noting that students who took the immersion trip participated in regular reflection, which has been shown to play a key role in promoting service-learning outcomes (e.g., Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000). Consistent with this view, McCarthy (1994) argues short-term service-learning experiences, when conducted appropriately, provide the elements of challenge and support that lead to changes in student perceptions and a com-

mitment to further service.

Clearly, the quality of educational experiences that occur before, during, and after community immersions are critical for fostering desired outcomes. For example, Weiler, LaGoy, Crane, and Rovner (1998) found that pre-service activities and reflection increased the likelihood that service would boost students' educational performance and civic responsibility. They also observed that reflection focusing on critical thinking about social problems was related to greater educational performance and civic responsibility than reflection that did not incorporate critical thinking. Similarly, Conrad and Hedin (1982) found a greater increase in problem-solving abilities for students who applied critical thinking to real life situations during their community service placements than either students who performed community service without these components or students in conventional classrooms. Finally, Eyler and Giles (1999) found that application of learning, interactions with diversity, and reflection activities (both written and oral) were positively associated with a host of personal and interpersonal outcomes.

#### A Model of Service-Learning with a Short-Term Immersion

At a surface level, the nine short-term courses included in this study differ in multiple ways, including the length of community immersion (2-7 days), form of engagement (primarily direct service to a greater emphasis on intellectual experiential contact), type of location (by region and urbanicity), and religious focus (working with faith-based versus secular organizations). Each course is described in Appendix A. Importantly, despite the apparent diversity among these courses, they all share a common set of goals, structures, and practices that could have significant bearing on students' orientations to equality, justice, and social responsibility. The instructors are all from the same center for community-based learning<sup>1</sup> and the courses themselves share a common genesis that warrants attention. The common bond among these courses can be considered through three driving forces: (a) learning objectives, (b) course structure, and (c) academic rigor. Understanding these commonalities may help other instructors identify and replicate the driving factors of success for service-learning courses involving short-term immersions.

The syllabus for each course in this study includes a statement of learning objectives that is course-specific, yet varies little in its underlying principles from one course to the next. Stated learning objectives from two different courses are listed below:

*Course 1.* "To reflect upon and analyze the social, political, economic, religious and cultural

forces operative in the Appalachia region through class presentations, discussions, and readings.”

*Course 2.* “To examine the social forces contributing to migrant work patterns and injustice, and reflect upon means to improve conditions.”

In general terms, the courses invoke students to adopt a posture of learning with and from community partners about the systematic forces driving current events and issues in their region; the ultimate intent is to equip these students with the desire and ability to work toward social justice. The learning objectives are reinforced by faculty and students informed by the mission of the center and university, which both ascribe to a faith-based mission in which “learning becomes service to justice” (University of Notre Dame, 2010, ¶ 1).

More implicit in the syllabi—but explicit in the goals of the originating center—is the commitment to developing student leaders. This learning objective fits both the first and second driving factors as the courses are designed to teach *about* leadership *through* leadership: it is both an objective and structural mode of delivering content. The leadership objective is expressed through the creation of leadership roles giving students significant on-campus and on-site responsibilities pertaining to curriculum design and delivery, logistics, and spiritual reflection. The Center fosters two types of leadership roles for the Social Concerns Seminars: student Task Forces for the two largest seminars (Appalachia and Urban Plunge), and Site Leaders for all the seminars. A Task Force is comprised of students who have taken the seminar and want to assist its faculty and staff on all facets of course development and implementation throughout the year. Students on a Task Force function collectively as teaching assistants: they may write and present lessons to the class, select guest speakers, select readings, assess student assignments, conduct site leader workshops, author documents on leadership or policy, and generally support and guide the direction of course content and practice. Site Leaders are individual students who may perform this same role for smaller seminars (i.e., ones that have fewer than 18 students travelling to one location), or those who manage transportation, budget, and reflection for a group of students at one site within the Appalachia or Urban Plunge program. In Spring 2010, a campus-based seminar was offered exclusively to upcoming Site Leaders to provide more consistent and extensive preparation. This arrangement of relying on Site Leaders during travel and immersion differs from many other universities’ service-learning immersion policies and practices, which routinely require university faculty or staff to participate in the trip. The level

of commitment required to assume these leadership roles provides an influential peer model for the kind of engagement and growth measured in this study and may be a key factor for universities wanting to replicate these positive results.

The second potential driving factor is course structure. The courses in this study are arranged in a similar pattern: 3-5 required pre-immersion classes, a sustained immersion away from campus, and 1-2 required post-immersion classes. The entire experience, including class meetings and engagement, is embedded within an academic framework, and these courses bear one credit (graded satisfactory/unsatisfactory) in a variety of disciplines. Overall, the faculty and staff offering the courses create a level of accountability, consequence, and substance that foster attention and respect among students. Given the importance of peer influence on many adolescent and college student outcomes (e.g., Astin, 1993; Damon, 1984), the presence of peer leaders is also a significant and important component of these courses.

Perhaps the most significant and distinguishing structural element of these courses is the sustained immersion. As stated earlier, the form, duration, and location of the immersions varies widely across the courses in this study, as does the method of traveling to, from, and within the immersion. Nonetheless, each course requires students to dislocate and disorient themselves from the familiar and to give themselves fully to the experience guided by community experts. Without university staff or faculty on-site, students must draw on their own preparation and on the support of the community they have engaged. They eat, work, and sleep under the same roof, approximating (albeit briefly) the full range of interactions, large and small, that constitute a life in that place. Whereas students in many traditional service-learning courses complete concrete tasks within fixed periods of time, students within these sustained immersions do not return immediately to their usual lives after a couple of hours of engagement. They often work from sunrise to sundown on direct service projects (e.g., repairing homes), completing the day with a meal prepared by or with community partners and guests invited to facilitate reflection and deepen the cultural and educational exchange through conversation and/or music. Many spend the night in homestays or at the very social service shelters they serve at during the day. In the immersive environment, experience—good and bad—is relentless for students, just as it is for permanent community members. With no easy way to return to the familiar, students learn to adapt and cope, and in doing so, may learn to appreciate on a deep level what it might mean to confront such issues as poor sanitation and the threat of violence all day and every day.

The third potential driving factor is academic rigor, which is built upon learning objectives that guide course components and evaluation. In these courses, learning happens through an integration of reading scholarly texts, direct contact with experts (in class and on site), and reflective compositions. The space afforded students to analyze their readings and experiences with both peer and faculty input makes academic depth possible. Through class assignments, students have the opportunity to write about, with, and for community, affording partners and students another mode of disciplined service-learning imbued with accountability and reciprocity. As indirect evidence for the efficacy of this approach, community partners routinely comment on how informed these students are about the issues they encounter, and many partners request copies of students' final compositions.

Clearly, community partners provide a critical part of this process, as they have significant roles in implementing the on-site aspects of the courses. Although students in the one-credit courses are not engaged with community partners for extended periods of time, we have built long-term relationships with numerous site partners. We explicitly draw them into an educational role with our students, while also allowing them to plan productive and mutually beneficial service engagements. Hosting students over multiple years provides partners with the opportunity to provide formative evaluation annually that enhances programming. In addition, we have occasionally invited national community partners to campus to recognize their role and to learn together.

### Present Research

In sum, the previous literature and conventional wisdom suggest that service-learning courses with weekly community interactions promote student growth. However, little is known about the educational efficacy of service-learning courses that employ a single, sustained immersion experience and to what degree courses with a brief immersion period are capable of promoting significant attitude change, learning, and development. The current study addresses both of these gaps in the literature. Specifically, we examined whether students adopt more positive orientations toward equality, justice, and social responsibility after taking service-learning courses with a sustained immersion. These orientations reflect two broad (and somewhat overlapping) learning goals that the service-learning course instructors and program directors had previously developed, which are also part of the university's mission statement: to promote (a) "a disciplined sensibility to...poverty [and] injustice" and (b) "a sense of human solidarity and concern for the common good" (University of Notre Dame, 2010, ¶ 1). Before and after each service-learning course, students

completed seven well-established scales gauging at least one of these two general constructs, so we were able to measure changes occurring over a reasonably short period of time (2-3 months for the one-credit courses). Moreover, to investigate whether the structure (not the duration) of the community immersion is primarily responsible for promoting these outcomes, we compared the development of students who participated in one-credit service-learning courses with a brief immersion (2-7 days) with those who participated in three-credit summer courses with a much longer immersion (8-10 weeks). Relative to the one-credit courses, the three-credit courses involve much more reading, writing, and service, but both types of courses are generally similar in the amount of time spent in pre- and post-immersion class sessions.

## Method

### *Research Participants*

Participants were 469 students (71% female, 21% students of color, 68% first-years and sophomores)<sup>2</sup> that completed a service-learning course at a medium-sized Catholic university in the Midwest. Twenty-seven percent of participants had taken one previous service-learning course (either one-credit or three-credit), and 17% had taken two or more previous service-learning courses. Of the total sample, 354 participants took a one-credit course during the academic year, while 115 took a three-credit course during the summer term. Preliminary analyses showed that these two groups of students did not differ significantly in terms of gender, race, and family income, but students in the three-credit courses were more likely than those in the one-credit courses to have taken a previous service-learning course, 59% vs. 39%,  $\chi^2(1) = 14.59, p < .001$ .

### *Procedure*

Before the first class session, instructors requested that students complete an online survey. This survey contained seven scales that measured students' entering attitudes and values, along with various other items (e.g., demographics). A total of 857 students completed the pretest survey, which represents 87% of the 989 students who completed one of these courses. After the final class session of the semester, the instructor or course coordinator asked students to complete a final survey, which contained the same seven scales as the pretest. Of the students who completed the pretest survey, 55% completed the posttest survey and provided their correct ID number to link the pretest and posttest.

### *Measures*

The seven outcome measures constitute a related set of attitudes and values pertaining to the recognition

and denunciation of societal inequality and the importance placed on helping others. We have described this overarching construct as *equality and social responsibility orientation* (Bowman & Brandenberger, in press). Although these measures are correlated with one another, we decided it was preferable to analyze them as separate outcomes. Each construct conveys a distinct aspect of equality and/or social responsibility; furthermore, as shown below, the substantive results sometimes differ across outcomes.

*Situational attributions for poverty* conveys a belief that poverty is caused by societal factors (e.g., poor school systems); this six-item scale ( $\alpha = .72$ ) is adapted from a survey used by Feagin (1971). Four items from a scale by Pascarella and colleagues (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996) were used to gauge *openness to diversity* ( $\alpha = .83$ ). *Responsibility for improving society* assesses how much personal responsibility one perceives for taking action to help others and the world; this seven-item scale ( $\alpha = .83$ ) is adapted from Nelson Laird, Engberg, and Hurtado (2005). An *empowerment view of helping* described beliefs about whether people can overcome their problems with the assistance of others; this five-item scale ( $\alpha = .63$ ) was taken from Michlitsch and Frankel (1989).

Three additional scales were reverse-coded, because lower values on these scales are generally viewed as reflecting more positive outcomes. *Belief in a just world* describes the belief that good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people; Dalbert and colleagues' popular six-item version of this scale ( $\alpha = .66$ ) was used (Dalbert,

Montada, & Schmitt, 1987). A short-form of the *social dominance orientation* scale was used (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994); this eight-item scale ( $\alpha = .82$ ) measures people's preference for and acceptance of inequality across social groups. Finally, a five-item *self-generating view of helping* scale (Michlitsch & Frankel, 1989) gauged people's beliefs that individuals are only able to help themselves overcome their problems ( $\alpha = .72$ ). For sample items and an overview of all scales, see Table 1.

Several demographic variables were used, which included year in college (1 = freshman, to 5 = graduate student), gender (0 = female, 1 = male), race/ethnicity (0 = White/Caucasian, 1 = student of color), and family income (1 = less than \$25,000/year, to 9 = \$200,000 and above). In addition, two dummy-coded variables indicated whether students had taken one previous service-learning course, or two or more courses; zero courses served as the referent group.

### Analyses

Before conducting the final analyses, we considered whether to include students who took the course with a two-day immersion in the same group as those that had a week-long immersion. We decided to combine these two groups into a single "one-credit" or "short-term" immersion group, because (a) preliminary analyses suggested that the gains for the two types of one-credit courses were fairly similar, and (b) the small sample size for the two-day immersion students ( $n = 95$ ) would reduce the statistical power when conducting group analyses.

Table 1  
Overview of Scales Used to Gauge Student Learning Outcomes

Scale (and source)	Sample item	# of items	Alpha (Time 2)
<b>Situational Attributions for Poverty</b> (adapted from Feagin, 1971)	Some people are poor because there are "low wages in some businesses and industries"	6	.72
<b>Openness to Diversity</b> (adapted from Pascarella et al., 1996)	"Learning about people from different cultures is a very important part of my college education."	4	.83
<b>Responsibility for Improving Society</b> (adapted from Nelson Laird et al., 2005)	Describe how much personal responsibility you have for "speaking up against social injustice"	7	.83
<b>Empowerment View of Helping</b> (Michlitsch & Frankel, 1989)	"People should help others help themselves."	5	.63
<b>Belief in a Just World</b> (Dalbert et al., 1987)	"I believe that, by and large, people get what they deserve."	6	.66
<b>Social Dominance Orientation</b> (Sidanius et al., 1994)	"It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others."	8	.82
<b>Self-generating View of Helping</b> (Michlitsch & Frankel, 1989)	"When things are tough, people have to rely on themselves and try harder."	7	.72

Note. The last three scales were reverse-coded for inclusion in the analyses.

Table 2  
*F-Values for Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) Examining Pre-Post and Course Type Differences in Equality and Social Responsibility Measures*

Dependent variable	Main effect of time	Main effect of credits	Time x credits interaction
Situational Attributions for Poverty	7.71**	5.76*	.23
Openness to Diversity	16.36***	1.60	.89
Responsibility for Improving Society	5.87*	2.44	.01
Empowerment View of Helping	13.22***	6.85**	.77
Belief in a Just World	14.00***	7.40**	11.14**
Social Dominance Orientation	.20	7.35**	12.00**
Self-Generating View of Helping	15.79***	11.32**	1.82

Note. The belief in a just world, social dominance orientation, and self-generating view of helping scales were reverse-coded so that higher values reflect more desirable outcomes.

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted for each of the seven outcomes, with time (pretest vs. posttest) as a within-subjects factor and course type (three credits vs. one credit) as a between-subjects factor. To further explore student growth, paired *t*-test analyses for each of the seven outcome variables were conducted separately among students who took one-credit courses and among those who took three-credit courses. In addition, seven ordinary least squares multiple regression analyses were performed; one posttest measure served as the dependent variable for each analysis, and the independent variables for all analyses were year in school, previous service-learning coursework, course type (one credit versus three credits), family income, gender, race/ethnicity, and the corresponding pretest.

### Results

A series of 2 x 2 ANOVAs revealed that the full sample of students gained significantly in the expected direction on all outcomes except *social dominance orientation*, as indicated by the significant main effects of time (see Table 2). For *belief in a just world*, this main effect was qualified by an interaction between time and credits,  $p < .005$ , such that any changes in the desired direction were primarily evident among students in the three-credit courses. A similar time x credit interaction also was apparent for *social dominance orientation*,  $p < .005$ , such that the expected changes were only apparent among students in the three-credit courses (means for each group are presented in Table 3). Moreover, students who took the three-credit courses had greater average overall scores than students in one-credit courses on five of the seven outcomes, as indicated by the main effect of credits (the exceptions were *openness to diversity* and *responsibility for improving society*).

Statistical tests were conducted separately for students in one-credit courses and those in three-credit courses, in order to examine changes in each of the

groups. As shown in Table 3, students who took one-credit courses gained significantly in the expected direction on five of the seven outcomes: *situational attributions for poverty*, *openness to diversity*, *responsibility for improving society*, *empowerment view of helping*, and *self-generating view of helping*. For instance, after taking the course, students became more likely to endorse *situational attributions for poverty* and less likely to hold a *self-generating view of helping* (i.e., to feel that people can only overcome obstacles by working harder). (To ease interpretation of what may constitute a desirable change, the last three scales in Table 3 were reverse-coded so that *higher* values actually reflect lower levels of the non-preferred outcome.) Moreover, students in one-credit courses changed in the opposite direction on *social dominance orientation*, such that they became more accepting of group inequality after their service-learning experience. No significant change occurred for *belief in a just world*. Students who took a three-credit course also changed significantly in the expected direction on five of the seven outcomes: *openness to diversity*, *empowerment view of helping*, *belief in a just world*, *social dominance orientation*, and *self-generating view of helping*.

Multiple regression analyses predicting each posttest outcome were conducted. Because the analyses controlled for pretest values on the relevant outcome, any significant effects should be interpreted as predicting changes during the course. As shown in Table 4, year in school was negatively related to gains in *openness to diversity* and *social dominance orientation*. Moreover, students who had taken previous service-learning courses had significantly greater gains on three of the seven outcomes than students who had not taken any previous courses. Similar to the ANOVA results, participating in a three-credit course (relative to a one-credit course) was associated with greater gains in *belief in a just world* and in *social dominance orientation*. In contrast, no consis-

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for *t*-test Analyses Examining Pre-Post Differences in Equality and Social Responsibility Measures

	One-credit courses			Three-credit courses		
	Mean (SD)		<i>t</i> -value	Mean (SD)		<i>t</i> -value
	Pretest	Posttest		Pretest	Posttest	
Situational Attributions for Poverty	2.94 (.50)	2.99 (.48)	2.30*	3.03 (.44)	3.11 (.45)	1.94
Openness to Diversity	4.36 (.55)	4.44 (.55)	3.09**	4.40 (.52)	4.53 (.50)	3.03**
Responsibility for Improving Society	3.24 (.52)	3.30 (.53)	2.33*	3.32 (.47)	3.38 (.45)	1.48
Empowerment View of Helping	3.88 (.44)	3.95 (.49)	2.67**	3.97 (.43)	4.09 (.45)	3.05**
Belief in a Just World	3.27 (.51)	3.28 (.53)	.41	3.33 (.56)	3.50 (.60)	4.06***
Social Dominance Orientation	6.00 (.69)	5.91 (.76)	-2.91**	6.08 (.65)	6.20 (.60)	2.76**
Self-Generating View of Helping	2.84 (.56)	2.91 (.54)	2.75**	2.99 (.52)	3.12 (.57)	2.77**

Note. The belief in a just world, social dominance orientation, and self-generating view of helping scales were reverse-coded so that higher values reflect more desirable outcomes.

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

tent patterns were observed for students' precollege characteristics. Family income was negatively related to (reverse-coded) gains in *belief in a just world*, and men had significantly smaller gains than women in *empowerment view of helping*, but no other significant effects were apparent for these two predictors. Race and ethnicity was not significantly related to any of the seven outcomes.

### Discussion

Participation in one-credit service-learning courses with a sustained immersion appears to have a positive impact on college student learning and development. The outcomes in this study capture a fairly broad set of attitudes and values related to diversity, poverty, justice, social change, and inequality. As discussed earlier, we believe that a short community immersion experience by itself is not sufficient to yield these effects. An intensive and educationally effective community engagement experience should also integrate academic content into real-world experiences, take students out of their comfort zone for a sustained period of time, and be designed to achieve identified learning goals. The learning outcomes of students who took courses with a short (two- to seven-day) immersion were reasonably similar to those of students who took courses with 8-10 weeks of community immersion. This finding further supports the importance of the overall course structure—not simply the amount of time spent in the community—in fostering student learning and development. In our model, this course

structure included a sustained community immersion experience that was primarily student-led; this immersion was preceded by and followed with several classroom sessions, which provided opportunities for structured reflection and academic integration.

While students in the three-credit courses improved significantly on measures of belief in a just world and social dominance orientation, students in the one-credit seminars did not exhibit the desired changes in these two outcomes. These two world-views are highly stable over time among samples of college students (Pratto et al., 1994), and previous researchers have often viewed just world beliefs and social dominance orientation as personality traits or individual characteristics rather than developmental outcomes (Furnham, 2003; Furnham & Proctor, 1989; Pratto et al., 1994; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). It may not be surprising, then, that a one-credit seminar was not sufficient to yield significant changes in these views. In contrast, the changes observed among students in the three-credit courses convey the potential to influence even deep-rooted beliefs and feelings about the way the world metes out justice.

Although students who took a three-credit course do not exhibit significant gains in situational attributions for poverty and responsibility for improving society, a closer inspection of the data suggests that these non-significant results may be misleading. In both instances, the mean differences (posttest minus pretest) for three-credit courses are positive, and they are at least as large as those for students who took one-credit courses. Therefore, the lack of statistical signif-

Table 4  
Standardized Coefficients for Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Equality and Social Responsibility Measures at Time 2

Independent variable	Dependent variable						
	Situational Attributions for Poverty	Openness to Diversity	Responsibility for Improving Society	Empowerment View of Helping	Belief in a Just World	Social Dominance Orientation	Self-Generating View of Helping
Year in school	-.071	-.085*	-.039	-.068	.014	-.095*	-.041
1 previous SL course	.081	.075	.099*	.028	.008	.049	.010
2 previous SL courses	.003	.087*	.086	.103*	-.066	.056	.044
Three-credit course	.061	.020	-.008	.020	.170***	.108**	.070
Family income	.075	.017	.022	-.001	-.083*	-.036	.012
Male	-.026	.004	-.067	-.122**	-.062	.009	-.064
Student of color	.012	.026	.007	-.043	-.055	.028	-.033
Pretest value	.530***	.592***	.510***	.496***	.619***	.659***	.630***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.301	.363	.286	.290	.436	.475	.442

Note. The belief in a just world, social dominance orientation, and self-generating view of helping scales were reverse-coded so that higher values reflect more desirable outcomes. SL = service-learning.

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

ificance appears to be merely the product of a smaller sample of students who took three-credit courses.

Importantly, the gains on the service-learning outcomes were generally unrelated to students' race/ethnicity, gender, or family income, which is consistent with large-scale studies on service-learning (e.g., Eyler & Giles, 1999, although they reported some gender effects in which women tended to gain more than men). This consistency suggests that students from all backgrounds—not just those from socially privileged groups—can learn a great deal from their engagement in service-learning coursework. In contrast, as shown in the regression analyses (Table 4), students who participated in service-learning earlier in their undergraduate years had larger gains on some outcome measures than more advanced students. Compared with juniors and seniors, first-year students and sophomores may perceive their service-learning experiences to be more novel and eye-opening, and these characteristics are associated with greater learning and development in college (Bowman, 2009, 2010a; Bowman & Brandenberger, in press; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). In support of this explanation, additional analyses (not reported here) found no significant relationship between year in school and pretest levels of the seven outcomes, which means that the findings are not the product of ceiling effects among more advanced undergraduates.

For several outcomes, students who had taken at least one previous service-learning course exhibited greater gains than students who were taking their first course, which suggests that continued involvement in service-learning yields important educational bene-

fits. Furthermore, this pattern is consistent with existing research on diversity and attitudinal outcomes. Bowman (2010b) argued that students who take their first diversity course often experience a state of disequilibrium, in which they are still attempting to reconcile their course material and experiences with their previous attitudes and worldviews. These students typically will not have positive changes in diversity-related attitudes or well-being until this disequilibrium is resolved, which can occur during a second course or through additional diversity experiences. Consistent with this view, he found that students who take at least two diversity courses have greater gains in diversity attitudes and well-being than students who take no diversity courses, but these benefits did not accrue for students who only take one course (also see Bowman, 2010c). Similarly, students who take their first service-learning course—which often involves substantial interactions with diversity—may still be working through and making sense of their profound experiences. By taking a second or third course, these students may be more likely to resolve these issues and therefore change their attitudes regarding equality and social responsibility.

Finally, some limitations in this study should be noted. First, this sample did not contain a control group of students that did not participate in service-learning coursework. A non-service-learning group would provide an ideal comparison to determine whether the gains among service-learning students were significantly greater than among other students. However, some research has shown that social dominance orientation, importance of social action engagement, and appreciation of diversity, for example, do



not change much at all during 1-2 years in college (Bowman, 2010b; Hurtado, Engberg, & Ponjuan, 2003; Pratto et al., 1994); therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that any significant growth during two or three months of service-learning would be greater than that experienced by other students. Second, the outcomes in this study only measured students' attitudes, perceptions, and values, so we cannot determine whether service-learning coursework contributes to other forms of growth (e.g., critical thinking). Third, this sample comes from a single Catholic university that uses a particular model and structure for its courses, so these findings may not be generalizable to other service-learning courses that contain a sustained community immersion experience. Given the strong emphasis on social justice and community service throughout this institution, the effects observed in the current study may actually be smaller than they would be at other institutions.

### Conclusion

This research underscores the need for thoughtful integration of course structure and best practices in service-learning. Short-term service-learning courses that involve sustained immersion, academic grounding, and opportunities for reflection can indeed be quite powerful. These sustained immersions take students outside their normal patterns of involvement and provide opportunities for deep interaction with community members and diverse perspectives. Peer interactions that reinforce learning are also important, as peers often play an integral role in the social and ethical development of youth and emerging adults (Astin, 1993;<sup>1</sup>Derryberry & Thoma, 2000; Piaget, 1932). Immersion-based learning provides deep opportunities for students to learn from one another as exemplars: Peers who show care or advocate for justice normalize such activities and present opportunities for continued dialogue. Similarly, being part of something generous or altruistic (not just observing it from afar) may foster feelings of moral elevation (Haidt, 2003) that can be quite moving and lasting for individuals.

These findings regarding student gains on numerous indicators of equality, justice, and social responsibility are consistent with the implicit focus within service-learning on social change (Eyler & Giles, 1999) and, at times, social justice (Butin, 2008). Service-learning rhetoric can be quite strong, stating that participating students will become champions of justice and life-long advocates for social change (Brandenberger, 1998). While longitudinal research is needed to confirm the longevity of the outcomes in the current study, these findings suggest that even short-term immersion courses, if built upon strong foundations, can foster significant change in stu-

dents' thinking about social responsibility and justice. Thus, the academic immersion model outlined above can serve as a viable alternative for practitioners seeking a flexible (yet significant) pedagogy that fosters attention to issues of equality, justice, and social responsibility. This model may work especially well in the context of a semester if the immersion occurs during a week-long spring break or fall break. This structure will ideally provide another useful option for faculty and instructors wishing to incorporate meaningful community engagement as a part of academic coursework.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> At the Center for Social Concerns, we use the term *community-based learning* to describe all courses with a community component, regardless of whether the course includes direct service. However, for the purposes of this journal, we focus specifically on courses that involve service to the community, and we use the term *service-learning* accordingly.

<sup>2</sup> Within the initial survey, an additional 33 students participated in coursework that did not have a service component, but they were not included in the current sample. Preliminary analyses (not reported here) showed that the gains of these students were similar to those of service-learning students; however, because the number of students who did not participate in service-learning is quite small, we cannot draw any strong conclusions from these results.

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Appendix A  
*Overview of One-Credit Service-Learning Courses Included in the Study*

Course title	Location(s)	Brief description
Appalachia Seminar	Various sites throughout Appalachia region	Appalachia Seminar, twenty-plus years after its creation, continues to send approximately four hundred students each year to five states in the Appalachia region. Students explore social, political, religious, and environmental issues and serve in a variety of contexts, such as home repair, tutoring, and environmental maintenance.
Approaches to Poverty and Development in Chile	Santiago, Chile	This seminar is available to students studying in Chile during the spring. The course combines service-learning, theological reflection, and social analysis. The seminar is facilitated in collaboration with the International Study Programs Office.
Church and Social Action: Urban Plunge	Over 30 U.S. cities	This seminar, a Notre Dame tradition for more than thirty years, is a two-day introduction to life in the inner city. Students gain a deeper awareness of complex urban issues through personal interactions with those at the margins. Participants work with individuals, agencies, and parishes involved in social and structural change, serving meals, caring for children, and other varied direct service projects.
Environmental Justice and Human Rights in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina	New Orleans, LA	This seminar explores environmental issues from the perspective of minority communities that have suffered due to Hurricane Katrina. Students explore the concepts of environmental racism, culture of poverty, justice, and equality through serving to build and repair homes in the Broadmore region.
Holy Cross Mission in Education	Goodyear, AZ	This seminar examines the education outreach endeavors of St. John Vianney Catholic Parish, and builds upon Notre Dame's relationship with the Congregation of Holy Cross. Students also collaborate with members of Holy Cross in Phoenix. Students spend the week tutoring children and volunteering as teaching assistants in elementary school classrooms.
The Holy Cross Mission in Hispanic Ministry	Coachella, CA	Mission in Hispanic Ministry examines the Church's preferential option for the poor through an experience of the spirituality, culture, and economy of a rural southern California valley community. Students serve in soup kitchens, clean and volunteer at the local homeless shelter, and visit local families with members of the Congregation of Holy Cross.
L'Arche Seminar	Toronto, ON, or Washington, DC	In the L'Arche Seminar, students share a week in community life with people who have developmental challenges and volunteer as art assistants, group physical activity assistants and as cleaning and cooking staff at the L'Arche group home. The philosophy of Jean Vanier and various spiritual writings augment their learning experience.
Lives in the Balance: Youth, Violence, and Society	Indianapolis, IN	Lives in the Balance examines the world of youth impacted by violence, either as victims or as perpetrators, with a focus on Indiana. This seminar is the result of a partnership between the Center for Social Concerns and the Indianapolis Peace Institute. Students serve by caring for children at a local center for impoverished children.
Migrant Experiences	Immokalee, FL	Migrant Experiences offers insight into the lives of migrant farm workers during the spring harvest. Students stay with migrant families, assist agencies that serve migrants, help to clean and repair the local homeless shelter, and meet with community leaders.