

IMPACTS OF SERVICE-LEARNING ON STUDENTS:

Persistence, Graduation, Personal & Professional Development



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Fresno State – Richter Center for
Community Engagement & Service-Learning

California State University, Fresno was founded as Fresno State Normal School in 1911, became a teacher's college in 1921, and has offered advanced degrees since 1949. The university's popular nickname is "Fresno State" and its mascot is the Bulldog. Fresno State is one of the 23 campuses of the California State University, one of the largest systems of higher education in the world, and has 26 nationally accredited departmental programs with more than 21,500 students enrolled (2009).

Matthew Ari Jendian was born and raised in Fresno and received his B.A. in sociology and minor degrees in psychology and Armenian Studies from Fresno State (1991) and his Ph.D. from USC (2001). He received his baccalaureate degree in sociology from California State University, Fresno in 1991 along with minor degrees in psychology and Armenian Studies. Dr. Jendian is founding director of the American Humanics Nonprofit Administration Program at Fresno State and serves as a tenured Associate Professor and chair of sociology. He authored *Becoming American, Remaining Ethnic* (LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2008) and was honored in *Menk*, an encyclopedia of biographies of prominent Armenian scholars. Dr. Jendian is the recipient of several honors, including the 2007 Social Action Award from Temple Beth Israel, the 2007 "Amigo Award" presented by Vida en El Valle to "a non-Latino individual or organization that has worked tirelessly on behalf of the Latino community," and the 2008 "Provost Award for Faculty Service." He was nominated for the 2009 California Campus Compact Cone Award for Excellence & Leadership in Cultivating Community Partnerships and has written and received national and federal grants to develop curricula that engage university students in capacity-building work with Community Benefit Organizations (CBOs) in Central California. Dr. Jendian has served as a board member for several CBOs, including American Humanics, Inc., Fresno Nonprofit Advancement Council, Fresno Housing Alliance, and Relational Culture Institute and as an external evaluator with local and multinational CBOs, including Porterville College and Armenian General Benevolent Union. He and his wife, Pamela, reside in Clovis with their two sons, Joshua and Nicholas.

FYI: Humanics defined: Traditionally defined as the "science of humanity," Dr. Laurence L. Dogget, President of Springfield College (MA), and Hanford Burr, Professor of Sociology, used the term "Humanics" in 1905 as the name of an undergraduate degree that involved "the education of the whole person in spirit, mind, and body for leadership in service to humanity." (<http://www.csufresno.edu/ah>)

Presentation Goals

- Overview of the documented power of service-learning to positively impact persistence & graduation rates at Fresno State
- Overview of a multi-semester study of service-learning student outcomes at Fresno State
- S-L Research Project (with control group) @ Fresno State
- Institutionalization of S-L Impact Pre- & Post- Surveys

Fresno State
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO

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Marie Fernandez (June 2009)

A university-wide study on how service-learning (SL) impacts students revealed statistically significant findings:

DOES SERVICE LEARNING HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED?



- ✓ SL positively impacts graduation rates;
- ✓ SL positively impacts persistence/retention rates;
- ✓ SL students rated Fresno State's contribution to their personal and job-related growth higher than non-SL students; and
- ✓ SL students report a higher level of job-related knowledge, skills acquisition, and a greater contribution to the welfare of the community.

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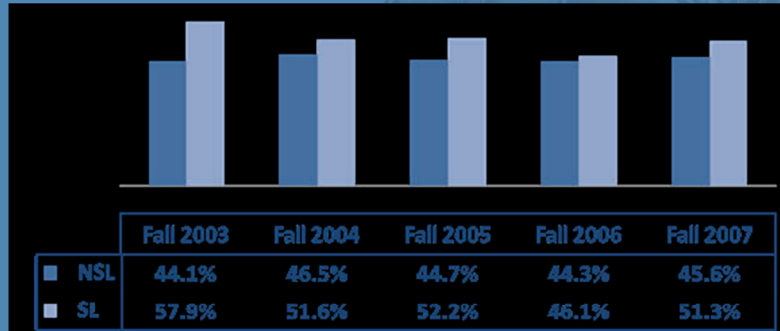
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http://www.csufresno.edu/irap/research/documents/sl_%202009_assess_full.pdf

At Fresno State, “engaging with the region” is one of our strategic goals. Adopting effective teaching methods is a goal in our Academic Plan. SL is one of the means by which engagement and active, experiential learning are achieved. Since 2005-06, the number of SL classes has grown from 124 to 160 in 2007-08. The number of students participating increased from 3,660 to 3,774. Approximately 10% of 2007-08 Fresno State graduates completed a SL course. The university has supported SL since the early 1990s. In 2007, Fresno State received a \$3.5 million donation to launch the Jan and Bud Richter Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning to continue and expand those activities.

So, more faculty members are using SL. More students are participating. And the university and Fresno community are supporting this method of teaching and learning. But does SL show positive effects for Fresno State students?

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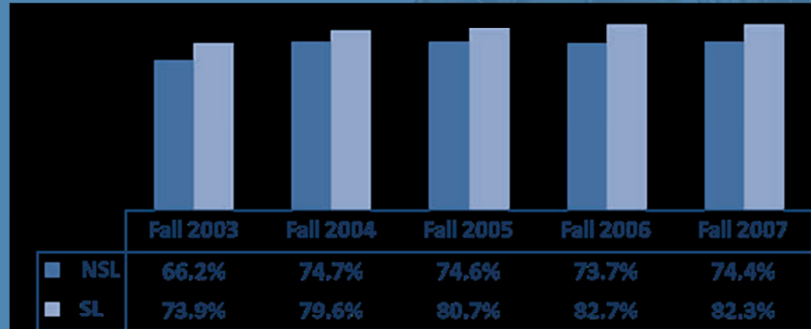
* One-year graduation rates refer to the percentages of students who graduated in one year after taking Service Learning classes.

Students who took SL as seniors were more likely than seniors who did not take SL to graduate within one year after taking the class (even when controlling for cumulative units earned and other factors) (Chart 1) .

This was true for seniors who entered as first-time freshmen or as transfers.

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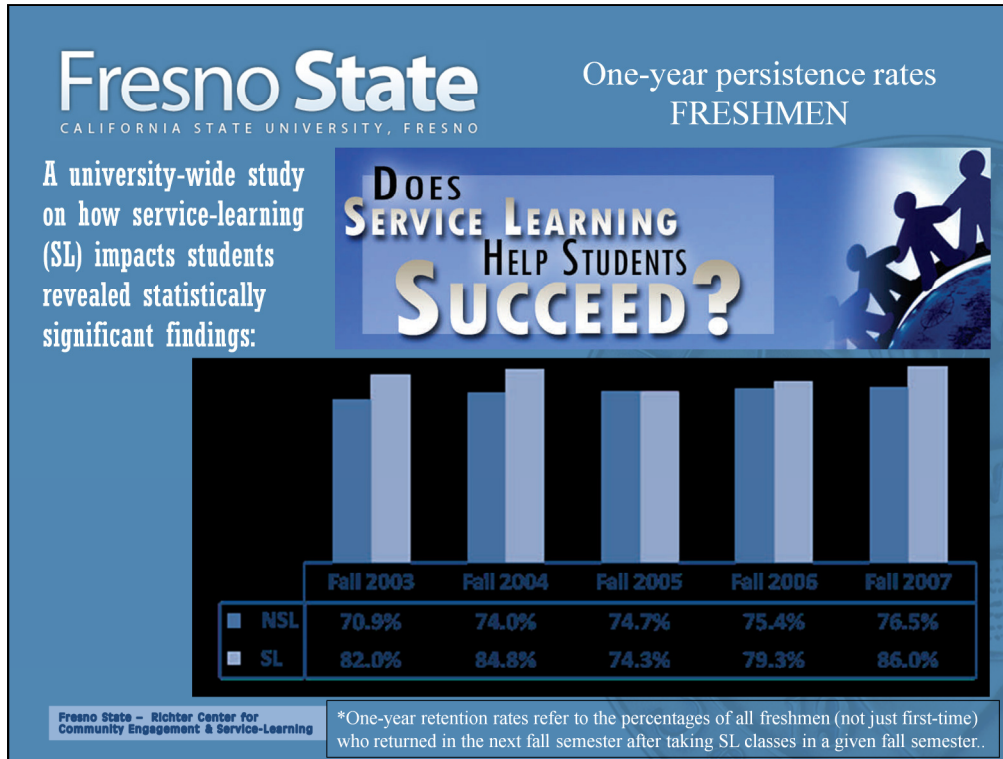


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One-year persistence rates refer to the percentages of seniors who persisted the next fall semester after taking SL classes in the given fall semester if not graduated.

Seniors who did not graduate within one year after taking an SL class persisted into the next year at higher rates than comparable non-SL students (again, even when controlling for cumulative units earned and other factors) (Chart 2).

The difference between SL and non-SL seniors on time to degree is very small and not consistently different across the 5 cohorts included in this analysis.



Freshmen who took an SL class had a higher 4-year graduation rate than non-SL freshmen until controlling for High School GPA and SAT scores. Being prepared for college outweighs the effect of SL for these students. The 5-year graduation rate though continues to show SL as influential. SL freshmen's one-year persistence rates after taking the class are higher than for non-SL freshmen (Chart 3).

Comparing SL and non-SL course sections, there is no difference in the average grade earned. SL sections show a slightly higher passing rate overall, but not consistently across semesters and in some semesters it is even lower than non-SL on average. Overall, the withdrawal rate is slightly lower for SL than non-SL classes, but again, this pattern is not consistent across semesters.

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Linking the 2007 National Survey of Student Engagement (N SSE) data to IRAP databases, we examined the survey's personal growth and job-related items to determine whether differences exist between students who had taken a SL class and those who had not. Although differences are small, SL students rated Fresno State's contribution to their personal and job-related growth higher than did non-SL students. For example, SL students report higher quality relationships with people, including those from other racial and ethnic backgrounds, and they work more effectively with others. They report a higher level of job-related knowledge and skills acquisition.

- Department of Sociology at Fresno State
- Desire to measure the impact of students enrolled in new departmental S-L courses
- 1545 surveys (931 pretests and 614 posttests) of students enrolled in three different courses—Soc1, Soc2, and Soc130W) over 7 consecutive semesters (Spring 2002 – Spring 2005)
- Included at least two cases in which both the S and non-S course were offered by the same instructor.

Data Collection & Findings: Soc130WS

- 260 surveys (148 pretests and 112 posttests of students enrolled in Soc130W)
- over 7 consecutive semesters (Spring 2002 – Spring 2005).

Demographics of the Sample: Soc130WS

- Roughly 68% of respondents were female and 32% were male. 55.5% born in 1980 or more recently.
- Approximately 13% of students were part time (enrolled in fewer than 12 units).
- 69.4% of these students reporting that they worked for pay during high school
- 34 majors represented in the sample.
- 15 different ethnic groups represented in the sample.

Importance of Volunteering

- 29.7% of the 148 students in pretest report they STRONGLY AGREE that “Adults should give some time for the good of their community” compared to 52.7% in the post test.

*“The experience of volunteering with Make-A-Wish Foundation **did change me**; I never realized how fulfilling community service could be and I **did feel good about myself** for spending some time helping others.*

I aim to ensure I dedicate some of my time to volunteering in the future, as I feel it is very important not only for the community but also to myself.”

(Latino male student in his 20s)

Civic Self-Efficacy

- 21.6% in pretest report they STRONGLY AGREE that **“I feel that I can have an impact on solving the problems in my community”** compared to 45.5% in the post test.

“Volunteering at the Poverello House makes me want to do more for my community. Even the smallest things that I would do, sometimes, wound up being the main course for dinner. It showed me that even a small effort can go a long ways.”

(Latina in her early 20s)

Empathy

- 34% v. 42% of students say that the following statement describes them “very well”: **“Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in his or her place.”**

*“The most important aspect of my service-learning experience was realizing the extent of the problem in Fresno. **I have read about and seen poverty, but to stare at it, to see it in other individuals is different.** I grew up poor, but I do not remember ever skipping a meal or being homeless. **I know about the homeless problem in the United States, but being close up and personal at Poverello House is something else.** I cannot put words to my feelings while I am at Poverello House. **It is a sense of compassion and empathy for them. Their faces are what has touched me the most.**”*

(Latina in her 20s; Criminology major)

Future Involvement in Service (Pre & Post Percentages)

How likely are you to volunteer after you finish college or during a break?

- 25.2% v. 54.6% report “very likely”

How likely are you to participate in community service activities next semester?

- 20.7% v. 44.9% report “very likely”

- *“As a social work major, it was a great experience at Boys and Girls Club working with children and teens who present obstacles in their lives, and it **allowed me to receive a head start in thinking how I am going to help in the future.**” (Latina in her mid 20s)*
- *“My experience at the Boys and Girls Club was different than I expected, as I did not realize how the exposure to an environment that I normally would not have been associated with would affect me. I have enjoyed every minute of this experience, and **I plan to continue volunteering at this site in the future.** ... This experience will help me deal with similar environments and has **taught me that preconceptions can only be proven if you allow them to be.**” (Caucasian female in her 20s; Criminology major)*

Service-Learning can be a
TRANSFORMATIVE
experience

*“Volunteering and working with Direction Sports brought me a new perspective. Understanding just how important immigration is and the benefits that it brings to our society is probably the most valuable lesson that I learned from this program. A quote that stands out from our reading this year was by Patrick Buchanan who stated, ‘...immigration is a challenge to our cultural integrity, our national identity, and potentially to our future as a country.’ A quote that, before the semester, I would have probably agreed with; however, **my experience with Direction Sports had a dramatic influence concerning my fundamental beliefs on immigration. Working with the Hmong and Mexican kids I came to understand that in reality immigration benefits the United States as a whole. The children in this program were beyond amazing; they were respectful, kind and good-hearted—all traits that contribute to a civil society.**”*

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(Caucasian male in his mid 20s)

S-L Research Project (with Control Group)

While no statistically significant differences between students enrolled in either SOC 1 course at the BEGINNING OF THE SEMESTER, at the end of the semester students enrolled in the "S" course were:

1. SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY to agree or strongly agree with the statement that **"I can have an impact on my community"** (62.2% vs. 36.4%).
 2. SIGNIFICANTLY LESS LIKELY to say the statement, **"I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the other person's view,"** described them somewhat well or very well. (23.2% vs. 29.6%).
 3. SIGNIFICANTLY LESS LIKELY to say the statement, **"I usually make up my mind on things right away,"** described them somewhat well or very well (34.1% vs. 36.7%).
- These findings provide some evidence that adding the service-learning experience in this particular course with this instructor cultivates a certain degree of "civic self-efficacy," greater empathy for others, and increased thoughtfulness in decision making.

PRE – POST Comparison with our data

RE: the statement, **"I usually make up my mind on things right away,"** none of the students in Soc1 service-learning courses said the statement described them very well while 4.2% of Non-S students said the statement described them very well.

- What methodologies do you use to demonstrate service-learning works on your campus?
- In what ways do you support faculty in developing sound research methods?
- What data do you collect from your students pre/post? How can faculty integrate teaching, service, and research to meet tenure & promotion expectations?
- What do you think would be the best way to provide centralized data and research support for faculty trying to demonstrate service-learning works? What would that look like? How would it be implemented?