

# Virginia Commonwealth University

## 2013-2014 Service-Learning Impact Measure Report

June 2014



# VCU

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

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## Executive Summary

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The VCU Service-Learning Office distributes the Service-Learning Impact Measure (SLIM) at the end of every semester to evaluate the impact of service-learning classes on student learning. During the 2013-2014 academic year, 2,987 graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in 224 designated service-learning classes. Each of these 2,987 students received the SLIM by email as an online survey. Five hundred sixty six students completed the SLIM for a 19% response rate. Data from Banner, the university's information system, showed that the majority of service-learning class instructors in 2013-2014 were female and non-tenure line faculty members.

Results indicated that students perceived service-learning classes very positively. Respondents reported that their learning benefited from the service component of the class, from the reflection activities, and from interactions with the instructor and their classmates. Respondents also reported that their skill level in 17 different skills increased as a result of their service-learning class participation. In particular, the students who responded to the survey believed that their service-learning class participation improved their ability to work collaboratively in groups, their awareness of the needs in the community, and their capacity to have an impact on social problems.

The VCU Service-Learning Office will use these results to further improve the quality of service-learning classes. Strategies will be employed to increase the SLIM response rate. Professional development offerings will be tailored to reach term (i.e., full-time non-tenure line) and adjunct faculty members, as these groups make up the majority of current service-learning instructors. Efforts will be made to recruit additional tenure-line faculty members to teach designated service-learning classes

## Methodology

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At the end of the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters, the VCU Service-Learning office implemented the VCU SLIM (Service-Learning Impact Measure) for all service-learning students using REDCap. This electronic survey was emailed to all 2,987 graduate and undergraduate students enrolled for credit in designated service-learning classes during those semesters, and 566 students (19%) completed the survey. Student responses from the Summer 2013 semester were not analyzed in the SLIM survey data this year due to a very low response rate.

## Findings

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**Course Demographics:** There were a total of 224 designated service-learning class sections offered during the summer, fall, and spring semesters. Of the 87 instructors who taught these classes 28 (32%) were tenure line faculty members. Of these 28 tenure line faculty members, 20 were tenured. Twenty seven (31%) of the 87 instructors who taught service-learning classes in 2013-2014 were term faculty members (i.e., full-time non-tenure line faculty members) and 32 (37%) were part-time adjunct instructors. The majority of service-learning class instructors were female (74%).

**Student Demographics:** Eighty two percent of respondents were undergraduates while 17% were graduate or professional students. Less than 1% of respondents were non-degree seeking students. The majority of respondents (76%) were female. The group of respondents was a racially mixed group. Fifty five percent of respondents identified their racial background as white, 19% as black, 8% as Asian, 5% as Hispanic, and 6% as biracial or multiracial. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and International each made up less than 1% of respondents. Nearly 6% of respondents chose not to identify their racial background. Thirty eight percent indicated that they are first-generation college students and 31% of undergraduates indicated that they are Pell grant recipients.

**Types of Community Partners Served:** Forty three percent of respondents had their service-learning class community placements in an educational setting or with organizations that serve youth. Health organizations represented 20% of placements, while 15% of students were placed at environmental agencies. Slightly more than 1% of students served at religious organizations. Slightly more than 2% served at art-related organizations, and 18% of placements fell into a variety of other categories.

**Intent to Continue Serving:** When asked whether they have any desire or plans to continue volunteering at the location where they had their service placement after their service-learning class ended, 40% of students said “yes.” Another 42% said “maybe,” and 18% said “no.” This response pattern clearly indicates the potential impact that service-learning has for community partners in terms of future volunteer service.

**Reflection:** Reflection is a required component of all VCU service-learning courses, and reflection activities take various forms. Students were asked to identify all methods of reflection used in their service-learning class. The two most common forms of reflection used in service-learning classes this year were class discussions (74%) and formal papers (77%). Additionally, 50% of students reported that reflection journals were used in their class and 52% of students reported that class presentations were used as reflection activities in their class. Twenty one percent of students interviewed community service recipients, 19% did community presentations, 12% completed blogs, 11% interviewed their professor or TA, and 10% completed other activities ranging from wikis to digital stories.

**Benefits of Class Components:** The VCU SLIM survey asks students to rate the degree to which they found reflection, community service, interactions with their instructor, and interactions with their peers to be beneficial to their learning in the class. Ratings used a 7-point scale, where 1=NOT BENEFICIAL AT ALL to 7=VERY BENEFICIAL. Students indicated that all of these 4 components were beneficial to their learning in the class. Detailed descriptive statistics for each item are shown in the table below.

N      Mean Rating      SD  
(7-point scale)

	N	Mean Rating	SD
How beneficial to your learning were the reflection activities/assignments of this class?	557	5.17	1.770
How beneficial to your learning was the community service component of this class?	556	5.83	1.667
How beneficial to your learning were your interactions with the instructor of the class?	556	5.53	1.817
How beneficial to your learning were your interactions with the other students in the class?	555	5.70	1.557

**Service-Learning Outcomes:** The survey asks students to rate the degree to which their service-learning class helped them develop each of 17 specific skills. Ratings are on a 7-point scale, where 1=NOT AT ALL and 7=VERY MUCH. For all outcomes, average ratings fell between 5.22 and 5.91. These results indicate that students in more than 200 service-learning classes believe that they developed a range of important skills as a result of their service-learning experiences. Detailed descriptive statistics for each item can be found in the table below.

N      Mean Rating      SD

As a result of this class I am better able to...

(7-point scale)

Apply theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	561	5.55	1.656
Examine the strengths and weaknesses of my own views on a topic or issue	559	5.66	1.578
Generate alternative solutions to a problem	558	5.57	1.610
Argue effectively for a particular alternative or idea	558	5.22	1.786
Clarify my professional goals	560	5.40	1.744
Be more aware of the needs of the community	560	5.89	1.550
Be more concerned about community issues	557	5.76	1.613
Contribute to the welfare of my community	558	5.80	1.567
Believe I can have a positive impact on social problems	555	5.81	1.547
Be more aware of some of my own biases and prejudices	559	5.50	1.682
Develop a personal code of values and ethics	559	5.46	1.790
Work together with others	560	5.91	1.496
Adjust to others expectations	561	5.63	1.534
Be a team player	561	5.94	1.506
Work collaboratively in groups	559	5.83	1.568
Appreciate others opinions	561	5.83	1.539
Be a role model for people in my community	556	5.71	1.641

**Qualitative Data.** At the end of the VCU SLIM, students are asked to “Tell us in your own words what you got out of your service-learning experience.” Student responses to this open-ended question were overwhelmingly positive. Of the 347 responses received 90% reflected positive comments, 7% were negative, and the remaining 3% included a mixture of positive and negative comments. A few examples of student quotes provided below are representative of the responses to this prompt.

*“This class helped me determine the future job that I want after graduation and gave me experience that I need to show organizations I am qualified.”*

*“I learned a lot of things about myself and the community, but that was because I had to due to my grade riding on the 20 hours I needed to fulfill. It was more of a job, which means it was not enjoyed.”*

*"I got to experience helping the community which was very rewarding. I didn't realize how much you can help the community in just one day in less than five hours it can help so much. I think everyone should have to help out to realize we can't have a clean and happy environment if you don't offer to help out just a little bit. Every helping hand can make a difference."*

*"Not as much as I anticipated at the beginning of the semester, my professor was great and I enjoyed being able to see the inside of the JCC, however I felt that it was a waste of time to spend 10 visits at the facility since none of the residents cared that we were there."*

*"I learned a lot about the elderly population in Richmond in an Assisted Living facility. I had not been around elderly people much until this service opportunity and have much respect for them and learned that we must not assume that they are not cognizant."*

*"A large amount of frustration and time consumption for largely meaningless tasks. Some of it was useful, most was not. I feel largely cheated, since I essentially paid VCU so that I could do community service. I'll definitely reflect this distrust and dislike in the future when asked about VCU."*

*"I truly appreciated being able to learn outside of the classroom, and not just once. I liked being able to do it on my own time, with options, and apply things I learned!"*

*"This was the most challenging class I have ever taken, however, it is also the most real world and useful for my job career."*

*"This service learning class has taught me more about how I interact with people who are very different from me. I learned that I can help people who need it, while at the same time getting their perspective on things."*

*"I really feel like this class has helped me become a better advocate for issues that I care about."*

*"I learned that it isn't the situation that decides how or what you take away from it but how you react; go in with a bad attitude and you're not going to learn much, go in with a positive attitude and ready to learn and it will benefit you more."*

*"I had a friend tell me about this specific class, and after taking it I will still continue to volunteer at my site. This class helped me realize that I have the ability to help others, and that I work with others extremely well. I personally believe it got me one step closer to reaching my future goals in psychology."*

*"I found the service-learning experience to be very beneficial to my overall learning in the course. I would rate my service learning experience as positive. I enjoyed being able to take concepts I learned in the classroom and apply them to real life situations out in the Richmond community. By working with children in elementary school, I found it very beneficial and exciting to be able to observe lecture concepts in my experience with mentoring."*

*"I learned I can remain professional in a non-professional environment."*

*"The service learning helped solidify the education I received in this class. Being able to do hands on work really made a difference."*

*"This was my first service learning course and I really did enjoy the experience. I am glad that we were only given a small amount of choices as to where we completed our service hours because it gave me a chance to step outside of my comfort zone."*

*"It was wonderful. I was scared at first and thought I wasn't cut out for the job until I was in my first week of service learning. Working with children was really fun. It was a bit difficult at times because I still need to work on my teaching voice, but I started to develop non-*

verbal messages for 'listen to me' or 'You might want to stop doing that/quiet down'. It was interesting to once again be in the elementary school setting, it's changed so much since I was in grade school, but there's so much more to learn!"

"It was amazing to see the psychological concepts discussed in class in a real life setting. This class also enabled me to children in the age group that I believed I wanted to work with in the future, and assess if that is a realistic goal."

"I learned that in order to get information on community trends, you really have to go out and plant yourself in the community to engage with them. I learned about the various non profit health organizations around Richmond. The biggest lesson from this class was teamwork. This course was so demanding that we had to make sure all group members were contributing, if someone did not do their work then the rest of the team had to collectively pick up the slack."

"This class gave me practical experience dealing with an issue that I already cared about. I feel that I've gained a deeper understanding of the many factors that affect food security."

"I developed a better sense of self. I found that I did not want to work with the elderly as much as I thought I did. However, I did enjoy myself while working there and have plans on volunteering there in the future."

"It was an incredible experience to team up with a medical student to provide care to patients in an underserved community. This elective greatly enhanced my pharmacy school experience by enabling me to apply what I have learned to actual patients in a community setting. It solidified my intention to go into ambulatory care in a rural community after graduation from pharmacy school."

"By having the opportunity to volunteer in these free/reduced clinics, I have realized how serious of a problem medical adherence is in the homeless and almost homeless community. Some of them can't even read their medicine labels. It feels great to know that I could be influencing the health of someone who may not have known anything about their medicine. I now feel like I can make a bigger difference in the community and use my new skills to help others. This opportunity has solidified my desire to work in the medical field and continue to have this feeling of helping others. In this class, I learned how to work well with others and express our idea (even if they are differing) in a way that can help the individual that we are giving the education session to."

"It was very very stressful. I was not the team manager and my team was not well organized. I constantly had to check up on others to make sure they were doing what they were doing. It has hindered my trust in working with other members. For others it was more of a positive experience, but my own personal experience was not great since I felt I had to do most of the work and could not count on other people. I do think it is a good class that teaches a lot about team work and leadership, but it should really be a separate class."

"I have learned so very much this semester! This service-learning experience has been an amazing, pleasurable experience that I would recommend to ANYONE at VCU! I wasn't sure how it would go in the beginning, but once I started getting into it, I absolutely loved it! I do plan on staying with Maymont and I really appreciate all the things I have learned over the course of the semester. This has been an exceptional experience and one that I will never forget!"

"I realized the impact I can have on the community. If individually I can help this much, then just imagine what VCU as a whole could accomplish. It also helped me to work collaboratively with others. Physically and intellectually out class came together to come up with beneficial ideas and worked to execute them."



## Summary and Next Steps

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The results of the 2013-2014 SLIM indicate that students who completed designated service-learning classes at VCU perceived those classes positively. Students reported that the class reflection activities, their service in the community, and their interactions with classmates and the instructor all benefited their learning. When asked to identify skills that they learned as a result of taking their service-learning class, students rated 'working together with others', 'working collaboratively in a group' and 'being a team player' very highly. Other highly rated skills included 'being aware of the needs in the community' and 'having a positive impact on social problems'. These perceptions are emphasized in the vast majority of comments provided by students in the qualitative section of the survey.

The survey provided valuable information for the Service-Learning Office to consider in efforts to improve and enhance program quality. These include working closely with faculty to ensure that reflection activities fit with course content and are meaningful learning tools and ensuring that there are opportunities in courses for students to have civil discourse with others on topics. The data indicate that the majority of service-learning instructors are full-time term (i.e., non-tenure line) and part-time adjunct instructors. Training should be tailored to this audience and efforts should be made to recruit additional tenure-line faculty members to teach service-learning classes.

The SLIM will continue to be a tool for quality assurance in the Service-Learning Office and will be distributed to students at the end of each semester. In the future, the Service-Learning staff will work to increase the percentage of students that participates in the SLIM survey to ensure that results are reflective of the general student population taking service-learning courses. These efforts will include looking at the timing of the survey release to ensure it does not overlap too closely with institutional course surveys and providing reasonable incentives to students for completion. Additionally, the staff will continue to work with service-learning instructors and Service-Learning Teaching Assistants (SLTAs) to promote the SLIM survey to the students in their courses and encourage participation.

## Appendix A

### SLIM Survey Questions

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#### SECTION 1: ABOUT THE COURSE

Please select the service-learning course that you are evaluating:

Where did you do your service? (i.e. , Where or for what organization did you serve?)

Approximately how many total hours of service did you perform during the semester?

Which category best describes the type of organization where you served?

- Education/Youth
- Environmental
- Health
- Religious Organization
- The Arts
- Other (please specify below)

Do you have any desire to continue serving at this location?

- Yes
- No

What reflection activities did you engage in as part of this class? Check all that apply.

- Written journal
- Reflection paper
- In-class presentation
- Class discussions
- Community presentation
- Blog
- Interview with service receiver
- Interview with professor or TA
- Other

If you selected 'other' please describe the reflection activities/assignments you completed.

*For each item below, select the number that describes the degree to which this service-learning class has been beneficial in the areas listed. Use a scale of 1 to 7 where 1=NOT BENEFICIAL and 7=HIGHLY BENEFICIAL.*

How beneficial to your learning were the reflection activities/assignments of this class?

How beneficial to your learning was the community service component of this class?

How beneficial to your learning were your interactions with the instructor of the class?

How beneficial to your learning were your interactions with other students in the class?

## **SECTION 2: ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE**

*For each item below, select the number that describes the degree to which this service-learning class has been beneficial in the areas listed. Use a scale of 1 to 7 where 1=NOT AT ALL and 7=VERY MUCH.*

Apply theories or concepts to practical problems or new situations.

Examine the strengths and weaknesses of my own views on a topic or issue.

Generate alternative solutions to problems.

Argue effectively for a particular alternative or idea.

Clarify my professional goals.

Be more aware of the needs of the community.

Be more concerned about community issues.

Contribute to the welfare of my community.

Believe I can have positive impacts on social problems.

Be more aware of some of my own biases and prejudices.

Develop a personal code of values and ethics.

Work together with others.

Adjust to others' expectations.

Be a team player.

Work collaboratively in groups.

Appreciate others' opinions.

Be a role model for people in my community.

### SECTION 3: ABOUT YOU

What is your student level?

- Undergraduate
- Graduate/Professional student
- Non-degree student

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Prefer not to answer

Which option best describes your racial background?

- White
- African American
- Asian
- Hispanic
- Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Two or more races (biracial or multiracial)
- International (i.e., visa holder)
- Prefer not to answer

Tell us in your own words what you got out of your service-learning experience