Assessing the Value Added By Community Service Learning: Comparing Learning Outcomes in Soc. 325 & Soc. 102

Joe Galura, Project Community; Lindsey Giblin, School of Social Work;
Mi Ri Jang, Social of Social Work; Ian Robinson, Department of Sociology, LSA
University of Michigan

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Abstract

Sociology 325, Project Community (PC), is a course for peer facilitators who facilitate sections of Sociology 389, a Project Community service-learning course. Soc. 102, Social Inequality is an introductory lecture course with about 150 students examining race, class, and inequality in the U.S. and beyond.

This project seeks to find out how effective Soc.102 and 325 are in promoting the following 3 kinds of learning:

a)Sympathetic Imagination and/or Affect Toward Those Disadvantaged by Social Inequality

b)Sociological Understanding of Social Identities & Social Inequalities

c)Intellectual and Emotional Orientation to Social Justice

Methods

This project uses data from entry and exit surveys that were administered at the beginning and end of the Fall 2010 semester to both Soc. 325 and Soc. 102 students.

Students were asked to give demographics such as race, gender, family income, year in school and major; and were asked how they thought about conflict and social justice in both the beginning and at end of the term.

We then compared the learning outcomes of students in Soc. 325 and Soc. 102 to find out if students who take Soc. 325 have higher levels of the 3 kinds of learning listed above.

Results

How did we get these 6 questions? Of the 50 questions the surveys asked, we focused on 6 because: a) they covered the three key areas of learning listed in the abstract, and b) there was statistically significant growth in both Soc.102 and Soc. 325 students' learning outcomes

Figure 1:

Legend:
- Privilege and oppression are related to social identity.
- When I learn about the injustices that people of different social groups have experienced, I tend to feel some of the anger they do.
- I feel hopeful when I hear others use their positions of privilege to promote greater social equality.
- Unfair hiring and promotion practices keep many people of color from gaining positions of power.
- I can think of a number of policy changes that would make the US a more just society.
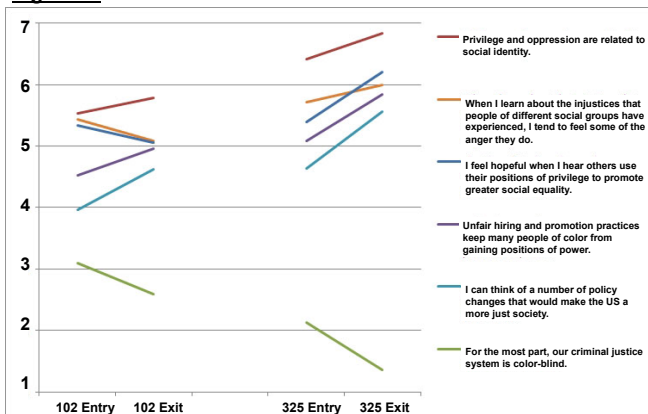- For the most part, our criminal justice system is color-blind.

Table 1 shows that the differences in learning evident in Figure 1 are statistically significant after controlling for race, family income, gender, and differences in the level of learning from the start of the term:

Table 1:

Table One: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis of Factors Affecting Scale of Student Learning in Soc 325 and Soc 102.

Question	Family Income	Race	Gender	Course	Starting Score	Adjusted R^2
S6a. Hopeful when privilege used for justice	.069	-.006	.135	.243**	-.539***	.32
S7d. Frustration at injustice to others	-.016	-.140	-.299***	-.107	-.592***	.29
S9d. Privilege is related to social identity	-.007	-.112	.175*	.182*	-.690***	.39
S13d. Our criminal justice system is color-blind	-.034	-.060	-.158*	-.140	-.585***	.33
S14b. Unfair hiring hurts many people of color	.068	-.088	.078	.057	-.459***	.17
S11b. Can think of policy changes => just society	-.056	.004	.048	.146*	-.671***	.40

Sympathetic Imagination   Sociological Understanding   Orientation to Social Justice

Statistically significant at .05 level = *   at .01 level = **   at .001 level = ***

Discussion

Figure 1 shows: a) that Soc. 325 students start from higher development baselines, and b) Soc. 325 students develop more on all three dimensions measured by our six questions.

Table 1 shows: a) the level of development from which students started had the biggest impact on the magnitude of their subsequent learning; b) that impact was negative (i.e., it's harder to raise learning by another level if one starts closer to the top level); and c) the only other statistically significant factors affecting learning – whether the students were enrolled in Soc 325 and the share of women in their course – both had positive impacts.

Conclusion

- We have looked at 6 of the 8 questions for which Soc 325 showed statistically significant results. With a larger sample size, however, we expect that many more Soc 102-325 differences would become statistically significant.

- For these 6 questions, we now have good evidence that something about PC significantly enhances the 3 kinds of learning we outlined.

- We hypothesize that these superior outcomes in PC are a product of three factors, to be tested in future research:

A) Experiential learning component -- going to community field site every week.

B) Liberationist teaching philosophy, adapted from the work of Paulo Freire.

C) The more intense level of peer-to-peer and GSI support the PC facilitators get to help them meet their greater responsibilities.

As a next step, we would like to compare Soc 389 (a bigger group, but still Project Community) to Soc 102 students.

Acknowledgments