Sticking Around:
Bloomington Host Agencies and Their Retention of Service Learners

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While service learning can be a beneficial experience for the students involved, allowing them to apply course concepts to the real world and to develop work skills, sometimes it is more difficult for the host agencies to reap comparable benefits. These host agencies allocate time and resources to train and develop projects for these service learners that sometimes only stay for a semester. Retaining service learners as volunteers could offset these resources, making service learners more of a returning investment. This research project investigates the retention of service learning volunteers in Bloomington host agencies. Through surveys and interviews with the Advocates for Community Engagement (ACEs), results uncover the current rates of retention and the practices that establish these rates. This information will further the understanding of best practices for host agencies to make service learning a mutually beneficial experience for the students and agencies alike. Further, the goal of the study is to discover if the ACEs have perspectives, opinions, and ideas for the retention of service learners as regular volunteers.

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Introduction

Service learning allows for students at colleges and universities to develop work experience and a sense of civic responsibility. According to Alice Kaiser-Drobney, effective service learning has four components: pre-service training, meaningful service, structured post-service reflection, and celebration (1997). These four steps are mainly student oriented. While "meaningful service" could refer to meaningfulness to the host agency, it perhaps more commonly refers to the student. In previous studies, the benefits of service learning to the involved students have been the key focus. However, the amount of research that focuses on the impact of service learning on the host agency is much more limited. Because resources are required to train and develop tasks for students that have the potential to only stay on for a semester, efforts to retain these volunteers could prove beneficial in making service learning a more worthwhile endeavor for host agencies. This study will reveal some best practices for community-based organizations to incorporate in order to retain more service learners after they complete their initial classroom commitment. In addition it will reveal barriers that could prevent successful retention. Service learning for a semester can be beneficial, but for some, retention could make it even more successful from the host agency point of view.

Literature Review

Service learning has the potential to be an effective, mutually satisfying program for students and host agencies. The number of higher education institutions with service learning programs is large and growing. Campus Compact,

a national organization with more than 1,100 members committed to growing student civic engagement, reports that 98 percent of member colleges and universities host service learning courses (Blouin & Perry 2009). Although there is a great number of resources and studies on service learning, the amount of information on the benefits to the host agency is limited. This literature review examines some of the articles that focus on effects of the host agency in addition to articles on volunteer retention for regular volunteers not involved in a service learning program.

Because of the multiple stakeholders involved with each service learning partnership, service learning can be viewed through several lenses including as a form of student learning, a program to increase civic engagement, and a supplier of unpaid labor to host agencies (Gazley, Littlepage, & Bennett 2012). While these service learning courses provide opportunities for students to engage in enhanced learning practices and serve their community, it is less clear to what extent host agencies benefit from service learning (Blouin & Perry 2009). Some studies show students participating in service learning can provide many benefits to their host agencies such as provision of access to campus resources, unpaid labor, increased visibility in the community, heightened quality of provided services, and more flexible allocation of resources (Gazley, Littlepage, & Bennett 2012, Blouin & Perry 2009). According to Gazley, Littlepage, and Bennett however, there is an unequal focus on the "demand" side of the service learning equation, or the push for student engagement as opposed to focusing on the host agencies' capacities to manage these students (2012). In other words, students demand opportunities while host

agencies supply them, but the focus is on the student benefit. In order to further understand the impacts of service learning on host agencies, research must uncover the problems associated with managing service learners.

When a community-based organization agrees to be a host agency for service learners, the commitment establishes a long list of expectations. These agencies are responsible for understanding course content and applying it to the students' responsibilities or developing student values or civic responsibility (Gazley, Littlepage, & Bennett 2012). These learning objectives can be a large responsibility to undertake. Hosting service learners can deplete resources and can cause frustration if the investment does not pay off (Blouin & Perry 2009). According to one study, the greatest limits to student involvement include staffing, lack of space, and agency priorities (Gazley, Littlepage, & Bennett 2012). It should be noted that some community-based organizations host service learners because of reasons others than gaining future volunteers, such as furthering their visibility or because their mission requires students involvement and education. However for nonprofits in general, volunteer turnover can interrupt functionality, hinder service to clients, and indicate an unfulfilling volunteer experience (Hager & Brudney 2004). Although some service learners do continue to volunteer after completing class requirements, some do not. Other reported problems with service learners include volunteers performing duties at which others would be more efficient, failure of volunteers to respect confidentiality agreements, and volunteers inaccurately representing the organization and mission (Gazley, Littlepage, & Bennett 2012, Blouin & Perry 2009).

Because of the potential for problematic and unfulfilling service learning experiences from the perspective of the host agencies, examining the retention of volunteers could lead to best practices for retaining service learners. Because of the limited amount of required volunteer time, some students tend to stop volunteering before the host agencies have gotten a return on their investment in training and developing projects for volunteers. Because of this, some host agencies have adapted service learning requirements to be for the duration of a semester as opposed to a certain number of hours (Blouin & Perry 2009). This helps to eliminate students completing their required number of hours in the beginning of the semester and ending their relationship with their host agencies without providing much sustained benefit. Host agencies prefer students to stay at least long enough to "fulfill the learning objectives of the course and get a broader sense of the community partner's mission and operation" (Blouin & Perry 2009). Because of this and other reasons, retaining service learners after their initial commitment could be a valuable skill that would benefit the host agencies, making service learning more worthwhile for them. One study showed that in the survey sample, 67% of service learners continued volunteering after their completion of their course requirement (Gazley, Littlepage, & Bennett 2012). This was seen more often when agencies hosted students as general volunteers as opposed to project based service learning. According to Blouin and Perry, previous service learners sometimes have the skills and dedication to continue working as volunteers, interns, or staff after their initial classroom commitment (2009). According to previous studies, several components of the service learning experience influence the retention rate of service learners.

For example, host agencies that treat service learners as regular programmatic volunteers as opposed to project volunteers tend to experience more volunteer retention (Gazley, Littlepage, & Bennett 2012). In addition, if students are not or feel as though they are not effectively managed, they are less likely to continue to volunteer past their classroom-required commitment (Gazley, Littlepage, & Bennett 2012).

Because of the little information known about the benefits to the host agency through service learning, examining retention of regular volunteers supplements the research. While service learners and volunteers are similar, note that service learners are required to serve while volunteers serve on their own volition. Studies show that when predicting volunteering in the future, past volunteering is the largest indicator (Locke, Ellis, & Smith 2003). Because of this, host agencies seemingly have an advantage because volunteering is initiated by course requirements. Agencies do not have to focus as much on recruitment, leaving more resources for retention efforts. However, there are many more factors that impact volunteer retention. The first six months of the volunteering is important for retention because most turnover occurs during this timeframe (Skoglund 2006). Volunteer management during service learning is especially important because of this fact because service learning takes place during a semester or approximately the first four months of service. Understandably, the more volunteer and agency goals align with each other, the more successful the partnership will be, making it easier to sustain (Locke, Ellis, & Smith 2003). In addition, evidence shows that the volunteer environment and communication climate highly impact volunteers'

continued service (Dwiggins-Beeler, Spitzberg, & Roesch 2011). Some volunteers expect more from volunteering than just knowing they provide a service. Mark Hager and Jeffrey Brudney suggest that volunteer recognition and opportunities for professional development can escalate volunteer retention (2004). In addition, ensuring that volunteers are matched with tasks that best suit their strengths and needs can increase volunteer happiness and therefore develop higher retention rates (Hager & Brudney 2004). Volunteers also want to feel needed. The more one feels like the only one up to the task and that without him or her, jobs will not get done, the more the volunteer will continue to donate time to the organization (Locke, Ellis, & Smith 2003). Turnover, the opposite of retention, is the number of volunteers that must be replaced if and when they leave (Skoglund 2006). Turnover can be harmful to an organization that requires volunteers to fulfill its mission (Skoglund 2006). Overall, the main reasons volunteers leave their organization are feelings of being overburdened or undervalued and poor volunteer management (Locke, Ellis, & Smith 2003). Volunteers want to invest their time wisely and effectively. If they feel as though they are wasting their time, and it isn't making a difference, they are not motivated to stay. If volunteers are unhappy with their volunteering situation, they could leave the organization or let their dissatisfaction show in other ways such as neglecting their duties or showing up late (Garner & Garner 2011). Volunteers that are not committed to the cause and the work required to sustain it could be more problematic than a volunteer that leaves. Well-managed, happy volunteers are more likely to continue, making training resources more effectively utilized in the long run.

Volunteers are obviously beneficial to an organization because they provide unpaid labor. However, some of the administrative costs to hosting volunteers are more significant than paid staff (Brudney & Duncombe 1992). These higher costs are because volunteers require recruitment, training, and supervision while working fewer hours than paid staff in addition to having less professional training and experience with higher turnover rates (Brudney & Duncombe 1992). The higher cost of training volunteers begins to explain the problems with high turnover with volunteers and service learners, which emphasizes the potential benefit to service learner retention.

Purpose

Studying the behaviors of Bloomington host agencies revealed some best practices for managing service learners in a way that is beneficial for the host agency, equally emphasizing the benefits to students and host agencies. Because of the nature of service learning, agencies train these student volunteers like they would train non-service learning volunteers and often only get service for a semester. The use of resources to train and develop projects for semester-long volunteers has the potential to be inefficient because the service provided by the service learner is short-lived. Increasing the amount or duration of service from these volunteers could make service learners more worthwhile because the resources invested in these students would go further. Some organizations would be affected differently, however. While some agencies can always use additional volunteers, some agencies have embraced their college-town community,

developing volunteer opportunities to fit the temporary schedule of a transient student. These different volunteer management viewpoints change the agency emphasis on retaining volunteers. Agencies that are constantly vying for volunteers have the potential to benefit more from service learners continuing their service after their coursework requirement is completed. However, some organizations, as stated previously, have adapted, making high volunteer turnover every semester an easy and efficient transition. Other agencies experience barriers to retaining service learners such as a new service learning program or a newly placed Advocate for Community Engagement. Other barriers could include location, scheduling conflicts, and time commitments. All of these agencies in a college town have a limited time span to keep student volunteers because of the constant graduation cycle displacing previous volunteers away from their educational establishment. However, younger students could stay for four years or more. Discovering best practices for all service learning host agencies still has the potential to make service learners a more valuable resource to the community.

Method

In order to study the current service learner management methods of the host agencies, I first emailed all 28 Advocates for Community Engagement (ACEs). These students act as liaisons between service learners, their respective host agency, and faculty, making service learning a more feasible and successful opportunity for all involved. The ACE program trains its advocates to develop "their professional, advocacy, communication, interpersonal, and leadership skills" (Center

for Innovative Teaching and Learning 2011). Because of the close relationship between ACEs, service learners, and host agencies, I reached out to them for their inside perspectives on service learning. I figured that the host agencies in Bloomington that have ACEs would be the most effective at retaining service learners because of their additional support to the organization. The ACEs are focused solely on service learning programs, projects, students, and anything else that would help facilitate service learning. After I briefly explained to the ACEs the purpose and goal of my research, I asked for their cooperation. I wrote ten survey questions related to service learning data, retention information, and volunteer management practices as well as the ACEs' personal perspectives on service learning and retention and sent them to all 28 ACEs. Out of the 28 ACEs contacted, 19 completed the survey for analysis. As the surveys were submitted, I read them and emailed individualized follow-up questions to further gauge the service learning procedure, perspective, and perceived potential. Out of the 19 ACEs I asked individualized questions to, 12 of them returned answers. In this study, the ACE is the sole voice of the agency. Because all the data collected was self-reported by an ACE, not an agency director or paid volunteer manager with unlimited access to agency information, some numbers were general estimates or in a range. I took the lowest number reported in a range and recorded estimates as hard data. Once I compiled the results of the surveys and individualized questions, I divided the agencies into 3 groups: agencies that experienced some service learner retention, agencies that experienced no service learner retention but were interested in increasing retention, and agencies that did not perceive a benefit in increased

retention rates for service learners and did not currently experience service learner retention.

Findings

While one Gazley, Littlepage, and Bennett study stated that 67% of service learners stayed past their initial course requirement (2012), my results differ with only 4% of service learners hosted staying past their initial commitment in the past year in the 19 agencies. Various factors could explain this discrepancy. The other study collected information from paid workers in the agency via telephone, while I collected information from student ACEs via email. Also, Gazley, Littlepage, and Bennett had a larger sample size that expanded across more than just Indiana University-Bloomington. These variances could explain the difference in results.

The surveys and individual communications with the ACEs of Indiana University-Bloomington revealed some general ideas and perspectives on service learning and service learner retention. In general, the ACEs reported a desire to improve service learner retention but recognized that their agencies did not place a high priority or invest many resources into this endeavor. Out of 19 surveys returned, 18 (94.7%) reported that a service learner who returned to volunteer after his or her initial course-required commitment was over would have a place at the agency. Twelve respondents (63.1%) reported that they would perceive benefits to their organization if volunteer retention increased. Two respondents were unsure or said benefits would depend on the timing of the returning service learner's interest.

Although there seemed to be interest in the idea of retention of service learners, only 8 agencies reported that they had at least one current volunteer that started as a service learner. In addition, 9 agencies reported that in the past year, at least one service learner stayed past his or her initial course requirement.

The host agencies varied vastly in number of service learners hosted and in number of non-service learning volunteers. Because of course requirement changes or only project based service learners that were not reported by the ACE, three organizations reported hosting zero service learners the semester of the survey. These low numbers are due to one agency only hosting project-based service learners that did not come into the agency or a recent change in course requirements for courses that previously provided service learners. With fewer courses with service learning requirements, fewer service learners make it to the agencies. Without help getting the service learners to the agencies, there are no volunteers to retain. However not all courses have been impacted by these changes. One organization cited having 103 service learners the same semester.

The service learning structure can also impact the effect the retention. There were only three organizations that had mainly or only project-based service learning. These three agencies did not have any service learners retained over the past year. Only one agency had one current volunteer that started as a service learner, and that volunteer started when the agency did host direct service learners and not solely project-based service learners. Other agencies cited concerns that an increase in service learners would take away volunteer opportunities from regular, long-term volunteers or patron volunteers that work to give back to the community

that serves them. This problem also poses a threat for increased service learner retention.

Most of the host agencies give service learners duties they would give any regular volunteer. Six agencies stated that service learners are treated almost exactly like volunteers. One agency said that it tried to place service learners with a task that aligned with their course topic but other than that treated them the same. Nine agencies said that service learners are treated like non-service learning volunteers except for an increase in supervision, attention to timeliness, or different time requirements. These organizations in general had higher expectations for the volunteers working for a grade than the ones volunteering on their own volition.

Group Divisions

Upon receiving completed surveys and communicating individually with the participating ACEs, I sorted the host agencies into three groups. Group 1 includes agencies that have a place for returning service learners, would benefit from returning service learners, and most importantly are retaining service learners. Group 2 includes agencies that have a place for returning service learners, would benefit from returning service learners, but are currently not experiencing retention of service learners. Group 3 includes agencies that do not have a place for returning service learners or would not benefit from returning service learners, and are not retaining service learners.

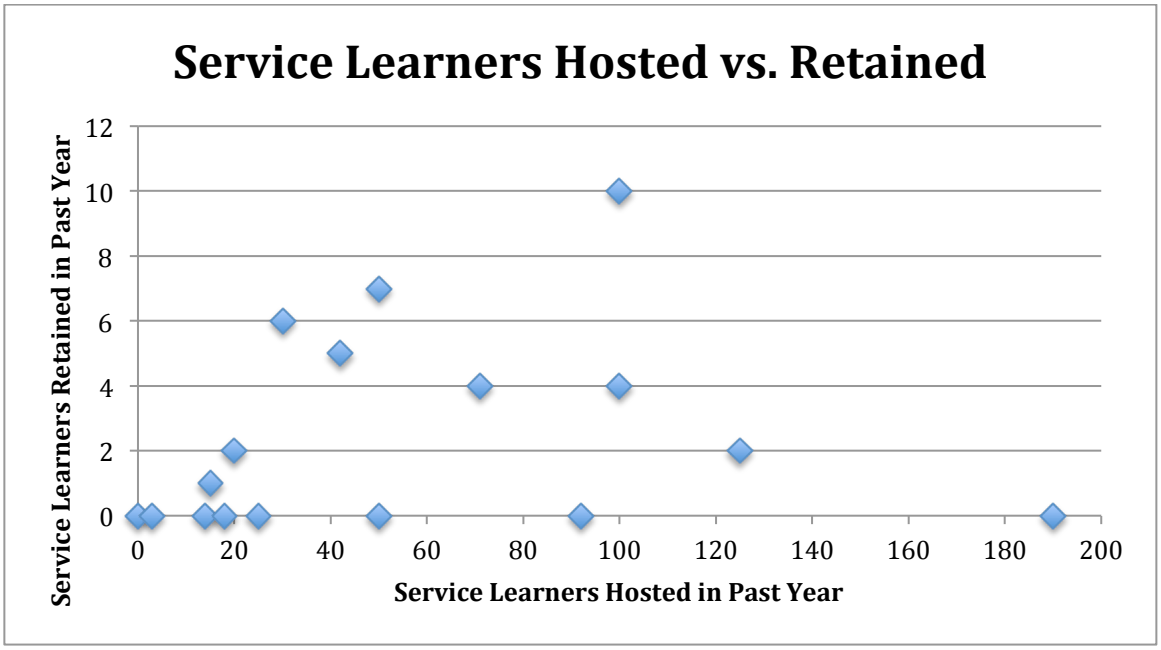
Group 1

In order to be placed in Group 1, host agencies must have retained one or more service learners. Retention could be achieved by two ways. First, at least one

regular, non-service learning volunteer currently volunteering started as a service learner. Second, in the past year, at least one service learner continued to volunteer past his or her initial course commitment. Ten organizations qualified as Group 1 agencies. Of these ten, seven agencies qualified for Group 1 through both methods. One agency qualified under the first method only. Two agencies qualified under the second method only. While 90% of these agencies said they would benefit from increased retention of service learners, 10% (1 agency) did state that increased retention would not substantially benefit the organization. The explanation stated that leaving volunteer slots open allowed for clients of the organization to "give back to the organization." While this agency could potentially fit into Group 3 due to no perceived benefits of increased retetnion, because of its success retaining service learners, it fit better into Group 1 for the purposes of examining retention trends.

Other than their qualifying characteristics, some other trends emerged in the agencies in Group 1. In terms of number of volunteers and service learners, Group 1 had much higher averages. Group 1 agencies averaged 41.1 currently serving non-service learning volunteers and 29.1 currently serving service learners. These results could indicate that Group 1 retained service learners because of their advantage of having more opportunities to retain these volunteers. When plotting the number of service learners hosted in the past year versus the number of service learners retained in the past year (Figure 1), there was a loosely positive correlation. However, it seems that retaining zero service learners was possible with any number of service learners in the past year.

Figure 1



Also, every agency that responded positively to the question "Does your agency directly ask service learners to stay on as volunteers after their course requirements are completed?" was in Group 1. Only two agencies responded this way. However this also means zero organizations responded "yes" and did not experience retention of volunteers. One agency did say that one idea for increasing retention was to directly ask for service learners to stay longer. It acknowledged a lack of proactivity in its retention efforts. Another agency suggested simply emailing service learners and welcoming them to return. In Group 1, five agencies directly mentioned communication or facilitated reflection as an idea to increase retention or a method they are already using with service learners and volunteers. The fact that increased communication is on the radar of the ACEs could indicate that they are already experiencing effective communications with their service learners or at least recognize the importance of this communication.

The structure of the service learning program seemed to make a difference in success of retention. In Group 1, five agencies put more focus on service learner performance, attendance, and timeliness but other than that treated service learners and non-service learning volunteers the same. These agencies averaged 5.8 service learners retained in the academic year of the survey. Three agencies in Group 1 said they treated service learners like they would treat a volunteer. This group averaged 2.7 service learners retained in the past year. One agency stated that it treats service learners similarly to regular volunteers, except that when placing them for a task, it tries to match up the student with a duty that best corresponds with his or her course topic. This agency retained 5 volunteers in the academic year of the survey.

Group 2

Some agencies justifiably had not invested resources into retaining service learners previously but are currently transitioning, making this more of a priority. Group 2 consists of three agencies that expressed an interest in increasing service learner retention but have not experienced retention thus far. The number of service learners hosted this semester in these agencies ranges from one to fifteen and the number of non-service learning volunteers ranges from 10 to 212.

All three organizations noted barriers in retaining service learners in the past. For example, one ACE reported that currently, most service learners participate in the same program. Because of this, it would make placement of new service learners difficult if old service learners stayed. However, this agency did report that it would benefit from increased service learning retention. Currently, it is trying to expand the number of programs that service learners help with, creating

more space for service learners whether they are new or returning. Another organization noted that the semester of the survey was only the second semester it hosted service learners. Obviously starting a program like service learning takes time, and retaining these temporary volunteers is less of a priority at the beginning. However, this agency did note that it is taking steps to get feedback from service learners "through conversations and end of semester surveys" to adapt and improve the student experience. This is a potentially important step to the beginning of service learner retention. The last agency faces different barriers: a low number of service learners and a lack of information regarding previous service learners. However, the ACE is currently working on a project to map out the past service learners and suggested that keeping in contact with these volunteers would encourage them to return.

These organizations are currently experiencing barriers to their service learner retention, but they have more than that in common. All three agencies would have some kind of volunteer opportunity already in place if a service learner wanted to continue service. However, none of these organizations directly asked service learners to continue their service even though they perceived potential benefits from increased retention.

Although these agencies have not experienced retention of service learners in the past year nor have any current volunteers that started as service learners, this does not indicate a failure. They appear to have experienced barriers to retaining this group of volunteers, but all are working to combat these barriers to potentially begin service learner retention in the coming semesters. The best practices

particularly apply to these agencies. Making a few changes could increase retention and provide benefits to the organizations.

Group 3

Of the 19 agencies that returned surveys, six of these organizations did not experience service learner retention nor had a great interest in increasing this retention. There were a variety of reasons that the agencies in Group 3 were not interested in increasing the retention of service learners. One agency reported that it simply did not have a place for returning service learners because the service learners they host are project based, and once the project is completed, there is no need for further help. This was the only organization surveyed that was not a nonprofit but was a city government department. Another agency cited similar concerns because of hosting only project-based service learners. While the agency had other positions for volunteers, these slots are typically full and involve entirely different tasks than what the service learner did for the class requirement. Note this starkly contrasts with Group 1 practices that treat volunteers and service learners similarly. Another ACE noted that if a volunteer wanted to continue service, a volunteer opportunity would be dependent on if a teacher "expressed interest in help." The emphasis on retaining service learners in this organization decreases because depending on the time, it would have to create a volunteer opportunity. Another agency stated that having a place for a returning service learner was dependent on they type of job they wanted. In addition, increasing retention for this agency would only be beneficial depending on what the volunteer wanted. With so much depending on desires of the volunteer, working toward retention is not a high

priority for this agency. One agency stated that retaining service learners would not benefit the organization because it would not leave space for new service learners and classes to volunteer. Because the ACE for this organization was new during the academic year of the survey, she could not compare the number of service learners currently to the number from previous years. Some organizations from different groups have noticed a decline in service learning classes and students, to be discussed in a following section. Another agency cited similar concerns that increased retention would lead to fewer opportunities for committed, long-term community members to volunteer. This agency is hesitant to host more service learners because it would be eliminating volunteer slots currently taken by permanent community members. However, this agency was interested in increasing its service learning involvement in a different way through partnering with different courses that are well-suited for the specific needs of the agency in a seemingly project-based structure.

Successful Agencies

While all Group 1 agencies experienced some success with retaining service learners past their initial course-required commitment, three agencies had at least five service learners stay on in the past year and at least five current non-service learning volunteers that started as service learners. These agencies with distinctly different missions demonstrate possible strategies for retention.

Agency 1 is a youth-serving organization. Hosting 8 service learners in the semester of the survey and 30 total the academic year of the survey, it has the smallest number of service learners of the three agencies. It currently hosts 20 non-

service learning volunteers making service learners 28% of their current volunteer base. In comparison to regular volunteers, service learners experience more weight on "attentiveness and timeliness," but both groups experience the same amount of training. Agency 1 stated that it has "absolutely" been pleased with the performance of service learners. It also stated that is has recently seen a decrease in the number of service learners. The semester of the survey, the agency hosted about 7 non-service learning volunteers that started as service learners. In addition, in the past year six service learners have stayed at the agency after completing their course requirements.

Agency 2 is a food pantry that currently hosts 15 service learners and about 50 non-service learning volunteers. This means service learners make up about 23% of total volunteers. One key difference in this organization is that it stated it did not believe it would benefit from increased retention. However it does appreciate the dedicated service learners that transition to be regular volunteers. The agency does think that leaving volunteer slots open for patrons to give back to the community is beneficial. Agency 2 does appreciate service learners, especially when patron volunteering is low. It has had overall good experiences with service learners in the past. At the time of the survey, five non-service learning volunteers started as service learners while seven service learners in the past year stayed after completion of course requirements. The service learners in this agency are also held to a higher standard with attendance because they are working for a grade. In addition, they are told to go directly to the ACE with questions, creating an automatic opening for communication. This agency has a picnic to recognize

volunteers, to which service learners are invited but often do not attend. The ACE stated that the agency might host a picnic or a similar event specifically for its service learners.

Agency 3 is an anti-violence women's shelter that currently hosts about 40 service learners and approximately 150 to 200 non-service learning volunteers. This makes service learners from 16 to 21% of all volunteers at the agency. Service learners and volunteers go through the same amount of training which includes 8 hours of general training and a shorter training specific to the program in which they are involved. However, service learning volunteers must report their hours and are supervised by the ACE. Non-service learning volunteers do not have to report their hours and are managed by the volunteer coordinator. Agency 3 has been pleased with the performance of its service learners. One idea Agency 3 had to increase retention was to help service learners connect to their service through reflection. This connection could potentially help service learners discover what volunteering means to them and how much they are helping when they do so. While it does not directly ask service learners to stay on as volunteers, Agency 3 feels as though if volunteers want to stay that they will. With more than 8 hours of training, it seems Agency 3 tries to and does make its volunteers and service learners feel very connected to the agency. Of all of the agencies surveyed, this organization was the only one to describe the number of previous service learners as a fraction of their current volunteers. According to the ACE, approximately a fourth to a half of current volunteers started as service learners. Also, the ACE estimated that a fourth to a half of service learners stay on past their initial course commitments. With a

retention rate of 25 to 50%, this host agency is clearly making a connection to its service learners that inspire them to stay, perhaps through extensive training and connection to volunteers.

Implications

The surveys show a number of challenges and successes for service learner retention. One Group 3 agency stated that retention of service learners would not benefit it because new service learners arrive every semester and if previous service learners continued to volunteer, there would not be enough spaces for the new service learners. However, a Group 1 agency stated because course requirements are changing, it is receiving less service learners than previously. Because of this cited concern, I asked a follow-up question to the responding ACEs to see if any other agencies were experiencing a decrease in the number of service learners per semester. Three ACEs reported a decrease in the number of service learners. Because of the potential for changes in course requirements, agencies that now may not have room for new service learners and retained service learners could experience a decline in volunteers. The strength of the relationships between the course instructors and host agencies could determine the future of service learning programs for a particular agency. An ACE of a Group 3 agency stated that the agency is "better served by maintaining partnerships with courses" because of the continued support through multiple semesters. The reliance on courses for service learners every semester could potentially be easier for some but the stakes are higher if a course ceases its service learning requirement. This conundrum

emphasizes the challenge it can be to host service learners. Maintaining relationships between the host agency, students, and instructors is a large task. The fact that the 28 agencies asked to complete the survey have ACEs means they have an additional resource to facilitate these relationships and therefore are attempting to take the step to work towards a beneficial experience for all stakeholders involved.

Multiple agencies listed ideas for service learner retention that stemmed from increased communication and reflection with this specific type of volunteer. While many courses involve reflection in their coursework, emphasizing the reflective opportunities could make a difference in retention.

Best Practices

After analyzing the results and the previous literature on the subject, I compiled three best practices, each with several components to focus on, in order for interested agencies to increase the amount of service learner retention. These practices would best help those agencies in Group 2. However, Group 1 agencies could also increase retention by implementing more of these practices or more effectively implementing them. If Group 3 agencies determine a priority shift and discover that they would benefit from increased retention of service learners, they could adapt as well.

Communication

While many organizations discussed the need for increased communication with service learners and regular volunteers, some agencies struggle to do so or

during this discussion, do not ask for service learners to return. Helping to guide a reflective conversation that emphasized the importance of the volunteer and his or her work could keep a service learner coming back. A focus on agency dependence of volunteers and making sure they feel valued has the potential to increase retention (Locke, Ellis, & Smith 2003). This is a good volunteer management practice and will make service learners feel recognized and appreciated. Volunteers are more likely to stay if they feel like they are the only ones that can do a job (Locke, Ellis, & Smith 2003), so telling a service learner that he or she did a good job and future work would be appreciated could make a large difference in the retention rate.

Nine out of the 19 agencies that returned surveys mentioned ideas on increased communication or opportunities for reflection as a way to increase service learner retention. It should be noted that this was not a direct question and that the only reference to communication in the survey was asking if the agencies directly asked service learners to continue serving. Ideas on how communication currently operates and could potentially operate varied. Some agencies focused on making sure service learners reflect on their experiences while other focused on making sure volunteers felt appreciated. These ideas also tie back to making sure volunteers feel valued and needed. Other agencies suggested simply keeping in contact with service learners via email or in person to make sure that they know they are welcome back. Recognizing that communication is key in retaining volunteers is a large step towards keeping service learners service past their initial commitment.

Diversity

Some agencies are more suited for service learners to continue volunteering, but diversifying the number or type of programs that service learners can participate in could help. Several agencies stated that if previous service learners returned after their initial commitment, there would not be space to host new service learners. In addition, regular, long-term volunteers could have fewer opportunities to continue volunteering. If service learners could be introduced into different programs, there could be more positions to fill. In addition, relying on just courses with individual service learners could lower numbers if the courses discard their service learning requirements. Working with students from multiple courses could help this reliance. If agencies work with classes as a whole as well as individual students that choose their host agency, service learner numbers would not be so heavily reliant on a few courses. While project-based service learners can be helpful, they also are not integrated into the normal programing of an agency. This structure creates more work for the agency to help transition a project-based service learner to a regular volunteer.

Volunteer Treatment

Treat volunteers and service learners similarly. The more service learners act like and are supervised like non-service learning volunteers, the more likely they will be willing to return. The transition is easier for service learners this way, and they will already be aware of and trained for the tasks for which they will be responsible. Agencies tend to have more success with retention and a more positive

view of retention when service learners are treated like other volunteers. This trend supports the findings of Gazley, Littlepage, and Bennett (2012).

Future Research

While this research adds to the knowledge on service learning, much information regarding this topic remains elusive. As previously stated, out of 28 surveys distributed to the 28 ACEs at Indiana University at the time of the study, only 19 agencies were represented through completed surveys and only 12 agencies completed individualized question responses. This small sample size, while perhaps representing service learning in Bloomington, Indiana, is not large enough to make generalized conclusions. In addition, the information gathered was self-reported by ACEs. While some respondents reported that they asked management in their agencies, other respondents estimated numbers or simply stated that they did not know the answer. This data collection leaves much room for future research to collect and analyze data, even in the agencies in this study.

Even before starting my research I realized I was leaving out a segment of the service learning host agency population. All the agencies that I surveyed had ACEs. These ACEs help to supervise service learners, potentially helping to establish a closer relationship between the service learners and the agency. This connection could play a part in retention because volunteers that feel connected and needed are more likely to continue their service (Locke, Ellis, & Smith 2003). Because of the presence of ACEs at the surveyed agencies, all of the organizations potentially have an advantage over agencies without ACEs. Not all host agencies at Indiana

University – Bloomington have ACEs to facilitate their service learning programs. In order to fully understand service learner retention in Bloomington, Indiana, studies should include all host agencies, not just those with ACEs.

While I conducted my research, several additional questions and specific characteristics came up as future research questions. A large number of these questions related to specific barriers that could provide reasoning for a low retention rate. Future studies could examine the amount of time an ACE has been placed at an agency, observing his or her experience with volunteer management in relation to keeping student volunteers serving at the agency. Another variable to consider is the age of the service learning program. Depending on the type of service learning, establishing these connections and developing programs for service learners can be costly of limited resources. This initial investment could prevent further resource allocation to retention. The longer the service learning program has been in place, the fewer resources the agency will potentially use to start and run the program and therefore will have more time and resources to allocate to retention efforts. Also, the type of service learning established could make a difference. While project-based service learning can be beneficial to an agency, there is typically a finite amount of work to be done. At the end of the project, the agency must develop a new one or train the volunteer for a program-based task like a regular volunteer. In the case of program-based service learning, a service learner has the duties of a regular volunteer, making a seamless transition from service-learner to volunteer. Lastly, the age or grade level of service learners has the potential to make a difference in retention as well. If some courses typically attract

younger students, the length of time that these students stay in the area likely increases, also increasing the potential time for them to remain at an agency. Also, students of different ages could have different levels of activities and free time as well as different priorities and professional goals. Agencies that have good relationships with courses with the right age of student with values that fit the organization could be beneficial to retention efforts.

Conclusions

Achieving volunteer retention is no easy task. Adding the additional difficulty of a young, student-based, transient population can make this task a hard-to-achieve and low priority with little success. Through combining information from the literature review and the data collected through surveys and interviews, there are several important findings that could help increase the retention rate for those agencies that are trying to achieve it.

While in Bloomington, most agencies report being satisfied with the performance of service learners, there is always room for improvement in a program. Working towards increased continuation of service learners volunteering could help if regular volunteers are scarce, training new volunteers is too resource-consuming, or if changes in course requirements reduces the number of student with service learning requirements. Service learning has the potential to be beneficial to all stakeholders involved, but ensuring that the community is being adequately served is a large priority. In order for this to happen, dedicated, well-trained, and responsible volunteers are needed in these host agencies. Keeping

these valuable resources around for longer than a semester could benefit agencies and perhaps provide a more rewarding experience for service learners as well.

Appendices

Appendix A

Agencies with ACEs at Indiana University-Bloomington and Survey Responses

Agency	First Survey Response	Second Survey Response
Area10 Agency on Aging	X	X
Banneker Center	X	X
Batchelor Middle School	X	X
Boys & Girls Club, Main Club	X	X
Boys& Girls Club, Crestmont	X	X
City of Bloomington, Department of Economic and Sustainable Development	X	X
Fair Trade Bloomington	X	X
Girls Inc.	X	X
Habitat ReStore	X	
Hoosier Hills Food Bank	X	
Middle Way House	X	X
Monroe County United Ministries	X	X
Mother Hubbard's Cupboard	X	X
People and Animal Learning Services	X	X
Bloomington Playwrights Project	X	
Buskirk-Chumley Theatre	X	
Ellettsville Boys & Girls Club	X	
Project School	X	
Fairview Elementary School		
Harmony School		
Head Start		
Hilltop Garden & Nature Center		
IU Office of Sustainability		
Midwest Pages to Prisoners Project		
My Sister's Closet		
Office of English Language Learning		
Shalom Community Center		
Templeton Elementary School		

Appendix B

Survey Questions

ACE Survey on Service Learners

Current Volunteers and Service Learners

1. How many service learners does your agency currently host (this semester)?

2. How many non-service learning volunteers does your agency currently host (this semester)?

3. How are service learners managed in comparison to regular volunteers? (eg. Types of duties, amount of supervision, recognition, etc.)

Retention of Service Learners

4. Of the current (this semester) non-service learning volunteers at your agency, how many started as service learners?

5. How many service learners has your agency hosted in the past year?

6. How many service learners in the past year have stayed at your agency after they complete their class requirements?

7. Does your agency directly ask service learners to stay on as volunteers after their course requirements are completed?

8. Would/Does your agency have a place for a past service learner if he/she returned as a regular volunteer?

Ideas/Opinions on Service Learning

9. Do you think it would benefit your host agency to retain more service learners?

10. Do you have any ideas for increasing retention of service learners at your agency?