Nevada Volunteers Higher Education Service-Learning Initiative Evaluation Brief
September 2010

The Nevada Volunteers Higher Education Service-Learning Initiative was designed to increase opportunities for students to engage in service learning at higher education institutions in Nevada. Three main goals were established for the project:

1. Increase the capacity of Nevada community partners (nonprofits and government agencies) to work with college students on service-learning projects and/or provide volunteer opportunities for students.
2. Increase the number of service opportunities available to students and enhance their motivation to participate in service
3. Build effective communication and support systems that bring together interested faculty, staff, and community nonprofits and agencies to partner in community service-learning opportunities.

The Center for Program Evaluation at the University of Nevada, Reno partnered with Nevada Volunteers to evaluate the initiative. This evaluation brief highlights the evaluation efforts focused on the community partner regional training meetings, the student working group participants, and the campus faculty members. Separate summaries are available for the student non-participant and community partner.

Community Partners

Nevada Volunteers held two regional training meetings, one in Reno and one in Las Vegas, which were designed to bring community partners, faculty and students together to help them develop mutually beneficial service-learning experiences and build the capacity of community partners to work with college students in a service-learning framework. The Reno meeting on June 4, 2010 was attended by 24 individuals, while 67 individuals attended the Las Vegas meeting on June 25, 2010. Participants represented more than 20 different organizations.

During the meeting, participants completed a self-assessment for service learning readiness related to community support and involvement in service learning. All of the Reno participants completed the self-assessment, while 13 of the Las Vegas participants did so. They rated their organization's stage of service learning readiness (Stage 1=Critical Mass Building; Stage 2=Quality Building; Stage 3=Institutionalization) on four different factors: organizational experience, coordinating structures, administrative support, and student support. Figure 1 shows the readiness stages for each of the four factors. Most participants felt their organizations were at either Stage 2 or Stage 3 for each of the four factors, although in some cases organizations were at Stage 1 on some factors.
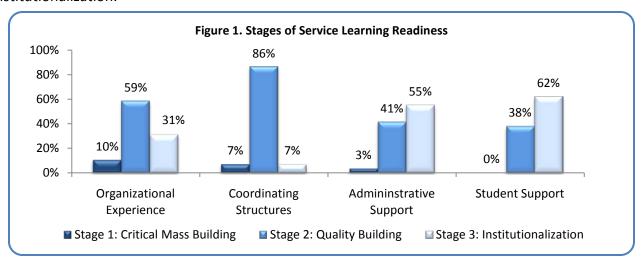
Community Partner Comments

"Great insight from students, organizations and faculty on how best to recruit student volunteers."

"I have a greater appreciation for taking the time to develop a clear plan and define roles."

"[The workshop] took my thinking process beyond "internships" and gave me many creative ways to expand service learning in our agencies."

"This conference was great. The network and connections with NSC and UNLV are invaluable."

With respect to Organizational Experience, most organizations were at Stage 2 or 3, meaning that they had some to a lot of experience working with volunteers, college students, and other agencies. The majority of participants (86%) indicated that their organizations were at Stage 2: Quality Building with respect to Coordinating Structures. This was reflected in participants' action plans, with many of the participants planning to increase campus contacts, clearly define the organization's mission, develop clear volunteer job descriptions and increase the diversity of volunteer opportunities available in the organization. Administrative Support was at Stage 2 or 3 according to most participants. In their action plans, many participants indicated that administration/board of directors were supportive of service learning efforts; however, many cited a lack of staff availability and resources to adequately oversee service learning volunteers. Organizations appeared most ready for service learning with respect to Student Support, for which 62% of participants reported their organization was in Stage 3: Institutionalization.

Figure 1. Stages of Service Learning Readiness

More than 80% of the participants said that, as a result of the workshop, they "very much" saw the benefits of working with student volunteers. The remaining participants said they "somewhat" saw the benefits (11%) or already saw the benefits before the workshop (7%). Participants comments about the workshop also indicated the success of the workshop in creating more awareness of service learning among community organizations as well as helping them to build their organizations' capacity to develop service learning opportunities for college students.

Students

Nevada Volunteers facilitated regional working groups of college students at Nevada higher education institutions. The students developed service-learning projects designed to assess the status of student volunteering and service-learning on their respective campuses, to identify challenges and supports to their student engagement and participation in community service-learning, or to co-create plans and implement strategies to increase student access to and motivation to participate in community service-learning. A total of 31 students across the state completed the required 50 hours on the project.

Student participants responded to an online survey at the beginning and end of the project. The pretest survey was completed by 26 students; the posttest survey was completed by 27 students. At the posttest, students were asked to report how many service hours they had completed. Responses

ranged from 20 to 62 hours with a mean of 48 hours completed. Students ranged in age from 18 to 40 years with a mean age of 23. Six different higher education institutions were represented by the survey respondents. College of Southern Nevada and University of Nevada Las Vegas had the highest percentage of student respondents (see Table 1).

The majority of respondents (81%) was female. Caucasians made up the largest ethnic group (39%), followed by African American and Asian (19% each). Forty-six percent (46%) of respondents were first generation college students. Half of the respondents indicated that they had never participated in service-learning as part of a class. The most commonly mentioned volunteer activity in the past 12 months was belonging to an organization or group (88%), followed by volunteering for a non-political group (62%; see Table 2). More than 60% of working group participants felt their peers volunteered less than they did.

Table 1. Student Respondent Demographics

College or University	#	%
College of Southern Nevada	**8**	**29.6**
Great Basin College	4	14.8
Nevada State College	3	11.1
University of Nevada Las Vegas	**8**	**29.6**
University of Nevada, Reno	3	11.1
Western Nevada College	1	3.7
Ethnicity		
African American/Black	4	15.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	19.2
Caucasian/White	**10**	**38.5**
Hispanic/Latino	5	19.2
Other	2	7.7
Previous service-learning experience as part of a class		
No, never.	**13**	**50.0**
Yes, in one class.	7	26.9
Yes, in more than one class.	6	23.1

Respondents rated the importance of 24 reasons for volunteering on a scale from 1=Not important to 7=important. The top six reasons with the highest mean ratings at posttest are shown in Table 3. "Because people should do something about issues that are important to them" had the highest mean rating. Two other reasons, not in the top six, showed statistically significant increases in mean importance rating from pretest to posttest—"To get to know people who are similar to myself" and "to feel needed."

Table 2. Volunteer Activities in the Past 12 months
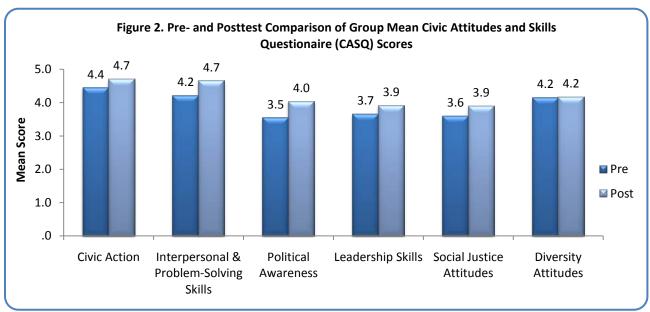
Activity	%
Belonged to an organization or group	88%
Volunteered for a non-political group	62%
Raised money for a charitable cause	46%
Worked to solve a community problem	45%
Personally walked, ran, or biked for charity	41%

Table 3. Reasons for volunteering

	Pre Mean	Post Mean
Because people should do something about issues that are important to them	6.31	6.41
To give something back to the community	6.46	6.33
To help those less fortunate than me	6.12	6.30
To acquire new skills and experiences	6.23	6.19
To provide a good experience for people who are in need	6.12	6.19
To improve the welfare of people in need	6.23	6.15

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Student respondents also completed the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ), which is a measure of attitudes, skills and behavioral intentions that might be affected by service-learning participation. Figure 2 shows the group mean scores on each of the six CASQ subscales at pretest and posttest. Mean group scores increased from pretest to posttest on three of the six subscales: Civic Action; Interpersonal and Problem-Solving Skills; and, Political Awareness.

Figure 2. Pre- and Posttest Comparison of Group Mean Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionaire (CASQ) Scores

Subscale	Pre	Post
Civic Action	4.4	4.7
Interpersonal & Problem-Solving Skills	4.2	4.7
Political Awareness	3.5	4.0
Leadership Skills	3.7	3.9
Social Justice Attitudes	3.6	3.9
Diversity Attitudes	4.2	4.2

Student Participant Comments

"I think this was a good project. It was well managed, not a lot of time, but concrete objectives were accomplished and community-organizational capacity was strengthened."

"I hope the work I put in can be picked up and further investigated because I do believe service learning would be such a great addition not only for university but for the community too."

"Thank you for this wonderful experience it gave me the chance I have been looking for to become involved in a leadership position."

"I became more aware of other students' ideas regarding volunteerism. I also learned more about how to spread the word for volunteering and how important it is."

"It was great knowing the research could be used to benefit the community. Personally, I was able to connect a lot of peers in on-campus organizations to the Nevada Volunteers website for local volunteering opportunities."

When describing what they learned about their campus and community as a result of participating in the project, many respondents mentioned discovering that many students are interested in volunteering but lack the time to volunteer and/or knowledge about volunteer opportunities. For example, one participant wrote, "[What] I learned from personally talking to students on campus was

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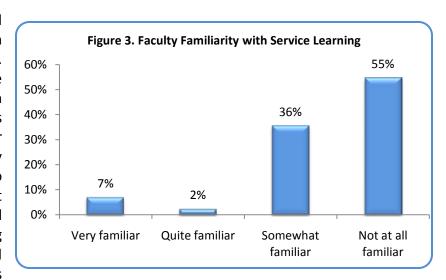Division of Health Sciences
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that many of them do want to volunteer and devote their time and energy, they just want someone to guide them and tell them where they need to go or find the right place for them to help out at." Several common themes emerged from posttest respondents descriptions of what they had gained from the experience:

- Leadership experience;
- Increased understanding of other students' motivations and understanding about volunteerism;
- Networking/new people
- Organizational skills and experience organizing a project
- More knowledge of where and how to volunteer/how to connect others to volunteer opportunities

Faculty survey

An online faculty survey was developed and administered in fall 2009. Response to the survey was low due to challenges in gaining access to faculty email distribution lists at most of the campuses. The survey was completed by 45 faculty members—the majority of whom were from Western Nevada College (42; 93%). One faculty member each responded from College of Southern Nevada, Great Basin College, and Truckee Meadows Community College. For the most part, faculty respondents had little familiarity with service-learning with more than half saying they were "not at all" familiar with it (see figure 3).

Seven respondents (17%) had previously used service-learning in their teaching or work with students. Service learning was a course requirement for two of the seven faculty members' courses. Students spent from 3 to 45 hours on their service learning projects. Faculty members reported spending from 2 to 100 hours supervising student projects. Faculty members reported finding assistance for service learning through school districts, a local organization and some individuals

Figure 3. Faculty Familiarity with Service Learning

Very familiar	Quite familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar
7%	2%	36%	55%

with relevant skills. When asked about challenges encountered, three of the five faculty respondents reported having no problems. One mentioned problems with students time and availability, while another faculty reporting difficulties tracking money from fund-raising.

Most faculty respondents (94%) indicated they would "maybe" consider using service learning in the future. When asked what they would need to use service learning, many respondents didn't know what they would need or felt they needed more information about service learning. Respondents anticipated having challenges with students' interest in the project, limited faculty and student time, fit with course content, institutional apathy, and coordination of projects with students' schedules. The

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most frequently mentioned perceived benefit of service learning was "making a difference in the community" (see Table 4). When asked what would cause them to start using service learning or help them use it more effectively, faculty most often mentioned having allocated time for service learning, followed by assistance in finding community service agencies.

Table 4. Faculty Perceived Benefits of Service Learning and Help Needed

Perceived Benefits of Service Learning		Help/Motivation Needed to Use Service Learning	
Making a difference in the community	47%	Allocated time	36%
Greater understanding of social issues	44%	Assistance finding community service agencies	27%
Practical application of course content	42%	Funding for project costs	22%
Increased student motivation	24%	Staff support	22%
Other[1]	4%	Tenure credit	4%
		Other[2]	9%

[1]Need more information; not sure there are benefits. [2]Getting interested volunteers; ideas for projects/community needs; more information about service learning

Conclusion

The findings discussed in this brief, along with the additional evaluation documents, support the conclusion that the Nevada Volunteers Higher Education Service-Learning Initiative was successful in its mission to increase opportunities for students to engage in service learning at higher education institutions in Nevada. The project was most successful in connecting with community partner organizations and college students. Capacity of community partner organizations to work with college students was increased through the project. Student participants found the project to be very beneficial in increasing their own motivation to volunteer and their leadership skills. Additionally, many were able to reach other students on campus to educate them about service learning and volunteering. It proved to be more challenging to connect with the higher education institutions. While little support for service learning was found institutionally, connections were made with individual faculty interested in service learning at various institutions across the state. Hopefully, the networks and connections made through this project will lead to increased use of service learning in Nevada and eventual increased institutional support for it at all the Nevada higher education institutions.

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