# Understanding the Possible Impact of a Community Service Learning Experience during University on Career Development

Mark Baetz, Chris McEvoy, Keith Adamson, Colleen Loomis
Wilfrid Laurier University

## Abstract

There is general consensus that volunteer and community service-learning (CSL) experiences are important to career development even though research remains unclear on the relationship and about how best to help students make a link between service and career decisions. This study investigated the possible impact of CSL experiences on students' career development among a sample of Canadian university students. Interviews were conducted with students ($N$ = 36) who had completed a CSL component in one or more psychology courses. Responses revealed that there are many factors and stakeholders involved in the relationship between a service-learning experience and career thinking, and different aspects of the experience can affect career choice in different ways. It was also found that students' responses in personal interviews did not always match up with prior responses on a closed-ended survey; 68% gave consistent responses in both the survey and interviews, whereas 26% gave inconsistent responses and all of these participants had initially reported no impact on a survey and then later discussed in interviews how CSL had confirmed a career choice. Further analysis of interview data found a connection between CSL and career thinking either towards or away from confirming a career choice and the type of impact varied by four characteristics: (1) the number of placements, (2) reflection assignments and activities, (3) emotional engagement, and (4) matching/degree of fit between the placement setting and a student's expectations for the placement. A subsequent review of the Campus Compact course syllabi web database of 50 disciplines showed that 8% of syllabi explicitly address work, career, or job issues and these syllabi provide useful
examples of reflection questions for linking the service-learning experience to career development. An important implication for assessing student CSL outcomes is that asking students one direct, closed-ended question to reflect on how a CSL placement has affected career thinking is too simplistic. Our findings may explain the inconclusive and unexpected findings of past research and guide career counsellors and teachers in facilitating reflections that foster student career development.

Career development counsellors play an important role in university settings through their work with students, faculty, and curriculum development and they actively seek to update the tools and resources used in these functions. In addition to administering well-known inventories and conducting interviews with students, a classic tool used is volunteer experience. Since at least the mid-1990s counsellors have been using community service-learning (CSL) (Keith, 1995) both for facilitating career development and to process students' reflections about possible career choices. Yet, research on the relation between CSL experiences and career decisions remains unclear, leaving career counsellors with questions about the role of CSL in career development. Community service learning is an educational approach involving students in a service experience which "is expected to meet community needs and to improve students' learning, growth and development" (Gray, Ondaatje,& Zakaras., 1999). CSL can occur as a graded component in a course or take place outside the curriculum as a non-graded activity such as an "Alternative Reading Week". CSL is most effective when it includes "key elements drawn from experiential education theory, especially developing critical thinking and intentionally facilitating reflection." (CACSL, 2010). As

part of the reflection process, several possible learning outcomes can be considered (Gemmel & Clayton, 2009) and one of the potentially "profound" learning outcomes from CSL involves career development (Franta, 1994, p.132, based on Ellis, 1993).

From the literature, the possibility of a significant impact of CSL on career development seems to have three categories. The first category relates to career choice, i.e., "Service-learning can help students investigate careers they may be interested in and clarify for themselves how interested they really are before they have spent time and money to prepare for that career" (Franta, 1994, p. 132). In other words, CSL enables students to gauge their interest in a particular career by actively experiencing the settings, populations, and organizations associated with that career in order to become more confident about a career choice. One study highlighted the importance of the setting and population involved when it was found that students are more likely to involve themselves in community service "when they intellectually perceive its importance and when they experience (or expect to experience) an emotional connection with the service recipients" (McCarthy & Tucker, 1999, p. 559). Another research study investigating the impact of various contextual and experiential factors influencing career choice found that "learning experiences (e.g. science/math grades) had the most influence on the career choice model…and directly and indirectly affected career choice through self-efficacy, outcome expectations and interests" (Garg, et al., 2010).

A second category of impact relates to career preparation such that CSL can represent a significant learning and skill development experience, which makes the student more qualified and better prepared for a variety of possible ca-

reers. A third type of impact occurred when the CSL placement site offered professional networking opportunities. More specifically, the community partner staff or the staff in a CSL Centre can become a potentially significant addition to a student's "network of career contacts" (Ellis, 1993, p. 131). These contacts may be able not only to provide further guidance about career choices and career preparation, but are also "good sources for reference letters from people who actually know a student's work" (Franta, 1994).

A review of the empirical research on the possible impact of CSL on career development finds that most studies have found an impact, although the focus of most research has been on the impact of CSL on career choice. Eyler, Giles, and Braxton (1997, as cited in Wolff, 2002) sampled 1,500 service-learning students across the U.S. and found that students who participated in CSL were significantly more likely to choose a career in a helping profession than were students who did not participate in CSL. Similar results were found in student self-report surveys that indicated a great proportion of students were committed to community service, working with children and/or educational careers after participating in service-learning (Tartter, 1996). Further, service-learning, as compared to community service in general, was found to be a critical factor in selecting a service career (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000). Service-learning can contribute to an increased desire to pursue service related careers (Astin & Sax, 1998; Jung et al., 1999). In a survey of students in all service-learning courses at their university in 2000, Hodge, Lewis, Kramer, and Hughes (2001) found that 36% of students indicated that service-learning had affected their career plans (i.e., they questioned, confirmed or changed career plans). At another university, surveys of university students in psychology courses with a CSL component/ community placement found that 64% reported an impact on career decisions in 1987, and in 2000, 48 % reported an impact (P. Davock, personal communication, February 14, 2005).

There have also been studies that found CSL did not have a positive impact on career development. In a large scale study, Gray and colleagues (1999) found no association between participation in service-learning and "confidence in your choice of career" and "preparation for your career" as variables under the broader category of "Professional Skills" (p. 40). In a much smaller study, Wolff (2002) found that students in a controlled service-learning project shifted, as anticipated, "from self-focused career motivation to other-focused value motivation" (p. 68) but also unexpectedly became less confident in their ability to engage effectively in career decision-making tasks or activities as measured by all of the subscales of the Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Scale (from Taylor & Betz, 1983). In attempting to explain this unexpected outcome, Wolff speculated that the students "may have realized that they did not gain additional career insight but found enjoyment in their ability to work with children" (p. 69) or they "may have thought of other career opportunities, possibly increasing distress about their careers while decreasing self-efficacy" (p. 69). Another possible explanation for CSL reportedly not having a positive impact on career development may be an absence of an "explicit effort by the instructor to relate the experience to career options" (Batchelder & Root, 1994, p. 354). In this study students reported with a yes or no response that CSL had an impact on career, but this type of response restricts our knowledge because it cannot tell us qualitative characteristics about the impact such as a positive reinforcing effect or a negative effect repelling one from a career.

Overall, the empirical research leaves us with a number of unanswered questions about why different studies come to different conclusions about the impact of CSL on career development, leaving implications for how to use CSL in career counselling. Given the unexpected research results, one question is whether researchers have chosen the most appropriate approaches or taken into account the many contextual and experiential factors which can be involved in assessing possible influences on career choice. Another question is which aspects of CSL might explain why students' career development is affected so differently such that nearly half of the students in a survey report no impact. To develop a more complete understanding of the impact of CSL on career development it appears that research assessments need to move away from using a restricted response option of either "yes or no" when asking about the impact of CSL on one's career choice. The next step in this line of research is to explore how students might (or might not) connect CSL to career decisions such as whether a student questions, confirms, or changes career plans.

In summary, research shows that service-learning experiences impact career development for some students. Research to date has focused mostly on the outcome of whether CSL impacts career choice. No clear evidence has been found that explores how a student may connect CSL experiences to one's career thinking. The current project fills this gap in the literature by asking the following research questions: (1) Which factors play a role in students' connecting CSL experiences with various career decisions? (2) What are the similarities and differences in CSL experiences between students who report making a connection and those that do not?

## Method

This survey study was designed to explore how students link service-learning experience to thoughts about a future career and to compare students who previously reported that a CSL experience impacted their career choice to those students who reported no impact. The study was reviewed and approved by the associated institutional review board for research involving human participants.

### Sampling and Participants

A stratified random sampling strategy was initially used resulting in a smaller than desired sample size so convenient sampling was employed for the replacement sample. The goal was to have 40 participants in the study, 20 from each group (i.e., impact and no impact). We invited 45 students to participate in the study from those students who had completed 1 of the 8 psychology courses offered with a CSL component, which included two third-year courses (psychology of exceptional children, youth and adults and Introduction

to Clinical Psychology) and six courses at the second-year level (3 of these were related to developmental psychology and one course each in abnormal, community, and educational psychology) The sample was selected by students' previous responses on a paper and pencil survey about whether the CSL experience had an impact on career. Those students who had said "yes, it impacted my career" were in one group ($n = 27$) and those who reported no impact were in another group ($n = 18$). Of those 45 students, 19 agreed to participate in this study (11 in the "yes" group and 8 in the "no" group). To increase the sample size we recruited 17 additional students who had completed a service-learning experience; there was no previous record of responses to survey questions for these students. In the end, our sample ($N = 36$) was comprised of a stratified random sample ($n = 19$) and a convenience sample ($n = 17$). Even though the sample is smaller than our original design, in studies using qualitative data gathered through individual interviews this sample size is sufficient and even larger than that in many studies with 10 or 20 participants. All participants were undergraduate university students, both men and women in their second, third, or fourth year of studies who had taken a university course with a CSL component; students' responses differed by year with more advanced students reporting an impact, but subsequent analyses showed that this difference was related to the number of courses taken with CSL rather than year of study alone; it is the case that as the year of studies increased so did the number of CSL courses taken.

**Instrument**

The instrument for data collection in this study was an interview guide with both open- and closed ended questions that asked students to describe the placement and how it may have impacted their thinking about career choices. Sample questions included: Please describe your CSL activity. How, if at all, did learning about yourself through this CSL activity influence your thinking about career choice? How, if at all, did connecting course content with CSL affect your career choice? How, if at all,

did working with this population through your CSL placement apply to your thinking about career choice? Is there anything else that might have influenced your thinking about career?

**Procedure**

The initial sample was identified (as specified above) and invited via email and telephone to participate in the study. For the replacement sample, potential participants were invited through announcements made in class and by oral invitations made in the hallways near classroom entries. Interested students provided contact information and the research assistants followed up with them to schedule an interview. Participants signed a consent form, engaged in an individual interview, which lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes, and received $10 compensation. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim into text. Data were managed using the NVivo 7.0 software package.

**Analysis**

Analyzing these data was an interactive and iterative process that, although non-linear, may be presented as three different analyses conducted. A first type of analysis included reading all transcripts ($N = 36$) to understand in general how students connect service-learning to their thinking about a future career. All 36 transcripts were analyzed using open coding with a priori defined themes that corresponded directly to the research questions, as well as for themes that emerged from the data. This approach required multiple readings of a transcript. This open coding was performed by teams of two research assistants with each one first reading and coding the text independently then meeting to review their codes and to develop a consensus code for each selected section of text (i.e., a code with 100% inter-rater agreement). A definition and summary for each code was written and representative quotations (i.e., raw data) were noted. Next, axial coding was performed to look for relationships among the codes. Related codes were grouped together to form a theme. Finally, the themes were compiled to document how students link their service-learning experiences to

their career considerations. A second step involved analyzing the 19 cases with previous data for consistency across survey data and interview data. In a third type of analysis, we compared responses of students who reported that their CSL experience had influenced their career thinking to those students who said it had not. Again, consensus coding was used this time among three data analysts.

**Findings**

With the combined sample ($N = 36$) we found five themes that emerged as influential factors on students linking CSL experiences with thinking about a future career: (1) personal skills development and a match with their interests; (2) satisfaction with their placement; (3) family; (4) friends; and (5) CSL experiences that reinforced previous experiences. In the first section, these themes are reported in order of descending importance in the data (e.g., the first theme is the most prominent finding). Quotations are used as illustrations and the number following a quote indicates a particular research participant.

Half of the students ($n = 18$) reported that the degree of match, or relative closeness, between a student's skills and interests and characteristics of a CSL placement were important to influencing career thinking.

> It kind of strengthened the way I feel about kids, so now I know that I actually do really want to work with them because there's an autistic kid and like, the way I saw him, I just felt that there was more that somebody could do for him…and it's just something I really want to do…I didn't know I cared so much and I just kind of figured that out. (#36)

> Early on I realized I enjoyed helping people deal with emotional situations…and I was good at it, and I had the patience and the trust…and I give good advice and people like that…and I thought if I can do this and make money doing it, then that would be ideal. (#21)

Many of the participants ($n = 10$) explicitly commented that they were satisfied with their placement experience. They mentioned that their placement provided an opportunity to gain experiential knowledge of a particular work environment, the clientele, and the work activities of their chosen career. Other participants commented that their placement experience provided an opportunity for a process of elimination for career choices or that they enjoyed the placement setting but would choose a different population for their future career. Overall, students found that their contact with staff and other volunteers within their placements influenced their career thinking. For example, students appreciated how staff created a family-like atmosphere and demonstrated overall enthusiasm and passion for their work. Staff also provided supportive relationships including tangible support such as writing letters of recommendation.

> Do you know what I mean, like I did a suicide intervention program, and I did a first aid program, and just stuff like that really helped. I mean interacting with volunteers is always helpful, too, because they have the same interests that you do. (#11)

> It's a very tight knit relationship between the volunteers and the staff. It's a very small school, so I think there is like . . . eight or nine teachers, so it, it's very tight knit, family… and I liked that idea. (#1)

Another influence on career thinking is family. Familial influences on career choice were mentioned by 27% ($n = 9$) of the participants. Students often discussed that their parents or family members were involved in a particular career, which the students now found interesting after completing their CSL placement. Several participants also mentioned that discussions with family members positively reinforced career interests.

> I think that if my parents hadn't have pushed me, then, that is probably the biggest in-

fluence because I don't think without that I would be that interested … So you know they were always just trying to push me to do the best that I could do. So they were definitely my first and biggest influence on that I would say. (#4)

> Just that, my dad was a teacher, and so that was what actually drove me towards this career, and then actually having two volunteer positions helped me confirm that yes, this is what I want to do. (#34)

> I think it would be interesting with like my Kin degree and a Psych minor, um, it's a good background to get into graduate school and I want to have a career sort of in the health field but, not physiotherapy, um, I don't know, it was one of those options that my mom mentioned and I thought well, I'll try speech language…that's interesting I guess. (#15)

A few participants ($n = 4$) mentioned that their peers positively reinforced their career thinking by telling them that they had the skills to be successful within their placement environment. Participants' also mentioned that working with their friends who shared the same career interests helped to create connections and deepen interest in a particular career.

> Ah, well I didn't, at first I guess, I didn't really consciously decide that, people were just saying: "Oh you'd really make a really good teacher", you know, so then I said, oh, I don't want be a teacher…And then you know, I got in, I don't know, it's probably half way through high school and I started volunteering and doing things like that, and then realized that I really liked it, and it did kind of suit my personality. (#4)

> Like a couple of my friends….they're really involved in the community as well, so I see them like being

so devoted to their jobs and I'm just like "Man, I really want to be that person too. (#16)

Some of the participants, 8% ($n = 3$), also reflected on how having had previous experiences that were similar to those in the CSL placement reinforced their ability to perform within that particular context.

> I've worked with kids before, but always a much like younger group (e.g., toddler, even infants, up to two, three, four years old) but never in a public school setting. And I found a lot of the things that I didn't realize would translate did, kind of in fact, translate over pretty well…So maybe I gained some confidence because I realized that some of the skills are more generalizable than I thought they were, as long as your conscious of the age bracket you were working with and make it appropriate. (#32)

In closing the presentation of the findings for the first research question, analysis of interview data resulted in five themes emerging as influential on students' thinking about their future career.

Now, we turn to findings for the second research question exploring similarities and differences in CSL experiences between students who report making a connection and those that do not. First, we found that students' ($N = 19$) responses in their interviews did not always match up with their prior responses on a closed-ended survey. Of the 19 students, 68% ($n = 13$) gave consistent responses in both the survey and interviews, whereas 26% ($n = 5$) gave inconsistent responses and those five individuals had said no impact on the survey but when interviewed said that the CSL experience confirmed their career choice. (Note: The total percentage is 94 because one participant is not included in these calculations because of reporting both yes and no impact for multiple placements.) Of those students checking "yes" on a survey about CSL

impacting career choice (*n* = 11), 100% gave interview responses consistent with their survey responses. Of those students checking "no" on a survey about CSL impacting career choice (*n* = 8), 63% (*n* = 5) gave interview responses inconsistent with their survey responses. Students who had initially said there was no impact on a survey discussed in interviews how CSL had confirmed a career choice.

> I think it confirmed a lot of the traits that I knew I had, because I worked with young children a lot before…Things like being capable of carrying for young children, patience, compassion, those are things I think just confirmed them, not that I found that they were new, but they just sort of renewed them. (#17)

> I think it was just a good experience…you get to just go and hang out with kids and it really brightens their day…it makes you feel a lot better like I always left there feeling great and it was a really good experience. It definitely taught me that I want to focus on other kids. (#31)

Another finding is that even in interviews students sometimes go back-and-forth between yes and no responses about how a CSL experience may have impacted career thinking.

> Actually, no [impact on career] because I knew that I wanted to be a teacher ever since I was very young, and so these experiences helped me to confirm that yes, this is what I want to do. (#34)

Given the finding that interview data were more credible than a single-item with a yes or no response and in order to increase the validity of our data we expanded the sample size to include the entire sample (*N* = 36). Using a grounded theory technique we first divided students into two groups based on whether or not CSL had impacted their career thinking. Ninety-two percent (*n* = 33) reported that CSL had impacted their career thinking and 6% (*n* = 2) re-

ported no impact or indecision about an impact, with one participant who reported both: an impact for one CSL experience but not for another. Further analysis of those who reported an impact revealed that there were two distinct subgroups—CSL had confirmed either towards (61%, 22 of 36) or away (31%, 11 of 36) from a career choice. Given these findings, we regrouped the sample from two to three groups before comparing the groups to examine how CSL experiences may have differently impacted career thinking.

A comparison across three groups revealed four themes that emerged as characteristics that differed among the groups: (1) the number of placements in which students had been enrolled; (2) reflection activities and assignments; (3) level of emotional engagement; and (4) choice/matching.

### Number of Placements

When analyzing interview transcripts across the groups there was a noticeable difference in the number of service-learning placements completed. For the undecided category no students indicated that they had completed or been enrolled in more than one class with a service-learning placement during their time as an undergraduate. In the confirmed-away impact group 27 % (3 of 11) of the students indicated that they had engaged or were currently engaged in more than one service-learning placement. Within the third group, students who indicated confirmed towards a particular career, 45 % (10 of 22) indicated that they had or were currently engaged in multiple service-learning placements.

### Reflection Activities & Assignments

Only students in the confirmed-towards group mentioned reflection assignments and activities as a part of their service-learning experience; none of the students in the other two impact groups mentioned either reflection assignments or activities. Students in the confirmed-towards group discussed how the reflection activities helped them to connect their placement experiences to course and class material, linking theory to action:

> I saw both…individual learning along with [the] community school environment [*the location of the CSL placement*] that we were learning in class so yeah it definitely went hand in hand. (#31)

Another student who felt the CSL experience impacted career noted that the placement provided a tangible example for theories presented in the classroom:

> [ I ] Think it's really so important, especially because, you know, psychology classes are…about helping people… it really gives you real world experience and able to see the theory in action. (#10)

### Level of Emotional Engagement

When students were discussing their awareness regarding the needs and resources of their placement organization/community, or their learning about themselves, a difference was found in the language students used to describe such awareness. Students who indicated that their placement had impacted their future career choice towards a particular career were found to use more emotional and expressive language. In other words, students in the confirmed towards career group used language that reflected a higher level of emotional engagement in describing their learning about the community needs and resources. For example, one student commented:

> I feel like the first time I went and I called my dad and I was crying, I was so upset, and I was like 'these people have so little and I have so much'…like this is how much I want to be there for them…it tells you about you, about who you want to be…it just reaffirmed, kind of, what I want to be, in working with the elderly. (#3)

Students in the undecided and confirmed-away groups did not express emotional connections. They discussed more skills development and learning with some emotional distance.

We learned to withhold judgements… and the other thing is just to try to be a bit desensitized but still sympathetic. (#21)

So I think the placement better helped me to understand how kids are, how they interact, and how to interact with them. (#20)

**Choice/Matching**

When students discussed their experiences within their service-learning placement, they talked about the extent to which a match existed between their personal expectations and the type of client, population, or organization in which they were engaged. Participants discussed their placement settings in distinct ways that matched their impact category. Within the categories, students often described their placement settings in similar ways; across categories there was a noticeable difference in the ways in which participants discussed their placements.

Students in the undecided group communicated that their thinking about their future career was likely not influenced by their placement experience. For example, some of the participants discussed that they already had a future career in mind. In contrast to the undecided group, participants in the confirmed-away group discussed their placement experiences largely in relation to what they perceived was a hectic or stressful work environment.

[in the placement] I found the classes were definitely oversized. I found that the teacher was doing a lot…So at times I felt, those children who needed extra means, or more attention, who tended to not be on top, or have just, you know, little problems...they definitely didn't get the attention that they needed. (#20)

Many students in this category often recognized the lack of adequate resources to address community/client needs, and the stressful work environment that resulted. Students often commented on lack of resources in classrooms to adequately facilitate learning, oversized classrooms and

teachers not having enough time to devote attention to students who needed it. Students in this group also described how non-profit organizations often struggle with minimal budgets to provide their services.

Because it takes a lot of money to run a place like that; and it's not coming through the memberships. So I just kind of, in my eyes, took me out of my bubble. (#15)

Well, just in terms of what supplies and stuff the teachers need; the fact that they don't have a lot of help in the class room. There are public students that don't speak any English, so it was hard to even get them to talk during class, so just a lot of quality resources and really just a lot of English as a second language. (#2)

Another finding within the confirmed-away category was that there was a mismatch between what students were expecting and what students experienced. Some of the students in this category commented that they liked their placement and the clients they served, however, for their career choice they would modify one or both of these characteristics. For example, students in classroom placements often referred to liking the youth, but would pick a different age to teach.

So for me though I think I learned that I knew that I wanted to be a teacher but I don't think that I want to go that young . . . . [I] learned that I like teaching…like not that I didn't think I liked kids…but I really like kids…like possibly like as a career…like I go into teaching like, at the junior level. (#26)

In contrast, students in the confirmed-towards group discussed their experiences in relation to how their placement context matched their needs, values, and goals. They described their service-learning context as familial and tight-knit, facilitating a productive placement experience that was congruent with their expectations.

It's a very tight knit relationship between the volunteers and the staff…and I liked that idea…that's why I came to (this university): small, its more intimate, it's tighter knit…that's the kind of job that I like; I like interaction with people, and …building relationships with people. (#1)

I think that every placement I've done has influenced my learning and what I want to [do]…like I never would have thought of doing a project with single mothers but, this group was really influential and I wasn't really considering teaching to be an option until this year, so I thought 'Okay, I'll do this placement and see what it would be like to teach this specific age or this specific population, I guess.' And they were great, so I really want to go into that. (#3)

**Discussion**

Most students involved in CSL report that CSL experiences impact their career development. Students' thinking on career issues is impacted by other volunteers and staff in the community partner, parents, peers, past CSL experiences, and their personal skills and interests. These multiple sources of influence may explain the inconclusive and unexpected findings in past research. Students may not always recognize a connection between CSL experiences and career decision-making because there are many influential factors on career development. Some influences may be more easily perceived such as being in the exact setting of a selected future career, while other influences may be less noticeable such as in cases where a CSL experience may be confirmation of skills or traits which then in turn confirms a career choice. This combination of direct and indirect influences was also identified by Garg and colleagues (2010).

One important finding is that students are not always aware of a link between a CSL experience and how they think about selecting a future career. When students were asked whether a

CSL experience had impacted their thinking about career and were given a yes/no option for a response many of those who say no when asked for more information in an open-ended style question report some sort of confirmation of a career. One possible explanation for the different responses may be that students may not understand that "impact" may mean confirming towards or confirming away from a career. Further confusion could arise if some aspects of the CSL experience confirmed towards a career and other aspects confirmed away from a particular career. Another possible explanation is that the awareness of or a connection to experiences may be delayed such that students who initially respond that there is not an effect of CSL on career thinking later realize that the CSL experience shapes career decisions. A third possible explanation is research method bias. Such bias may exist because assessing an impact of CSL on career thinking with a yes/no response is too simplistic and it may be that qualitative analysis is needed "to uncover the sources and content of what is learned through service" (Hedin, 1995). For example, it is clear from our findings that students may encounter challenges in clarifying links between the actual CSL experience and career thinking. Future research can test for method bias by administering the two assessments simultaneously, rather than sequentially as done in the current study, and in using qualitative approaches attending to disentangling seemingly contradictory (e.g., no it did not have an impact and then yes, it did) reports from research participants.

Influences of CSL on career thinking are based, in part, on prior influences. Clearly some influences are occurring before a CSL placement begins. Yet, the CSL experience plays a role in reinforcing previously entertained ideas. In addition to playing a reinforcing role, CSL placements provide other influences that shape career thinking. Findings from this study suggest that CSL experiences may act as a subtle confirmation or as one step in a continuum of confirmation of a career choice.

Another possible explanation for the range of previous research findings on the impact of CSL on career decision-making may be due to the variability of the use of reflection exercises that tie the learning placement to career thinking. Our findings show that reflection activities and assignments played a key role in students' ability to make concrete connections between their CSL placement and career thinking, and previously authors have mentioned that some instructors do not have an explicit reflection component for career thinking (Batchelder & Root, 1994). Course instructors are concerned with delivering the course content in effective ways, often having students reflect upon their placement in relation to the course material, without relating the content specifically to career development. As a result, some students may not be making explicit efforts to reflect on how their service-learning and classroom experiences are affecting their thinking about a future career. Our findings suggest that in order for career thinking to be influenced students' CSL experiences need to be accompanied by guided reflection.

Findings from the current study also indicate that those students who are positively influenced use more emotionally expressive language when describing their experiences within their placement, which is consistent with an earlier study's findings (McCarthy & Tucker, 1999). In our study, students personally affected by client issues are more likely to connect their CSL experience with an impact on their career thinking than students who do not feel an emotional connection to their placement. Through this heightened level of understanding and exposure to social issues, students are able to appreciate more fully the many challenges faced by their clients. Furthermore, not only do students appreciate client issues, but through the placement, they are given opportunities to engage themselves in ameliorating client situations. Our study's findings reinforce previous research on this point which found that students who engaged in service-learning have an increased inclination to engage in careers which involve helping people or alleviating social issues (Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; as cited in Wolff, 2002).

**Limitations and Implications**

Of course, our study has limitations to consider. We were unable to reach the designed stratified sample. This smaller sample size of 19, however, did lead to an interesting and potentially significant finding about how students who may initially report no impact may have been impacted. On a slightly different note, this study had a small sample of non-impacted students, so findings from this part of the study should not be generalized.

Our findings have a number of implications for future research, career counselling, service-learning programming, and maximization of student outcomes. An important implication for assessing student CSL outcomes is that asking students one direct, close-ended question to reflect on how a CSL placement has affected career thinking is too simplistic. There are likely to be many factors at play that a student will need to consider in answering such a question. In future research a more finely tuned assessment would ask a series of questions based on the possible roles and impacts of the various stakeholders potentially involved in the CSL process. In addition, asking open-ended questions such as "How was your career thinking impacted?" or "What aspects of your CSL experience moved you toward or away from a particular career?" would help generate more in-depth responses than a closed-ended question with a commonly used dichotomous response set (e.g., yes/no). In order to understand more fully which processes and characteristics of service-learning programs affect student career thinking, career counsellors and researchers must ask multiple open-ended questions in order to illuminate the many different direct and indirect relationships associated with service-learning that affect students' career decisions.

Our findings also have implications for future service-learning practices in order to maximize student outcomes. Reflection processes can be of a concrete or abstract nature, with concrete processes often associated with future actions to be considered or taken (Burke, Scheuer, & Meredith, 2007). Reflection assignments and activities incorporated into course syllabi and service-learning coursework, delivered by

faculty that facilitates students making-concrete connections among their placement experiences, experiential learning, classroom learning, and their career thinking, will yield a higher degree of connection between a CSL experience and a career choice. In order to maximize student outcomes, explicit efforts must be made on the part of both direct and indirect stakeholders of the service-learning process to relate student experiences and learning to desired outcomes such as classroom leaning, skill development, and career thinking. Career counsellors can use this information and help students connect their CSL experiences to career thinking. They may also help instructors develop how CSL is used and reflected upon in courses. Another implication is that counsellors may further facilitate students' reflections by eliciting emotional language (in addition to rational) with questions about how the experiences made them feel (happy, sad, angry, frustrated, rewarded, gratified, etc.).

Given the role of the teacher as a key stakeholder in the reflection component of the service-learning process, we undertook a further analysis of how teachers of courses with a CSL component may have attempted to make a concrete connection to career thinking as part of the CSL reflection process. This analysis was based on the Campus Compact course syllabi web database with syllabi posted in 50 disciplines. In our analysis of these syllabi we asked three questions: (1) Given the importance of classroom/reflection assignments for ensuring students connect a CSL experience to career development, to what extent do the syllabi include reflection/assignment questions which involve career development issues? (2) Given that there are likely multiple sources of influence involved in connecting a CSL experience to career development, are there reflection/assignment questions dealing with career development which acknowledge multiple sources of influence and if so, what sources are acknowledged? (3) Are there reflection/assignment questions which acknowledge the complexity of assessing the impact of a CSL experience on career choice i.e., certain aspects of a CSL experience may confirm a student's interest in a particular career

choice while other aspects of the experience may move a student away from a particular career choice?

In answering the first question we looked for reflection/assignment questions which referred to career development issues by either using the word "career" or referred to "profession", "professional", "job", "employment", "work" or "occupation". It was found that eight percent (45/595) of the syllabi entries across 21 of the 50 disciplines had reflection/assignment questions which involved career development issues. It should also be noted that some syllabi were posted to more than one discipline so that there were actually only 30 different course syllabi with the career development connection. Overall this small number indicates that generally teachers appear not to be making an explicit effort to connect a CSL experience to career development issues.

In answering the second question we found three examples of reflection questions which specifically identified at least three sources of influence in connecting a CSL experience to career development as follows:

"Your journal should clearly illustrate the connections you are making between the campus community, the service learning community, your specific community partner, the local community, your chosen profession, and the larger society. (Cahill & Philley, 2001)

"(In the journal) … is the recording of thoughts and feelings as one interacts with clients, staff and peers in various ways with growing awareness of one's own qualities and evolving interests in helping and in professional social work." (Fairless, 2001)

"What "teacher skills" did you need to use in this (CSL) project? What knowledge or abilities did you develop as a result of working on this project? What skills or abilities do you now recognize that you need to develop?...How might what you learned about service, social issues or community agencies impact your future teaching of elementary social studies? (Wade, 2008)

In these examples there is clearly a recognition that to fully appreciate how the CSL experience can be connected to career development, multiple sources of influence should be considered. The influences identified in these examples in-

cluded personal interests, skills and knowledge, and contact with peers and staff from the campus and service learning community, community partner staff and clients, and other members of the local and broader community.

In answering the third question we found that questions dealing with career choice were open-ended e.g., "how has this experience affected your (career) plans" (Coplin, 2001). There were no reflection/assignment questions which specifically guided the student to consider whether the CSL experience confirmed a movement either toward or away from a particular career choice. Thus, career counsellors may want to avoid using closed-ended questions as well as open-ended ones that are too broad or vague.

Overall, while relatively few course syllabi made any reference to career issues, in some cases a strong connection was made including specific reflection questions dealing with either a specific career or more general career issues. In other words the level of guidance to career issues among these syllabi varied widely. Future research could explore the impact on student assessment of the impact of CSL on career development in CSL courses because of varying levels of guidance provided through specific CSL reflection questions.

### Conclusion

Limitations notwithstanding, findings from the rest of the study are generalizable to the population of undergraduate students. The impact of CSL on career decisions stands in a complex context of a student's learning about oneself (e.g., skills and values), differences between CSL and volunteer activities, responsibilities, reflection activities and assignments, and learning about the client population served. Our research illuminates that for a majority of students, service-learning experiences can impact career decision-making, and career counsellors, researchers and teachers in courses with CSL will be more likely to find (or foster) this connection using open-ended questions.

### Acknowledgments

### References

Astin, A. W., & Sax, L. J. (1998). How undergraduates are affected by service participation. *Journal of College Student Development, 39*, 251-263.

Batchelder, T. H., & Root, S. (1994). Effects of an undergraduate program to integrate learning and service: Cognitive, prosocial cognitive, and identity outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence, 17*, 341-355.

Burke, M J., Scheuer, M L., & .Meredith, J. A. (2007). A dialogical approach to skill development: The case of safety skills. *Human Resource Management Review, 17*, 235-250.

Cahill, K., & Philley, (2001) "Communication Tech Tutors" available at: http://www.compact.org/syllabi/communications/communication-tech-tutors/3796/ (accessed 20, February, 2010)

Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning, "What is Community Service-Learning?" available at: http://www.community-servicelearning.ca/en/welcome_what_is.htm (accessed 14, September, 2010)

Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., Ridge, R. D., & Miene, P. K. (1994). Matching messages to motives in persuasion: A functional approach to promoting volunteerism. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 24,* 1129-1149.

Coplin, W, (2001), "Methods of Policy Analysis and Presentation" available at:http://www.compact.org/syllabi/public-policy/methods-of-policy-analysis-and-presentation/3919/ (accessed at 20, February, 2010)

Ellis, J.R. (1994). Volunteerism as an enhancement to career development. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 30*, 127-132.

Fairless, B., "Volunteer Experience" available at : http://www.compact.org/syllabi/social-services/volunteer-experience/3944/ (accessed 20, February, 2010)

Franta, P. (1994). Service-learning: A new priority for career centers. *Journal of Career Development, 21*, 131-134.

Garg, R., Kauppi, C., Urajnik, D., & Lewko, J. (2010). A longitudinal study of the effects ofcontext and experience on the scientific career choices of Canadian adolescents. *Canadian Journal of Career Development*, *9*(1), 15-24.

Gemmel, L., & Clayton, P. (2009). "A Comprehensive Framework for Community Service-Learning in Canada", Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning. available at http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/documents/AComprehensive-FrameworkforCSL.pdf (accessed 14, September, 2010)

Gray, M.J., Ondaatje, E.H., & Zakaras, L. (1999). *Combining service and learning in higher education: Summary Report.* (Available from Rand Education, 1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138)

Hedin, D., (1995) "Current Research and Methods of Assessing Community Service" (Available from NYLC Resource Center at www.nylc.org).

Hodge, G., Lewis, T., Kramer, K., & Hughes, R. (2001). Collaboration for excellence: Engaged scholarship at Collin County Community College. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 25*, 675-690.

Jung, G., Tang, J., Piessens, P., Grant, U., Johnson, N., & Murray, H. (1999). Community learning: The reach for health nursing program-middle school collaboration. *Journal of Nursing Education, 38*, 215-221.

Keith, J. F. (1995). Introducing a campus to service learning. *Journal of Career Development*, *22*, 135-139. Retrieved from www.csa.com

McCarthy, A. M., Tucker, M. L. (1999). Student attitudes toward service-learning: Implications for implementation. *Journal of Management Education, 23,* 554-573.

Schwartz, S. H. (1977). Normative influences on altruism. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 10, pp. 221-279). New York: Academic Press.

Sledge, A.C., Shelburne, M., & Jones, R. (1993). Affective Domain Objectives in Volunteer Courses for Postsecondary Teachers. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Sutherland, D., Doerkson, M., Hanslip, T., Roberts, J. Stewart, S. Sagnes, Friesen-Storz, T. (2006). Youth volunteerism: measuring the benefits of community service learning programs. Report. Knowledge Development. Imagine Canada.

Tartter, V.C. (1996). *City College Report to FIPSE*. New York: City College Research Foundation.

Taylor, K.M., & Betz, N.E. (1983). Application of self-efficacy theory to the understanding and treatment of career indecision. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 22*, 63-81.

Vogelgesang L.J., & Astin, A.W. (2000) Comparing the Effects of Service-Learning and Community Service. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 7*, 25-34.

Wade, R, (2008), "Elementary Social Studies", available at : http://www.compact.org/syllabi/education/elementary-social-studies/4198/ (accessed at 20, February, 2010)

Wolff, M., P. (2002). Pre and posttest analysis of a strategic service-learning project. Retreived from Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering Vol 64(6-B), 2003, pp. 2900.