Reflecting on the Student Experience of Community Service-Learning

and Continued Paths in the Non-Profit Sector

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Abstract

Purpose: To understand the relationship between University of Alberta Community Service-Learning (CSL) students who pursue both the Community Engagement and Service-Learning certificate and the CSL paid student internship and their career or engagement paths in the non-profit sector following graduation. **Method:** Adding to extensive literature on service-learning, this study gathered qualitative data through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with CSL alumni. **Results:** This study found that students who participated in sustained CSL experiences during their undergraduate studies continue their commitment to community engagement after graduation. **Value:** Findings provide grounds for continued and enhanced support of the CSL program that is shown to enhance students' skills and knowledge, build capacity for non-profit organizations, and fulfill the University of Alberta's contribution to the public good and meet performance-based funding metrics.

Keywords: Community service-learning, Service-learning, Experiential Learning, Community Engagement, Skill Development, Critical Thinking, Social Responsibility, Non-Profit Sector

Paper Category: Capstone Project

CHAPTER I: Introduction

Community Service-Learning (CSL) at the University of Alberta offers undergraduate students opportunities to link their academic coursework with hands-on learning. This linkage of theory and practice is based within Butin's framework of respect, reciprocity, relevance, and reflection (2010). Among the varied experiential learning opportunities available for students across campus, CSL is a uniquely curricular experience that connects theory and practice. Students who are enrolled in either a CSL designated course or a course with a CSL component spend twenty hours in the community outside of the classroom. CSL partners with over 200 non-profit community organizations in the Edmonton area. Ideally, through these experiences, students contribute to the work of a local community organization and increase their own awareness of the social issues in their community. Through CSL some students are able to deeply reflect on their experiential learning placement and think critically about community issues such as poverty, homelessness, and inequality. These students immerse themselves in uncomfortable and unknown situations; they dig deep, and they make connections. Students who are enthusiastic about this pedagogy can pursue a Certificate in Community Engagement and Service-Learning which demonstrates that they have chosen to spend over 100 hours working with local non-profit organizations throughout their undergraduate academic career. To achieve the certificate, students must complete five CSL courses over the course of their undergraduate degree to demonstrate that they have significantly integrated service-learning into their education. Of the five courses, one must be a "CSL designated" course which explores the practice and pedagogy of service-learning, while the remaining four can be courses in any department that offer a CSL placement.

The CSL administrative office also provides opportunities for students to learn more about experiential learning and the non-profit community through a four-month paid internship. CSL student interns work 10 hours per week over an academic term and act as advocates for the program. These students contribute to the creative work of the CSL program through student outreach, social media, event planning, and building onto the *Faces of CSL* blog. Created in 2012, the *Faces of CSL* blog showcases individuals (students, instructors, community partners) who have been involved with the program through stories and images. The student intern is responsible for interviewing CSL stakeholders and adding their stories to the blog. The combined experience of the certificate and the internship provide professional skill development and in-depth knowledge of the non-profit sector that has the potential to influence either their career or engagement paths.

I hope to articulate a relationship between students who pursue sustained CSL opportunities during their undergraduate studies and their subsequent employment or engagement decisions within the non-profit sector after graduation. The non-profit sector is where students spend their time in CSL placements working with and learning from local community organizations. As "experiential learning" opportunities become buzz words across campus, the University of Alberta CSL program faces growing pressure to distinguish itself as both unique and valuable. By highlighting the specific learning and skill development that occurs within CSL that can lead to both knowledge of and value for work within the non-profit sector, I hope to provide support for the validity and necessity of the program.

Impactful service-learning programs are becoming increasingly vital. The need is three-fold: a growing emphasis for post-secondary institutions to demonstrate how they contribute to the greater good of community (Braunsberger & Flamm, 2013); urgent student needs to obtain both meaningful and practical skills that will help them to be successful in careers after graduation (Altman, Carpenter, Dietrick, Strom, & VanHorn, 2012); and an obligation to address extreme social justice issues such as climate change, homelessness, and reconciliation with Indigenous people (Grain & Lund, 2018).

I have worked with the University of Alberta Community Service-Learning (CSL) program since 2011. Within my role, I work very closely with the CSL students during their internship. Once the students had graduated, I became curious whether these students were continuing their paths, either for personal or professional reasons, within the non-profit sector, and continuing to be deeply involved in their community as they had been as students. Although the CSL program conducts extensive evaluations with instructors, students, and community partners at the end of each academic term, an exploration into specifically the CSL certificate, the student internship and alumni career paths or engagement had never been done. With an ongoing massive restructuring of the entire university administration, coupled with drastic provincial government budget cuts, and an announcement of a move towards a performance-based funding model with experiential learning highlighted as one of the indicators, my research topic is extremely relevant to both myself as a CSL staff member and the whole CSL program. Additionally, as an interest in the concept of experiential learning across campus broadens, there are concerns about a "watering down" of the value CSL, and that a cut to funding and staff within our office may be imminent. Validity of the work that we do and an understanding of the benefits to students is critical.

Additionally, with the COVID-19 pandemic hitting the non-profit sector particularly hard, and a side effect of stay-at-home restrictions that has increased individuals' interest in engagement, this study has potential to both increase capacity for non-profit organizations and meet the public's need for community involvement, albeit virtually, by providing awareness of opportunities within the non-profit sector.

Problem and Research Question

My research question asks: Do undergraduate students who participate in long-term engagement in service-learning opportunities as well as paid internships tend to either pursue employment in the non-profit sector after graduation or display lasting engagement in the community? Specifically, I want to know whether University of Alberta undergraduate students who achieve the Certificate in Engagement and Service-Learning, and are successfully hired as a CSL student intern, go on to seek out employment in the non-profit sector after graduation and if their CSL experiences influence their long-term engagement with social issues in their community.

This research will be useful for the CSL program at the University of Alberta, undergraduate students, and non-profit organizations in the Edmonton community. CSL involvement and working with the CSL office can help provide hands-on skills, knowledge, and experience for students in preparation for careers after graduation. Without CSL opportunities, undergraduate students may not be aware of the work that happens within non-profit organizations or of the opportunities to find meaningful and impactful work within the sector. The CSL community partners within non-profit organizations are considered to be co-educators on social issues in our community who students can learn from directly - learning that is often not covered within academic coursework. Through a qualitative approach of one-on-one interviews with CSL alumni, I hope to understand whether their CSL experiences have assisted them in their educational, career and engagement trajectories, and how they may articulate these program learning outcomes.

CHAPTER II: Literature Review

To get a broad understanding of the current literature on experiential learning, I developed three guiding literature review questions:

LRQ1: What personal and professional skills do students acquire through service-learning?

LRQ2: What do students learn about social issues and civic engagement through their involvement with service-learning?

LRQ3: How do students' service-learning experiences influence their future career paths?

Search Parameters

My research strategy began by broadly searching the University of Alberta's Library portal, Google Scholar, Sage Journals, ERIC, and Campus Compact. Fortunately, there are also many academic journals (e.g. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*) and current conversations through the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC) focused exclusively on service-learning. Additionally, I was able to look internally within the University of Alberta CSL program. Since 2004, CSL has conducted program evaluations on all CSL courses that gather feedback and data from students, instructors, and community partners. This data is compiled into an abridged evaluation report that is posted and publicly available on the CSL website. Lastly, I looked at the projected and documented learning outcomes for

students who participate in the CSL program, and what skills/knowledges/experiences are considered to be beneficial for working within non-profit community organizations.

Eligibility Criteria

With such an abundance of literature on service-learning to work through I identified the following keywords or groupings:

I. Service-learning: community service-learning, experiential learning, community engaged learning.

II. 'Types' of service-learning: anti-foundational, cultural, critical, transformational, social justice, values education.

III. Student experience: learning outcomes, skill development, critical thinking, social change, impacts, citizen participation, civic responsibility.

IV. Career paths: career development, work in the non-profit sector; Millennial career choices, employment outcomes.

To begin the literature review process, I created a spreadsheet of parameters to organize my literature which included: type of resource; date of publication; relevance; methodology; keywords; author reputation; theoretical framework; and bias. When reading through the literature, I summarized each article to 2-3 sentences per article; synthesized key elements; analyzed and broke down those elements; developed main themes (e.g. experiential learning, skill development, career development, et cetera); critically evaluated the findings; and lastly assessed their strengths and weaknesses. As I began to accumulate a very large number of

resources, I switched to the reference management tool *Paperpile* which allowed me to easily sort and label; it felt much more comprehensive than the original spreadsheet I had created.

Discussion of the Literature

Defining Service-Learning

Service-learning has roots back to John Dewey's model of learning through experience (1938), Paulo Freire's education for critical consciousness (1974), and David Kolb's theory of experience as a source of learning (1984). Fundamental to all of these philosophies is the importance of critical reflection and the emphasis on the *process* of learning. Repeated throughout the literature are the key aspects of service-learning: experience, reflection, and reciprocity (Einfeld & Collins, 2008). Broadly, service-learning intentionally shapes learning through hands-on student engagement in activities that address community needs (Dorow, Wolfe, Taylor, Trueblood, & Goebel, 2013). Some scholars draw attention to the three-way benefits of service-learning that include: active student learning, production of new knowledge in the classroom, and enhanced community capacity (Mitchell, 2008). Butin (2010) acknowledges service learning as the "successful linkage of classrooms with communities and theory with practice that improves students' academic achievement, enhances their cultural competence, and fosters a more inclusive and just world" (p. 21).

Basic criteria for CSL centers on '4Rs': respect, reciprocity, relevance, and reflection (Butin, 2010). Students should be respectful of the communities being served; service should not be beneficial only to the student, but to the wider community as well; the service must be relevant to the content of the academic course; and lastly, reflection is fundamental to provide context and meaning to the service (Butin, 2010). The reflection piece of service-learning is so

imperative because that is where the learning occurs and where students make connections or disconnections between theory and practice (Mitchell, 2008). Critical reflection is what is referred to as the hyphen between service and learning (Hullender, et al., 2015) and is what distinguishes service-learning from 'charity' or 'helping' (Ashgar & Rowe, 2017).

Intentionality and Reflection

There is discussion that "traditional" service-learning does not go far enough to create social change and has the potential to create a 'saviour mentality' (Andrews & Leonard, 2018), or be exploitative and only beneficial for students (Ashgar & Rowe, 2017). Ideally, for service-learning to be transformative for students, the experience must be created intentionally and authentically (Goldberg & Coufal, 2009; Coker & Porter, 2015); be reciprocal for both students and community (Andrews & Leonard, 2018; Ashgar & Rowe, 2017); focus on social responsibility over student development (Coker, Heiser, Taylor, & Book, 2017; Gallant, et al., 2017); be longer than one term (Barrera, Willner & Kukahiko, 2017); and include reflection (Hullender, Hinck, Wood-Nartker, Burton, & Bowlby, 2015; Choo, 2019). Conversation has moved to the importance of not simply service-learning but to critical service-learning, transformative learning or social justice education (Mitchell, 2007; Hullender, et al., 2015; Bowen, 2014). Literature points to three main elements that distinguish the different approaches to service-learning (critical over traditional): "working to redistribute power amongst all participants in the service-learning relationship, developing authentic relationships in the classroom and community, and working from a social change perspective" (Mitchell, 2008, p. 50). Social justice education redirects the focus of service-learning from charity to social change and connects awareness to action (Bowen, 2014). Critical service-learning moves students

beyond helping in their communities to transforming their communities (Rosenberger, 2000; Einfeld & Collins, 2008). Grain and Lund propose that by "enacting a social justice approach, service-learning has the potential to empower communities, resist and disrupt oppressive power structures, and work for solidarity with host and partner communities" (2018, p. 3). Critical service-learning allows students to go deeper into social issues and analyze the root causes of inequalities (Kajner, Chovanec, Underwood, & Mian, 2013). Lastly, for service-learning to be transformative for both students and community, it is important to move beyond just critical thinking, towards enacting real change (Butin, 2015).

Post-Secondary Commitment to Campus and Community

In 2016, then University of Alberta President, David Turpin, and the Board of Governors introduced a new institutional strategic plan titled *For the Public Good*. Within this plan, two of the five strategic goals, *Experience* and *Engage,* highlighted the desire to increase experiential learning opportunities for students and increase the institution's engagement with community (*For the Public Good*, 2016). In 2020, the University released a *Community Engagement Consultation Report* that highlighted its ongoing community engagement practices across campus, including community service-learning, "where our students not only gain real-world knowledge outside the classroom, but also build their capacity to do community engaged work" (University of Alberta, 2020).

These goals reflect a growing trend for post-secondary institutions to prove their commitment to both campus and community and respond to increased criticism that they are not doing enough to contribute to the social well-being of community or prepare students adequately for careers by providing more service-learning opportunities across campuses (Braunsberger &

Flamm, 2013). In particular, liberal arts institutions who are faced with declining enrollments and decreased financial support are expanding their experiential learning opportunities to remain viable and competitive (Beck, Boys, Haas, & King, 2017).

The growth in membership of organizations such as Campus Compact is evidence of this trend. Campus Compact is an American coalition of over 1000 post-secondary institutions that "envisions colleges and universities as vital agents and architects of a diverse democracy, committed to educating students for responsible citizenship in ways that both deepen their education and improve the quality of community life" (Campus Compact, 2016). In their 2016-member survey, more than half of respondents identified specific student outcomes for community engagement including: critical thinking, civic learning, engagement across difference, global learning and social justice orientation. Service-learning allows institutions to meet all of the above outcomes but requires properly implemented measurements of data to prove exactly *how* they are contributing to the greater public good (Soria, Mitchell, Lauer, & Scali, 2018); considerations of potential limitations in cost, scope, and commitment for students (Tiessen, Grantham, & Cameron, 2018); and a designated office of service-learning to be best equipped to collaborate with community (Vernon & Foster, 2002).

As higher education is being asked to respond to the emerging needs of a globalized society, institutions are forced to explore innovative approaches to civic leadership education such as service-learning (Kliewer, Moretto, & Purcell, 2016).

"In the last decade, the challenges of issues with crucial components such as gender, identity and diversity global issues in the local, national and global perspective have spread amidst the community at large and particularly among the students. In this view,

this initiative to prepare them with civic responsibility awareness should bring along with encouraging them to harness their individual qualities through experiential learning" (Huda, Mat Teh, Nor Muhamad, & Mohd Nasir, 2018).

Grain & Lund (2018) note that given the current political and social climate (mass immigration, climate catastrophe, gun violence, racism) post-secondary educators have a responsibility to incorporate service-learning with a social justice lens into their curriculum. They stress that service-learning can humanize real-world and/or global issues by creating opportunities for students to engage with real people in the community. They suggest that students themselves are hungry for meaningful engagement that goes beyond volunteerism and 'feel-good' opportunities.

Butin (2010) even calls for a disciplining or departmentalizing of the field of service-learning as the most productive way to spread the scholarship of engagement across the institution where community engagement could be legitimized and sustained. Additional positive effects of service-learning for post-secondary institutions include improved student satisfaction and an increase in a students' probability of graduation (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001). Both of these impacts provide further evidence for institutions to allocate more resources to expand service-learning opportunities for students (Wang & Calvano, 2018).

Student Learning Outcomes and Skill Development

The positive effects of service-learning for students is very well documented. Outcomes include personal development such as self-efficacy, personal identity, empowerment, spiritual growth, and moral development (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Boyd & Brackman, 2012). As well, there are a

variety of social outcomes for students from service-learning experiences such as reducing stereotypes and facilitating cultural understanding (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000); improving social responsibility and citizenship skills (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001); and demonstrating commitment to service (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Hébert & Hauf, 2015).

A meta-analysis by Celio, Durlak & Dymnicki (2011) found that students participating in service-learning demonstrated significant positive gains in five outcomes areas including attitudes toward self, attitudes toward school and learning, civic engagement, social skills, and academic performance. Service-learning also has positive effects on students' interpersonal development and the ability to work well with others, including leadership and collaboration skills (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000). Wang & Calvano (2018) found that when service-learning was effectively incorporated into a course, Kolb's learning stages were met through the hands-on learning, abstract concepts were realized through reflection exercises, and desired learning outcomes enhanced. Bradberry & De Maio (2019) found that experiential learning helped to make course content more relevant and allowed students to develop written and oral communication skills, and the capability to research and analyze. They note that learning by doing also builds 'soft skills' required for successful careers after graduation such as: curiosity, creativity, grit, digital awareness, contextual thinking, and humility. Lucy-Bouler & Lucy-Bouler (2012) found that through signature programs working within the community, such as CSL, students learn transferable and practical skills in: communication, grant writing, financials, marketing, volunteer management, diversity awareness, ethics, risk management, information technology, relationship building, teamwork.

Learning outcomes for service-learning students include the improved ability to apply what they have learned in the "real world", to understand social issues, and to think critically

(Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Goldberg & Coufal, 2009; Hullender, Hinck, Wood-Nartker, Burton, & Bowlby, 2015; Beck, Boys, Haas, & King, 2017; Burch, Giambatista, Batchelor, Burch, Hoover, & Heller, 2019). Service-learning has the potential to create civically-minded graduates who encompass core elements such as: academic knowledge and technical skills; knowledge of volunteer opportunities and non-profit organizations; knowledge of contemporary social issues; listening and communication skills; diversity skills; self-efficacy; and behavioural intentions (Bringle, Studer, Wilson, Clayton, & Steinberg, 2011).

Service-learning and other experiential learning experiences such as internships also provide a valuable way for students to learn more about potential career paths (Eyler, 2009); to demonstrate greater understanding of career-decision-making (Coulter-Kern, Coulter-Kern, Schenkel, Walker, & Fogle, 2013); and to have a greater desire for their career to have a social impact (Seider, Rabinowicz, & Gillmor, 2011).

Community Benefits

While the majority of research on service-learning looks at the impacts on students and effective methods for instructors or facilitators, often very little attention is paid to the community partners who are considered integral stakeholders. Through reciprocal and authentic relationship building between university and community, the community gains access to new resources, the community/university bond is strengthened, and the university helps the community reach its goals (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001). Community partners identify students' skill sets as advantageous to non-profits and value the new networks that service-learning creates for them (George-Paschal, Hawkins, & Graybeal, 2011). Through service-learning, community partners are valued as co-educators and share power with students and

instructors to build collaborative relationships (Mitchell, 2007). Rinaldo, Davis & Borunda (2015) found that service-learning projects are beneficial to the organization because students bring energy and educational expertise and help the organization achieve their mission. Additionally, partners note that they truly value being a part of the students' learning and overall report positive effects of the service-learning relationship. Finally, several non-profit organizations report that without student volunteers through service-learning, most of their programs would be greatly reduced and the number of clients served would decrease (Vernon & Foster, 2002).

Alumni Career Paths

Broadly, students who do service-learning in their undergraduate degree have significantly higher starting salaries, receive raises more quickly and gain full-time status in their first job (Matthews, Dorfman, & Wu, 2015) which demonstrates a positive relationship between experiential learning and competitiveness in the job market (Tiessen, Grantham, & Cameron, 2018). Newman & Hernandez (2011) found that service-learning had a favorable impact on graduates' career plans, helped prepare them for the world of work, and instilled the importance of having a career that involves helping other people. High quality service-learning programs can have positive long-term effects on participants' attitudes, behaviors, career selection, career preparation, skill development, and continued community service involvement (Mitchell, 2018).

Service-learning helps students in their ability to develop the skills and qualifications required to successfully find careers in the non-profit sector such as communication, grant writing, volunteer management and relationship building (Lucy-Bouler & Lucy-Bouler, 2012). Further, sustained service-learning experiences can be directly influential in graduates' career

decision-making toward public service by helping them to build skills such as self-knowledge, confidence, civic responsibility, recognition of privilege, teamwork, communication, and real-world/community awareness (Rose, 2013; Mitchell, 2018). Research by Bradberry & De Maio (2019) demonstrates that participation in service-learning correlates to the likelihood of pursuing graduate studies, graduation rates, employment outcomes, and developing skills relevant to future career success. Alumni of service-learning programs identify the important role that these experiences played in introducing them to prospective careers in the non-profit sector (Altman, Carpenter, Dietrick, Strom, & VanHorn, 2012; Mitchell & Rost-Banik, 2019). Most leaders working within the non-profit sector state that hands-on experience versus formal managerial training helped them to advance within their careers (Suarez, 2010).

My research will look at CSL alumni who graduated within the last 10 years, most of whom are a part of the Millennial generation (born 1980-1995). Studies show that Millennials have greater empathy and interest in affecting change, and value meaningful and fulfilling careers - qualities which would potentially make them a suitable fit for careers in the non-profit, public and social sector (McGinnis Johnson & Ng, 2016). This generation also values social responsibility and shows a high tolerance for diversity, characteristics that suggest non-profit, government/public service work is most suitable for them (Ng & Gossett, 2013).

Lasting Engagement

There are over 25,000 non-profit organizations in the province of Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2018) who are facing an increased need for services despite also suffering from decreased resources (Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, 2018). The current demand for an awareness and engagement of social issues is critical and highlights the need for an

understanding of the long-term impacts of service-learning. Studies show that students who volunteer during their university studies are twice as likely to volunteer after graduation (Newman & Hernandez, 2011). As well, undergraduate service participation encourages students to become more socially responsible, more committed to serving their communities, and more empowered (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999). The practice of reflection, critical to service-learning, also has lasting effects on graduates' civic and professional lives. Benefits of a continued practice of reflection include improved quality of work, understanding of their own social identities, and commitment to community action (Mitchell, Richard, Battistoni, Rost-Banik, Netz, & Zakoske, 2015). Moely (2018) found that service-learning enhanced alumni interest and participation in community engagement after graduation and increased their feelings of self-efficacy about their capacity to contribute to positive change.

Key Findings

The literature reveals that service-learning is an effective pedagogy for institutions to connect campus with community; for students to develop critical thinking and professional skills; and for community to increase their resources, connections, and contributions to student learning. For the impacts of service-learning to be meaningful and long-lasting, engagement must be intentional, reciprocal, reflective and longer-term. Service-learning can influence future careers paths and continued civic engagement in community.

Limitations

Much of the literature focuses on impacts for students over community. I believe there is more to learn from the experiences of community partners who work with students and how these relationships can be fostered to create connections to careers for students in the non-profit

sector. As well, the literature I have gathered shows a gap in the negative impacts of service-

learning and how it may be harmful for students, institutions and/or community partners.

CHAPTER III: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

Since 2004 the University of Alberta CSL program has conducted evaluations of all CSL courses at the end of each academic term. These evaluations are completed by students, instructors and community partners to gauge the success and limitations of their service-learning experience. While these evaluations are robust and ambitious and provide the program with comprehensive data, both quantitative and qualitative, there has not been a specific study done on the relationship between student interns, the certificate recipients, and employment and/or continued engagement in the non-profit sector.

My research study hopes to understand a relationship between students who have a breadth of experience with the CSL program, including the certificate and the internship, and future professional paths or continuing engagement within the non-profit sector. My hope is that this research will provide strong evidence for the value of CSL as an important and critical unit for students at the University of Alberta who experience this pedagogical approach, and for non-profit organizations within the Edmonton community.

This research provides the opportunity to share the important benefits that community service-learning has for both students and the community. The purpose of this research is to contribute to the awareness of CSL as an approach to learning and development, and to explore the impact the CSL experience has on future work choices. Lastly, this research intends to provide grounds for how students can develop professional identities within CSL experiences

and how CSL can cultivate enhanced meaningful employment and engagement opportunities within the non-profit sector.

My research will be guided by a constructivist perspective. With roots in Piaget, constructivism centers on the belief that there are multiple realities that are socially constructed as learners assign meanings to their observations (Merrigan, Houston, & Johnson, 2012). This theory focuses on the learners as the creators of their knowledge based on their experiences. "The constructivist perspective posits that knowledge is not passively received from the world or from authoritative sources but constructed by individuals or groups making sense of their experiential worlds" (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 162). A constructivist theory may support the idea that service-learning can provide a unique and positive context for students to construct knowledge and understanding (Hecht, 2003). Through this constructivist perspective I hope to understand how students make sense or meaning through their experiences and observations that occur within their CSL placements and then apply that to future choices.

My research strategy uses qualitative data collected through semi-structured online interviews with CSL alumni who have both achieved the Certificate in Community Engagement and Service-Learning and been employed as a CSL student intern during their undergraduate studies. I originally intended for in-person interviews, but transitioned to online Zoom interviews due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

My research methodology centres on narrative inquiry, or the understanding of experience. "Narrative inquiry begins in experience as expressed and told stories. The method and the inquiry always have experiential starting points that are informed by and intertwined with theoretical literature that informs either the methodology or an understanding of the experiences with which the inquirer began" (Clandinin, 2007, p. 5). Through narrative inquiry I

hope to understand how these alumni make meaning out of their CSL experiences and how that might lead to social action such as acquiring new knowledge, changing career paths, continuing volunteer work, et cetera.

Design

I used purposive sampling of CSL alumni who had both achieved the CSL certificate and worked as a CSL student intern. Purposive sampling is used as a way to obtain the best information by selecting items or people most likely to have the experience or expertise to provide quality information and valuable insights on the research topic (Denscombe, 2014). A sample is selected based on the relevance to the research issue and the knowledge of the topic. "The advantage of purposive sampling is that it allows the researcher to focus on the people or events which there are good grounds for believing they will be critical for the research" (Denscombe, p. 41).

My research study was designed using a qualitative data approach collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews (SSI). The semi-structured interview allows for qualitative description. Interviews, in contrast to surveys, provide more depth and complexity to the data including opinions, feelings, and emotions (Adams, 2015). It is a flexible tool to capture the ways people make meaning of their experiences (Denscombe, 2014). I wanted to provide a rich description of University of Alberta CSL students' experiences to understand the long-term effects of these experiences and their possible impacts on future career decisions and/or continued community engagement.

The SSI allows the researcher to gather subjective responses from individuals regarding a specific situation or phenomenon they have experienced. It is an effective tool to use when there is sufficient objective knowledge about an experience, but inadequate subjective knowledge

(McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The SSI combines both closed- and open-ended questions, followed by why or how questions. Advantages of semi-structured interviews are that they allow the researcher to use a guide of topics of interest versus a strict schedule (Merrigan, Huston & Johnston, 2012) and provide the opportunity for the conversation to develop organically (Denscombe, 2014). "The dialogue can meander around the topics on the agenda—rather than adhering slavishly to verbatim questions as in a standardized survey—and may delve into totally unforeseen issues" (Adams, 2015, p. 493). Finally, the SSI allows the individuals being interviewed to: "develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher. The answers are open-ended, and there is more emphasis on the interviewee elaborating points of interest" (Denscombe, 2014, p. 175).

Some disadvantages of in person interviews can include cost, time and travel; however, the COVID-19 restrictions actually made the one-on-one interviews very feasible due to low cost, accessibility, and flexibility.

Participants

Since 2004, nearly 12,000 students have participated in CSL courses at the University of Alberta (CSL Annual Reports, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020). Since 2009 over 300 of these students have achieved the CSL certificate (Office of Alumni Relations). I wanted to connect with students who have a breadth of experience with the CSL program, uniquely the combination of the certificate and the internship. I hoped to understand if these experiences guide students towards professional and/or community engagement paths within the non-profit sector.

The inclusion criterion of participants specifically included all CSL alumni who have both received CSL Certificate and have been hired as CSL student interns. Students were

recruited spanning the beginning of the implementation of the CSL student internship (2012) up to the year 2020. All participants were people 18 years and over and included a variety of ages, genders, and ethnic backgrounds. Student emails were obtained via CSL program records and confirmed with the University of Alberta Alumni Relations records. Risk to interview participants was minimal since all of the participants had already received their CSL certificate, had graduated from the University of Alberta, and were no longer employed by the CSL office. If any participants had been having difficulty finding employment since graduation, some questions may have potentially caused slight discomfort.

At all stages of the research process participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the option of withdrawing from the study, and any potential risks or benefits. Written and/or electronic consent was obtained for interviews and steps were taken to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants including the removal of any identifying information from all data collection strategies, during data analysis, data storage, and dissemination/publication. Interviewees were assigned aliases such as 'Student 1', and the transcriptions used these same assigned aliases or roles. All data was stored in a secured and locked location, accessible only to myself and my supervisor. Names and ID numbers were destroyed once all data had been collected and interview transcripts will be destroyed five years after data collection, except for those participants who have consented to being contacted at a later date for follow-up research, in which case this information will be destroyed after seven years or after an individual has been contacted for further participation, whichever comes first.

Benefits to the participants include the opportunity to contribute to the continued development of the CSL program and to increase knowledge about the value of CSL to a broader community. By reflecting on their past CSL experiences, participants have the opportunity

to apply critical thinking, communication skills, leadership skills, and problem-solving skills, to practical post-graduation areas such as increased social citizenship, and career preparation/development.

Setting

Initially interviews were planned to be held on the University of Alberta campus at the CSL offices housed in the Arts and Convocation Hall building. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all research was scheduled remotely online via the Zoom platform. I had originally chosen the CSL offices because they were a familiar location for both myself as the researcher and the participants who had previously worked at the location. There is a large, private meeting room where the interviews could have taken place with easy access to washrooms and a kitchen where refreshments could be prepared. I had anticipated this familiarity would create a positive level of comfort for participants.

Face-to-face interviews were originally considered because of their personal nature. Through in person interviews it is easier to create a climate of trust or positive ambience and interviewees may be willing to share more detailed information (Merrigan, Huston & Johnston, 2012). The researcher can also closely monitor any social cues such as intonation, facial expressions, and body language. In face-to-face interviews, "the interviewer and interviewee can directly react to what the other says or does. An advantage of this synchronous communication is that the answer of the interviewee is more spontaneous, without an extended reflection" (Opdenakker, 2006, p. 3).

In person interviews can be difficult to arrange between the researcher and participants due to conflicting schedules or distant locations. The forced restrictions of the pandemic actually

provided an opportunity to reach more participants more easily via online platforms. Fortunately, the majority of Canadians have access to the internet in their homes or on their phones/devices (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, 2018). As well, modern video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, allow people in different locations to communicate using audio and video imaging in real time. Additional strengths of online platforms such as Zoom include convenience and ease of use; enhanced personal interface to discuss personal topics; accessibility; and time-saving with no travel requirements (Gray, Wong-Wylie, Rempel & Cook, 2020). Advantages specific to Zoom are that it does not require participants to have an account or download a program; has screen-sharing abilities for both the interviewer and participants; includes password protection for confidentiality and recording capacity to either the host's computer or Zoom's cloud storage; and automatically saves the interview into both audio only and a combined audio video files (Zoom, 2021).

Any considerations that online interviews would feel impersonal and distant were quickly alleviated. Building rapport with the participants was enhanced due to both our CSL relationship history and the fact that everyone was experiencing the unfamiliarity of the pandemic - participants were very eager and willing to talk. Deakin & Wakefield (2013) noted that researchers who compared face-to-face versus online interviews found the quality of the interviews did not differ and that online participants were often more open and expressive.

A different option for gathering data that I considered was establishing focus groups of 4 to 8 participants that would potentially take advantage of group dynamics and encourage discussion. Kidd & Parshall (2000) suggest that because focus groups are both interpersonal and interactive they have potential to produce information that might not be gathered from a single participant and generate a broader range of views. However, I didn't want to unintentionally

create any "group think" amongst the participants and wanted to dive deeper into individual experiences to see how or if they were similar to each other. By setting up one-on-one interviews I hoped to create an atmosphere where the participants would feel that they could share their individual experiences openly and in-depth. Additionally, the logistics of scheduling a mutually convenient time for multiple participants to attend the focus groups seemed daunting and time consuming, especially during a pandemic.

Instrument

I used online face-to-face semi-structured interviews as the data collection technique. As mentioned, I had access to participants' email addresses from the office of Alumni Relations so that I could target my specific population of alumni who had both achieved the CSL certificate and worked as a CSL student intern. In the introductory email I stated my position as a graduate student and provided sufficient background information about the research, specifically that I hoped to better understand the relationship between their CSL experience and their employment and/or community engagement paths. Alumni were invited to participate in an online conversational interview with me at a convenient time between July 13th-31st, 2020. I explained that the entire interview would take approximately 30 minutes; to thank participants for their time, each would receive a $25.00 gift card of their choice. I emphasized that participation was completely voluntary and that at any time participants were welcome to decline. To ensure that I captured their words adequately, I notified them that the interview would be recorded and I would be taking notes. I assured them that anything said during the interview would be kept strictly confidential. Lastly, I attached a consent form to be reviewed and accepted before the interview.

I chose interviews because they are an effective tool when "there is a need to attain highly personalized data, there are opportunities required for probing, and a good return rate is important" (Koskei & Simiyu, 2015, p. 109). Because I wanted the interview to be more conversational and flexible I created a semi-structured interview guide with an introduction, declaration of consent, and four main guiding questions with accompanying prompts, probes and checks, followed by a wrap-up. In the interest of full disclosure, I worked very closely with many of the CSL student interns with the exception of during my parental leave so had established a base relationship with the majority of participants. However, these participants had already completed their degree, certificate and internship, and I held no evaluative power over them at the time of interview. Despite the familiarity between researcher and interviewee I was conscious to appear professional and effectively structure the interview so that it was more than just a casual conversation. As noted by Denscombe (2014), I followed the guidelines for being a good interviewer including displaying attentiveness, sensitivity, non-judgement, toleration of silences, and the use of prompts, probes, and checks. Prior to the interview I opened the meeting room 15 minutes ahead of the scheduled time, prepared blank sheets to record notes, and tested the back-up recording application on my phone, *Rev*. *Rev* is an automatic speech recognition system that records audio interviews and transcribes speech to text. Zoom also has a built-in recording capacity which I employed in conjunction with *Rev*. However, to ensure accuracy of the conversation, I planned to have a back-up recording system which also acted as a quick and efficient way to transcribe the interviews. Using *Rev* conveniently allowed for a quick turnaround time where I could anonymize the interviewee's information and send it back for their review.

In the end, online interviews proved to be the most effective technique for my research because they provided a rich depth of information on my topic; I was able to gain valuable insights into students' CSL experiences and I received a higher than anticipated response rate. Both the Zoom and *Rev* platforms were easy and inexpensive to use for myself and the interviewees and provided a much needed degree of flexibility in an unsettling time.

Procedures

The first step before beginning my data collection was the submission of a detailed application to the University of Alberta's Research Ethics & Management Online (ARISE) system in January, 2020. After many edits and guidance from my supervisor, I secured approval to proceed by April, 2020. By this time, the pandemic had widely spread and we were in full lockdown. I was both working from home and home schooling so my research was put on pause until July. That month, I sent an email via the University of Alberta email server directly to all CSL intern alumni who had also achieved the certificate describing the purpose of my research, and issued an invitation to participate in an online interview.

In an effort to increase response rates, I sent a reminder email to any participants I had not heard back from one week after the initial email. Once a participant responded with their preferred time and date, I scheduled a Zoom meeting and sent a calendar invite. I created a spreadsheet of all participants, recorded their interview time, and date, and confirmation that I had received their signed consent form. The calendar invites, which included the link to the Zoom interview, sent an automatic reminder to participants 24 hours before the scheduled meeting. Although the interviews were only expected to take 30 minutes, I scheduled each Zoom session for 1 hour to allow for set up time and any technical difficulties that may occur. Fifteen

minutes prior to the interview time, I opened the meeting, tested my audio recording application, *Rev,* and prepared blank papers for taking notes. I ensured that I was in a quiet, secure location to avoid any distractions or disruptions.

When the participant was logged into the meeting, I greeted them initially and then reviewed my purpose for the study and confirmed their consent. Before beginning my questions, I asked if the participant needed any clarification or had any questions of their own. Despite having previously worked with the interviewees in some cases it had been several years since we had interacted. In order to re-establish rapport, we chatted about the pandemic and coping mechanisms. I then proceeded to follow my interview guide, making sure to keep the conversation going through prompts, and taking notes of key words, pauses, and facial expressions. Taking notes in combination with audio and video recordings can provide supplementary useful information (Denscombe, 2014). Once the interview was over, I thanked the participant and stopped the recordings. I then informed the participant that I would send a transcribed anonymized copy of our conversation for review and asked what type of gift card they would like to receive. I made a back-up of each Zoom interview and stored them in a protected file. The data was catalogued and indexed with a unique label according to the sequence of participants, e.g. "Student 1" or "S1". Through the *Rev* application, the recorded interview was sent off for transcribing and typically was returned within 24 hours. When it was returned I made a back-up copy of each transcription. I then went through each transcript and removed any identifying information such as name and catalogued according to the sequence as above and sent each participant a copy of their transcript for review via email. Original recordings, transcripts of interviews, and digital files were encrypted and kept in a secure

environment. All archived material is under password protection and will be removed once the study is complete.

In my initial exploration of the data, both the transcripts and my notes, I made annotations on any obvious themes that emerged such as: communication; social media; creativity; basic office skills; relationship building; event planning; storytelling; professionalism; "out-of-box thinking". The results were then broken down into smaller units, coded, organized into categories, counted and then analyzed into broader themes. Finally, I looked for broader concepts within the themes and then compared those themes.

The most obvious challenge that presented itself was the pandemic and the subsequent uncertainty of the state of...everything. Schools, campus, and libraries closed preventing access to quiet study spaces where data could be adequately and efficiently analyzed. While I was able to review each transcript directly afterwards, there was a gap between preliminary review and in-depth analysis. This gap extended my initial timeframe to complete a thorough analysis.

Analysis

I analyzed my data using grounded theory. Grounded theory is the discovery of theory from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or the existence of meaning in data (Denscombe, 2014), where data collection and analysis occur at the same time (Charmaz, 2014). In a grounded theory approach, "the analysis requires a detailed scrutiny of the text and involves a gradual process of coding and categorizing the data. The ultimate goal of the analysis is to derive concepts and theories that capture the meaning contained within the data" (Denscombe, 2014, p. 285). It involves an iterative process of looking closely at the data, developing concepts based on the data, and continually comparing and refining those concepts. As Charmaz & Belgrave note: "A

grounded theory of a studied topic starts with concrete data and ends with rendering them in an explanatory theory" (2015, p. 1).

The first step in a grounded theory process is to thoroughly explore the data. After an extended COVID pause, I returned to the interview transcripts to refamiliarize myself with the data. I went back to my notes taken during the interviews and cross-referenced them with the transcripts. Next, I began writing memos. Any new ideas or new interpretations that emerged through revisiting the data were documented as memos to record my analytical thought process. Then I started to code the data (open coding) (Rapley, 2001). My initial interpretation of the raw data led me to unitize the data into "chunks" such as: type of action (pursuing the certificate; looking for work in non-profit sector; engaging in community); shades of opinion (importance of CSL during undergraduate; value of community engagement); particular skills (creativity; communication; relationship building; professionalism); and implied meaning (critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, contributing to social change).

As the codes began to take shape, I looked for relationships or connections between the codes to categorize them according to general ideas and common headings (axial coding) such as: intentionality; value of engagement; skill acquisition; continued engagement. In order to reduce the number of codes and categories, I needed to identify importance and congruence. This process involved comparing, contrasting and refining concepts. Subsequently, I developed six key themes based on significant concepts to provide an understanding of the data (selective coding) which I will detail in the following "Findings" section.

For a research procedure to be considered reliable and valid, the measurements taken need to be logical, comprehensible, defensible, consistent, and accurate (Merrigan, Huston & Johnston, 2012). To address reliability and validity concerns, I considered a constructivist

grounded theory approach that "fosters asking probing questions about the data and scrutinizing the researcher and the research process" (Charmaz, 2017, p. 34). A constructivist approach aligns with my theoretical framework and takes into account not only what is happening within the data, but also within the participants (subject and researcher), and the social, historical, situational contexts of the research. As I reviewed the data and began to develop theory from that data, I felt it was important to look critically at my position not only as a researcher, but also as a CSL team member, and a CSL student supervisor.

As Denscombe (2014) points out, it is important to consider the researcher's 'self', and acknowledge that my identity cannot be entirely removed from the process of analyzing the data. Given my position within CSL, could a different researcher have produced similar results? I believe so, not only because I kept a detailed audit trail of my decision making and analysis process, but also because I only had direct involvement in one aspect of the participants' CSL experience - the internship. To alleviate any appearance of a conflict of interest, it should be made clear that I had no involvement in participants' CSL curricular experience or their experiences after graduation, that the CSL program is not funding my research, and the results in no way affect my position.

Summary

I intended to explore a relationship between students who deeply pursued CSL opportunities during their undergraduate studies and their subsequent employment or engagement decisions within the non-profit sector after graduation. My research question asked: Do undergraduate students who pursue long-term engagement in service-learning opportunities

as well as paid internships tend to pursue employment in the non-profit sector after graduation and/or display lasting engagement in the community?

Through purposeful sampling of CSL alumni who both achieved the CSL certificate and completed a term as a CSL student intern, participants were invited for a one-on-one online interview. Based on the data I gathered through the interviews, I went through the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing any emergent patterns. After ensuring 'fit' within the categories I was able to summarize and form themes based on the students' responses. These findings are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV: Findings and Discussion

Findings

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of my grounded theory approach to analyzing the data collected through semi-structured interviews. To understand the relationship between CSL alumni who have both achieved the certificate and worked as a student intern, and their career paths or continued engagement following graduation, I hosted one-on-one online interviews with thirteen former CSL students (out of a total of nineteen who were contacted). Guided by a literature review of research that explores the benefits of community service-learning, this study gathered first-hand personal experiences from University of Alberta students who pursued sustained community engagement opportunities.

My findings are organized by recurring themes that emerged after in-depth review and analysis of interview transcripts, note taking and memos. I spent time re-familiarizing myself with the transcripts and reviewing each several times before I began to code, categorize, and structure around themes. After a few read-throughs, I initially created codes on a line-by-line method according to prominent areas or "chunks" such as: actions (e.g., choosing CSL courses - C1A), values (e.g., importance of volunteering - C2A), skill development (e.g., critical thinking - C3A), and beliefs (e.g., moral obligations - C4A). Each of these areas contained between 6-10 codes within, which were then grouped into the following categories: history of volunteerism; finding a good fit; recognizing personal privilege; skill development (professional and soft); continued commitment to service; participation in advocating for social change; personal values or morals. Lastly these categories were refined into key concepts or themes including: predisposition; intentionality; deepening knowledge; capacity-building; non-profit engagement;

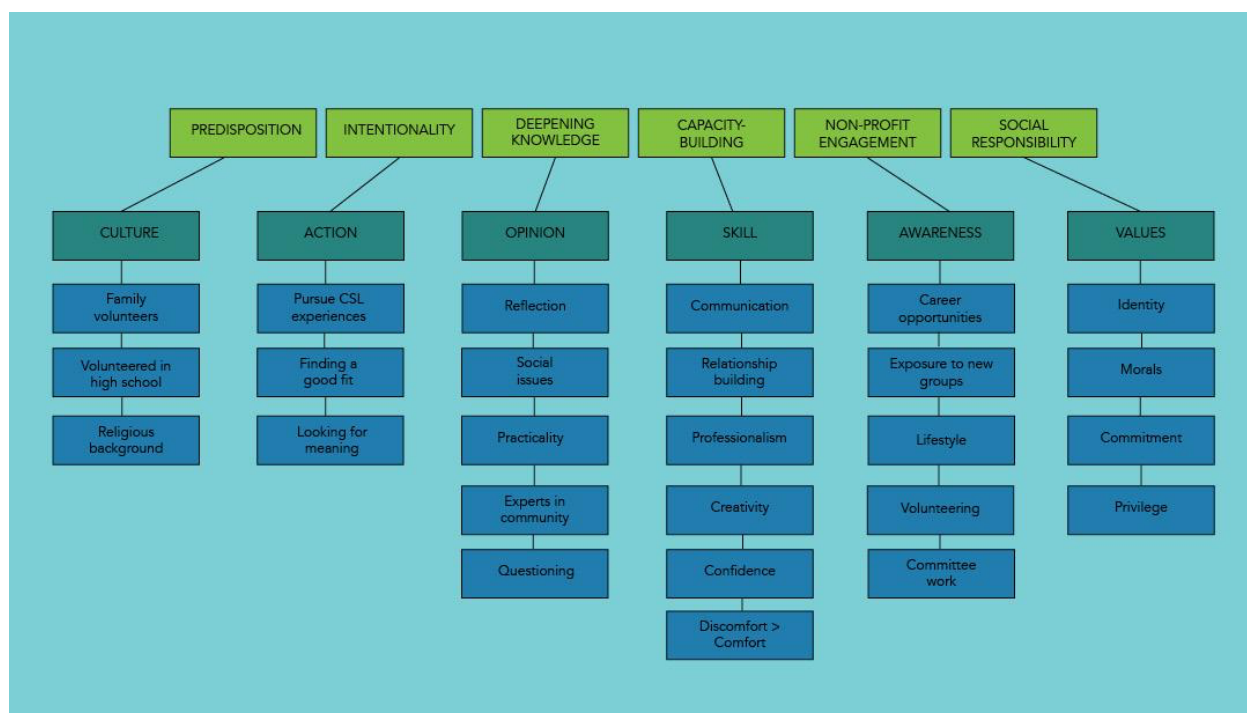and, social responsibility (Figure 1). This section on findings is organized according to these six themes.

Figure 1. Coding Frame

Predisposition

All of the participants indicated a history of volunteerism prior to entering post-secondary education and being exposed to community service-learning opportunities. For some, interest in volunteering came from their parents or family. Noted one participant, "My mom was a lifelong volunteer", and another, "My whole family just...volunteers until they bleed".

Other participants became involved in volunteering through school; said one participant, "Throughout high school, I got really involved, I was sitting on lots of different youth committees and volunteering with so many different programs". Other participants explained that volunteering was connected to their religious beliefs, "My religious community, one of our central tenets is volunteering, so it was just kind of what we grew up with." And finally, some

participants recognized that helping others was ingrained into their culture and community, "The context that I was raised in, is very much, very far away from individualism. Everything is community based. If you move up the ladder, you've got to bring everybody who grew up with you." The data shows that all participants had been exposed to the concept of volunteerism or helping others, so the nature of service was not foreign to any of them. While not unknown to them, this exposure laid the groundwork for these students to pursue engagement opportunities when they arrived at the university.

Intentionality

When participants entered post-secondary, many did not fully know what either 'community service-learning' or 'CSL' meant at first, "This sounds interesting, but I don't know what it is." Others gravitated instantly towards CSL, because it seemed like "a good fit"; for instance when one participant heard 'CSL', they responded, "It just sounded like it was for me". All of the participants spoke of a desire to find more meaning in their studies, and CSL provided that for them: "[CSL] brought so much joy to my education that otherwise I just really stopped caring about school". Explained another participant:

> In my second year, I was really struggling with my coursework and really struggling with trying to make connections to what I was learning or make it meaningful to me in any sort of way. I took the CSL 100 course and it really started to solidify that there was something in university that was of interest to me, and also aligned with what I believed about community.

For most participants, after their initial exposure to a CSL course, they were hooked,

"I took CSL and there was no going back, I was like, 'I need to do this', and began to intentionally look for more CSL opportunities: 'Okay, what else can I do with CSL? How does this work?'".

What appealed to the participants about CSL was the practical hands-on experience of being able to apply their classroom learning to real life situations. Said one participant, "Learning by doing is just so valuable." Many of the participants commented that CSL made theoretical concepts more digestible for them, "I think [CSL] helps students connect more to the content that they're learning. It helps bring the abstract ideas that you learn in the classroom and helps bring them to become a real tangible thing."

A drive to be more involved with CSL led all of the participants to complete more CSL courses towards achieving the Certificate in Community Engagement and Service-Learning as well as apply for the paid CSL student internship position. The certificate is accomplished by completing five CSL courses over the course of a degree, for a total of approximately 100 hours of service working with a breadth of community non-profit organizations. Participants planned their course schedules astutely so that the certificate was attainable for them within the parameters of meeting their specific degree requirements. Most participants remarked that the certificate was very important to them. One participant reflected:

> I feel very proud of the fact that I went through my CSL certificate. When I walked
> across the stage and they called out my name and they said that I got a Bachelor's with a
> CSL certificate. It felt really nice that they said that, and they recognized that and they
> acknowledged the work that went into that. It made me feel like what I did was
> important. That what I did with CSL, all my volunteering, it does stand for something.

The certificate was also impactful for the participants when seeking employment after graduation: "It's something that I include in my resumes." Even for alumni who graduated some time ago, the certificate still resonates with them. Commented one participant, "Eight years ago since I graduated and still when I do job interviews, I always mentioned my CSL certificate. I feel like I bring it up every time."

By intentionally choosing to incorporate CSL into their undergraduate education, these students found the meaning they were looking for, "it really increased and expanded my experience in university." CSL provided these participants with the opportunities to engage in their community as they had prior to attending university, and enhanced not only their learning but their academic journey, "It changed everything about my post-secondary experience."

Deepening Knowledge

While all participants had prior experience with volunteering, their CSL opportunities expanded their knowledge of the implications of providing service. Through reflection and critical thinking about positionality, participants claimed that CSL broadened their understanding of what it means to "help". The transition from volunteering to curricular community service-learning led participants to begin to question their actions, "I don't always get that like, 'Oh, it feels good to help people' feeling, because now I'm like, 'Actually, I don't know if I'm really the one who should be doing this, or if this is the way it should be done.'"

A key component to community service-learning is reflecting on the service experience and understanding the significance of service (Butin, 2005). Reflection added to their volunteer experience and forced participants to think profoundly about what it means to engage in community. One participant noted that: "It really just opened my mind to more than just how do

you help people, but also, how do you recognize sort of injustice or inequality or a broken system?" Through their CSL experiences with non-profit community organizations and their subsequent reflection, the participants were also able to think deeper about societal challenges, "I think the number one thing for me has been thinking critically about social issues and how we engage with them and respond to them, and what is my role in that, because before, I had never heard of service-learning, I never really understood the difference." CSL also offered the participants an opportunity to consider the community's needs versus the individual need or desire to help. A participant commented that:

> First I need to understand what the community is and I think that's basically what CSL taught me, is you can't just go running headlong into what's going on. If you're going to be going into a community, you should be asking them what they need, right?

Just as the participants were looking for added meaning to their education during their undergraduate studies, many discovered that after their CSL experiences, they were also looking to deepen their engagement with the community in a more meaningful way. One participant remarked, "Thinking about really examining systemic issues and thinking about theory, what I was learning in my courses versus seeing what those issues looked like in practice or how they challenged one another. I just found that I was able to engage with community in a much more critically aware, and reflective and intentional sense."

Through CSL experiences, participants also increased their understanding of the value of the knowledge held by community members. As explained by one participant, "To this day, still what interests me about CSL, is the idea that you learn and you should be learning as much when you're in community, if not more, as what you're learning in a classroom. There's so much more

to learn than in a classroom and people that you're told are experts, there are experts in community too."

As the majority of CSL placements at the University of Alberta are with non-profit organizations, participants remarked on their expanded understanding of that sector as a result of their experiences. "CSL was really where I was exposed to different communities and learned about unique needs and the nature of non-profits. My love for non-profits really stems from those placements with CSL," claimed one participant.

Another participant remarked on her previous naivety on the concept of volunteering that was then altered after her experience with CSL, "Being 18 years old and not having really ever reflected on, if I'm volunteering it has to be a good thing. But we talked a lot about when *isn't* it good? And who is it *actually* benefiting? And to really consider how it's beneficial to us and sometimes that's at the cost of communities. So, really just thinking multiple times before stepping into a volunteer role and really understanding what position I'm in when I'm in those different spaces."

Capacity-building

Participants remarked on a variety of skills developed through their CSL experiences, both through their curricular CSL courses and the paid student internship. For all participants, CSL placements took them out of their comfort zone or "safe bubble" by introducing them to unfamiliar community organizations, community members and community issues. To deal with the unfamiliarity, participants found that they had to "be open to new ideas", and, "learn how to be adaptable." Participants commented that being open also meant being open to being wrong and dealing with obstacles:

Learning there are going to be failures and there are going to be so many challenges. And understanding that there's so much to learn from successes and failures even more so, and that you should welcome the failures because there's something that you didn't think about before.

Despite these challenges, participants acknowledged that overcoming these experiences, "humbled" and "grounded" them and eventually led to increased confidence. Overcoming and adapting to the challenges faced in community settings, helped them grow personally, as noted by one participant, "Those instances of learning outside of the classroom that are not even a part of the coursework, those are the things that I can look back on and be like, 'Oh, that was really helpful in developing my own personal skills.'"

Through multiple placements within the community, participants commented on the ability to build relationships with many organizations and individuals. By making these connections through CSL, one participant revealed that now, "I know that I can reach out to different people in different areas." Participants noted that they appreciated developing those relationship building skills and that it allowed them to make future connections within the community later on. One participant commented that CSL allowed her to, "Be able to understand an organization, even though I didn't think I had an interest in it. And then, it actually linked into my career later on which I would have never thought about."

Both CSL course work and the paid student internship provided learning environments where participants developed communication and collaboration skills. Placements highlighted the need for clear communication when working with communities. One participant noted the importance of: "Learning the language of change, of community and being able to communicate

that to other people so that you can work with people within a community to help it, even if it's not your own." In the role of student intern, participants were responsible for social media, interviews, and event planning. Through this position, participants noted that they learned "how to communicate messaging to different audiences" and to "be intentional with language." These "people skills" or "soft skills" were "skills that you build into your day-to-day life." Working with community partners and with the CSL team meant working collaboratively. One participant shared, "CSL taught me the idea that if I want to make a change, that I need to involve other people too." The skill of working together was also honed through the internship and observing the CSL staff, "The office was very collaborative. Everybody had their workload and it needed to kind of flow together in some way. I got to see how all the positions just fit into one another."

Many participants expressed how CSL, through both the certificate and the internship, allowed them to be creative. CSL placements provided space where participants felt they could express themselves openly. Said one participant, "Coming up with an innovative way to create projects through listening and collaboration...that's the creative part that I really loved. For me that artistic approach is really important. I think I was really lucky with my placements to have spaces where my ideas were very welcomed." Through the internship, participants noted that they appreciated the flexibility to be creative and innovative, "the ability to seek out opportunities is something that I learned at the CSL office."

For most of the participants, working in the CSL office as an intern was their first experience in a professional office environment. Offered one participant, "It was nice to know what the nine-to-five life is like." Participants commented that they learned "basic administrative tasks" and, "how to do them and do them well." The internship provided participants "with the ability to understand context and logical things." The intern position also gave the participants

the opportunity to understand how a group of professionals worked together. This was a beneficial experience to gain before entering the workforce, as noted by one participant, "I really felt like a full team member. I think we all shared a common think. A common trait that lets us be open with each other, examine new ideas, have different perspectives. That was a really helpful workplace environment for somebody who was about to go out into the world." Lastly, participants commented that the internship instilled a sense of responsibility when working in a professional setting, "The professionalism you need to have, it needs to carry out in not only the email conversations, but then the face-to-face, on the phone, everything you do not only reflects on you as a person, but also on the organization."

Non-profit Engagement

Five of the thirteen participants are currently working full-time within the non-profit sector. Another four are working with the education system, from elementary to high school and post-secondary. Two are employed within the public sector, one is unemployed, and one is working in the for-profit sector (Figure 2). All of the participants shared that their CSL experiences enhanced their understanding of the non-profit sector, and expanded their knowledge of potential career opportunities within the sector. Said one participant, "[CSL] was probably the sole reason I ended up in the sector. 100%. I didn't have any comprehension really of the scope of it. The scale, what type of work was being done, the complexities of it."

PARTICIPANT	VOLUNTEER HISTORY?	UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE	CAREER	NON-PROFIT	SOCIAL/PUBLIC	FOR-PROFIT	EDUCATION	CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT?
1	Y	Arts + Certificate	Program Coordinator, Immigration & Settlement	Y				Y
2	Y	Arts + Certificate	Advancement Manager, University				Y	Y
3	Y	Business + Certificate	Education Programs Supervisor, Municipal		Y			Y
4	Y	Arts + Certificate	Children/Youth Facilitator	Y				Y
5	Y	Science + Certificate	Community Health		Y			Y
6	Y	Education + Certificate	Educator				Y	Y
7	Y	Arts + Certificate	Manager, Youth Programs	Y				Y
8	Y	Education + Certificate	Educator				Y	Y
9	Y	Arts + Certificate	Unemployed					Y
10	Y	Arts + Certificate	Coordinator, Social Justice & LGBTQ2+ Youth	Y				Y
11	Y	Arts + Certificate	Lawyer			Y		Y
12	Y	Arts + Certificate	Administrator, Community Arts Org	Y				Y
13	Y	Education + Certificate	Community Liason & Educator				Y	Y

Figure 2. Participant Graph

Being exposed to a variety of non-profit organizations through their CSL placements, as well as through the interviews conducted with community partners during their student internship, participants' awareness of the work being done in the sector was broadened. This awareness was influential when participants began to look for work following graduation. Noted one participant, "Jobs that I was looking for were more community outreach positions, community education positions. I looked and I applied for more jobs in the non-profit sector than I probably otherwise would have, because of my familiarity with the non-profit sector that I got through CSL."

The data suggests that CSL was also significant in the participants' understanding that non-profit work could be rewarding both personally and financially. One participant who had originally thought of pursuing a career in the for-profit or private sector remarked, "I feel like if I didn't work with CSL, I think I might've been more of a, 'Oh, I'll go into industry business.' Like, 'I want money.' Maybe, because I feel like that's what everyone has to do to survive, but now I'm like, you can survive and there's opportunities in the non-profit sector that I think would be more of a lifestyle I'd want to live, and interesting to me. And just more rewarding."

For some participants, the introduction to CSL early in their undergraduate studies, shaped both their choice of academic program and their employment direction after graduation.

Said a participant, "I attribute CSL to changing the direction of my career path and my whole educational journey."

All of the participants who are working in the education field have chosen to incorporate service-learning pedagogy in their own classrooms to help their students comprehend abstract concepts such as colonialism. One participant reached out to a former CSL community partner and invited him into his classroom to teach his students about traditional Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and the class ended up taking a guided walk through the river valley. Another participant has modelled her own teaching philosophy after community service-learning, stating, "The work that I do now, I wouldn't have known about had it not been for CSL, because I'm involved in alternative learning and education, and that to me, is what CSL is all about."

For participants who are not currently working in the non-profit sector, they have chosen to join volunteer committees in their professional roles or participate in community-led programs through their work. Their previous association with engagement motivated them to continue to be involved. Explained one participant: "I talk about volunteerism in my work a lot too. I'm involved in different committees at work, it's not necessarily volunteering because I'm getting paid to do it. But it's being involved in different sorts of committees like an engagement committee. This was also something I looked for right away in my work because I wanted something more."

Social Responsibility

All participants noted a passion for continued engagement in community after graduation either through volunteering, advocacy, or activism. Many mentioned that their personal engagement is important, valuable, and simply ingrained in them. As one participant put it, "I

think it's really important and I think just the way that I've always oriented myself, it's weird if I'm not doing something. I always want to be involved in community in some way." Participation in social change is a moral responsibility for them as citizens. Described one participant,

> My definition of humanity is one that's based on community. I think that if we don't engage, then what are we doing all of this for? If community is not at the center of the work that you're doing, what is the purpose of what you're doing?

Community engagement is integral to the way these participants choose to live their lives. For one participant, actively contributing to society is practically a 'no-brainer': "We all live in communities, right? There's no way that you wouldn't want to better where you live."

All participants also acknowledged their privilege and how that motivated them to be engaged in their community. Recognition of their personal privilege is an additional factor that drives them to want to meaningfully participate in social change. One participant commented that it was important to her: "To be able to recognize the privilege that I carry and to be able to advocate for change using the privilege that I have in the spaces that maybe other voices aren't heard as much or where I can amplify those voices." Another commented that: "I have energy and time to give and there are places that need support. I feel like I've just been so privileged in areas of my life. It feels wrong to keep it all to myself."

Discussion

My original research question asked: Do undergraduate students who pursue long-term engagement in service-learning opportunities as well as paid internships tend to seek out employment in the non-profit sector after graduation and/or display lasting engagement in the community? This study does demonstrate a relationship between sustained service-learning experiences during undergraduate education and continued community engagement post graduation. The results indicate that students who pursued CSL opportunities had a prior history of volunteerism through either their family or during high school. The data suggests that through CSL courses, participants were able to deepen their knowledge of the non-profit sector and develop critical thinking skills through the practice of reflection. The data also suggests that both the pursuit of the CSL certificate and the participation in the CSL student internship increased the participants' professional skills including communication, collaboration, and relationship building. This analysis supports the idea that engagement in CSL experiences broadened the participants' understanding of the potential of the non-profit sector to be a viable career option. Lastly, the results show that participants feel a moral obligation to continue community service based on their awareness of social issues and their own position or privilege.

Interpretations

The results of this study are significant for the University of Alberta Community Service-Learning program because they demonstrate that students develop practical and effectual skills through CSL that assist in future engagement in non-profit careers and continued engagement in community. This study provides insight into the value of experiential learning programs in post-

secondary institutions for both students and non-profit organizations. The data contributes to the literature highlighting the benefits of service-learning during undergraduate studies and the impact on career development following graduation. Originally I had proposed the following questions to guide my literature review:

LRQ1: What personal and professional skills do students acquire through service-learning?

LRQ2: What do students learn about social issues and civic engagement through their involvement with service-learning?

LRQ3: How do students' service-learning experiences influence their future career paths?

The following discussion section is again organized according to the six defining themes identified within the data.

Predisposition

The majority of participants claimed to have had a history of volunteerism throughout high school. The results align with the theory that volunteering during high school predisposes students to volunteer at the post-secondary level (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999) and that high school participation in service increases the probability that students will participate in community service activities during university (Astin & Sax, 1998). Of the thirteen participants, eleven of them identified as female, and several noted that their religion centred on ideas of helping or volunteering. The data also supports the theory that other predisposing factors to participation in service learning in post-secondary include involvement in religious activities and

identifying as a woman (Astin & Sax, 1998; Marks & Jones, 2004). The participants in this study also demonstrated that: "students entering college with strong values of social responsibility and for whom service is integral to their identities will most likely sustain their community service" (Marks & Jones, 2004, p. 328).

Intentionality

The study supports the literature that CSL improves student satisfaction of their education experience (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001), enhances students' academic achievement (Astin, 2000) and provides a deeper understanding of subject matter than classroom teaching alone (Eyler, 2009). Participants in the study noted a dissatisfaction in their studies and that they were looking for deeper meaning. They also spoke of a need for practical experience where they could apply their learning to real-life settings. The results of the study build on the existing evidence that CSL has the ability to make abstract concepts and real-world issues more tangible and relatable (Butin, 2010), that students are looking for greater engagement beyond volunteer opportunities (Grain & Lund, 2018), and students have a desire to apply course material to practical and meaningful social challenges (Bringle, 2003; Eyler & Giles, 1999). The study also supports the findings that students who participate in service-learning report positive attitudes towards multiple forms of engagement including community engagement, academic engagement, and interpersonal engagement (Gallini & Moley, 2003).

Literature on service-learning shows that in order for it to be transformative for students, it must be longer term (Barrera, Willner, & Kukahiko, 2017; Gallant, Fenton, Hamilton-Hinch, Hutchinson, Rehman, & Singleton, 2017). Participants in the study support this claim by engaging in sustained CSL experiences over the duration of their undergraduate degree in order

to achieve the certificate and additional experience through the CSL student internship. As Coker's research suggests: "more experiential learning is better whether in the form of depth or breadth (2017, p. 19).

Deepening Knowledge

The study is consistent with the research that shows that critical reflection on service experiences is vital for participants to be able to distinguish CSL from just 'helping' (Ashgar & Rowe, 2017). Participants in the study were able to reflect on their service experience and critically think about what it means to serve. The data supports that through reflection students become more socially responsible, more committed to serving their communities, and more empowered (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999). Through reflection students can more deeply understand the meaning of their experience and that may potentially lead to personal transformations (Mezirow, 1997). Additionally, because reflection connects the service experience to the academic course material, service-learning students tend to display positive attitudes towards political and social justice (Moely, 2002).

CSL at the University of Alberta adopts a social change lens particularly through the CSL designated courses which are one of the requirements of the certificate. The data shows that a social change perspective may motivate students to ask questions about community needs, their personal roles in service, and social justice issues that they may encounter through community engagement (Moely & Illustre, 2014). Typically, CSL students spend between 20-30 hours working with the community as part of their coursework. Participants in this study spent approximately 100 hours in the community in order to complete the certificate, as well as four consecutive months with the CSL office. The results of this study support previous research that

finds students who are involved in more than 20 hours of service-learning tend to gain a greater sense of social issues (Coker, Heiser, Taylor, & Book, 2017).

Broadly, the results show that students who engage in service-learning courses have a greater moral development, personal responsibility, and understanding of justice issues (Mabry, 1998) as well as an increased awareness of the world, and an increased awareness of one's personal values (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000). The study also illustrates that through service-learning and community engagement students become aware of the knowledge based in community, and that there are experts outside of academia (Butin, 2005).

Capacity Building

Previous studies have highlighted the many skills that can be developed through service-learning experiences including cooperation and collaboration, conflict resolution, critical thinking, and life skills (Astin & Sax, 1998). This study supports all of these findings, as well as the enhancement of social responsibility and citizenship skills (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001), interpersonal development and leadership skills (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000), and an awareness of self (Mitchell & Rost-Banik, 2019). The data also shows that students who participate in CSL may learn transferable and practical skills in communication, marketing, volunteer management, diversity awareness, risk management, information technology, relationship building, and teamwork (Lucy-Bouler & Lucy-Bouler, 2012). Other findings on service-learning students' skill development that are reinforced through this study are increased academic knowledge and technical skills; knowledge of volunteer opportunities and non-profit organizations; knowledge of contemporary social issues; listening skills; and self-efficacy (Bringle, Studer, Wilson, Clayton, & Steinberg, 2011; Wang, 2000).

Relationship building both within the classroom and within the community (Mitchell, 2008), and preparation for future careers (Astin & Sax, 1998) were further skills highlighted by study participants. The wide scope of skills developed through CSL strengthened the participants' awareness of and engagement with the non-profit sector.

Non-profit Engagement

This study adds to previous research that service-learning experiences, including internships, can be valuable ways for students to learn more about potential career paths (Eyler, 2009), gain a greater understanding of career-decision-making (Coulter-Kern, Coulter-Kern, Schenkel, Walker, & Fogle, 2013), and advance career preparation and confidence (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000). Results of this study add to the research by Mitchell (2019) who found that sustained service-learning programs, such as the Certificate in Community Engagement and Service-Learning, can have positive long-term effects on participants' career selection and career preparation, skill development, and continued community service involvement. These results build on existing evidence that increased breadth of service-learning can lead to increased career development benefits (Coker & Porter, 2015), and that it can impact graduates' career plans, help prepare them for the world of work, and instill the importance of having a career that involves helping other people (Newman & Hernandez, 2011).

All of the participants in this study fall within the Millennial generation. The data contributes to previous studies that show Millennials display great empathy, are interested in affecting change, value meaningful careers (McGinnis Johnson, & Ng, 2016), and are motivated by careers that have a social impact (Seider, Rabinowicz, & Gillmor, 2011).

This study also adds to the research on alumni of service-learning programs who identify that these experiences introduced them to prospective careers in the non-profit sector (Altman, Carpenter, Dietrick, Strom, & VanHorn, 2012; Astin & Sax, 1998); affected their decision to pursue a career in a service field (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000); and impacted their decisions to continue service involvement through either volunteer service or finding a job in a service field (Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005; Mitchell & Rost-Banik, 2019). This research shows a positive relationship between service-learning and careers in the non-profit sector.

Social Responsibility

These results build on existing evidence that shows that following service-learning participation, students have a stronger understanding of their own social identities, a greater commitment to community action and service (Mitchell, Richard, Battistoni, Rost-Banik, Netz, & Zakoske, 2015; Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Hébert & Hauf, 2015; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000), and less inclination to feel that individuals have little power to change society (Astin & Sax, 1998).

Participants in this study acknowledged their privilege and a moral need to continue to contribute to social change within their communities which aligns with previous research that service-learning helps students understand systemic injustices and identify their privilege (Mitchell & Rost-Banik, 2019). This data supports the research that service-learning enhances alumni's interest and participation in community engagement, civic action, continued service or volunteering, understanding of social justice issues, increases in community self-efficacy or their feelings about their individual capacity to contribute to positive change (Conway, Amel, &

Gerwien, 2009; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Moely & Illustre, 2004; Simons & Cleary, 2006; Moely, 2018).

This study aligns with previous literature that reports service-learning experiences have long-term positive effects on graduates' attitudes toward social and personal responsibility and the importance of personal political participation (Huda, Mat Teh, Nor Muhamad, & Mohd Nasir, 2018; Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005) often lasting well beyond the first five years after graduation (Marks & Jones, 2004).

Implications

Implications for this data are threefold: First, due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby the non-profit sector has been affected particularly hard and is currently experiencing a massive decline in both capacity and funding, students with CSL experience and knowledge of the sector are needed more than ever. Second, programs such as CSL at the University of Alberta that provide multiple and sustained service-learning opportunities for students, have proven to enhance students professional and personal skills that prepare them for careers following graduation. Third, with extensive restructuring, budget cuts, and decline in services, the University of Alberta needs to bolster student satisfaction (retention/attraction) and its promise to contribute to the greater public good. Results of this study can positively impact all three of these concerns.

Rebuilding the Sector

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, non-profit organizations are "working in more complex environments, with access to fewer resources, experiencing increased demand, and losing capacity" (Alberta Nonprofit Network Report, 2020, p. 5). In a recent report issued by

Imagine Canada, 69% of Canadian charities are experiencing a decrease in revenue and 73% face a decrease in donations (Sector Monitor, 2020) as a result of the pandemic. In addition to fewer donations, cancelled fundraisers, staff cuts, lower volunteerism, and increased demand for services, the impact of the pandemic has revealed a gap in modern technological infrastructure and knowledge that non-profits desperately need in this period of online everything (The Globe and Mail, 2020, December 14). The results of this research demonstrate that CSL alumni have both deep knowledge of and lasting relationships throughout the non-profit sector stemming from their sustained and multiple CSL experiences. The knowledge and connections that these graduates have can contribute to the declining capacity the non-profit sector is currently confronted with. Even prior to the pandemic, the literature on community partners shows that without student volunteers through service-learning, their programs would be reduced and the number of clients served would decrease (Vernon & Foster, 2002). The CSL program, like all programs everywhere in 2020, has adapted to online community engagement through project-based and remote-services placements such as researching funding opportunities, grant writing, social media posting, organizing online workshops, online tutoring, and creating promotional materials, to name a few innovations. As non-profit organizations continue to develop online services, CSL students can provide the experience and skills this sector needs.

Career Preparedness

Evident implications of this research are the development of practical and necessary skills students need to be successful in the world following graduation. The skills students develop through service-learning and the internship as described in this study are vital and fundamental to equip graduates with competitive and real-world capabilities. CSL alumni are entering the

workforce with professional skills, knowledge and experience as well as the confidence to creatively adapt to new communities and organizations.

This study shows that community service-learning is an effective practice for enhancing student development during their undergraduate years and has potential to address the Government of Alberta's proposed implementation of a performance-based funding model for post-secondary institutions. This model ties funding for post-secondary institutions directly to performance measures that are set by the provincial government. Performance measures have yet to be confirmed, but in the initial announcement last year, examples included graduate employment rate, graduate skills and competencies, and work-integrated learning opportunities (Minister of Advanced Education, Government of Alberta, 2020). The learning and competency outcomes of CSL alumni provide strong evidence to address each of these, should the government implement the above measures.

The Public Good

Post-secondary institutions are increasingly asked to prove their commitment to both campus and community (Braunsberger & Flamm, 2013), and prepare students for civic responsibility (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has a 'community engagement' classification that recognizes post-secondaries who "prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good" (Noel & Earwicker, 2015, p. 35). Trolian, SanGiovanni, & Jacobson, have found that "service by research university students often contributes to carrying out the public mission of the university,

allowing universities to expand their reach as students contribute to surrounding communities"
(2016, p. 194). This study shows that the University of Alberta CSL program fulfils the greater
university commitment to contribute to the public good, as well as produces graduates with the
values required to contribute to social change, and a moral responsibility to engage with their
communities.

The current President Bill Flanagan is implementing a new "University for Tomorrow"
vision that aims for "new levels of impact and engagement, expanded enrolment, expanded range
of work-integrated learning opportunities, and rise in global rankings" (University of Alberta,
2020). However, the university is in the midst of a combined massive deficit and drastic
reduction in funding. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced student learning to move online,
student services have been greatly reduced and tuition is increasing. Previous research findings
suggest that "research universities with an interest in strengthening their contributions to
surrounding communities, attracting engaged students, and deepening their students' ties to the
institution will stand to benefit from making explicit institutional commitments to service and
facilitating opportunities for their students to serve" (Trolian, SanGiovanni, & Jacobson, 2016, p.
195).

CSL can be a leader for the university in both building relationships with off-campus
communities and in improving student satisfaction. In the best interest of an engaged future for
all stakeholders, the University of Alberta should prioritize service-learning, provide the
necessary resources, and connect service-learning experiences across campus. This study has
shown the potential value of service-learning to students, the non-profit sector, and the greater
university. Going forward the university should create messaging that will highlight the

outcomes of community engagement and subsequently facilitate more students participating in

service-learning experiences.

CHAPTER V: Conclusion

Service-learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.

Bringle, Hatcher, and McIntosh, 2006, p. 12

When intentional (Coker & Porter, 2015) and long term (Barrera, Willner & Kukahiko, 2017), service-learning can be transformational for students (Butin, 2015) and impactful for community organizations (Ashgar & Rowe, 2017). Students who engage in service-learning experiences during their post-secondary studies develop skills to prepare them for professional careers after graduation (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999), particularly careers in the non-profit sector (Mitchell & Rost-Banik, 2019). Service-learning experiences also lead to continued participation in community (Newman & Hernandez, 2011) and increased awareness of social issues even after graduates have completed their studies (Moely, 2018). Service-learning can also help post-secondary institutions as a whole meet their commitment to contribute to the public good (Trolian, SanGiovanni, & Jacobson, 2016).

Since 2004, Community Service-Learning (CSL) at the University of Alberta has linked academic coursework to community-based experiences for undergraduate students. This study

intended to find a relationship between students who both achieve the Certificate in Community Engagement and Service-Learning and complete a four-month CSL student internship, and their subsequent career paths within the non-profit sector or lasting engagement in community. Research into this relationship had never before been conducted by the CSL program, and with a current climate of debilitating funding cuts and intensive administrative reorganization, one of the purposes of this study was to find value and need for service-learning. Additionally, this research intended to showcase the benefits of CSL to all stakeholders, including students, non-profit community organizations, and the institution itself. These results contribute to the awareness of CSL as both an approach to learning and a method of skill development for students in preparation for professional careers and continued community engagement.

Guided by a constructivist perspective, I hoped to understand how students constructed meaning through their CSL experiences. I collected qualitative data through semi-structured one-on-one online interviews with CSL alumni and employed a grounded theory approach to analyze the data and define recurring patterns or themes. The data revealed that students who sought out CSL opportunities had a history of volunteerism, and lacked a sense of connection or deeper meaning with their academic studies. Through CSL, these students not only found that "fit", they also developed critical thinking skills and expanded their awareness of the implications of service. Findings of this study show that students gained a breadth of skills through both their CSL experiences in community and the CSL internship position. Lastly, the data demonstrates that some CSL alumni tend to look for employment in the non-profit sector and exhibit lasting commitment to their communities.

Admittedly, I am a big proponent of service-learning and am passionate about the work I do. This project has surpassed my expectations of the demonstrated value of CSL and

highlighted possibilities for the program to authentically affect change in communities, now more than ever. It has been a pleasure for me to reflect with CSL alumni on the impacts of community service-learning.

Limitations

The reliability of this data is impacted by my previous relationship with the participants as their CSL internship supervisor. During their internship, I worked closely with the participants; however, the data remains valid as communicated by the participants themselves and recorded by myself as the researcher. Another limitation of the data is the reliance on the participants' retrospective sensemaking. For many of the participants, it had been some time between graduation and our interview leaving them to rely on their memory of past experiences. It is also important to note that CSL was not the only contributor to the participants interest in community engagement. Several other factors such as those described (history of volunteerism, family, beliefs), and others not expressed in the data, could also have contributed to their current levels of participation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, I recommend further research into the following four areas: First, how can more students be made aware of CSL opportunities earlier on in their academic journey? Second, to better understand the effects of CSL experiences for students, further research of all CSL alumni, not just certificate holders and former interns, could be explored. Third, how can post-secondary career services and CSL programs work together more collaboratively? And fourth, through direct consultation with non-profit organizations, determine how can CSL alumni meet their organizational needs?

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Appendices

Appendix A: Introductory Email to Participants

Dear Participant -

I hope this finds you enjoying summer as best as you can in these odd days. I am writing to you as a MA student and I am currently researching University of Alberta alumni who have both received the Certificate in Community Engagement (I know you aren't completed yet, but so close) and Service-Learning and been previously hired by the CSL office as a student intern.

You are invited to participate in an on-line conversational interview with me at a time most convenient for you between **July 13th-31st, 2020**. The entire interview will take approximately 30 minutes. To thank you for your time, following the interview you will receive a $25.00 gift card of your choice.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If at any time you do not want to continue with the interview, you are welcome to decline. To ensure I am capturing your words adequately, the interview will be recorded and I will take notes. Anything you say during the interview will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are interested in participating, please email me at flaman@ualberta.ca or call 782.932.1123 to set up a convenient interview time. Please feel welcome to contact me directly with any questions or concerns you may have about the interview.

Thanks so much for your consideration.

Kind regards,
Jill Flaman

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Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: Reflecting on the student experience of community service-learning and career paths in the non-profit sector

Researcher: Jill Flaman, MA student, University of Alberta, Faculty of Extension, flaman@ualberta.ca, 780.492.2017

Supervisor: Dr. Katy Campbell, Professor, University of Alberta, Faculty of Extension, katy.campbell@ualberta.ca, 780.492.8162

Background: As a CSL Certificate holder and a former student intern, you are being invited to participate in a research project about the learning and professional outcomes of the Community Service-Learning Program. Results of the study will be disseminated in a graduate Capstone project. Before you make a decision, one of the researchers can go over this form with you. You are encouraged to ask questions if you feel anything needs to be made clearer. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to understand connections between CSL experiences and future employment paths and continued community engagement.

Study Procedures: Research activities include one-on-one online personal interviews that will be recorded, between July 13-31, 2020, over Zoom. Interviews will take approximately 30 minutes. Recordings will be used to ensure accuracy and will be used solely by the researcher. With your consent, allow storage of study information in a secure data repository to facilitate future research.

Potential Benefits: Potential benefits of participation in the evaluation include the opportunity for you to contribute to improvement of the Community Service-Learning Program, and how CSL can best articulate learning and professional outcomes for students.

Potential Risks: There are no anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Compensation: Participants will receive a $25.00 gift card of their choice at the end of the interview.

Voluntary Participation: You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Participation is voluntary, and participants may refuse to participate in parts of the study, may decline to answer any question. Participation or not, will not result in any loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled (e.g. current or future services received through CSL will not be affected).

Confidentiality: All personal identifying information collected (e.g., names, email addresses, etc.) will be kept in confidence. All information and identifiable data will be stored and kept on a password protected file on a computer, accessible by only myself and my supervisor.

Freedom to Withdraw: Participants may withdraw from the study for any reason. You may withdraw from participation in this research at any time up until the time data is reported or published

Questions: Please contact me with any questions/clarifications about this project (flaman@ualberta.ca or 780.492.2037). If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the Research Ethics Office at the University of Alberta at reoffice@ualberta.ca or 780.492.0459.

Consent Statement: I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

_____   _____

Participant's Name (printed) and Signature   Date

_____   _____

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix C: Interview Guide

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am interviewing you to better understand your experience with the CSL program and your transition to employment after graduation. There are no right or wrong answers to any of my questions, I am interested in your own experiences.

Consent
Participation in this study is voluntary and your decision to participate, or not participate, will not affect your relationship to the CSL program. The interview should take approximately thirty to forty-five minutes depending on how much information you would like to share. With your permission, I would like to record the interview because I don't want to miss any of your

comments. I will also be taking notes. All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your de-identified interview responses will only be shared with research team members and we will ensure that any information we include in our report does not identify you as the respondent. You may decline to answer any question or stop the interview at any time and for any reason.

Are there any questions about what I have just explained?

May I record our interview? Is it okay for me to take notes?

Establishing Rapport
How are you doing today? How are you coping in this strange new world?

Previous CSL Experience
Can you tell me about your experience with the CSL program (academically)?

Prompts:
- How did you initially hear about CSL/get involved?
- What attracted you to CSL?
- Do you remember which courses you took?
- Do you remember which community organizations you were placed with?
- Did you receive the certificate?
- Did you participate in the Non-Profit Board Internship program?
- Was your academic path altered in any way after your CSL experience?
- What skills do you think you learned from CSL courses/placements?

Internship
Now tell me about working with the CSL team - what was that like?

Prompts:
- Do you remember when you worked as the CSL student intern?
- Had you worked in an office before?
- What were some of your responsibilities?
- What skills do you think you learned in that position?

Post-graduation
What did you do after graduation?

Prompts:
- Did you find work right away?
- Did you take a break/travel?

- What was your first job after graduating?
- What type of jobs did you search for?
- What field did/do you hope to work in after graduation?
- Do you feel your CSL experiences had any influence on your field preferences?

Community Engagement

Do you currently do any volunteer work?

Prompts:

- How often? (if yes)
- Lack of time? (if no)
- Where do you volunteer?
- What about volunteering interests you?
- Are you engaged in your community in other ways?
- Do you think volunteering is important?

Conclusion

Thank you for this conversation. That is all of the questions I have. Do you have anything else you would like to add? Is there anything I may have missed?

I will send you a transcript of this interview within the next thirty days.