



STUDENT SUCCESS

“Studies have revealed that SL can have a positive influence on the personal, social, civic, career, and academic growth of students. ...SL has great potential for enhancing underrepresented students’ academic success, regardless of when the students enroll in the SL courses during four college years.” (Song et al., 2017, p.24; 33)

CALL TO ACTION

Former President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, Carol Schneider, frames student success as “arguably the greatest challenge of higher education: helping America’s extraordinarily diverse students reap the full benefits—economic, civic, and personal—of their studies in college” (Kuh, 2008, p. 2).



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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The series *Contributions of Civic and Community Engagement in Higher Education* is produced by the Community of Practice, Inquiry, and Learning (COPIIL) of North Carolina Campus Engagement (formerly known as North Carolina Campus Compact). Focused on the benefits and value of civic and community engagement (CCE) in higher education, the series has two parts: (1) a Primer that provides an overview of each of 17 topical areas organized into three categories (priorities related to students, to institutions, and to communities) and that is designed as an accessible and evidence-based introduction to some of the key priorities that well-designed CCE can advance and (2) a set of more developed briefs in these 17 topical areas, intended to support ongoing exploration and inquiry in each of these areas and to guide ongoing deepening of practice.

Neither the Primer nor this set of topical briefs is comprehensive, but we do believe the topics included—selected through discussions within COPIIL and consultation with CCE thought leaders—are among the most relevant for this moment in the evolution of CCE and in our nation’s history. Neither the topics nor the work of CCE fit neatly into these categories; the topical priorities and the contributions of CCE to them are as deeply interwoven as the CCE work of community members, students, staff, and faculty is interdependent. The set of topical briefs may be expanded in the coming years as additional topics seem important to include and as additional practitioner-scholarship becomes available.

Each brief includes a summary of the topic and the role of higher education in general and CCE in particular in advancing it, an annotated list of associated scholarship, and a list of references and additional readings; quotes from students, alums, community members, faculty, staff, and literature related to CCE serve to concretize the possibilities and the stakes. Both components of the series incorporate examples from across the NC Campus Engagement network; descriptions of the examples draw on information available through campus websites and personal communication with key stakeholders.

NOTE: We use the term “civic and community engagement” to include many practices and pedagogies, including service-learning, community-engaged learning, election engagement, volunteerism, social entrepreneurship, community-based participatory research, social justice activism, and deliberative dialogue.

OVERVIEW

Educational research using national data sets has documented a set of high impact practices, including service-learning and other forms of community-based learning, that enhance student success. Students who participated in service-learning reported engaging in deep learning, which has been associated with “earn[ing] higher grades and retain[ing], integrat[ing], and transfer[ing] information at higher rates” (Kuh, 2008, p. 13). Students who participate in CCE have reported an increase in self-esteem and social skills; positive attitudes toward their institution and toward learning; and increased integration into and investment in the social and academic fabric of the campus and community. These outcomes translate into increased retention, graduation rates, and academic performance (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013; Reed et al., 2015).

Thus, civic and community engagement (CCE), including service-learning, is being increasingly used as a strategic approach toward increasing grade point average (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013) and motivation to succeed in and finish college (Yeh, 2010; Yob, 2014).

This is important because not all populations have the same access nor success rate in higher education institutions. In 2021, the U.S. Census reported that only 37.9% of the population in the United States between the ages of 25 to 29 had completed a bachelor’s degree or higher, with only 28.1% of Black and 20.6% Hispanic individuals, compared to 41.9% of non-Hispanic White and 61% of Asian individuals. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Hence, there is increasing pressure to improve college completion rates, particularly for students from underrepresented groups, namely, students of color, first-generation college students, and students from low-income economic backgrounds. Service-learning and other high-impact practices hold much benefit for all students from the full range of backgrounds but even more so for students from historically underserved populations (Kuh, 2008; Song et al., 2017).

ASSOCIATED SCHOLARSHIP

- Students involved in CCE reported finding a connection between their personal values and their academic studies and greater meaning and agency in their education as well as greater motivation to succeed and finish college (Yeh, 2010; Yob, 2014).
- Significant positive relationships between service-learning participation and likelihood of graduating have been documented. For example: “Although SL students and non-SL students had similar pre-college academic characteristics, SL students were more successful . . . earned more credits, had a higher average college GPA, and . . . graduated at a significantly higher rate than did non-SL students” (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013, p. 18).
- CCE participation seems to benefit non-underrepresented students more than underrepresented students with respect to the retention and four-year graduation rates, and enhance academic success, regardless of when the students enroll in the high impact CCE courses. (Song et al., 2017; York, 2016)
- Research has suggested that intervention programs, such as SL, are especially effective during the first semester for academically underprepared students (Weissman et al., 1997).
- Service-learning is positively associated with the ability of students to operationalize citizenship/civic behaviors and this indirectly augments students’ perceptions of academic gains (Furco, 2015)

CENTRAL PIEDMONT COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Central Piedmont Community College conducted a five- year (2006 - 2010) longitudinal assessment to study the impact of service- learning on student learning and on its institutional mission to student learning, success, and completion. Results showed that students who participated in service- learning courses earned higher grades, earned graduation credentials at a higher rate, and were retained at a higher rate than non- service- learning students. Service- learning students earned an A/ B/ C and successfully completed their service- learning courses at a 23 % higher rate than non- service- learning students enrolled in the same course/ semester. They also earned graduation credentials at a 17 % higher rate. And, compared to non- service- learning students, they were retained from Fall to Spring at a 20 - 25 % higher rate and from Fall to Fall at a 13 - 23 % higher rate. Although this study was not controlled for student self-selection into service- learning, the results are certainly suggestive.

For more information, contact the Central Piedmont Community College at: service.learning@cpcc.edu.

WINGATE UNIVERSITY

In 2019, the Collaborative for the Common Good at Wingate University, developed high impact CCE classes in several disciplines, including Psychology and General Education. In Spring 2020, an Adult and Aging SL course offered by Dr. Candace Lapan in the Psychology department and preliminary data indicates that students in the SL course had significantly higher final course grades and higher scores on an end of semester assessment. Students in the SL class also reported somewhat higher 21st century skills, which include teamwork and problem solving. In Fall 2022, the Religion Department offered a SL course entitled Food and Faith. This course was developed to serve underserved populations and 104 students enrolled in this class, with over 80% being freshmen and sophomores. Preliminary data indicates that students significantly improved over the course of the semester in terms of their level of Civic Engagement, Civic Skills, and 21st century skills. Longitudinal assessments are ongoing.

For more information, contact Wingate University's Collaborative for the Common Good at: ccg@wingate.edu.

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<https://nccampusengagement.org/community-of-practice-inquiry-and-learning-copil/>

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