

**Innovative Service-Learning Practices:
Psychology of Diverse Populations (PSY 411)**

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Abstract

The service-learning (SL) teaching methodology connects students' academic coursework to real-world experiences. Each SL opportunity is unique and requires the student to initiate applications of classroom material to SL projects. This current project researched the impact of a SL component course paired with a diversity class. Funding from the CASL Faculty Research Stipend Award was used to employ a graduate assistant (GA) to oversee a pre-/post-test evaluation of implicit and explicit measures, analyze the data, and write a final results section for publication.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to examine the impact of a component service-learning (SL) section, linked to Psychology of Diverse Populations (PSY 411), on assessments of racial prejudice. Students enrolled in the SL section were able to immediately apply course knowledge within the community. It was hypothesized that participation in SL increases students' academic learning beyond the textbook/classroom examples, activities, and materials. To determine the specific impact, the project combined explicit and implicit measures to gauge students' racially prejudicial beliefs before and after a semester long diversity class.

Learning Objectives

- Inform instructors of the how a SL component was implemented within PSY 411
- Describe how data was collected in the PSY 411 classroom
- Provide empirical knowledge to illustrate the impact of SL

Synopsis

Continual diversification of the United States requires undergraduates to receive experience with cultural competency (Wade-Berg, Weisinger, & Hicks-Coolick, 2013). Building on the public affairs mission at Missouri State University, the Psychology of Diverse Populations (PSY 411) course was created to expand students' accountability for ethical leadership, community engagement, and cultural competence. The PSY 411 course spans the topics of sexual orientation, age, weight, religious affiliation, ethnicity, and other aspects of exceptionality. It explores ideas behind societal reactions to diversity from a psychological standpoint in a discussion-based format. The course provides an opportunity for students to enroll in a service-learning (SL) component. This component allows students to apply class material within the community while also conveying their SL experiences to classmates. In this way, SL builds personal value into course objectives. Explicit and implicit measures were used to determine racially prejudicial beliefs before and after a full semester. A feedback presentation was provided at mid-semester to inform students of their pre-test scores and an interpretation for score ranges.

Student participants responded to three explicit measures (Modern Racism Scale, Explicit Racial Resentment Scale, Motivation to Control Prejudicial Reactions Scale) and two implicit measures (Implicit Association Task-IAT: Racial Preference and Racially Motivated Stereotyping). Instruments such as the IAT (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995) are employed when socially desirable responding is likely. Three groups were created: SL-Prior (completed a SL course in a previous semester), SL-Concurrent (attending a SL course in the current semester), and Non-SL (no SL experience). Pre-test scores indicated the SL-Prior group had higher scores on the stereotype, preference, and motivation to control measures in addition to lower racial prejudice scores than the other groups. This suggests that their previous SL experience had a long term impact on course constructs. In examination of the post-test results, a ceiling effect was observed in the SL-Prior group on the stereotype, preference, and motivation to control instruments while a slight decrease was exhibited in the racial prejudice scale. However, change scores from the SL-Concurrent and Non-SL students support the hypothesis that the diversity course impacts these constructs with preference, stereotype, and motivation control measures increasing and racial prejudice scores decreasing. The SL-Concurrent group exhibited the largest difference scores; this could indicate they, in particular, benefitted from the combination of

course material and SL participation. Yet, further investigation with a larger sample size is required.

Suggested Practices

- Adding a SL component increases course material application and understanding in both current and subsequent semesters.
- Self-reflection exercises should be included in SL to further facilitate self-awareness and material comprehension/implementation.
- Explicit and implicit measures serve as self-awareness tools to enhance student learning in the classroom.

References

- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (Eds.). (2002). *Handbook of Self-Determination Research* (pp. 183-204, 405-430). Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Wade-Berg, J., Weisinger, J., & Hicks-Coolick, A. (2013). A call for cultural competence education in higher education. *INSIGHT into Diversity*, 80(4/5), 26.
- Greenwald, A., & Banaji, M. (1995). Implicit social cognition: Attitudes, self-esteem, and stereotypes. *Psychological Review*, 102(1), 4-27.

Additional Resources

Project Implicit (2011). Retrieved from <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>