



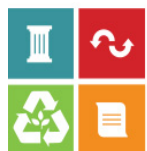
Millersville University
SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY

Polling & Research Office



*Survey of Student Engagement at
Millersville University
May 2011*

Prepared by:
Dr. Adam Lawrence
Director



Millersville University
SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY

CIVIC AND COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT

Purpose

Conducted during the spring of 2011, the “Survey of Student Engagement at Millersville University” is the first of what will be a quadrennial effort to assess the civic and community engagement of students in the Millersville University community and beyond. Of particular emphasis in this survey was student participation in **community service** activities and **service-learning** courses. We not only wanted to determine the extent to which students were involved in community service and were taking service-learning courses, we wanted to know if students believed that they benefitted from their participation in these activities, which students were the most likely to say they benefitted, and whether students generally believed that *all* students should participate in community service and service-learning courses before graduating from Millersville University.

The 2011 survey of student engagement was based on a questionnaire consisting of several components: 1) questions measuring the attitudes and behaviors of students related to community service and service-learning; 2) questions that asked students about their participation in various civic activities; 3) questions that asked students about their attitudes toward government; 4) questions that asked students which news media they use and how often; and 5) questions designed to gather information about students’ demographic characteristics. Our study of student participation in community service and service-learning was framed by the following research questions:

Community Service

Q: How many students participated in community service? Was their participation linked to a specific course?

Q: Who participated in community service?

Q: What did students perceive to be the benefits of participating in community service?

Q: Who benefitted the most from participating in community service?

Q: Did students who participated in community service generally agree that all students should participate in community service?

Service-learning

Q: How many students participated in a service-learning course?

Q: Who participated in a service-learning course?

Q: What did students perceive to be the benefits of participating in a service-learning course?

Q: Did students who participated in service-learning courses generally agree that all students should take a service-learning course?

Methodology

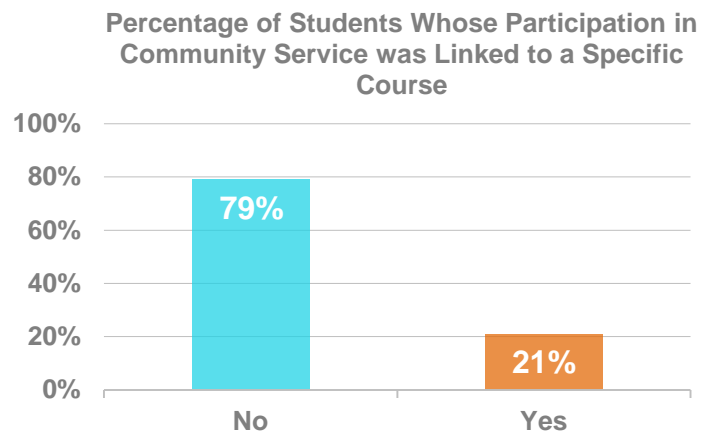
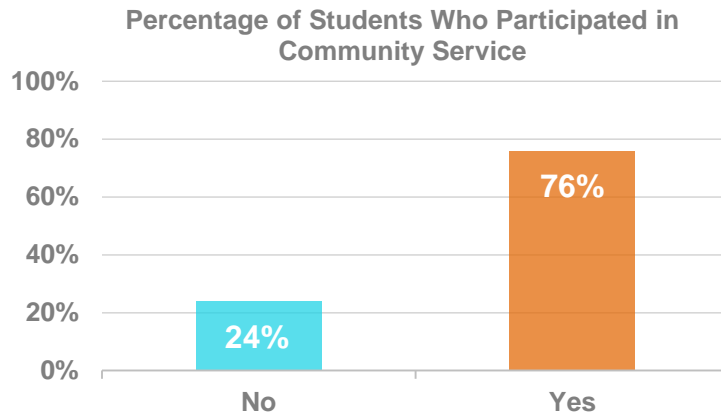
The results of this study are based on an online survey of 858 Millersville University students conducted from March 31 to May 13 under the supervision of Dr. Adam Lawrence, Director of the Millersville University Polling & Research Office. The sampling frame consisted of the universe of undergraduate students enrolled at Millersville University in the spring of 2011 as determined by a comprehensive e-mail distribution list made available to the Polling & Research Office. E-mail invitations were sent to all undergraduate students on March 28, 2011, and a reminder was sent on May 1. To encourage participation, students were informed in the invitation that they would be entered into a random drawing for one of several gift cards if they elected to provide their contact information. A profile of the respondents who completed the survey is provided in the Appendix.

Community Service

Q: How many students participated in community service? Was their participation linked to a specific course?

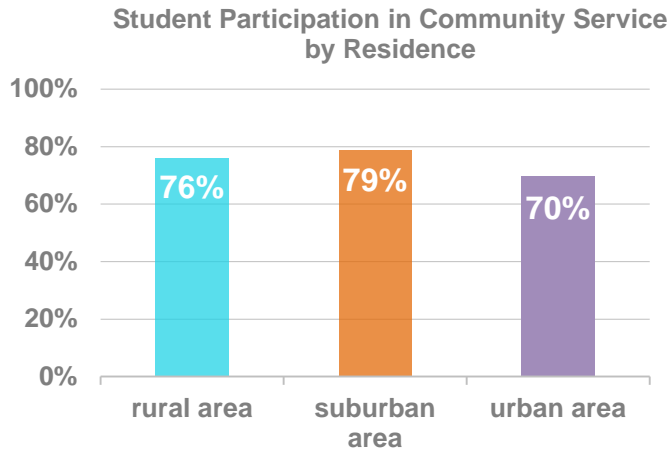
We asked students whether they volunteered, or were currently volunteering, in a neighborhood, at a place of worship, in the university community, or in some other setting. The results confirm that a full three quarters of students (76%) participated in some form of community service during the past year. By contrast, only 24% of students said they had not performed some kind of community service over the past year.

Interestingly, participation in community service was linked to a specific course for only a very small proportion of the students we surveyed. Our findings show that 21% of students who participated in community service did so as part of a course they were taking or had taken during the past year.



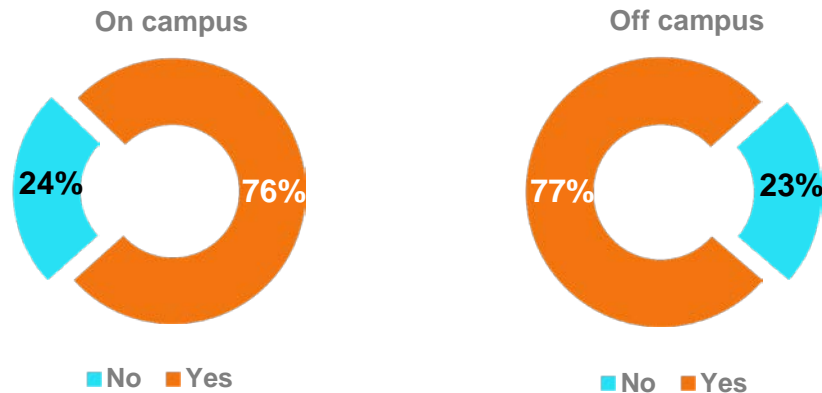
Q: Who participated in community service?

In addition to documenting the frequency of student participation in various community service activities on campus and beyond, we were also interested in finding out who participated. More specifically, we sought to determine if participation in community service varied according to a number of respondent characteristics, including: the location of the student's primary residence (urban, suburban, rural), whether the student lived on or off campus, the student's academic status (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), the school in which the student's major is included (Humanities & Social Sciences, Education, Science & Mathematics, undeclared), the student's race and ethnicity, and the student's gender. In one final attempt to identify those students most likely to participate in community service, we asked students questions designed to ascertain their levels of political efficacy, news consumption, and civic participation, each of which is explained in detail later in this report.

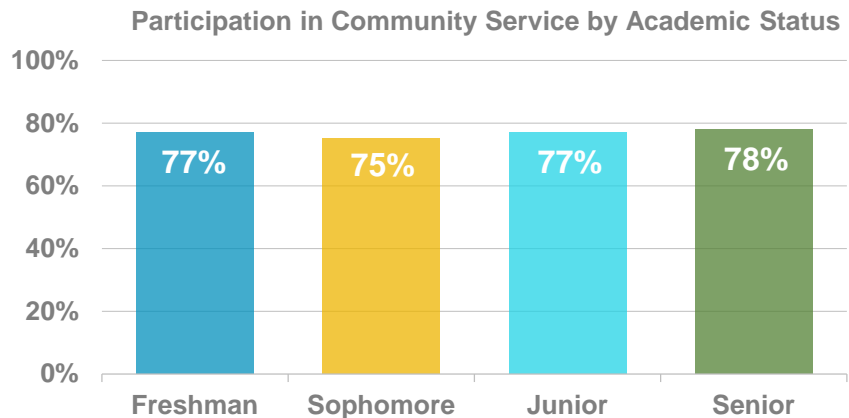


First, we asked students about the location of the residence in which they spent most of their childhood. The results of our survey confirm that community service varied according to the location of the student’s primary residence, but only to a limited extent. While 79% of those from suburban areas and 76% of those from rural areas participated in some form of community service, a slightly smaller 70% of those who grew up in an urban area did the same (6% below the overall sample average of 76% noted above).

Next, we wanted to know if those who lived on campus were more likely to participate in community service than those who lived off campus. Remarkably, as the figures below reveal, there is almost no difference in the rate of participation in community service among those who lived on campus as compared to those who lived off campus: according to our results, 76% of on campus students and 77% of students who lived off campus participated in community service sometime during the past year.

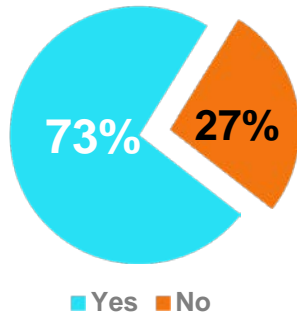


Similarly, when we examined student participation in community service by academic status (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), we found no meaningful differences. The rates of participation varied from a low of 75% among freshman, to a high of 78% among seniors.

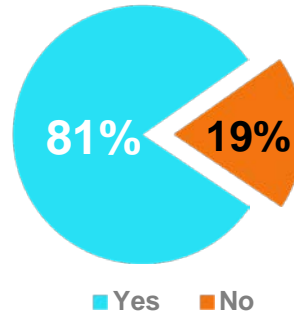


Our survey uncovered relatively modest differences in participation in community service by school. The difference between the school with the highest rate of participation and the school with the lowest was 9%: participation was highest among students enrolled in majors in Education (81%) and lowest among students in Science and Mathematics (72%). In the Humanities and Social Sciences, 73% took part in community service, and 77% of undeclared students performed community service over the past year.

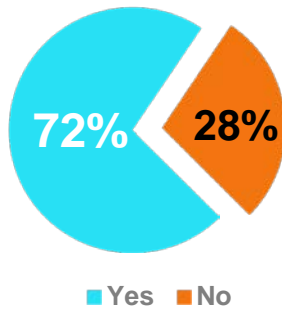
Humanities & Social Sciences



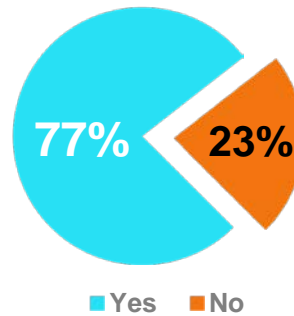
Education



Science & Mathematics

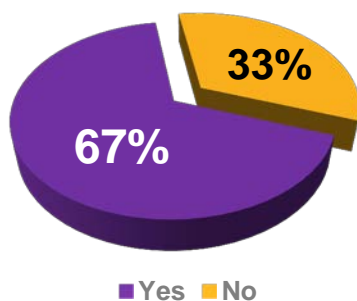


Undeclared

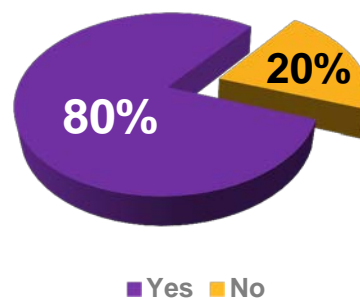


Disparities in the rate of participation in community service were considerably greater among students of different genders and different races and ethnicities. First, as the graphs show, female respondents participated in far greater proportions than their male counterparts. Whereas roughly two-thirds of male students participated in community service, 80% of females reported participating in some form of community service.

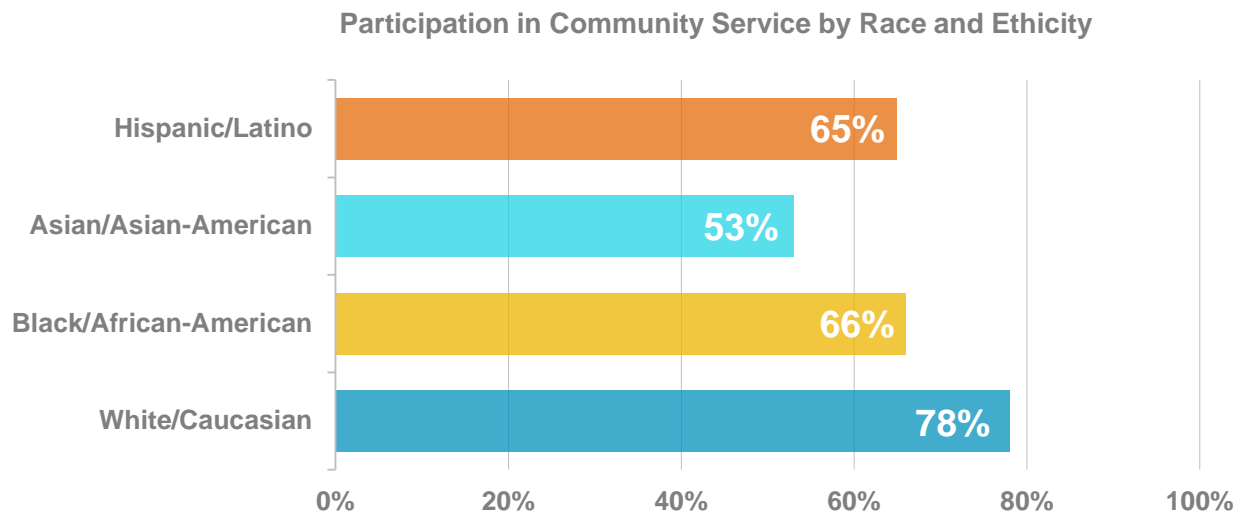
Male



Female

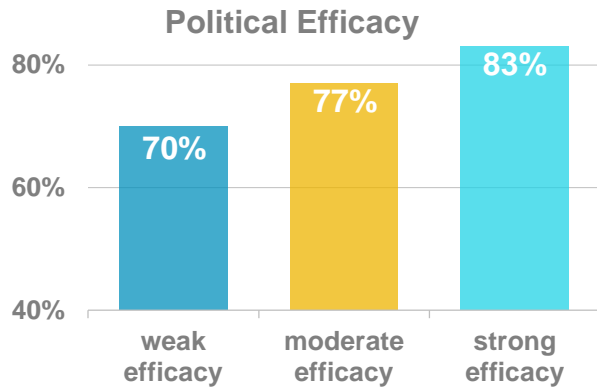


Among the largest differences in participation we found in this survey were among students of different races and ethnicities. At 78%, the participation among white students in community service was 12% higher than the next highest group—African Americans (66%)—and 13% higher than the rate of participation among Latino students (65%). The relatively low percentage of Asian Americans who said they participated in community service cannot be deemed reliable, due to the relatively small number of Asian students who completed our survey and responded to this question. On the whole, the results reveal rather large differences in the rates of participation in community service by race and ethnicity.

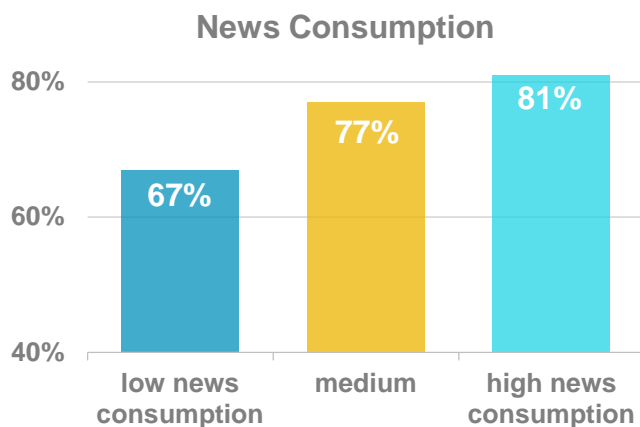


Individuals with a high degree of political efficacy are confident in their own ability to understand and affect the political process (internal political efficacy), and they believe that government will respond to the demands of citizens (external political efficacy). In our survey, we wanted to determine the extent to which students’ self-reported levels of political efficacy were related to their participation in community service activities. To measure political efficacy, we asked students: 1) if they thought that government and politics were so complicated that they can’t really understand what’s going on; 2) if they believed that public officials don’t care about what people like them think; 3) whether they trust the government to do what’s right all or most of the time, and 4) whether, if they set their mind to it, they felt they could make a difference. Based on the answers we received, we grouped respondents into one of three groups; those with strong, moderate, or weak political efficacy. Those categorized as having strong political efficacy were students who did not believe that government and politics were too complicated, and who did not agree that public officials don’t care much about what people like them think. Students with strong political efficacy also said that they did trust the government to do what’s right, and they did believe that they could make a difference in the world if they set their mind to it. By contrast, students with low levels of political efficacy believed that government and politics were too complicated, that public officials don’t care about what people like them think, but did not believe they could trust the government to do what’s right, and did not believe that they could make a difference.

Our results suggest that there is a connection between students' political efficacy and whether they had participated, or were currently participating, in community service. Just 70% of students who report weak political efficacy said they participated in community service. The rate of participation among those with strong political efficacy was 13% higher at 83%. The participation in community service among those whose political efficacy we categorized as moderate fell roughly halfway between at 77%.



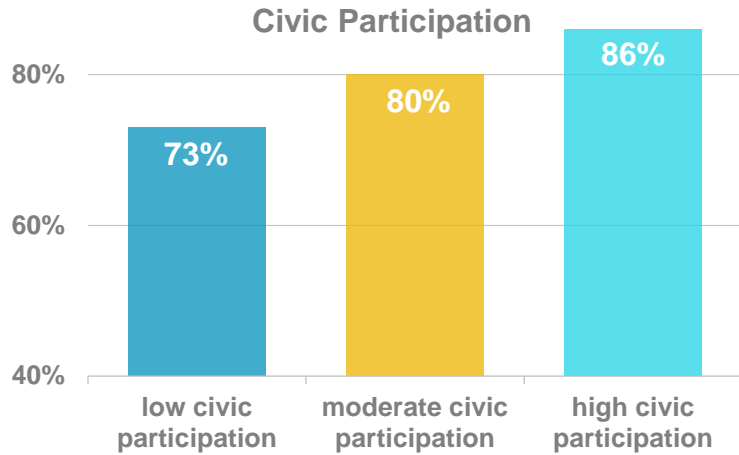
We also attempted to determine if students who made an effort to stay informed were more likely to participate in community service. To measure students' levels of news consumption, we asked them how often they: 1) read a newspaper; 2) watched the news on TV; 3) read the news online, and; 4) listened to the news or political shows on the radio. Based on their answers to these questions, respondents were placed in one of three categories: high, medium, or low news consumption.



We found that the amount of news consumed by students is strongly related to whether they participated in community service activities. Participation in community service was highest among students who consumed news most often: 81% of avid news consumers said they participated in community service, 77% of those with moderate levels of news consumption participated, and just 67% of those who reported low levels of news consumption participated in community service.

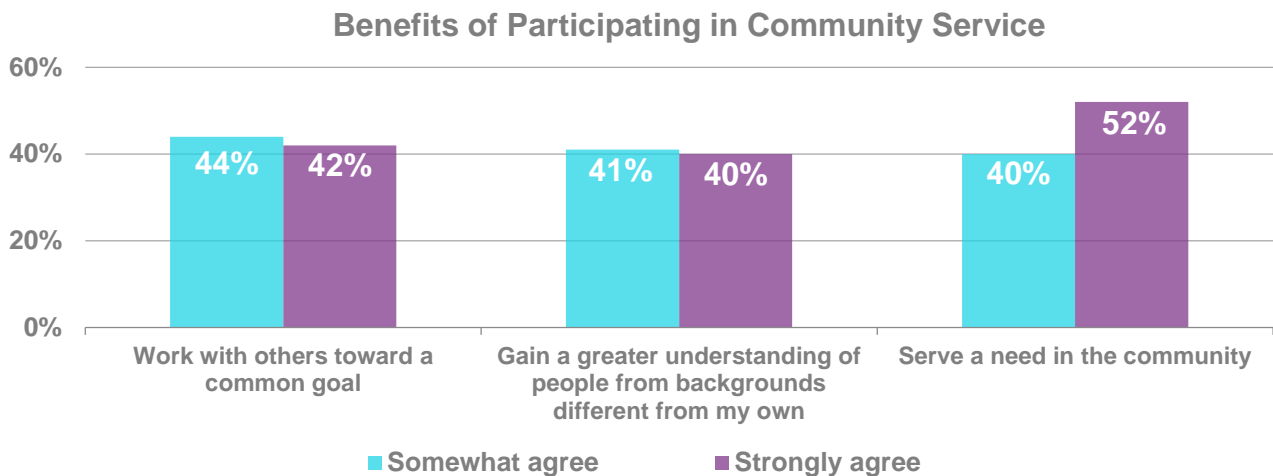
Finally, we investigated the question of whether students' participation in a number of specific civic activities was connected to their participation in community service. To gauge the extent of student involvement in civic affairs, we asked whether, over the past year, they had: 1) contacted a public official; 2) attended a meeting of town council, city council, school board, etc.; 3) helped promote political involvement or assisted with voter registration; 4) worked or volunteered for a political campaign; 5) wore a button, put a sticker on their car, or placed a sign in front of their house/dorm/apartment in support of a candidate or political or social cause; 6) contributed money to a candidate, political party, or organization that supported political candidates; 7) signed a petition (paper or online) about a political or social issue, and; 8) participated in a protest, march, or demonstration. As with political efficacy and news consumption, we placed respondents into three groups; those with high, moderate, and low levels of civic participation.

The results of our survey clearly confirm that those who were the most active participants in civic affairs were also among the most active participants in community service. An impressive 86% of students we categorized as demonstrating a high rate of civic participation said that they also participated in community service. By sharp contrast, just 73% of students who reported low rates of civic participation were active in community service.



Q: What did students perceive to be the benefits of participating in community service?

In addition to understanding which students were more likely to volunteer in neighborhoods, at places of worship, or in the university community, we also asked students to tell us about the benefits they believed they received from their participation in community service. Specifically, we asked our student respondents to tell us if their participation in community service helped them to: 1) work with others toward a common goal; 2) gain a greater understanding of people from backgrounds different from their own, and 3) serve a need in the community. The results summarized below reveal the positive assessments students expressed about their participation in community service. In general, the students who responded to our survey indicated that they were able to gain a great deal from their participation in community service.



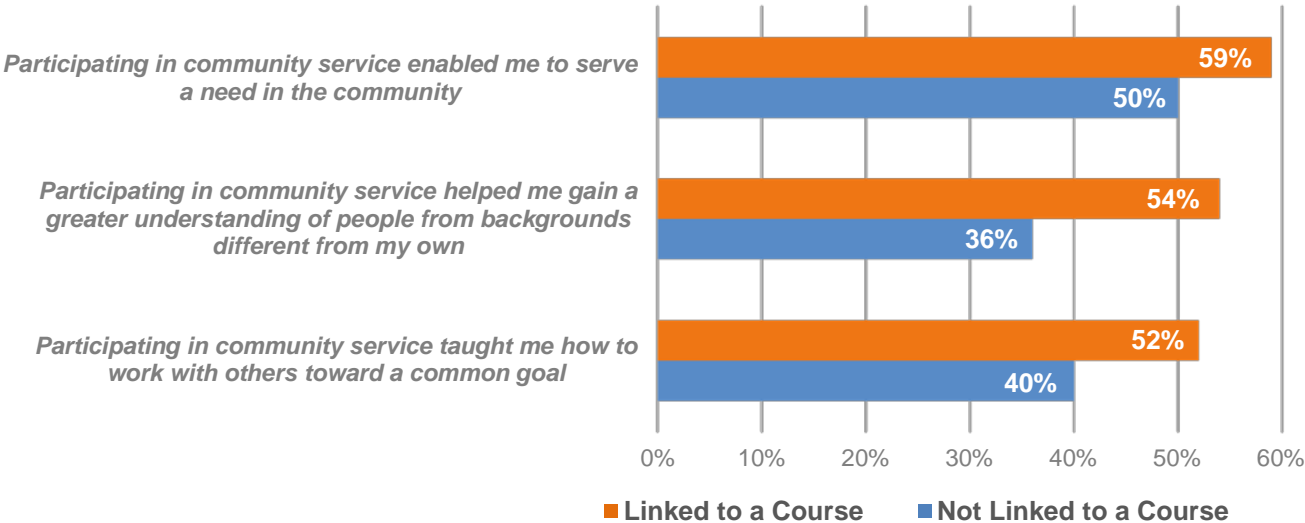
Substantial percentages of respondents agreed (either strongly or somewhat) that participation in community service helped them work with others toward a common goal (86%), gain a great of people from different backgrounds (81%), and serve a need in the community (92%). In the case of each of the three statements, the proportion of respondents who strongly disagreed was equal to or below 5%.

Q: Who benefitted the most from participating in community service?

While our results demonstrate the benefits associated with participating in community service, we wanted to identify which students were the most likely to say they benefitted from their participation in community service. In particular, we sought to determine if there was a relationship between the benefits of community service perceived by respondents and: 1) whether their participation was linked to a specific course; 2) the school in which their major was included; 3) their gender, and; 4) their race and ethnicity.

As the data suggest, students whose participation in community service was linked to a specific course they were taking were able to benefit substantially more than students whose participation was not connected to a course. Interestingly, the proportion of students who strongly agreed that community service enabled them to serve a need in the community was 9% higher among students whose participation was linked to a course. Similarly, the percentage of respondents who strongly agreed that community participation helped them to a gain a greater understanding of people from different backgrounds was an impressive 18% higher among students whose participation was connected to a course. Last, while 52% of respondents whose participation was linked to a course strongly agreed that community service taught them how to work toward a common goal, just 40% of respondents whose participation was not linked to a course reported the same.

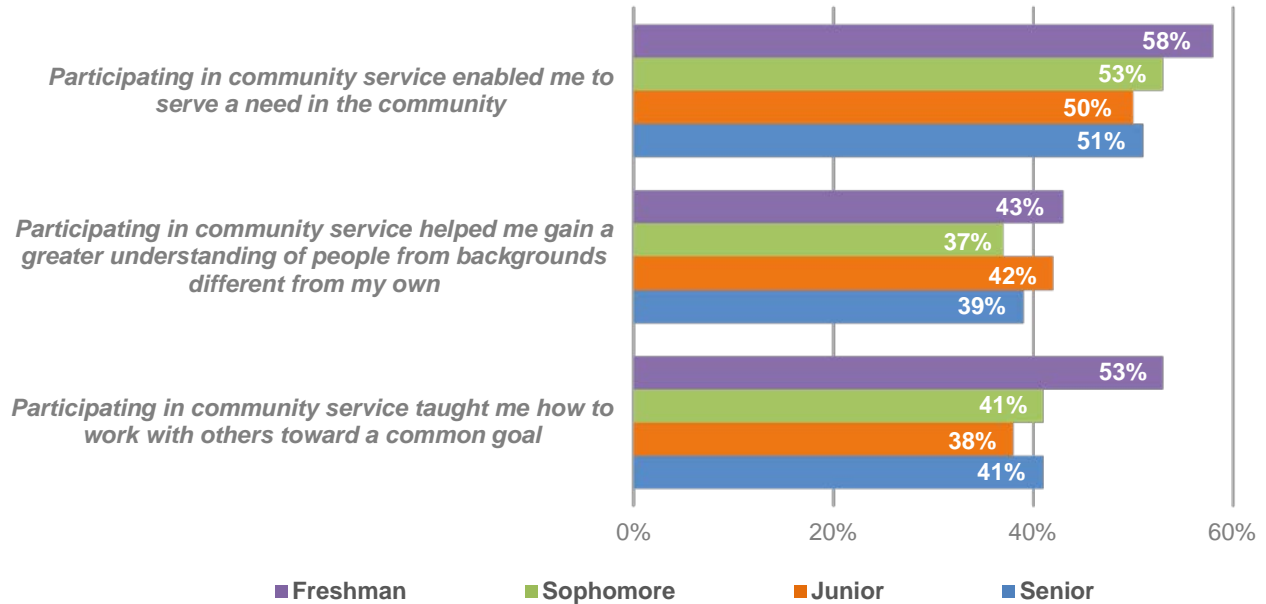
Was your participation in community service linked to a specific course?



Note: Values indicate the percentage of respondents in both groups who strongly agreed with the statement.

The extent to which students benefitted from community service varied according to their academic status, but only to a modest degree. For each of the three questions we asked, freshmen surpassed their more seasoned counterparts. Of particular interest, the percentage of students who strongly agreed with the statement, “participating in community service taught me how to work with others toward a common goal,” was 12% higher among freshman than sophomores and seniors, and 15% higher among freshman compared to juniors.

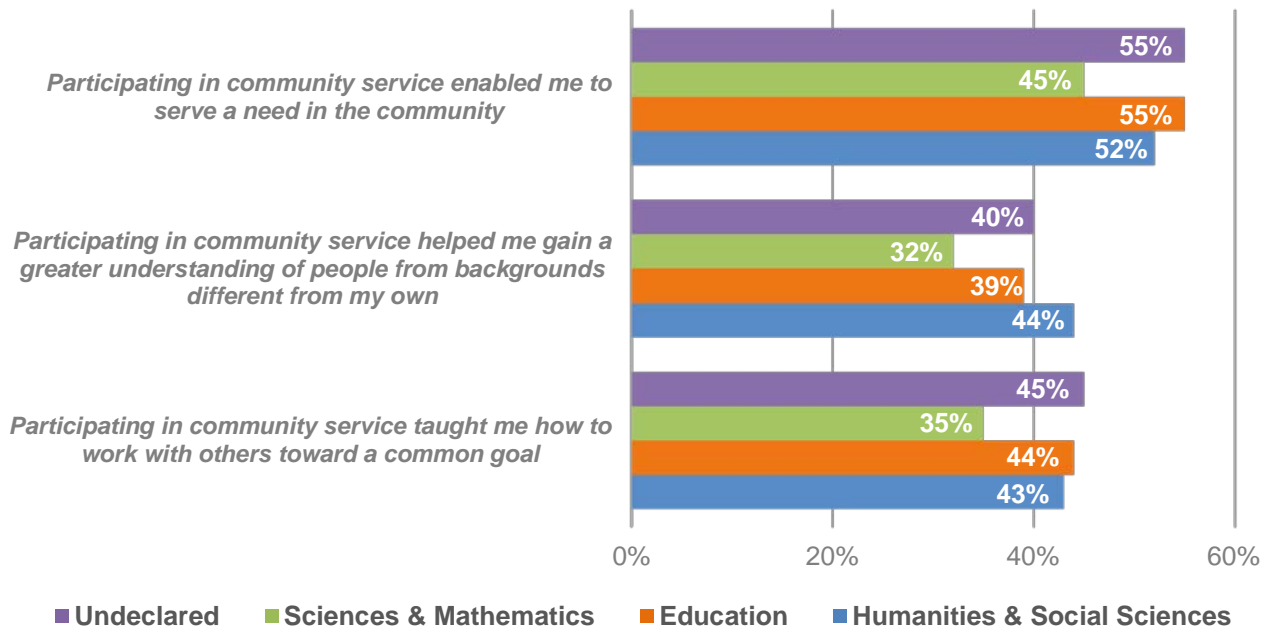
Academic status



Note: Values indicate the percentage of respondents in each group who strongly agreed with the statement.

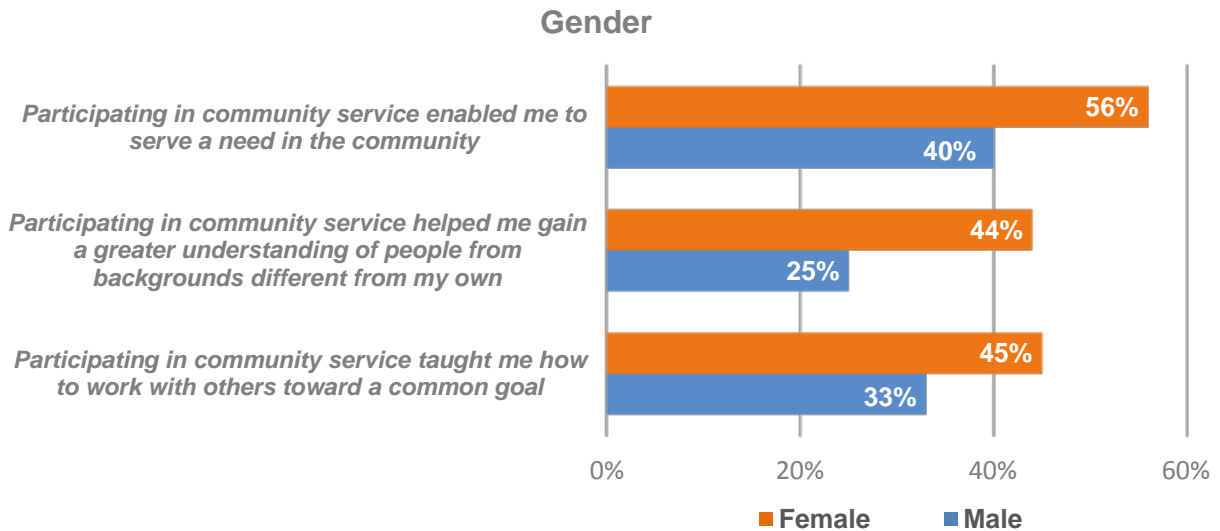
Two noteworthy patterns are evident in students’ perceptions of the benefits of community service by school. When it comes to serving a need in the community, students in the Humanities and Social Sciences perceived somewhat greater benefit than undeclared students and students in the other two academic schools. In addition, for each of the three questions asked, students in Science and Mathematics reported gaining less benefit than undeclared students and students in the schools of Education and Humanities and Social Sciences.

School



Note: Values indicate the percentage of respondents in each group who strongly agreed with the statement.

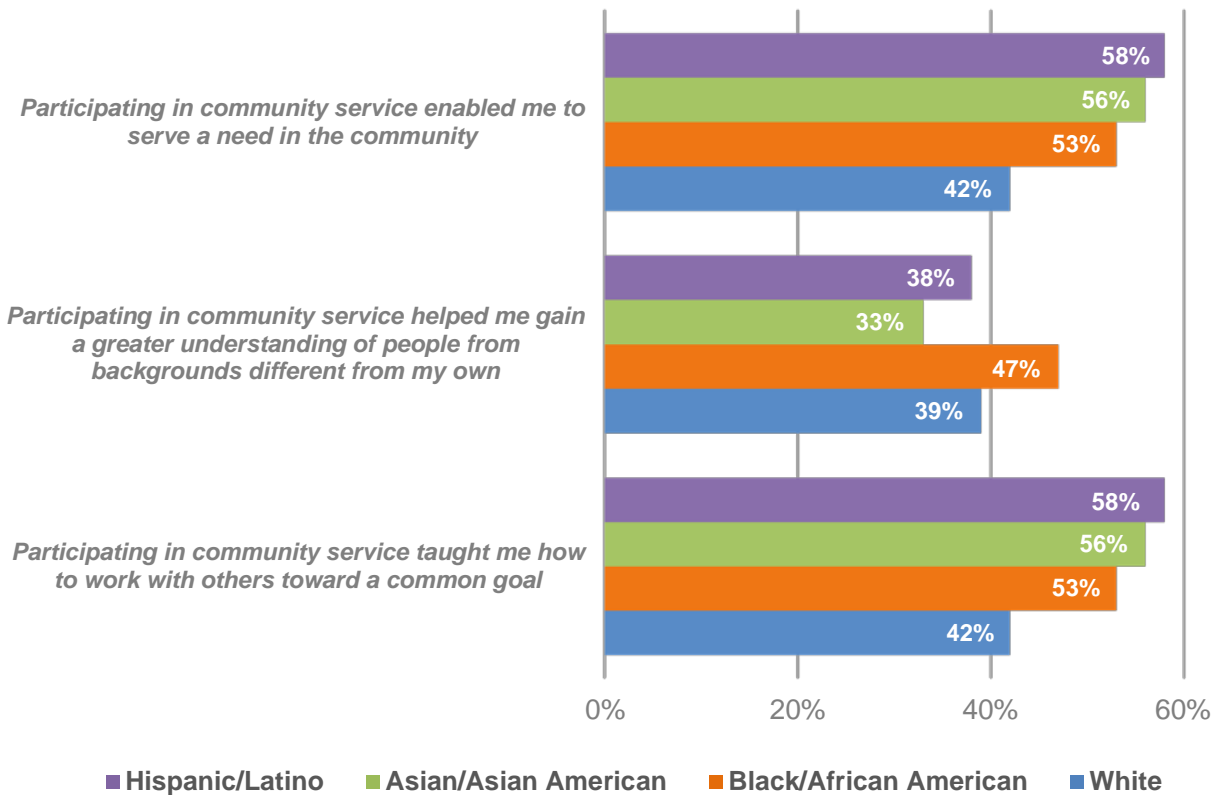
Finally, we wanted to determine if students’ perceptions of the benefits of community service differed according to their gender or race and ethnicity. First, with regard to gender, there are sizeable differences in the extent to which male students and female students benefitted from participation in community service. The percentage of females who strongly agreed that their participation allowed them to serve a need in the community (56%) is 16% higher than among males (40%). Female students were also far more likely than males to indicate that community service enabled them to gain a greater understanding of people from different backgrounds (female: 44%; male: 25%) and taught them how to work with others toward a common goal (female: 45%; male: 33%).



Note: Values indicate the percentage of respondents in both groups who strongly agreed with the statement.

There are no consistent across-the-board differences in the benefits of community service perceived by students from different races and ethnicities. Latino students were slightly more likely than African American and Asian students—and substantially more likely than white students—to say that community service enabled them to serve a need in the community and work with others toward a common goal. On the other hand, African Americans were more likely to strongly agree that participating in community service helped them to gain a greater understanding of people from different backgrounds. White students were substantially less likely than students from other groups to strongly agree that participating in community service helped them to serve a need in the community and work with others toward a common goal, but more likely than Asian students to say they gained a greater understanding of people from different backgrounds.

Race and Ethnicity

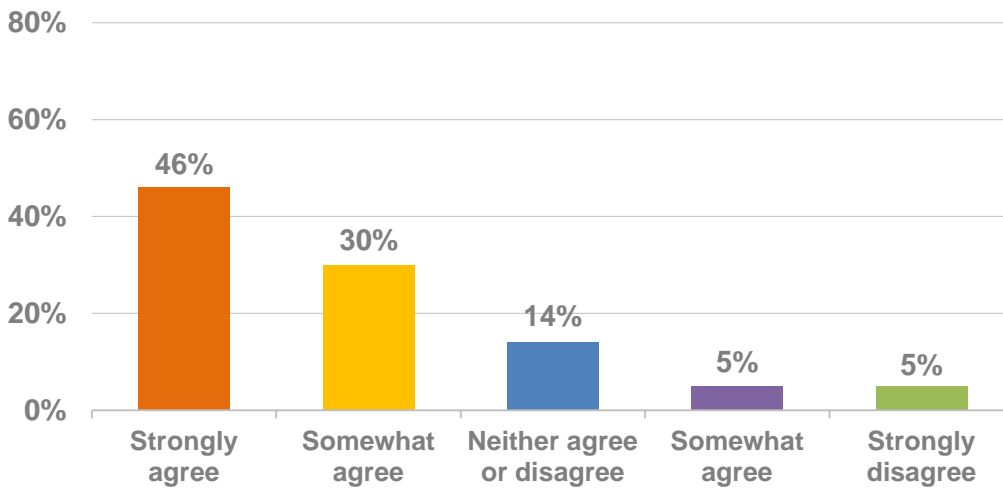


Note: Values indicate the percentage of respondents in each group who strongly agreed with the statement.

Q: Did students who participated in community service generally agree that all students should participate in community service?

In the final part of our examination of student perceptions of community service, we attempted to determine whether students believed that all students should participate in community service before graduating from Millersville University. Specifically, we asked those students who had participated, or were currently participating, in community service whether they agreed with the statement, “Based on my own personal experience, I believe it is important for all students to participate in community service.” The responses we received constitute a strong endorsement of the value of participating in community service. In particular, 76% of those who participated in community service either strongly agreed (46%) or somewhat agreed (30%) that all students should participate in some form of community service before graduation. By contrast, only 10% disagreed; 5% did so strongly, and another 5% somewhat disagreed.

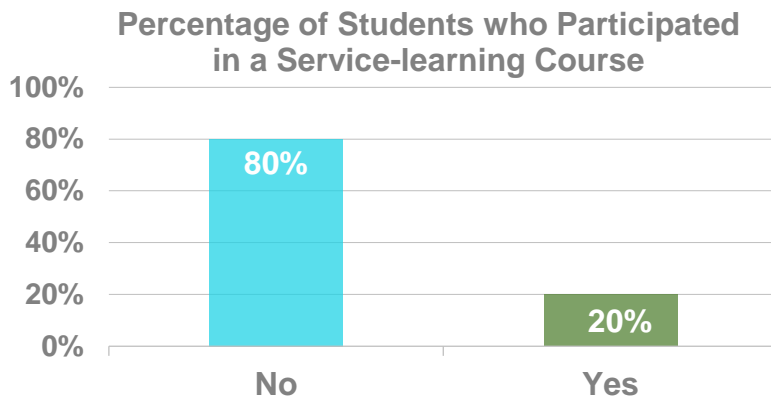
Based on my own personal experience, I believe it is important for all students to participate in community service before they graduate from Millersville University.



Service-Learning

Q: How many students participated in a service-learning course?

Before asking our student respondents whether they had taken, or were currently taking, a service-learning course, we provided the following definition of a service-learning in order to ensure an informed response: “A service-learning course is a 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 curricular content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.”¹



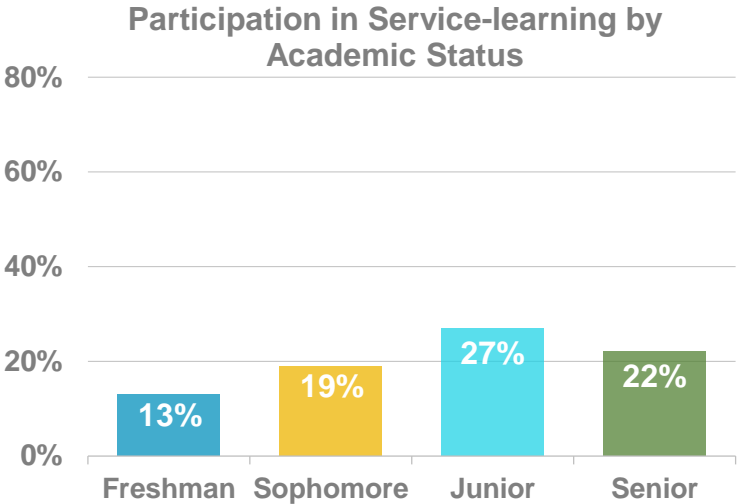
While the overwhelming majority of students said they had participated in some form of community service, the same cannot be said for service-learning courses. Our survey of student engagement revealed that 76% of students had participated, or were currently participating, in community service. Conversely, only 20% of students said they had taken, or were currently taking, a service-learning course.

¹ The definition of service-learning used in this survey is from the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse. <http://www.servicelearning.org/service-learning-research-primer/service-learning>.

Q: Who participated in a service-learning course?

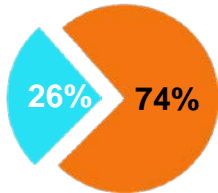
A very small proportion of the students we surveyed said they participated in a service-learning course. But the question remains: which students participated in service-learning? In the discussion that follows, we document the patterns of participation in service-learning by academic status, school, location of residence, gender, and race and ethnicity.

The data reveal a clear pattern in students’ participation in service-learning by academic status: participation in service-learning was progressively higher during the first three years of a student’s undergraduate education, after which, during the senior year, participation declined slightly. At 13%, participation was lowest among freshmen. Among sophomores, participation was 6% higher. Participation among juniors was the highest of any class at 27%, and is more than double that of freshman.



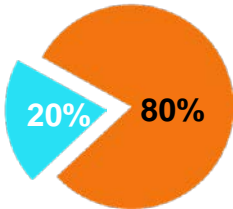
The results also show considerable variation in participation in service-learning by academic school. The rate of participation was highest among students with majors in the Humanities and Social Sciences (26%), and lowest among those enrolled in Science and Mathematics (11%). The rate of participation of students in the School of Education and undeclared students fell somewhere in between at 20% each.

Humanities & Social Sciences



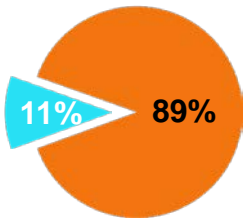
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Education



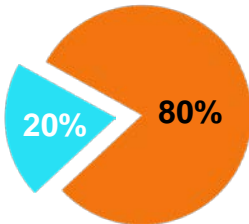
■ Yes ■ No

Science & Mathematics



■ Yes ■ No

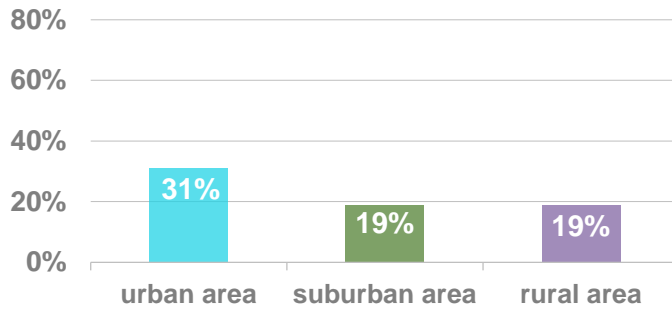
Undeclared



■ Yes ■ No

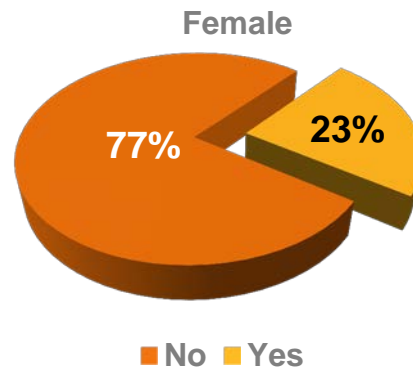
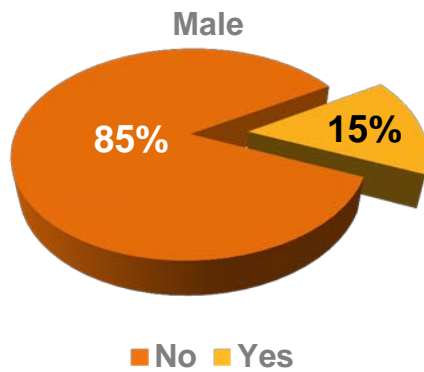


Participation in Service-learning by Residence



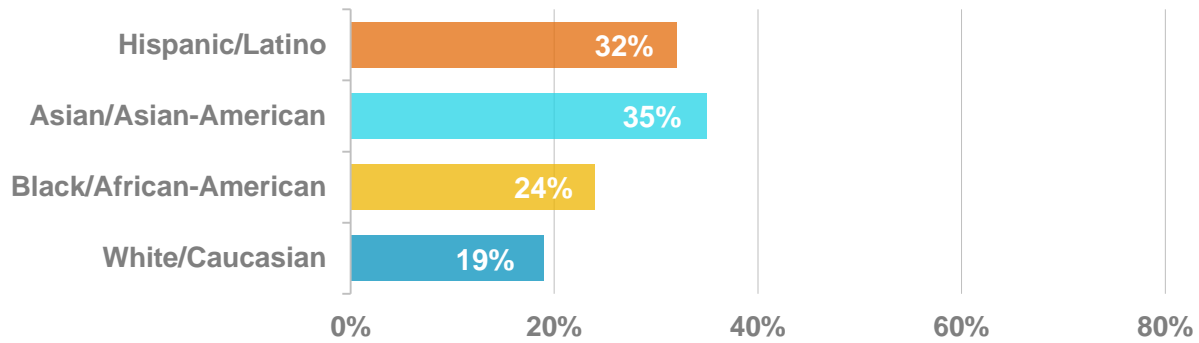
The location of the primary residence in which the students spent most of their childhood was also related to whether they participated in service-learning courses. While participation of students who grew up in rural and suburban areas was relatively low at 19%, the participation of those who grew up in urban environments was considerably higher at 31%.

Just as participation in community service was higher among female students, we found a similar pattern for service-learning. On the other hand, the gender gap in participation in service-learning was not quite as large as the gender gap in participation in community service. Female students' participation in community service was 13% higher than their male counterparts (80% v. 67%); the rate of female student's participation in service-learning courses was 8% higher than that of males (23% v. 15%).



The final respondent characteristic that we considered in our examination of service-learning was race and ethnicity. We discovered that participation in service-learning varied remarkably depending upon the racial and ethnic background of our student respondents. The lowest rate of participation was found among white respondents, at 19%. A slightly greater proportion of African Americans participated in service-learning (24%). Interestingly, the rate of participation among both Asian students and Latino students was greater, by far, than both white and African American students. Nearly a third of Latino students said they had taken, or were currently taking, a service-learning course. Even more impressive, 35% of Asian students reported that they were participating, or had already participated, in a service-learning course.

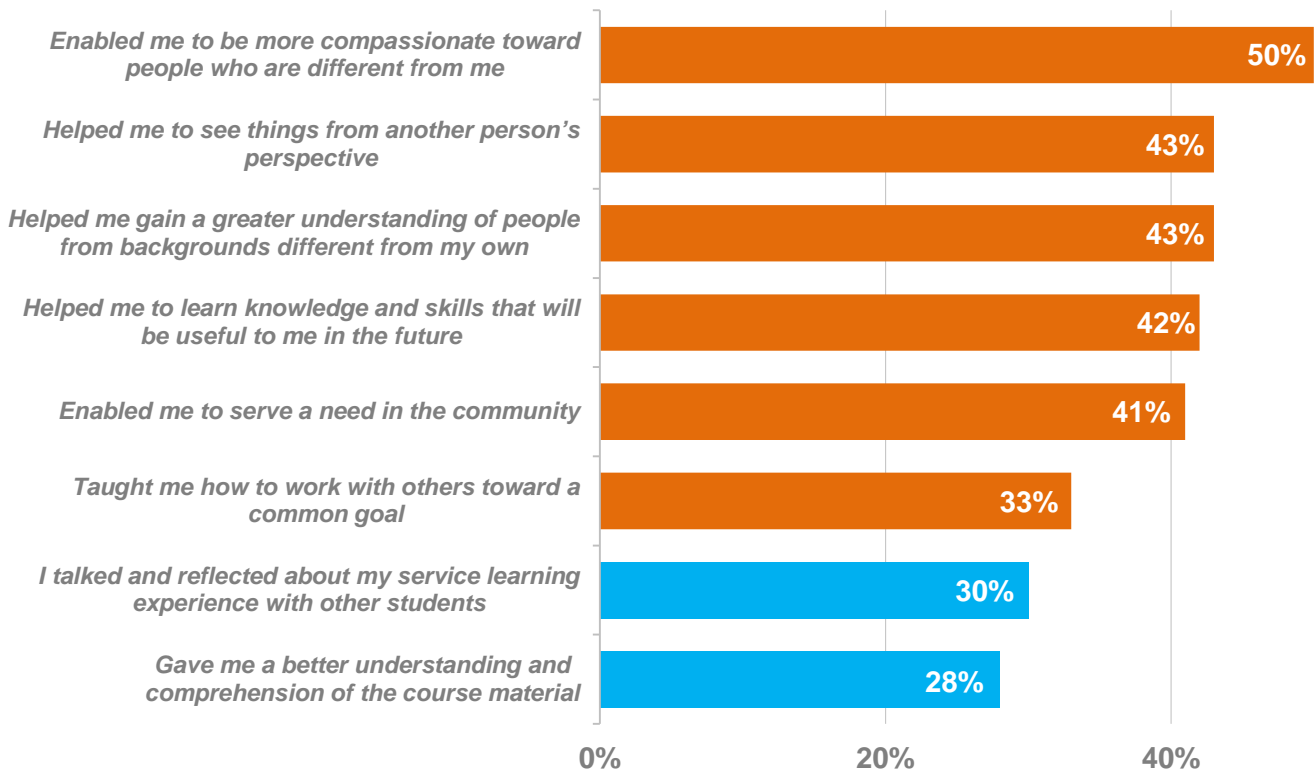
Participation in Service-learning by Race and Ethnicity



Q: What did students perceive to be the benefits of participating in a service-learning course?

More than just establishing how many students and which students were more likely to participate in service-learning, we wanted to elicit from the students what they perceived the greatest benefits they gained as a result of their participation in service-learning courses. Toward this end, we asked students to assess the extent to which they gained eight specific benefits from the service-learning courses they completed, or were in the process of completing.

Benefits of Participating in a Service-learning Course



Note: Values indicate the percentage of respondents in each group who strongly agreed with the statement.

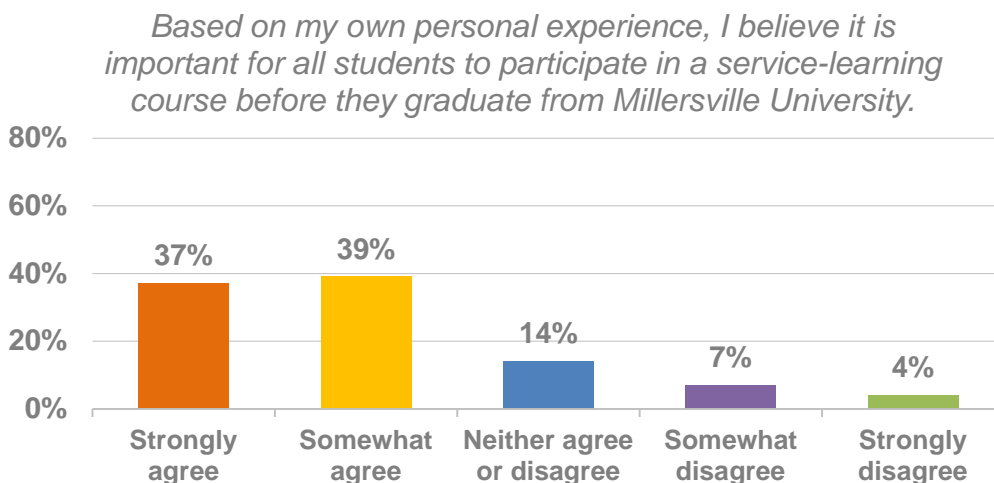


As the data summarized above indicate, large percentages of students strongly agreed that they benefitted from their service-learning experiences. An impressive 50% of students strongly agreed that their service-learning experience helped them develop a sense of compassion for those different from them. Only 5% disagreed with this statement (strongly: 4%; somewhat: 1%). More than 40% of students who participated in service-learning strongly agreed that their experience helped them to: 1) see things from another’s perspective; 2) understand people from different backgrounds; 3) learn useful knowledge and skills, and; 4) serve a need in the community. Importantly, no more than 7% disagreed with any of these four statements.

A slightly lower percentage of respondents strongly agreed that the instructors of their service-learning courses encouraged them to “talk and reflect” about their experience with other students (30%). On the other hand, 54% somewhat agreed with this statement, and only 11% disagreed (strongly: 4%; somewhat: 7%). Finally, 28% of students who took service-learning courses strongly agreed that the experience gave them a better understanding of the course material. Here again, though, a healthy 43% somewhat agreed with the statement, and only 12% disagreed (strongly: 7%; somewhat: 5%).

Q: Did students who participated in service-learning courses generally agree that all students should take a service-learning course?

Based on the findings reported here, large percentages of our student respondents believed they received a number of tangible benefits from their participation in service-learning courses. The final question we investigated is whether respondents believed that all students should take advantage of the opportunity to participate in a service-learning course before graduating from Millersville University. As the results below suggest, the answer is, generally speaking, yes.



A close examination of the responses to this question reveals that 76% of student respondents agreed that all students should participate in a service-learning course before graduating. A comparatively small 11% disagreed. All things considered, the recommendation offered by the small proportion of students who have taken a service-learning course is decidedly positive.

Appendix

Gender	
Male	70%
Female	30%

Academic Status	
Freshman	17%
Sophomore	20%
Junior	28%
Senior	34%

School	
Humanities/Social Sciences	37%
Education	44%
Science & Mathematics	16%
Undeclared	3%

Race and Ethnicity	
White/Caucasian	87%
Black/African American	4%
Asian/Asian American	2%
Hispanic/Latino	5%
Native American	0%
Other	2%

Gender	
On campus	27%
Off campus	73%

Location of residence	
Rural area	35%
Suburban area	54%
Urban area	11%



The Center for Public Scholarship

Polling & Research Office

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