

## Student Volunteers in a College Town: Burden or Lifeblood for the Voluntary Sector?

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Student volunteerism, in general, and service-learning, in particular, serves a number of purposes. For example, service-learning furthers students' education; promotes civic engagement; and benefits the community (Littlepage, Gazley, & Bennett, 2012). In college towns—towns where the university or college is the primary industry—student volunteers can potentially be the lifeblood of the voluntary sector, providing nonprofit and community-based organizations with an evergreen supply of motivated volunteers. These volunteers provide administrative or programmatic support, help with fundraising or special events, and transfer cutting edge knowledge from their professors. Or so the theory goes.

There is an assumption that nonprofit will supply students with opportunities and students will supply nonprofits with labor; however, Littlepage, Gazley, & Bennett (2012) argue the “service-learning research rarely examines whether either of these assumptions is true” (p. 308). It is possible that instead of being a lifeblood to the local voluntary sector, student volunteers can be a burden. This might occur when organizations do not have the volunteer administration capacity to support volunteers, when students are unprepared for volunteer assignments, or when the availability of students does not match the organization's need. Any of these factors might be intensified in the context of a college town.

## Abstract

Student volunteers provide a valuable source of unpaid labor to nonprofit organizations, particularly organizations in college towns where students make up a significant portion of the population. Indeed, students may be the lifeblood for these organizations. However, students may also be a burden if organizations do not have the volunteer administration capacity to support volunteers, if students are unprepared for volunteer assignments, or if the availability of students does not match the organization's need. The purpose of this exploratory case study is to identify whether students were a burden to or the lifeblood of the voluntary sector in a college town. We surveyed 55 nonprofit leaders to identify their volunteer management capacity, experience of student volunteers (emphasizing the match between supply and demand), and their ideas for improvement. We found student volunteers comprise a significant percentage of their overall volunteer population and brought valuable skills and enthusiasm. However, we also found a mismatch between the demand for student volunteers and the supply of student volunteers, particularly as it relates to availability. We identified a number of recommendations to improve the overall service-learning experience. These findings are of interest to nonprofit organizations and educational institutions in college towns.

The purpose of this exploratory case study is to identify if students were a burden to or the lifeblood of the voluntary sector in a college town. We focused our research on Gainesville, Florida which, as we describe in the methodology, is a small town with a large university and community college student population. We surveyed nonprofit organizations and found that student volunteers comprise a significant percentage of their overall volunteer population and brought valuable skills and enthusiasm. However, we also found a mismatch between the demand for student volunteers and the supply of student volunteers, particularly as it relates to availability. We identified a number of recommendations to improve the overall experience of student volunteers. These findings are of interest to nonprofit organizations and educational institutions in college towns.

## **Background**

In this section we review literature at the intersection of student volunteerism (including service-learning) and nonprofit volunteer management. Specifically, we look at the demand side (i.e., student volunteers) as it relates to the supply side (i.e., the nonprofit organizations). The research described in this section indicates there is high potential for a mismatch between the supply of student volunteers and the demand for student volunteers in a college town.

### **The Demand Side: Student Volunteers**

As previously mentioned, there are numerous benefits of volunteering for students, including increased learning, increase civic engagement, and developing professional networks and skills (Littlepage, Gazley, & Bennett, 2012; Skulan, 2018). These benefits have been the subject of much research (see, for example, Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2008) which has indicated that service-learning can lead to a change in students attitudes about social issues (Caswell, 2018), changes in attitude about specific populations (Whitekiller & Bang, 2018), and lead to an increase in capacity across multiple professional and personal domains (Carlisle, Gourd, Rajkhan, & Nitta, 2017). Additionally, at least some nonprofit leaders see service-learning as an opportunity for students to “cross cultural boundaries and better understand socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic disparities in American society” (Worrall, 2007, p.10).

There are also challenges posed by service-learning. Mandated student volunteering can initially be perceived negatively (Henney, Hackett, & Porreca, 2017) and may potentially decrease their intrinsic motivations to volunteer (Beehr, LeGro, Porter, Bowling, & Swader, 2010). Additionally, college students may have time and resource constraints that may prevent them from volunteering or taking service-learning courses even if they wanted to (Gage & Thapa, 2012). These constraints may mean that, overall, the students who volunteer are the students who have more time and money—i.e., students often from middle or upper class households. Volunteering can yield valuable professional benefits. If primarily well-off students have more freedom to

volunteer, then volunteering in college may extend that privilege and actually contribute to continued economic inequity.

### **The Supply Side: Nonprofit and Community-based Organizations**

From the supply side, there are numerous potential benefits of student volunteers to nonprofit or community-based organizations, such as free labor, the opportunity to train and vet potential new staff, affiliation with and access to educational institutions, publicity, and overall increased organizational capacity (Edwards, Mooney, & Heald, 2001). The potential downsides can include an overall lower quality of work than professional staff, time and resource demands related to volunteer administration, security and public relations risks, and reliability and scheduling problems (Skulan, 2018).

An organization's ability to capitalize on the opportunities and to mitigate the potential challenges of student volunteers hinges on their volunteer administration capacity. Gazley, Littlepage, & Bennett (2012) found that the same volunteer management best practices that are employed with traditional volunteers are also important to college student volunteering. Thus, the organization's overall volunteer management capacity is an indicator of their readiness to provide high-quality service-learning opportunities for students.

Volunteer management practices are similar to human resource practices (Pynes, 2013; Hagar and Brudney, 2004). For each volunteer position there should be a comprehensive job or position plan that should include an analysis of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics needed and a position description. Additionally, the organization should engage in strategic recruitment, screening, selection, including background checks as appropriate for the position. Once invited to volunteer, the volunteer should receive an orientation, regular training, and performance evaluations. Additionally, the organization should be strategic in how they recognize and quantify the contributions of volunteers. Beyond this, the organization must develop policies related to volunteer administration and consider insurance for volunteers.

Volunteer management best practices are, unfortunately, not widespread (Hagar and Brudney, 2004) in part due to lack of resources. While these functions can be carried out by a volunteer in a small organization, they really require the dedication of a paid staff member. And at least two thirds of the voluntary sector does not have more than \$50,000 in revenue (Jones, et.al, 2018; McKeever, 2015). Organizations in a small college town may be even less likely to have the resources necessary for effective volunteer administration.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to analyze the match (or potential mismatch) between the supply and demand for student volunteers in a college town. Specifically, we ask if

student volunteers in a college town are more of a burden or a lifeblood for the voluntary sector. The specific research questions are as follows:

- What is the volunteer management capacity of nonprofit organizations in a small college town?
- How do nonprofit organizations experience college and university student volunteers?
- How can colleges and universities support nonprofit organizations' engagement of student volunteers?

### **Research Design and Methodology**

To address the research questions, we conducted a case study of one college town, Gainesville, Florida. Specifically, we surveyed nonprofit leaders to identify their volunteer management capacity, experience of student volunteers (emphasizing the match between supply and demand), and their ideas for improvement. Gainesville, Florida is an excellent place to investigate these research questions because it is a small town (2017 population 131,591; U.S. Census, n.d.) with approximately 1,266 nonprofit organizations, only less than 400 of which have revenue greater than \$50,000 (Jones, Pracht, Simonne, Renfrow, & Hunter, 2018). Most organizations have insufficient revenue to hire a volunteer administrator. Gainesville is also home to both the state's flagship university, the University of Florida (UF), and to Santa Fe College (SFC), one of the best community colleges in the nation. Enrollment at UF is greater than 52,000 (in-person, University of Florida, n.d.) and enrollment at Santa Fe College is greater than 16,000 (Santa Fe College Office of Institutional Research; Santa Fe College, n.d.). These facts suggest students may be competing for limited volunteer opportunities at a limited number of nonprofit organizations.

### **The Sample**

An online survey was emailed to 197 agency leaders from Gainesville, Florida and surrounding areas. The sample was developed by combining internal distribution lists from volunteering hubs around campus, including the David & Wanda Brown Center for Leadership and Service (BCLS), the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences (which offers a nonprofit practicum/internship), and other similar programs that actively engage students in service-learning. Sixty-five people responded to the survey and fifty-five completed the survey (response rate of 28%). To accommodate the breadth of services opportunities, the distribution list included both nonprofit and government agencies with which students currently volunteer.

Eighty-seven percent of the sample were nonprofit agencies and 13 percent were government agencies that engaged student volunteers. The participants represented a variety of different leadership positions, including executive director/chief executive officer (27%), mid-level manager (not volunteer related; 25%), other volunteer administrator (22%), senior leader (24%), and founders (2%).

The sample included both large and small organizations but the majority would be classified as small. We were able to identify the annual budgets for 40 of the 55 nonprofit participants. These annual budgets ranged from a low of \$12,000 to a high of more than \$40 million. Removing the outlier (>\$40 million), the average annual budget was \$620,797. Twenty-nine of the participants have budgets less than \$500,000, 13 of which have budgets less than \$100,000. The number of employees ranged from 0 to 4,500, with an average of 31 employees (after removing the outliers of 3,000 and 4,500). Most of the sample had fewer than 10 employees. The number of volunteers ranged from 4 to 21,000 with an average of 374 (after removing the outlier of 21,000).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

We developed a survey that addressed three core areas: volunteer administration capacity, experience with student volunteers, and ideas for improvement. The survey was administered in February and March, 2018. The survey included thirty questions (5 open-ended; 25 close-ended). We drew from multiple sources to develop the survey questions. Specifically, we used a recent report on the nonprofit sector in North Central Florida (Jones, et al., 2016) to develop the scales for number of employees and volunteers; we adapted questions from Carter-Kahl's (2013) work on types of volunteers and challenges related to volunteer management; and we adapted findings about volunteer management activities from a report by Hagar and Brudney (2014).

Close-ended questions were analyzed descriptively. Open-ended questions were coded thematically using a process known as inductive coding (Patton, 2002). Specifically, we reviewed the data for each open-ended questions and inductively identified themes and noted outliers. The themes are presented in quote matrixes and the outliers are discussed in the accompanying text.

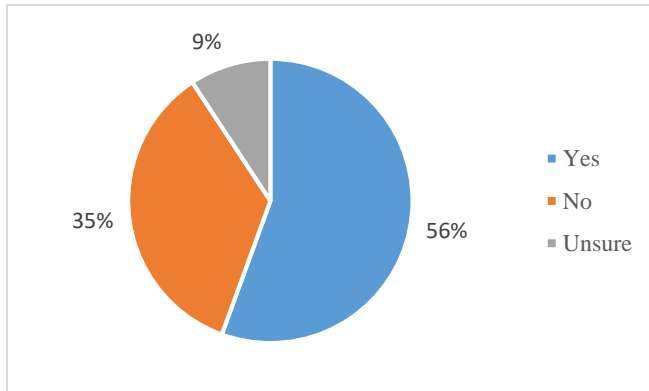
## Findings

### **Part I: Volunteer Administration Capacity**

#### **Volunteer Administrator**

Fifty-six percent of the sample had a paid volunteer administrator, 35 percent did not, and 9 percent were unsure (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Paid Volunteer Administrator



**Time dedicated to volunteer administration.** Of those that had a volunteer administrator, 67 percent had a full-time employee, 12 percent had a part-time employee, and 21 percent had a volunteer. The full and part-time employees often split their time between multiple responsibilities. Of those that had a paid employee designated, exactly 50% had less than one half of one full time equivalent (FTE) and 50% had more than a half-time person. Only three (8%) had an employee 100 percent dedicated to volunteer administration. In short, only a few organizations had a paid, full-time volunteer coordinator.

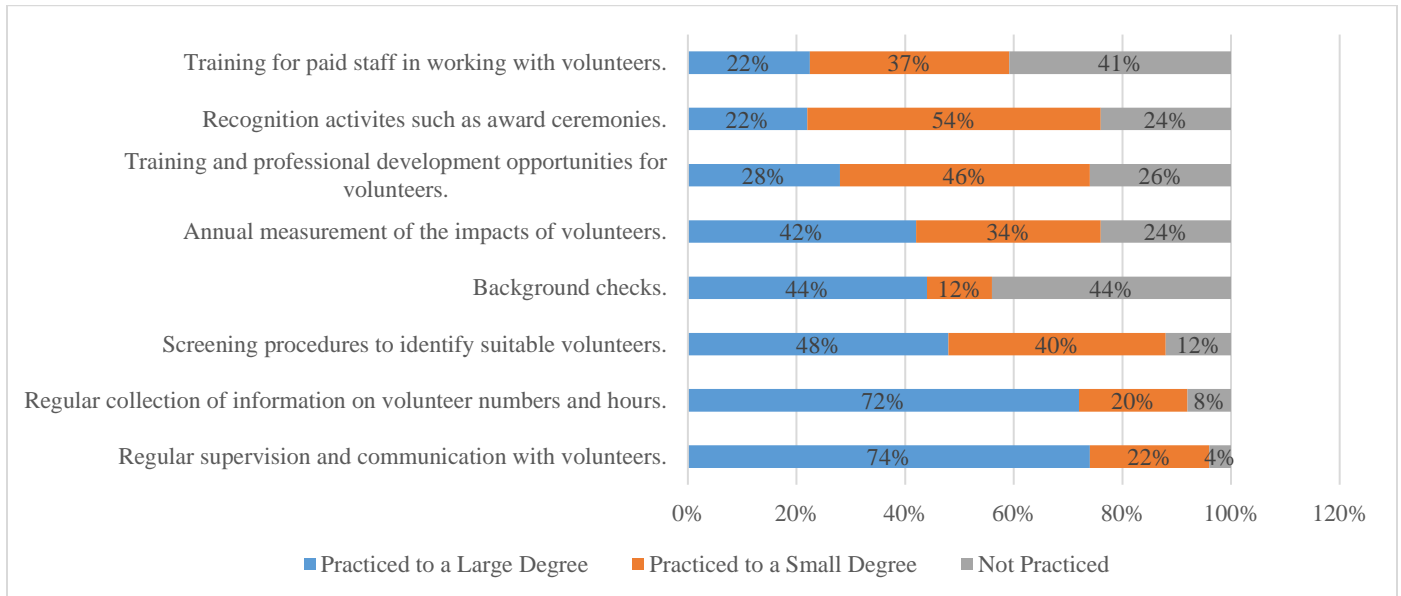
**Tenure and education.** Most of the volunteer administrators in the sample had generally been on the job between one and five years (50%). Thirty-four percent had less than one year on the job. Just less than half of the sample (47%) had at least a Bachelor's level of education. Most of their educational foci was not specific to nonprofit or volunteer administration but, rather, included a variety of programs such as political science, sociology, law, social science, public relations, or other related field. Those without a Bachelor's level of education reported having been trained by previous staff, taken classes at conferences, and/or engaged in field experience.

#### **Volunteer Management Practices**

The sample engaged in a variety of volunteer management best practices. Seventy-four percent indicated they regularly supervised and communicated with volunteers. Seventy-two percent indicated they regularly collected information on the number of volunteers and of hours volunteered. Alarming, less than half engaged to large degree in screening procedures or background checks, two steps critical to ensure proper

placement and to decrease risk, particularly when working with vulnerable populations. Approximately a quarter of the sample trained staff to work with volunteers, engaged in regular recognition activities, or provided professional development opportunities to a large degree. See Figure 2.

Figure 2 Volunteer Management Practices



About half or more of the sample had in place the core volunteer management documents or policies necessary for an effective organization (Table 1). Specifically, 73 percent conducted volunteer orientations, 71 percent had written policies and procedures pertaining to volunteers, 67 percent had volunteer job positions, 56 percent had liability insurance for volunteers, and 55 percent had a volunteer handbook or manual.

Table 1 Volunteer Management Documents and Policies

Volunteer Orientation	73%
Written Policies and Procedures	71%
Volunteer Job Positions	67%
Liability Coverage or Insurance for Volunteers	56%
Volunteer Handbook or Manual	55%

### Types of Volunteers Accepted

Participants were asked to rank their demand for volunteers based on length of time. There was strong consensus that order of demand was as follows: long-term, short-term, and one-time.

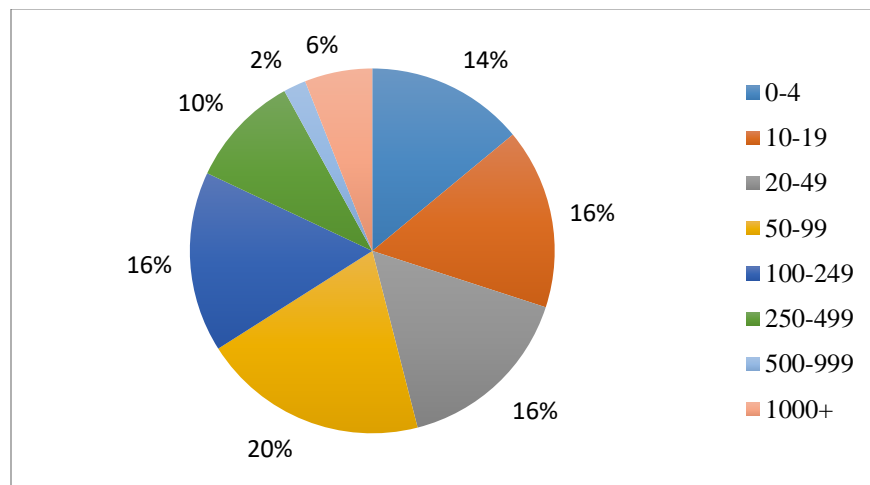
Eighty-four percent of the participants indicated their organization accepted groups of volunteers. Nine participants provided additional written comments which suggested their ability to accept groups varied based on time of year and available projects. The size of groups accepted ranged from 8 to 200.

## ***Part II: Nonprofit Experience of Student Volunteers***

### **Current Use of Students**

As described in the sampling (see methodology), participants ranged in the number of volunteers they engaged. They also ranged in the number of college and university student volunteers they engaged on an annual basis (see Figure 3). At the low end of the spectrum, the majority of participants engaged 100 or fewer student volunteers in 2017. At the high end of the spectrum, a few organizations engaged more than 500 volunteers. See Figure 3.

Figure 3 Number of Student Volunteers in 2017



**Student volunteers as percent of total volunteer population.** The student volunteer population comprised a majority of the participants' overall volunteer population. On average, 54% of their volunteer population were students. The range was 2-98%, with the median being 65% and the mode being 80%.

**Volunteer site locations.** Participants reported that students volunteered in sites around the county, including outlying areas; however, the majority of sites were within the city of Gainesville and, specifically, within walking distance of the major university. A smaller percentage of students volunteered in various regions round the county (see Table 2).



Table 2 Volunteer Locations

Site Location Where Volunteering Occurs	Percentage of Organizations
City of Gainesville- Downtown*	45%
City of Gainesville- Midtown*	42%
City of Gainesville- Southwest	36%
City of Gainesville- Southeast	35%
City of Gainesville- Northeast	31%
City of Gainesville- Northwest**	29%
Alachua County- Alachua	18%
Alachua County- Newberry	13%
Alachua County- Hawthorn	9%
Alachua County- Archer	9%
Alachua County- Waldo	7%
Alachua County- Micanopy	7%
Alachua County- High Springs	5%
Alachua County- La Crosse	2%

\*Near the major university

\*\*Near the primary community college

**Working directly with faculty.** The majority of responded have worked directly with supervising faculty members. Specifically, 68 percent had worked with faculty, 30 percent had not, and two percent were unsure.

**Benefits of student volunteers.** Participants were asked to describe the benefits of student volunteers. Primarily, participants indicated students provided programmatic support (38% of respondents) and helped with programmatic expansion (7%). Students also brought enthusiasm and passion (24% of respondents) and creativity (5%). Another benefit of student volunteers was their ability to market the organization (13%), including allowing the organization to have a presence on the university campus. Some participants (11%) mentioned talent, but emphasized talent related to technology rather than talent related to course-work. See Table 3.

Table 3 Benefits of Student Volunteers

Theme	Sample Response
Programmatic Support (38%) and Expansion (7%)	<p><i>“Our volunteers are everything. They are the front line of our suicide and crisis intervention work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Several projects per year are completed by student groups, also informal “office” work days have regularly assisted us in cleaning out and managing our warehouse.”</i></p>
Enthusiasm and Passion (24%) and Creativity (5%)	<p><i>“Enthusiasm! Many student volunteers are pre-vet and really help to create an energetic, fast-paced environment that encourages a lot of in-the-moment learning!”</i></p> <p><i>“They bring creativity/design, youth perspective, passion, curiosity, &amp; eagerness to help. All good things!”</i></p>
Marketing and Exposure (13%)	<p><i>“They are able to give our organization a presence on campus.”</i></p> <p><i>“Many students have helped with outreach/increase in areas of volunteer recruiting and client recruiting, data projects, help us meet our yearly goals!”</i></p>
Expertise and Talent Related to Technology (11%)	<p><i>“Knowledge of current trends and issues among young people, well-informed about technology and social media, passionate about helping.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are flexible in their hours, well versed on technology, passionate about our mission.”</i></p>

**Supply of vs. Demand for Student Volunteers**

Participants were asked to rate their demand for students on a one to five scale, with one being “disagree strongly” and five being “agree strongly.” There was more demand for individual student volunteers (average rating of 4.3) than group volunteers (3.4). There was less consensus in responding to the statement “we have the right amount of student groups.” See Table 4.

Table 4 Participant Organizations’ Demand for Student Volunteers

Statement	Average
We would like more student volunteers	4.3
We would like more groups of student volunteers.	3.4
We have the right amount of student groups volunteering with our organization.	3.3

When asked as an open-ended question what would need to change in order for the supply of students to adequately meet their demand, participants indicated the core

issues were availability, commitment, and professionalism. One person indicated it would be helpful to have a point of contact at the university or college. Three sample quotes are included below. These quotes address the key concerns articulated by many of the respondents.

*“The transient volunteer circle is tiring but unavoidable in a college town. More involvement before they are seniors and about to move away would be nice (us recruiting more freshman/sophomore).”*

*“We would really like to see more long-term commitment from our student volunteers. We see many volunteers that need 20 hours of volunteer work for a class and never come back once the hours are completed. I personally think that should be eliminated from a course requirement as it only forces the student to be involved and not really want to volunteer on their own. We get a good amount of group volunteers and while we truly appreciate their help, we know that most of them will never come back.”*

*“Students are frequently unavailable during holidays, and may be juggling many other obligations/commitments that make it difficult for them to volunteer consistently.”*

### **Student-Related Challenges**

Participants were asked to identify the top three student-related challenges out of a list of fourteen potential options. There was strong consensus on the following four challenges (listed in order of participants' perceived order of importance):

1. Students are unavailable at the times required.
2. Students are unavailable for the length of commitment required.
3. Students are unwilling to commit to the length of time required.
4. Students do not have transportation to the volunteer location.

### **Student Preparedness and Availability**

Participants were asked to rate student preparedness and availability on a one to five scale, with one being “disagree strongly” and five being “agree strongly.” There was great variability of responses to the statements on student availability, with the sample's average scores being 3.5 for “available for a length of commitment that suits our needs” and 3.4 for “available during the times of the years when we need them most.” The variability in responses suggests that the fit between supply of and demand for volunteer hours varies by organization—for some organizations the fit works well and for others there is a mis-match. There was less variability for the statements on preparedness, with the sample's average score being 4.0 or above for both of those measures. See Table 5.

Table 5 Student Preparedness and Availability

Statement	Average
Students have the skills needed to be effective volunteers.	4.3
Students have the professionalism and "soft skills" needed to be effective volunteers.	4.0
Students are available for a length of commitment that suits our needs	3.5
Students are available during the times of the years we need them most.	3.4

### **Organization-related Challenges**

Participants were asked to identify the top three organization-related challenges out of a list of fifteen potential options. There was consensus across the following challenges (listed in order of participants' perceived importance):

1. There are limited funds to support volunteer engagement.
2. Our organization does not have a staff member dedicated to engaging volunteers.
3. We are unsure where to find the volunteers we need.
4. We don't have time to post volunteer opportunities.

### **Part III: Recommendations for Improvement**

**Student preparedness.** Participants indicated students could better prepare themselves for a meaningful volunteer experience by researching the agency before volunteering, following through on their commitments, improving their soft skills, and taking more initiative. One respondent suggested students organize a carpool/ride share program. See Table 6.

Table 6 Potential Student Improvements

Theme	Sample Response
Researching the Agency	<i>“Read through training and commitment requirements.”</i> <i>“Find out more about the site before they come.”</i>
Following Through on Commitments	<i>“They can plan to stick with a schedule and treat volunteerism as a job and resume building for the future.”</i> <i>“Be realistic about how much time and energy they actually have to offer to volunteering.”</i>
Improving Soft Skills	<i>“Ask questions and learn business etiquette.”</i> <i>“Focus on professionalism and commitment to the cause.”</i>
Taking Initiative	<i>“Be more proactive and ask for things to do when they have completed tasks.”</i> <i>“Come with ideas! We are a community space, we are here for them!”</i>

**Organizational improvements.** Participants indicated that their organization could better engage student volunteers by expanding their recruitment activities, creating more opportunities, improving their onboarding/training processes, adding volunteer management staff, and better recognizing their volunteers. See Table 7.

Table 7 Potential Organizational Improvements

Theme	Sample Response
Recruitment	<p><i>“Increase marketing for volunteers on-line, etc.”</i></p> <p><i>“Partner with student involvement, reach out to clubs, have incentive</i></p>
More Opportunities	<p><i>“Prepare daily activities when client numbers are not time-intensive.”</i></p> <p><i>“Set up department specific opportunities in more areas across the organization.”</i></p>
Onboarding/ Training	<p><i>“We can create mandatory group training so that volunteers can work together and all have the same basic training experiences, versus having to teach and train volunteers individually. It would also be beneficial to cross-train volunteers for every volunteer position we have so that we can utilize all volunteers to cover shifts that become available or need coverage.”</i></p>
Adding Staff	<p><i>“Have a staff volunteer coordinator to allow more organization of projects and volunteers.”</i></p>
Volunteer Recognition	<p><i>“Have more get togethers to celebrate the volunteers.”</i></p>

**College and university support.** Participants were asked how the local colleges and universities could support their organization’s engagement of volunteers in an open-ended question. The overwhelming theme of the responses was that participants wanted support recruiting students. In particular, they wanted to see more recruitment events on campus and in classrooms, promotion of volunteer opportunities, and updated contact information for student clubs and groups. The second most prominent theme was that participants wanted colleges and universities to promote different service-learning formats, including internships, smaller groups, more targeted courses, and encouraging volunteerism beyond service-learning. See Table 8.

Table 8 Potential Organizational Improvements

Theme	Sample Response
Recruitment	<p><i>“Allow us to have more visibility on campus, in programs, at special events.”</i></p> <p><i>“More opportunities to engage with students on campus, such as volunteer fairs.”</i></p> <p><i>“By hosting volunteer fairs as well as making it course requirements to volunteer with community organizations- that way students are forced to volunteer.”</i></p>
Change in Format	<p><i>“Find ways to volunteer in smaller groups, with more flexibility in timing.”</i></p> <p><i>“Require service learning through internships.”</i></p> <p><i>“Less one-time groups offered; instead more targeted course/major partnering to meet the needs of local NGOs working hard in the community. Support and instill high expectations and standards.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encourage volunteers to get invested in their community beyond just a class requirement.”</i></p>

In a close-ended question, participants were asked about what types of support they would use if it were made available. The responses again centered on recruitment, with participants wanting to participate in networking fairs, student volunteer websites, or meet and greet sessions with faculty. However, participants were also open to trainings on volunteer management and, to a lesser degree, trainings on student volunteers and how to develop service-learning opportunities. See Table 9.

Table 9 Desired College and University Support

Opportunities to present to University of Florida or Santa Fe College campus departments or student organizations	72%
Student volunteer website with information and tips	63%
“Meet & Greet” sessions with faculty who offer service-learning opportunities	63%
Training on volunteer management best practices	58%
Networking fairs to pair students with volunteer opportunities	58%
Opportunities to “table” at the University of Florida or Santa Fe College	56%
Yearly meetings to network with other local nonprofit leaders	53%
Training on how to develop service-learning opportunities	37%
Training on types of student volunteers	35%

## **Discussion and Recommendations**

We analyzed survey data from 55 nonprofit leaders in Gainesville, Florida to identify their volunteer management capacity and their experience utilizing college and university student volunteers. We found that slightly more than half of the participants had a paid volunteer administrator and very few had a paid full time volunteer coordinator. Some but not all organizations regularly engaged in volunteer management practices such as training for staff, training for volunteers, volunteer recognition, background checks, and screening processes. Only about half of the sample had a volunteer manual or liability coverage for volunteers. On average, college and university students were 54 percent of their volunteer population. While these volunteers provided numerous benefits, participants identified student availability and transportation as key challenges. Participants also identified organizational related barriers to student engagement, such as the lack of funds, no dedicated staff member, and difficulties related to recruitment. Most of the participant-identified recommendations centered on recruitment and on encouraging students to engage in a long-term, ongoing manner.

### **Volunteer Management**

As previous scholars have found, an organization's overall volunteer management capacity is an indication of its capacity to engage student volunteers (Gazley, Littlepage, & Bennett, 2012). However, the overall volunteer management capacity of nonprofit organizations is generally quite low, as many organizations have no paid volunteer management staff and many volunteer management best practices are not wide spread (Hagar and Brudney, 2004). For some domains, such as supervision and communication with volunteers and the regular collection of volunteer hours, the Gainesville sample scored slightly higher than Hagar and Brudney's (2004) national sample. Additionally, more than 70 percent of the sample than a volunteer orientation process and written policies and procedures. However, on key safety measures such as volunteer screening, this sample scored approximately the same. Only 48 percent regularly screened volunteers, only 44 percent conducted regular background checks, and 22 percent regularly provided training for staff working with volunteers. Only 56 percent had liability coverage for volunteers and 55 percent had a volunteer management or handbook. These findings suggest that the nonprofit organizations that engage student volunteers in this college down are doing what we call "surface level" volunteer management—volunteer management which makes it appear the program is well constructed—without fully developing volunteer programs.

### **Supply and Demand**

As identified in the literature review, there are many potential benefits to service-learning. However, the service-learning literature rarely examines whether its assumptions about these benefits are true (Littelpage, Gazely, & Bennett, 2012). One of the assumptions made in the literature is that the students provide a supply of labor



needed by the nonprofit organizations. However, there is great potential for mismatch between supply and demand. This study found that in one college town, there is indeed a mismatch. Specifically, nonprofits in the sample indicated they would like more individual student volunteers who are willing to commit for an extended period of time. They described the constant turnover as “tiring” and expressed frustration at students who came for a short number of hours during the semester and then never returned. While many organizations accepted group volunteering, their clear preference was for individuals. Group or short-term individual assignments may fit the students’ needs, but it did not fit the nonprofit organization’s needs.

## **Recommendations**

There are a number of ways to improve the meaningful engagement of student volunteers in nonprofit organizations. From the university or college side, faculty need to be cautious when developing service-learning assignments. In particular, consider whether assigning students to volunteer for a small number of hours is actually benefiting the community. Depending on the organization, the costs may outweigh the benefits. Faculty can talk with students about the costs associated with their volunteering, and encourage them to realize that when they volunteer, they are not only giving of their time, they are also consuming the resources of the organization. Thus, students should arrive prepared, having done their homework on the agency, and ready to get to work. This pre-work is similar to the “layered learning” approach (Cooke, et al., 2017) that facilitates student skill-building in service-learning. Additionally, colleges and universities can help nonprofit organizations to recruit student volunteers and, in particular, find ways to highlight and celebrate students who volunteer with one organization over the course of a number of years or semesters (as opposed to students who provide small numbers of hours to multiple organizations).

From the nonprofit side, organizations can prioritize volunteer management by developing the aforementioned best practices. This includes background checks, liability insurance, written job descriptions, and policies and procedures. Additionally, nonprofit organizations can be strategic in how they describe their volunteer opportunities. For example, nonprofits could create a program whereby students who stay with the organization for a number of semester area eligible for more exciting or advanced opportunities, eligible to engage in professional development trainings with staff, or are giving a “promotion” (e.g., from Volunteer Receptionist to Volunteer Administrative Coordinator). These sorts of benefits are a low-cost way to encourage students to commit long-term.

## **Limitations**

This case study described the perceptions of 55 nonprofit leaders in one college town—Gainesville, Florida. The findings may or may not be generalizable to other college towns. Additionally, the sample included a small number of government agencies that

frequently engaged local student volunteers. These government agencies represent a small group that does engage student volunteers locally and nationally; however, their experiences of student volunteers may be different from nonprofit organizations' experiences. Future research will need to tease out such differences.

### **Conclusion**

As previously discussed, there are logical reasons to believe that student volunteers in a college town could be either a burden or the lifeblood of the local voluntary sector. This case study suggests students can be both. On the one hand, students compromised more than half of the sample's volunteer population and infused the sector with their valuable time, energy, and knowledge. On the other hand, students' availability and time constraints generally did not match the organization's needs. In short, there was a mismatch between supply and demand. Like trying to fit a round peg into a square hole, this mismatch is likely the cause of much tension between nonprofits, students, and the educational institutions. The good news is there are actions all three sets of stakeholders can take to ease the friction and improve the overall experience for both students and nonprofit organizations.

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