

# Do “Days of Service” Meet Institutional Service-Learning Goals? A Case Study in Assessment of the MLK Day of Service

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## ABSTRACT

This study pilots a survey tool for assessing participant experiences in the MLK Day of Service at a public university. Student, faculty, staff, community volunteer, and community partner participants (N=344) reflected upon service, learning, and university-community connections as part of a multi-method evaluation process. Quantitative analysis of unidimensional and summed variables found significant variation by instructional site and participant affiliation. Such measures and instruments may clarify the role of Days of Service in advancing institutional service-learning goals.

*Keywords:* extracurricular service, survey tool, connection, quantitative analysis

Public universities seek increasingly to demonstrate engagement with their communities, in part by sponsoring activities such as those advocated by Campus Compact, the organization representing a coalition of over 1,000 institutions of higher education involved in campus-based civic engagement. Beyond including community engagement and service in institutional mission statements, Campus Compact emphasizes “integrated and complementary community service activities” that “weave together student service, service-learning and other community engagement activities on campus” (Campus Compact, 2015). While the recent literature has explored outcomes of classroom-based engagement activities, less focus has been given to assessing outcomes of extracurricular campus activities such as annual MLK Days of Service held on many campuses each January.

Service-learning pedagogies encourage college and university students to expand how they define and value education. Unique service-learning experiences can

form the basis of a life-long appreciation for community and professional identity, as well as a commitment to social justice. Using the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse framework of service learning with emphases on service, instruction, and reflection (Seifer & Connors, 2007), combined with an added dimension called “connection,” we explore the utility of quantitative measures for assessing effects of Day of Service participation on participants’ experiences of service, learning, and making community connections during one university’s 2016 MLK Day of Service event.

## BACKGROUND

In 1994, the United States Congress charged the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) with spearheading the celebration of the Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) federal holiday as a national Day of Service. The CNCS describes the annual event as an opportunity

to transform Rev. King's principles of non-violence and "the Beloved Community" into "community action that helps solve social problems," primarily by carrying out collective service projects that address a range of community needs, both tangible and spiritual (CNCS, n.d.). Campuses across the country make use of MLK Day of Service events to cultivate linkages between campus constituencies—particularly students, but also faculty, staff, and alumni—and surrounding communities. These events also are used to demonstrate, primarily through enumeration of participants and service hours, campus commitment to community engagement. Finally, campus administrations may use MLK Days of Service to introduce the concept of service learning to students and faculty members without requiring enrollment in a semester-long service-learning course, or as a supplement to such enrollments.

Previous research examining intersections of teaching, research, and service has concentrated on service learning as one mode of high-impact, collaborative learning, a category that also includes classroom volunteering, study abroad, and undergraduate research (for a recent summary, see Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015). Recent reviews and project examples selected from the academic literature highlight the use of service learning to enhance disciplinary leadership skills (Foli, Braswell, Kirkpatrick, & Lim, 2014), encourage professional maturity (Beck, Chretien, & Kind, 2015; Foli et al., 2014; Van Winkle et al., 2013), retain students (Gutierrez, Reeves-Gutierrez, & Helms, 2012), and develop cultural and intergenerational awareness (Cupelli, 2016; Ross, 2012; Roodin, Brown, & Shedlock, 2013).

Although a comprehensive literature review on classroom-based service-learning projects and empirical outcomes is beyond this paper's scope, recent meta-analyses of interdisciplinary service-learning projects present several factors related to outcomes of service-learning pedagogy. Yorio and Ye (2012) report that the method of student

evaluation moderates the impact of service learning on cognitive development. In their meta-analysis, objective measurement of learning outcomes was associated with larger gains as compared to instances where only subjective, self-reported evaluations of learning were collected. Whereas no significant differences in terms of development of personal insight or understanding social issues were found between service-learning projects that were self-selected and those that were assigned, differences in learning and cognitive development were noted, with higher positive effects observed among students provided options for choosing from multiple service-learning projects. Finally, higher impact on understanding of social issues was noted for projects that included discussion opportunities for reflection, as compared to those including only written reflection.

A meta-analysis conducted by Warren (2012) also proposes that learning outcomes are positively impacted by service learning. Unlike Yorio and Ye's work (2012), Warren's analysis suggests greater learning effects from projects that include self-reported measures of student learning, rather than objective measures, but the difference was non-significant. Findings from these meta-analyses highlight choice of activities, discussion, and reflection as factors that contribute to learning from a service experience. They also point to the need for development and testing of theoretical propositions about the effects of service-learning and engagement experiences on specific learning outcomes. The creation, testing, and refinement of both self-report and objective measures of engagement and learning are key steps in such a project.

The empirical literature on single-day service experiences is far more limited than that on course-based service learning (Hahn, Hatcher, Norris, & Halford, 2015). Episodic volunteering among adults has been investigated (Dunn, Chambers, & Hyde, 2016; Hustinx, Haski-Leventhal, & Handy, 2008; Hyde, Dunn, Bax, & Chambers, 2016) with an eye toward factors con-

tributing to volunteer motivation, satisfaction, and retention, but not explicitly in the university campus context. A study on short-term community engagement (Reed, Jernstedt, Hawley, Reber, & DuBois, 2005) took place in the context of an undergraduate course and over a somewhat more extended time frame (8-10 hours over the course of a week), but shared some features of the MLK Day of Service described below, including an orientation meeting prior to the service-learning experience and follow-up debriefing. It found increases in a sense of the meaning derived from the college experience and in likelihood of choosing a nonprofit service occupation among engagement participants, as compared to non-participants.

Alongside course-based service learning, Days of Service are a potential point of entry for engagement-minded students to experience short-term community and civic engagement. The NASPA Lead Initiative on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement comprises 96 member campuses dedicated to supporting “civic mindedness” by strengthening co-curricular student engagement activities such as Days of Service (NASPA, 2017). In addition, the Council on the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education offers guidelines for quality implementation of co-curricular engagement programs (CAS, 2017). Days of Service present a plausible basis of comparison for future student participation in both classroom-based and extracurricular service-learning opportunities. However, single-day service events run the risk of constituting a singular “checklist” item demonstrating institutional engagement, rather than providing participants—students in particular—a holistic, comprehensive framework for longer-term social action and critical thinking.

Here we present preliminary quantitative results from use of an exploratory survey instrument designed to collect self-report participant reflection data on multiple dimensions of Day of Service participation. The assessment tool, designed partly

to assess learning outcomes related to social justice concepts, was piloted at the 2016 MLK Day of Service event sponsored by a mid-size U.S. university serving a diverse population. We demonstrate that quantitative measures can be designed effectively to reflect elements of an institutional service-learning framework such as service, learning, connection, and reflection, and to capture variation in factors of interest across campus sites and participant roles. We envisage the development of similar measures and instruments to capture participant reflections on experience of community service, opportunity for learning, and connection with community through increased understanding of social issues across instructional sites, higher education campuses, community organizations, and service projects.

### **The University and Its Communities**

A pilot participant survey and discussion-based reflection process were used to assess Day of Service participation at a mid-size public comprehensive university located in a partly urban, partly rural coastal area of the northeastern United States. The university’s 2016 MLK Day of Service was held at its Main Campus and at four additional instructional sites, here referred to as City Campus (to the east of Main Campus), West Campus, North Campus, and South Campus, with a conservative estimate of 800 total participants including university students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of surrounding communities. In addition to a center for external community engagement, the university supports a separate Office of Service-Learning previously granted a voluntary “Community Engagement” classification by the Carnegie Foundation (NERCHE, n.d.).

Through the coordination efforts of the Office of Service-Learning, the university provides student, faculty, staff, and community members with two Days of Service each year, including a Fall Day of Service and the MLK Day of Service in January. Institutional goals pertaining to Days of

Service include preparing students and other members of the campus community for active citizenship, creating co-curricular experiences that reinforce classroom learning, and fostering interaction among member communities on campus, as well as between the campus and surrounding communities.

Although each of the university's five locations is a fully operational instructional site, each has unique characteristics shaped by its local community and by the students, faculty, and staff specific to its role in the university's educational mission. Main Campus is located in a rural area 13 miles west of the small but densely populated urban area where City Campus is located. On-campus residency for students is currently available only on the Main Campus site. West Campus is 20 miles farther west of Main Campus in a more rural, more affluent, and less densely populated area than the areas surrounding Main and City Campuses. All three of these campus sites are within the same county, with a fourth instructional site located in the county to the north and a fifth site in the county to the south. All three counties' poverty rates put them in the poorer half of counties in the state (U.S. Census).

Racial-ethnic demographics differ widely across areas served by the university's multiple sites. The central county's population (served by Main, City, and West campuses) contains the lowest proportion of white, non-Latino residents of the three counties at about 56%, with great differences from one instructional site to another within the county (16% white, non-Latino in the city, vs. 67% and 74% white, non-Latino in the towns around Main and West Campuses, respectively) (U.S. Census). Both the northern and southern counties' white, non-Latino populations are considerably higher at 85%. Socioeconomic and racial-ethnic differences represented in the communities served by each site, as well as in the organizations and projects associated with each site at the event, merited comparison of Day of Service participants' survey

responses by location of their participation. Anticipated variation in participants' perspectives and experiences according to their affiliations to the campus as students, alumni, faculty, staff, community partners, and community volunteers merited comparison of responses by role.

## METHOD

### **Service, Connection, Learning, and Reflection**

The university formed a 25-member MLK Day of Service Planning Committee of administrative staff and faculty members, including representatives from Student Affairs, the university's Office of Service-Learning, and its Center for Community Engagement. The Assessment Subcommittee ("assessment team") of the Planning Committee, including faculty, service-learning staff, and administrative staff, tasked itself to develop and implement a multi-method design to assess participant experiences in the event. The current study uses only the quantitative data for the purposes of scale development, but qualitative data collection procedures are summarized here in the interest of transparency regarding study design. Qualitative data collection procedures served dual purposes of assessment and participant reflection, and the latter might have affected the service-learning experience reported in the participant survey (as intended by the service-learning-connection-reflection model).

The Office of Service-Learning had conducted participant surveys and reflection sessions for several Day of Service events in previous years. While the general themes of service, learning, and participant satisfaction were consistent across these earlier assessments, less consistency was evident in specific survey items and in overall structure of the instruments used. In order to improve upon instruments and data from previous evaluations, the assessment team collaboratively designed a survey instrument including quantitative and qualitative items and group-based reflection proce-

dures to gather supplemental qualitative data. The team's intent was to develop instruments that could be refined and ultimately used consistently to assess participant experiences in Day of Service events from one year to the next.

Notably the assessment team included social science faculty with expertise in survey development and quantitative and qualitative analysis, as well as faculty and administrative staff with expertise in service learning, community engagement, student services, and other specialties. This combination allowed for innovative collaboration among social scientists, community engagement specialists, and student services experts directly involved in organizing university Days of Service.

The team developed and refined assessment procedures and survey items over several meetings beginning eight months before the event. Initial discussion prioritized themes for assessment including service, learning, reflection, university-community connections, and social justice. Because individual and group reflection has been shown to enhance learning from service experiences, the team spent some time discussing how to provide multiple opportunities for reflection that could simultaneously heighten participant learning and provide meaningful assessment data.

In subsequent meetings the team wrote, piloted, and revised items for each theme and section of the survey as well as for the reflection sessions that would be facilitated by project leaders—university students, faculty, and staff who had volunteered to take on an enhanced role on each service project. The assessment team obtained IRB approval for the study and its informed consent procedures. Project leaders were offered a brief, optional orientation session in advance of MLK Day about coordinating volunteer teams and facilitating reflection sessions and survey completion at the event. A minority of project leaders attended the orientation, with most instead receiving a written set of instructions, complemented for some by the experience of

having served as Day of Service volunteers or project leaders in the past.

In line with institutional goals and team members' scholarly and professional priorities, emergent objectives for assessment included building connections between the university and local organizations and communities, and cultivating awareness of social justice issues, particularly among students. Essentially, in recognition that the assessment "tail" might have the capacity to "wag the dog" of the service-learning experience, the team sought to incorporate rudimentary social justice concepts in the assessment, with the aim of heightening participant attention to this dimension of community engagement as part of their Day of Service. Particularly as compared to semester-long service-learning courses, the team was interested in whether a single-day event could increase participant awareness of social justice issues, and considered whether such awareness could be facilitated by the assessment process itself.

Methods for gathering data from participants included multiple components meant to address four key aspects of the experience of interest to the assessment team: service, learning, connection, and reflection. The survey combined quantitative and qualitative evaluation items, including items concerning satisfaction with multiple aspects of the overall experience such as registration procedures and logistics of service placements, as well as demographic information. The university's electronic registration system allowed those with university identification cards to "swipe in" to the event, providing supplementary demographic data.

All respondents were asked to identify their role in the MLK Day of Service as either a university student, faculty or staff member, "at-large" community member volunteer (including university alumni), or representative of a service organization ("community partner"), as well as the campus site and organization where they spent their day, and the kinds of projects and tasks they worked on. Participants, who ei-

ther had submitted volunteer applications ahead of time or were day-of “walk-ins,” were asked for their preferences of campus site and project type based on interest in ten subject areas categorizing 39 available community projects into broad topics including hunger and homelessness, political and social issues, health and wellness, and literacy and learning. Participants at some sites had the option to participate in more than one project, depending on their scheduling availability and the design and time-length of project activities. In the present study, comparisons were conducted based on each participant’s starting location and community role, due to the team’s expectation that participants’ experiences would vary due in part to the community contexts, structure, and types of service activities carried out at each site, and in part to the nature of participants’ affiliations with the university. This pilot assessment did not analyze effects of independent variables at the level of individual partner organizations or service projects, but this information could prove useful in future studies.

### Survey Instrument, Data Collection, and Analysis

Selected quantitative items assessed three key aspects of participation in the MLK Day of Service: providing service to the community; making or strengthening connections with community members, organizations, or the university; and learning about social issues, organizations, and communities. The following ten items measured specific aspects of service learning at the Day of Service [variable names are bracketed]:

#### Service

1. After today, how likely are you to participate in future University Days of Service? [PARTICIPATE]
2. In my service experience today, I enjoyed myself. [ENJOY]
3. In my service experience today, my tasks were challenging. [CHALLENGE]
4. In my service experience today, my tasks were important. [IMPORTANT]
5. In my service experience today, I made a real contribution. [CONTRIBUTE]

#### Connection

6. In my service experience today, I made a connection with the people I was serving. [CONNECTPPL]
7. In my service experience today, I made a connection with the organization/project I worked with. [CONNECTORG]

#### Learning

8. In my service experience today, I learned something about the people served by my community partner organization/project. [LEARNPPL]
9. In my service experience today, I learned something about the organization/project I worked with. [LEARNORG]
10. As a result of participating today, I learned something about the root cause of a social issue that the organization/project addresses. [LEARNISSUE]

The survey instrument was accessed by participants via URL using their personal cell phones, handheld devices, or laptop computers provided by the university. If no device or Wi-Fi connection was available, especially at more remote and rural sites (such as a horse rescue facility or wildlife refuge, for example), participants were provided hard-copy versions of the survey and their responses were later entered electronically by trained research assistants.

Although not included in the current analyses, supplemental qualitative reflections included brief, informal follow-up discussions facilitated by volunteer project leaders who posed a short list of prepared questions to small groups of willing participants. Participants also recorded written responses on newsprint using markers and adhesive notes; project leaders then provided the written responses and their own written summaries of group discussions to the assessment team. A brief orientation session and written guidelines for project leaders had included instructions for implementa-

tion of reflection procedures (both written and discussion-based). As approved by the IRB, no personally identifying information was collected in surveys or reflection sessions. Participation was voluntary; however, participants were asked (although not strictly required) to complete the survey and to participate in reflection sessions before collecting the “swag” to which they were entitled as volunteers (t-shirts and water bottles designed especially for the event).

Statistical comparisons were conducted using SPSS 23 to identify differences in agreement with ten statements (dependent variables) concerning participation in the 2016 MLK Day of Service. Nine were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), with higher values indicating the highest self-reported agreement scores among participants. The final item, likelihood of repeat participation, was measured on a different 5-point scale (1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely). Respondent data (N=344) were categorized using two independent variables: starting location of the participant's service activity for the day (“instructional site”) and the participant's affiliation with the university (“role”). Due to statistical deviance from normality in all variables, statistical analyses were conducted using non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis tests and post-hoc comparisons (Dunn's tests) to identify differences in responses to the ten items across four instructional sites and four categories of campus or community role: university student, faculty and/or staff member, at-large community member, or representative of a partner service organization.

## RESULTS

### Overall Participation

A total of 389 participants initiated responses to the survey questions (either online or on paper) following the university's 2016 Day of Service. The majority of respondents (N=305, 79.4%) indicated that their day started at Main Campus, with the

remainder starting at the City (N=28, 7.3%), North (N=31, 8.1%), West (N=18, 4.7%), and South (N=7, 0.5%) Campuses. For the purposes of analysis, 344 completed surveys (83.5%) were included in the final statistical comparisons. Surveys from the South Campus (N=7) were removed as the total number would not permit site-based comparisons, and another 38 surveys were removed due to incompleteness. The final dataset (N=344) for the study included participants dispersed across four instructional sites, including 274 (79.7%) at Main Campus, 26 (7.6%) at City Campus, 29 (8.4%) at North Campus, and 15 (4.4%) at West Campus. Of these respondents, 215 (62.5%) identified as current students, 30 (8.7%) as faculty and/or staff members, 81 (23.5%) as “at-large” community members (including alumni), and 18 (5.2%) as service-learning community partners. Distribution of data within the location and role dataset was non-normal, with a skewness of 2.089 (SE = .13) and kurtosis of 3.143 (SE = .26) for the former, and a skewness of .917 (SE = .13) and kurtosis of -.709 (SE = .26) for the latter. Given the non-normal distribution of data, non-parametric statistics were used for comparative analyses.

### Overall Attitudinal Results

General attitudinal results indicated respondents were positive in their attitudes toward the experience of the MLK Day of Service in terms of the importance and contribution of their service, whether they had developed a connection to the community, and whether they had learned about a community issue or organization. About 90% (N=308) of respondents indicated agreement with the statement that their service experience tasks were important, and almost 90% (N=301) of respondents felt that they had made a real contribution by participating in the MLK Day of Service. However, most participants (73%, N=250, including “neutral” responses) did not find their tasks particularly challenging.

Most respondents either strongly agreed (36.3%, N=125) or agreed (36%,

N=124) that they had made a connection with the people they were serving. The vast majority also strongly agreed (N=45.6%, N=157) or agreed (37.5%, N=129) that they had made a connection with the organization and/or project with which they volunteered. Although not incorporated into the current analyses, descriptive results indicate participants also made new connections with the university, with 61.6% (N=205) indicating that they learned more about university programs and services. Over half (53.8%; N=179) felt more involved with campus activities, 40.5% (N=135) felt more informed about how to request information and assistance, and 37.8% (N=126) felt that they had more interaction with faculty and administration as a result of the MLK Day of Service.

In terms of learning about the communities served, most respondents indicated agreement that they had learned something about the people served by the project: 78% (N=268) chose either “strongly agree” or “agree”. Over 83% of respondents (N=286) also strongly agreed or agreed that they had learned something about their service organization or project. Finally, over 70% of survey participants (N=242) indicated they had learned something about the root cause

of a social issue that the organization with which they were working addressed in the community (41.1% “Strongly agree”; 30.8% “Agree”).

### Statistical Comparison of Attitudinal Results

Comparisons were conducted among four instructional sites: Main, City, North, and West Campuses (see Table 1 header row for numbers and percentages of total MLK Day of Service evaluation respondents from each site).

Significant differences among locations were identified for four of the ten items using Kruskal-Wallis H tests. First, there was a statistically significant difference for the enjoyment [ENJOY] variable [ $H(3) = 7.897, p = .048$ ], with a mean rank score of 166.88 for Main Campus, 203.15 for City Campus, 201.48 for North Campus, and 166.00 for West Campus. A significant difference was also found for the connection with people [CONNECTPPL] variable [ $H(3) = 16.704, p = .001$ ], with a mean rank of 170.67 for Main, 234.00 for City, 163.48 for North, and 116.83 for West Campus. The learning about people [LEARNPPL] variable also demonstrated a significant difference [ $H(3) = 13.033, p = .005$ ], with a

Table 1. Self-reported participant scores by MLK Day of Service campus instructional site.

	Main (N=274, 79.7%)	City (N=26, 7.6%)	North (N=29, 8.4%)	West (N=15, 4.4%)
PARTICIPATE	4.715 (.710)	4.769 (.587)	4.897 (.309)	4.928 (.267)
ENJOY*	4.460 (.736) <sup>b</sup>	4.769 (.430) <sup>a</sup>	4.759 (.435)	4.533 (.516)
CHALLENGE	2.938 (1.052)	2.615 (1.023)	2.517 (1.184)	2.867 (1.407)
IMPORTANT	4.447 (.685)	4.769 (.430)	4.621 (.622)	4.600 (.632)
CONTRIBUTE	4.354 (.762)	4.692 (.471)	4.379 (.775)	4.533 (.640)
CONNECTPPL**	3.989 (.959)	4.615 (.496) <sup>a</sup>	3.931 (.961)	3.400 (1.121) <sup>b</sup>
CONNECTORG	4.234 (.814)	4.615 (.571)	4.241 (.830)	4.067 (1.163)
LEARNPPL**	4.118 (.803)	4.615 (.637) <sup>a</sup>	4.000 (.817) <sup>b</sup>	4.400 (.737)
LEARNORG**	4.272 (.749)	4.692 (.618) <sup>a</sup>	4.035 (.731)	4.000 (1.038) <sup>b</sup>
LEARNISSUE	4.077 (1.012)	4.154 (.925)	3.793 (.774)	3.714 (1.204)

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$  in Kruskal-Wallis comparisons. The group reporting the highest agreement score for each significant item is noted by (a); groups reporting the lowest agreement scores are noted by (b).



mean rank of 165.57 for Main, 226.08 for City, 151.61 for North, and 198.57 for West Campus. Finally, a significant difference was detected for the variable representing learning about the organization [LEARNORG] [ $H(3) = 13.378, p = .004$ ], with a mean rank of 170.29 for Main, 225.81 for City, 138.81 for North, and 149.74 for West Campus (Table 1).

Notably, City Campus participants indicated the highest level of agreement for each of these four variables. For level of enjoyment [ENJOY], Main and West campus participants ranked their experience the lowest, and for learning about people [LEARNPPL], participants on Main and North campuses indicated the lowest levels of agreement. West Campus participants agreed least with statements about connecting with people being served by the projects [CONNECTPPL] and with learning about the organizations with which they volunteered [LEARNORG].

Post-hoc comparisons (Dunn's tests) were used to further examine how the four locations differed in the key variables identified by Kruskal-Wallis analyses. Whereas significant differences in the ENJOY variable were detected in the overall Kruskal-

Wallis test, pairwise significant differences were not identified among the four locations. In the case of the CONNECTPPL variable, significant differences were discovered between the Main and City campuses [ $z = -63.334, p = .006$ ], the City and North campuses [ $z = 70.517, p = .033$ ], and the City and West [ $z = 117.167, p = .001$ ] campuses. For LEARNPPL, post-hoc differences were noted between the Main and City [ $z = -60.511, p = .008$ ] and the City and North [ $z = 74.470, p = .017$ ] campuses. Finally, for the ORGLEARN variable, significant post-hoc differences were calculated between the Main and City [ $z = -55.515, p = .017$ ] and City and North [ $z = 86.997, p = .002$ ] campuses.

Statistical comparisons were also conducted to identify differences in responses to the ten selected statements across four categories of affiliation to the campus or community ("role"): university student, faculty or staff, at-large community member, and community partner (see Table 2 header row for role numbers and percentages).

Statistical differences were discovered following Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric comparisons of participants by role for

Table 2: Self-reported scores by affiliation role of MLK Day of Service participant.

	Student (N=215, 62.5%)	Faculty/Staff (N=30, 8.7%)	Community Member (N=81, 23.5%)	Community Partner (N=18, 5.2%)
PARTICIPATE	4.712 (.704)	4.867 (.730)	4.788 (.520)	4.722 (.669)
ENJOY	4.447 (.721)	4.667 (.547)	4.617 (.663)	4.556 (.705)
CHALLENGE	2.823 (1.0169)	3.233 (1.223)	2.827 (1.126)	3.111 (1.323)
IMPORTANT*	4.437 (.666) <sup>b</sup>	4.700 (.596)	4.513 (.693)	4.722 (.575) <sup>a</sup>
CONTRIBUTE**	4.312 (.770) <sup>b</sup>	4.567 (.568)	4.432 (.724)	4.833 (.383) <sup>a</sup>
CONNECTPPL	3.954 (1.004)	4.033 (.928)	4.037 (.887)	4.444 (.705)
CONNECTORG	4.214 (.860)	4.233 (.898)	4.296 (.715)	4.611 (.608)
LEARNPPL	4.145 (.818)	4.167 (.747)	4.138 (.775)	4.438 (.814)
LEARNORG	4.271 (.764)	4.100 (.803)	4.313 (.756)	4.412 (.712)
LEARNISSUE*	4.009 (1.035)	3.633 (1.066) <sup>b</sup>	4.250 (.894) <sup>a</sup>	4.235 (.831)

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$  in Kruskal-Wallis comparisons. The group reporting the highest agreement score for each significant item is noted by (a); groups reporting the lowest agreement scores are noted by (b).

three items: importance of tasks [IMPORTANT], contribution of tasks [CONTRIBUTE], and learning about a social issue [LEARNISSUE]. First, perception of task importance differed by role [ $H(3) = 8.651, p = .034$ ], with a mean rank of 163.34 for students, 202.43 for faculty members, 176.44 for community members, and 204.97 for community partners. Second, perception of task contribution significantly differed [ $H(3) = 11.615, p = .009$ ], with a mean rank of 162.92 for students, 191.33 for faculty members, 178.02 for community members, and 230.17 for community partners. Third, participants differed by role in their assessment of whether they had learned about a social issue [ $H(3) = 8.513, p = .037$ ], with a mean rank of 168.74 for students, 132.38 for faculty members, 188.45 for community members, and 185.44 for community partners. For these items, community partners indicated the highest levels of agreement with the statements regarding the importance and contribution of tasks, whereas students were the least likely to express agreement with these statements. At-large community members agreed most with the statement that they had learned something new about a social issue facing their community, whereas faculty and staff indicated the lowest level of agreement on this item.

Post-hoc Dunn's tests were also conducted on the key variables noted in Table 2. All initial significant differences observed among different roles for IMPORTANT at the  $p = .05$  level were lost. For the LEARNISSUE variable, a significant difference was found between faculty members and community members [ $z = -56.067, p = .029$ ]. One post-hoc significant difference was also noted for the CONTRIBUTE variable, between students and community partners [ $z = -67.204, p = .013$ ].

### Statistical Comparison of Summed Variables

One goal of the study was to create summary variables to represent measures of self-reported reflection on service, learning,

and community connection. Initially, a summary variable for Service [SUMSERV] was designed to include reflection on whether participants felt that: 1) tasks they completed during the MLK Day of Service project were important [IMPORTANT], 2) their participation made a real contribution [CONTRIBUTE], and 3) their tasks were challenging [CHALLENGE]. A reliability analysis indicated, however, that this initial summed variable was relatively weak, producing a Cronbach's Alpha value of only .572. Removal of one variable, CHALLENGE, increased the Cronbach's Alpha to .816. We therefore proceeded with analyzing the summed service variable by including only two measurements, IMPORTANT and CONTRIBUTE.

To create a summed variable to measure reflection on Learning [SUMLEARN], three variables were combined, including statements noting agreement with whether participants: 1) learned something about people impacted by the MLK Day of Service project [LEARNPPL], 2) learned something about the organization with whom they served [LEARNORG], and 3) learned something about a pressing social issue [LEARNISSUE]. Like the initial service variable [SUMSERV], reliability analysis of the learning variable [SUMLEARN] indicated only moderate reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha value of .724. However, removal of LEARNISSUE increased the value to a stronger .841. Thus, as with the Service summed variable, the Learning summed variable used in the present study includes only the LEARNPPL and LEARNORG measures.

Finally, to compute a summed measure of Connection with community [SUMCONNECT], two variables were used. First, participants indicated their level of agreement with Statement 6, about making a connection with people impacted by the MLK Day of Service project [CONNECTPPL]. Second, participants reported their level of agreement with Statement 7, examining development of a connection with the organization with whom

they served [CONNECTORG]. Moderate reliability was suggested by the Cronbach's Alpha obtained, .797. The summed values for these three variables (SUMSERV, SUMLEARN, and SUMCONNECT) were used to further compare patterns of participant reflection across individual campus locations, as well as in a comparison of Main Campus to an aggregate sub-sample of non-Main Campuses (City, North, and West Campuses).

Among the four instructional sites (Main, City, North, and West Campuses), Kruskal-Wallis comparisons indicated statistically significant differences for the SUMLEARN [ $H(3) = 13.378$ ,  $p = .004$ ] and SUMCONNECT [ $H(3) = 12.325$ ,  $p = .006$ ] variables (Table 3). For both, values for City Campus were highest. No significant difference across the four campuses was noted for the SUMSERV variable. However, comparing the Main campus to the aggregate sub-sample created by combining the three non-Main campus locations, a significant difference was noted only for the SUMSERV variable [ $H(1) = 5.313$ ,  $p = .021$ ] (Table 3). Post-hoc Dunn's tests provided details regarding the nature of the differences in the summed variables between sites. For the SUMLEARN variable, statistical differences were found between the Main and City [ $z = -63.747$ ,  $p = .005$ ] and the City and North [ $z = 86.577$ ,  $p = .004$ ] campuses. In the case of the SUMCONNECT variable, statistical differences were noted between the Main and City [ $z = -61.769$ ,  $p = .011$ ] and the City and West [ $z = 95.447$ ,  $p = .013$ ] campuses.

## DISCUSSION

Single-day service events such as the annual MLK Day of Service are intended to provide university students, faculty, staff, and community members with the opportunity to serve, learn, and connect with their campus and wider communities through service. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, "the MLK Day of Service empowers individuals, strengthens communities, bridges barriers, creates solutions to social problems, and moves us closer to Dr. King's vision of a beloved community" (CNCS, n.d.). In this description, participants are urged to move beyond mere acts of voluntary service, and instead to adopt a model of service learning that integrates service, learning and community building. The current study aimed to create and pilot measures to assess participants' Day of Service experiences in relation to the goals of service learning and civic and community engagement in a public university context.

Our research team undertook the assessment process described above not only to provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on their service experiences and what they had learned, but for the university's MLK Day Planning Committee to gather data for purposes of reflecting on its own planning process and, accordingly, on the meaning and value of the event in the context of institutional goals, especially those pertaining to co-curricular service events. The team proceeded with prelimi-

Table 3. Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) by instructional campus site for summed service, learning, and connection variables.

Summed Variable	Main Campus	City Campus	North Campus	West Campus	Non-Main (Aggregate)
SUMSERV	8.799 (1.336)	9.462 (.811)	9.000 (1.225)	9.133 (1.187)	9.200* (1.085)
SUMLEARN**	8.382 (1.440)	9.310 (1.192)	8.071 (1.412)	8.357 (1.692)	8.603 (1.488)
SUMCONNECT**	8.222 (1.619)	9.231 (.992)	8.172 (1.605)	7.467 (2.134)	8.414 (1.672)

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$  in Kruskal-Wallis comparisons. Difference for SUMSERV is significant only in comparison of aggregate subsample of all non-Main campuses to Main Campus.

nary quantitative and qualitative measures for assessing whether the Day of Service event advanced institutional goals and the vision of Dr. King as interpreted by the MLK Day of Service Planning Committee and its Assessment Subcommittee. The results were presented to the Committee and to the university's board of trustees. The Committee and the assessment team in particular discussed the results in relation to institutional goals of cultivating student civic engagement, promoting critical thinking, creating meaningful co-curricular experiences, and deepening university-community connections.

The current study provided an opportunity to test quantitative measures of service, learning, and connection as part of a multi-method assessment of participants' experiences in the MLK Day of Service. These measures were moderately successful in capturing variation across instructional sites and participant affiliation roles using both unidimensional and summed variables. The high level of agreement in response to several of the prompts (with "agree" and "strongly agree" responses in the 70th to 90th percentile ranges for several variables) indicates that future versions of the instrument may benefit from more specific inquiries that enable finer distinction among participants' experiences, and more precise explanation of variation across participant roles and characteristics, service sites, service projects, and additional specific aspects of Day-of-Service participation.

The current study analyzed selected survey responses provided by 344 participants in various roles on four different instructional sites of a mid-size public university. The majority of the participants were enrolled university students, and the majority of participants took part in service projects that were based on the Main Campus, as opposed to other instructional sites. Participants generally indicated satisfaction and enjoyment of the day's activities, with participants on the City Campus indicating a higher level of enjoyment than those on other campuses. Notably, City Campus par-

ticipants also scored connections with people and their own learning about communities and partner organizations more highly than did participants at other sites. Significant differences among campus sites were noted for the summed variables SUMLEARN and SUMCONNECT, with the highest agreement scores provided by City Campus participants. No significant difference among the four campuses was noted for the SUMSERV variable; however, with aggregation, non-Main participants in the aggregate indicated higher agreement than those on Main Campus.

In these preliminary results, size effects limit interpretation (particularly for non-Main Campus instructional sites), so more data would be required to strengthen interpretations presented here. In particular the number of participants at City Campus (N=26) was lower than at other campuses, and readers should refrain from drawing too strong a conclusion regarding location differences based on data from only one Day of Service event.

That caveat aside, one factor in differences across sites might be that participants who remained on the more familiar Main Campus (overwhelmingly undergraduate students) were less likely to experience direct encounters with either community partners (individual representatives of organizations hosting service projects) or members of the communities served by the day's efforts than were those who traveled to City Campus for the day. The sheer number of students and larger number and variety of projects on Main Campus than at other sites might simply have meant that a smaller proportion of Main Campus participants had opportunities for connection and learning about communities and organizations than participants at other sites. Another possibility is that students who chose to remain on Main Campus (again, the majority of undergraduates who participated in the event) may share a lower level of inclination to engage directly with off-campus communities. In contrast, students and other volunteers seeking such interaction, and

therefore choosing to go to the campus site embedded in the most diverse community (City), might also be those most primed for awareness and appreciation of learning opportunities provided by community engagement experiences that connect them with people from backgrounds different from their own.

Future research might examine differences among campus participants by role and location in greater depth, and could expand comparison to the level of individual partner organizations and service projects, or to organizations and projects grouped by type. Such extensions of this work might explore what features of local communities, community partner organizations, service projects, or activities lend themselves to deeper engagement, critical thinking, and learning about social issues in the context of a short-term service experience. Level and depth of engagement may also vary by demographic characteristics of participants, or by the extent of their prior exposure to issues critically related to the experience, either through prior life experience or through additional service or engagement opportunities. Further, effects of longer-term engagement such as semester-long service-learning courses may be moderated by prior or subsequent short-term Day of Service experiences, and this effect might be well worth investigating in light of institutional service-learning goals.

In assessing the quality of measures developed for this pilot assessment, two findings stand out in preliminary analyses. First, students at four instructional sites recorded the lowest scores among participant roles for an item rating their agreement with a statement affirming that they had “made a real contribution.” For this variable, the highest agreement score was recorded for community partners. This result may indicate a difference in interpretation among survey respondents, with students assessing feelings about their own actions, whereas community partners may have been considering the importance or value of the contributions made by other participants to bene-

fit their own organizations. Future revision of the assessment tool may wish to focus on creating additional questions regarding task importance or contribution to explore reasons behind the differences among students, faculty/staff, community members, and community partners on these items, or possibly to tailor response choices to each respective participant role.

Second, faculty and staff members at the four instructional sites expressed a lower level of agreement than other participants with the statement indicating that their service experience contributed to their learning about root causes of a social issue. Because faculty and staff volunteers may have prior background knowledge about a range of social issues, they might well not have learned much about social issues that was new to them from their MLK Day service experience.

Alternatively, from the perspective of MLK Day organizers and evaluators, the extent to which this particular group learns about social issues may not be of great concern. If lack of such learning contributed to lowered participation by faculty and staff, it may be worthy of attention. However, if learning something new about social issues is not a primary motivator of faculty and staff for Day of Service participation, other rewards that motivate them—possibly including the opportunity to contribute to others’ learning, namely students’ and community volunteers’—may be worth identifying and evaluating. In contributing to the learning of students and community members through Day of Service, faculty may, for example, feel more invested in future campus service efforts; at the same time, the learning-related benefits of their efforts may be felt more among students and community members than among themselves. Methodologically, of course, only a design that uses pre- and post-test measures to capture change in participant knowledge can provide objective answers to such questions, beyond what is revealed by participants’ self-reported perceptions.

Days of Service present opportunities for university students, faculty, staff, community members, and organizational community partners to share common learning and service space, and to build connections among one another, as well as among their respective organizations, higher education institutions, and communities. If institutions truly intend for Days of Service to advance institutional service-learning goals, and if such goals concern matters of social justice, then particular care and effort must be made to ensure not only a positive service experience, but effective means for participants to reflect upon that experience in ways that contribute both to their learning and to new knowledge about the effects of short-term service and engagement on learning outcomes related to social justice on campus and in the community. The current study contributes a first step toward developing meaningful measures of learning outcomes of short-term experiences of service learning, civic, and community engagement.

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