Community Agency Voice and Benefit in Service-Learning

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Supervisors from 40 community agencies working with a university-based service-learning program were interviewed regarding the extent of their input in service-learning program planning and implementation (Agency Voice)*, Interpersonal Relations with service-learning students, Perceived Benefit of the service-learning program to the agency, and their Perceptions of the University. Issues of diversity in the context of service-learning were considered. Support was found for two hypotheses: First, agency members' indicating more voice in program planning saw more benefits to their agency from taking part in the service-learning program. Secondly, the perception of benefits predicted agency members' positive perceptions of the university as a whole. Representatives of agencies with a longer history of participation in the service-learning program and from agencies involving larger numbers of service-learning students were more positive about some aspects of the relationship.*

Most service-learning research has focused on the student, especially the college student, who performs the service (e.g., Astin & Sax, 1998; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002). In a review of the literature, Stukas, Clary, and Snyder (1999) found specific benefits of service-learning for the student, such as increased self-esteem and developing career goals. Similarly, Eyler and Giles (1999) found positive outcomes related to students' acceptance of people from diverse backgrounds; personal development, such as greater self-knowledge; and interpersonal development, such as increased leadership and communication skills.

Stukas et al. (1999) noted that programs that aim to "assess the recipient of help, in addition to the student helper, appear few and far between" (p. 12). In the past several years, however, there has been increased discussion of the principles and theoretical models for developing service-learning "partnerships" between academic institutions and community agencies. In *Building Partnerships for Service-Learning,* Barbara Jacoby and Associates (2003) address various aspects of developing such partnerships, including a discussion of Community-Campus Partnerships for Health's principles, which emphasize "the *process* of partnership—the development of mutual trust, respect, genuine commitment, and continuous feedback—through open and accessible communication" (p. 13). The authors conclude that partnerships start and build upon interpersonal relationships, that they can exist on the micro or macro level, and that they take time to develop and are dynamic.

Despite the discourse concerning partnership development, not much empirical work has been conducted to assess the community's perspective. Giles and Eyler (1998), and Schmidt and Robby (2002) stress the need to investigate the value service-learning brings to the community. Research reports sometimes offer only summary impressions of findings and give a limited picture of factors affecting community agency satisfaction, benefits, and relations with the university-based service-learning program. Only a few studies provide information from community members themselves about their roles in, and views of, service-learning. Three studies, in particular, have been informative about the views of community members participating in service-learning programs based at higher education institutions.

Vernon and Ward (1999) studied the nature of relationships between universities and their surrounding communities, surveying 65 community members who were working with service-learning programs at four colleges or universities. Ninety-two percent of those community members expressed a positive view of the college or university in their town and 87% "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the university or college was perceived positively by other members of the community. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents indicated that service-learning students were "effective" or "very effective" in helping the agency meet its goals. Challenges to working with students included dealing with their class schedules, limitations of their short-term commitment, and the amount of training they required to serve effectively. Most community partners desired more communication and coordination with university program offices

and faculty.

Ferrari and Worrall (2000) surveyed 30 community-based organization (CBO) supervisors involved in a service-learning program, asking them to evaluate university service-learning students. The supervisors all expressed very positive perceptions of the students' work and service skills. However, the authors express concern that little variance in scores was obtained. They suggested that this response pattern might have been due to a response bias (i.e., that the CBO supervisors gave positive evaluations so as not to jeopardize their relationship with the University). The authors suggest that future research needs to examine such response patterns as sources of bias in data obtained from community partners.

Schmidt and Robby (2002) examined the value of service-learning to the community by focusing on the clients directly served. They found that tutoring by college student service learners enhanced children's academic outcomes. The tutoring program was a joint project between a university and a school district, so that faculty from the university worked with administrative staff and teachers from the school district to design, implement, and evaluate the tutoring program. The authors conclude that this broad participation in program development resulted in an effective project design and strong support for implementation. Such program characteristics need to be explored further as to the impact they have on community partner satisfaction and benefits.

The reports summarized above demonstrate that it is possible to assess the university-community relationship and the impact of service-learning on communities. However, there are limitations in the previous research. Looking at the body of research, we find that the methodologies used to study community impact often fail to report on the reliability or validity of measures. Often measurement techniques do not allow for an in-depth account of the community partners' views, and the generalizability of findings has been limited by a low number of participants. Often research is designed without seeking community members' input to develop hypotheses or research instruments.

Although community partners appear to have positive views of service-learning, the existing research has not sufficiently explained *why* community agencies perceive benefits from their involvement in service-learning programs. The aim of the present research was to learn about community agency partners' perceptions of a university-based service-learning program that was placing students at their agencies. We began by seeking a theoretical model with which to think about uni-

versity-community relationships. Social exchange theory (Cook, 1975; Levine & White, 1961; Nord, 1968) appeared to offer a useful frame of reference for conceptualizing the relationships in service-learning. For the purposes of the current study, "social exchange" was conceptualized as reciprocal action between individuals or groups of individuals that contributes toward building a relationship. Implied is a two-sided, mutually contingent, and mutually rewarding process involving "exchange" (Emerson, 1976). Emerson suggests that the exchange approach can be described as the "economic analysis of noneconomic social situations" (p. 336). He posits that a resource will continue to flow only if there is a perceived valued return.

Service-learning can be considered through the social exchange frame of reference. One aspect of quality service-learning is the potential for reciprocity between the university providing the service and the agency receiving it. It is assumed that both universities and community agencies desire to form and maintain relationships with each other because of the potential benefit they each may gain. If there is an equal exchange of resources over time, both parties should view the service-learning experience as beneficial. However, evidence of reciprocity from the community perspective is lacking (Jones, 2003). The present study examined aspects of a service-learning relationship that affect the extent to which the community benefits from that relationship.

Social exchange theory was used to develop the constructs and hypotheses below. Table 1 shows the correspondence between constructs assessed in the present study and those described in the research reviewed above, as well as in other research efforts (Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Gelmon, Holland, Seifer, Shinnamon, & Connors, 1998; Jones & Hill, 2001).

The first hypothesis in this study is that community agency partners who have a voice in program planning and implementation will view the service-learning program as being beneficial to the agency. This hypothesis introduces two variables: *agency voice* and *agency benefit*. *Agency voice* is defined as the extent of contributions made by agency members to the planning and implementation of the service-learning program. *Agency benefit* is defined as economic, social, or other gains that members of the community agencies see their agency obtaining by participating in the service-learning program. This hypothesis is grounded in the idea of reciprocity for optimizing the benefits of programs. It is based on the assumption that community partners need to be viewed and involved as active par-

Table 1
Evolution of Present Study Constructs from Past Research Constructs

Previous Studies	Construct	Present Study Construct
Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan (1996); Schmidt and Robby (2002)	Community involvement in program planning and implementation	Agency voice
	Economic and social benefits	Agency benefit
	Awareness of university	Perception of university
Gelmon, Holland, Seifer, Shinnamon, & Connors (1998)	Mutuality of planning efforts	Agency voice
	Economic and social benefits	Agency benefit
	Institutional assets and limitations	Perception of university
Vernon & Ward (1999)	View of university	Perception of university
	Effectiveness of students	Agency benefit
	Communication and coordination with university office	Agency voice
Ferrari & Worrall (2000)	Students' service skills	Interpersonal relations
	Students' work skills	Agency benefit
Jones & Hill (2001)	Relationship building	Interpersonal relations
	Cultural learning, negotiating individuality, crossing boundaries	Interpersonal relations including diversity

ticipants in the design, implementation, and evaluation of community-based learning experiences to ensure mutual benefits to the community and the university (Gelmon et al., 1998). This hypothesis illustrates the assumption implied in social exchange theory that a resource (the community agency's involvement in the service-learning program) will only continue to flow if there is a valued return contingent upon it (agency benefits). Service-learning may be considered optimal from the community's perspective if both the university and agency are involved in the planning and implementation of the program.

The second hypothesis is this study is that agency voice in program planning and implementation will contribute to the development of positive interpersonal relations between agency members and student service learners. A further aspect of service-learning that may affect the community agency's perception of a rewarding exchange with the university is the establishment of ongoing positive interpersonal relationships. *Positive interpersonal relations* are defined as relationships with students that agency partners consider rewarding and mutual. The contribution by the agency partners to the planning and implementation of the program may foster the development of positive interpersonal relationships between the students and the agency members because the agency partners will perceive that they are working in collaboration with the university, of which the students are representatives. In addition, a service experience in which students feel comfortable, useful, and well-received may stimulate the development of positive interpersonal relationships between the students and agency partners. In some instances, issues of diversity may play a role in limiting or strengthening relationships (Jones & Hill, 2001).

The third hypothesis is that agency partners will perceive agency benefits of the service-learning program when interpersonal relations between the students and the agency members are positive. This hypothesis, based on Driscoll et al. (1996), and Jones and Hill (2001), suggests that interpersonal relationships enhance community partners' perception of benefits of service-learning. The relation between these variables may be bidirectional. Those community partners who perceive benefits to their agency during the semester may be more invested in forming and maintaining positive interpersonal relations with the students. Furthermore, students may have more positive attitudes at the agency when they can see the usefulness of their efforts. This enthusiasm may contribute to the development of positive interpersonal relationships between students and agency members.

The fourth hypothesis is that partners who experience agency benefits will have a favorable perception of the University. This hypothesis was also based on the work of Gelmon et al. (1998), who reported that agencies viewed the university as positive when they had a positive experience with the service-learning program. The outcome variable of *perception of the university* may be indicated by the

agency partner's awareness of the university, positive regard for the university, and the desire to work with the university again.

The fifth hypothesis is that a linear relation will be demonstrated, in which agency benefit mediates the relation between agency voice and the perception of the University. As suggested by social exchange theory, the current study focuses not on individual actions and decisions, but on the social relations between the University and the agency, from the community partner's perspective. It was hypothesized that the community partner would consider these relations as positive if the community partner perceives agency voice in planning and program implementation as well as agency benefits from the program.

Method

Participants

Interviews were conducted with 40 site coordinators of various community agencies that had been involved in the service-learning program at the University. Twenty-seven of the participants were female (67.5%). Nineteen of the participants were African American (47.5%), 16 were Caucasian (40%), 3 were Hispanic (7.5%), 1 was from an Eastern European country (2.5%), and 1 was from the Caribbean Islands (2.5%).

The types of agencies involved in the study were as follows. Education sites ($n = 10$; 25%) included schools and other educational programs. Students at education sites typically tutored children in various subjects. Health sites ($n = 4$; 10%) were hospitals in which students typically assisted nurses with minor procedures or interacted with patients in waiting rooms. Environmental agencies ($n = 4$; 10%) included those working for the improvement of urban physical conditions. Governmental and Trade agencies ($n = 4$; 10%) included city, state, or federal departments and offices working to improve the city's international business relations. At environmental, and governmental and trade sites, students typically conducted library or Internet research. Legal sites ($n = 4$; 10%) included public interest law firms in which students often assisted attorneys with client meetings and helped clients file complaints. Nonprofit sites ($n = 7$; 17.5%) included agencies promoting the arts, working toward improving the living conditions for persons with specific illnesses, or labor organizations. In these agencies, students helped maintain installations at galleries, plan fundraisers, or met with clients to discuss issues to be addressed by the agency. Outreach sites ($n = 7$; 17.5%) included those offering direct services such as career counseling or tax assistance to people in the community. At these sites, students generally worked one-on-one serving clients.

The length of time that agencies in the study had been involved in the service-learning program ranged from one semester to nine semesters, with an average of 3.1 semesters. Individuals interviewed for the study had been supervising students from one semester to eight semesters, with an average of two semesters. The sites varied greatly in the number of service-learning students, with a minimum of 1, a maximum of 24, and an average of approximately 7 students. In the semester preceding the interview, students performed from 12 to 72 hours of service per semester, with most students performing approximately 30 service hours.

Program Characteristics

The service-learning program at the University began in 1997. In a typical semester, 25 courses are offered in various disciplines including psychology, biology, foreign languages, sociology, and business administration. Each semester, approximately 450 students are placed in 40 to 50 agencies, schools, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and hospitals. Most of the students are female (approximately 66%) and from White, middle to upper-middle class backgrounds. In most service-learning courses, students are given a choice at the beginning of the semester of several different sites at which they can serve.

The program is coordinated through the University's Office of Service Learning (OSL), which has three full-time program coordinators, a director, associate director, and additional support staff. The Program Coordinators work with faculty and community agencies to plan and implement service-learning activities. In addition, the OSL provides resources for students to use at their sites (e.g. books for tutoring), on-site orientations for students at the beginning of each semester, "rap" sessions for oral reflection by students, and workshops for service-learning faculty and community partners. The office co-sponsors a half-day training for students during which student affairs staff and community members facilitate discussions about race, class, and community. This training helps students learn about historical and current issues in the community that may affect their reception at community agencies.

A standard routine has been established over the years for setting up relationships with community sites. Formal agreements are made with agencies that specify the roles and responsibilities of the agency and the University. Community agencies prepare a job description for the work that service-

Table 2
Assessment of Community Agency Perceptions

Construct: Agency Voice	$r*$
Internal Consistency: *alpha* = .76, *n* = 35	
What was the extent of your role in planning for the service-learner position?	.28
How much contact did you have with the faculty member involved in the program?	.46
How involved was the faculty member in the planning process?	.39
How much contact did you have with the Office of Service Learning (OSL) representative?	.34
When working with OSL, to what extent do you feel that your agency and the OSL were equal partners?	.63
In planning the service learner's activities, how willing was the OSL staff to listen to you?	.66
How willing was the OSL to take your suggestions?	.66
How satisfied were you with the "job description" created for the service-learners' work?	.11
How much did you contribute to that "job description"?	.27
Overall, how would you characterize the planning for the service-learner's position?	.38

Construct: Agency Benefit	
Internal Consistency: *alpha* = .66, *n* = 40	
To what extent did you find your service-learner(s) organized and prepared?	.48
How directly related to the needs of your agency were the service-learner's responsibilities?	.27
To what extent did you find your service-learner(s) effective in helping your organization meet its goals?	.59
Did your service-learner(s) ever negatively affect your organization? **	.32
To what extent was your site's involvement with OSL a burden to you, your staff, or your clients? **	.44
To what extent did you gain any economic benefits or resources through your involvement with OSL?	.52
To what extent did you gain any other benefits through your involvement with OSL?	.28

Construct: Interpersonal Relations-not including Diversity Items	
Internal Consistency: *alpha* = .75, *n* = 32	
What was your first impression upon meeting your service-learner(s)?	.18
What did you perceive to be your service-learner's first impression of you, the staff, or clients of your site?	.44
How would you characterize your interaction with your service-learner at the beginning of the semester?	.36
How did your service-learner(s) interact with your agency's clients?	-.03
To what extent do you feel your service-learner(s) was sensitive to the needs and problems facing this particular community?	.32
To what extent did your service-learner(s) display an interest in learning about your organization's missions and goals?	.57
To what extent do you feel your service-learner(s) came to understand your organization's missions and goals?	.52
To what extent did your service-learner(s) display an interest in learning about your organization's history within the context of the community?	.58
To what extent do you feel your service-learner(s) came to understand your organization's history within the context of the community?	.57
From your perspective, how did your service-learner(s)' perceptions/assumptions of site change over the course of the semester?	.10
How would you characterize your interaction with your service-learner(s) at the end of the semester?	.33
How did this relationship change over time?	.47

continued

learning students will do at their site. These practices have been implemented to develop a "partnership" between the community agency and the University in carrying out the service-learning program.

Interview and Measures

Table 2 shows the questions used in the interview and internal consistencies of the interview scales. Each respondent reported a rating for each item on a 1-to-5-point scale, with a rating of 1 representing the minimal score (e.g. "poor" or "not at all") and 5 representing the optimal score (e.g. "excellent" or "maximally"). The respondent then elaborated his or her answer. The interview began with a section concerning agency voice. The 10 items in this section regarded the supervisor's contribution to the planning and implementation of the program. The *alpha* coefficient for *Agency Voice* was .76, for *n* = 35 cases.

Next, seven questions regarding *Agency Benefit* were asked. These items concerned the supervisor's perceived benefit to the agency of working with the service-learning program. The internal consistency of this seven-item scale was .66, *n* = 40.

Next, questions relating to the *Interpersonal Relations* between the agency members and the stu-

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Table 2 (continued)
Assessment of Community Agency Perceptions

	r*
Construct: Interpersonal Relations-including Diversity items	
Internal Consistency: *alpha* = .78, *n* = 25	
What was your first impression upon meeting your service-learner(s)?	.20
What did you perceive to be your service-learner's first impression of you, the staff, or clients of your site?	.48
How would you characterize your interaction with your service-learner at the beginning of the semester?	.44
How did your service-learner(s) interact with your agency's clients?	-.10
To what extent do you feel your service-learner(s) was sensitive to the needs and problems facing this particular community?	.32
To what extent did your service-learner(s) display an interest in learning about your organization's mission and goals?	.71
To what extent do you feel your service-learner(s) came to understand your organization's mission and goals?	.53
To what extent did your service-learner(s) display an interest in learning about your organization's history within the context of the community?	.66
To what extent do you feel your service-learner(s) came to understand your organization's history within the context of the community?	.61
To what extent did you perceive that the student enjoyed working with people of a different race, social class, or culture?***	.40
To what extent did you perceive that the student valued working with people of a different race, social class, or culture?***	.33
To what extent did service-learner(s) cause any harm or discomfort to you or to any other agency members because of their insensitivity about race, social class, or cultural differences? **, ***	.00
To what extent did site members cause any harm or discomfort to student(s) because of their insensitivity about race, social class, or cultural differences? **	.06
From your perspective, how did your service-learners' perceptions/assumptions of site change over the course of the semester?	.15
How would you characterize your interaction with your service-learner(s) at the end of the semester?	.45
How did this relationship change over time?	.49
Construct: Perception of University	
Internal Consistency: *alpha* = .77, *n* = 38	
To what extent do you feel that Tulane University (TU) is sensitive to the needs of the New Orleans community?	.78
To what extent do you feel that TU is dedicated to a real involvement with the community?	.75
To what extent did you find the operations of TU to be unsuitable to the operations of your organization? **	.34
What is your current perception of the university's relationship to the community?	.46

Note. *Values are corrected item-total correlations. ** Reversed scored before analysis. ***Items addressing issues of diversity.

dents were asked. Because the racial/ethnic, socioeconomic status, and cultural background often differed between the University students and agency members, several items included diversity issues. Before the items concerning issues of diversity were presented, the participant was asked if he or she thought that racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, or cultural differences existed in general between the students serving at the site and the site's service recipients. If the participant did not perceive differences, the four items regarding diversity were skipped. Separate reliability analyses were conducted for two *Interpersonal Relations* measures: *Interpersonal Relations-not including Diversity* contained 12 items. The internal consistency of this measure was *alpha* = .75, *n* = 32. *Interpersonal Relations-including Diversity* contained 16 items, yielding an alpha coefficient of .78 (N = 25 cases).

The interview concluded with four questions regarding the supervisor's *Perception of the University*. The alpha coefficient for this scale was .77, *n* = 38.

As indicated above, the internal consistencies of each scale are quite good, given the nature of the data and limited number of respondents. Summary scores for each scale were obtained by averaging the scores for items on each scale (with items reverse scored as appropriate). Table 2 presents the correlations of each item with the total score for its scale, so that the contribution of each item to the scale score can be seen.

Procedure

In spring 2001, feedback on a preliminary version of the interview protocol was obtained from members of the University's Service Learning Committee. This advisory committee is comprised of members of the community involved with the service-learning program, University faculty, staff, and students. Revisions to the protocol were made

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Measures

Measure	n	M	SD	Interpersonal Relations	Agency Benefit	Perception of University
Agency Voice	35	3.77	.56	.06	.36*	.10
Interpersonal Relations	32	3.77	.46	—	.35*	.10
Agency Benefit	40	3.79	.62		—	.33*
Perception of University	38	3.95	.66			—

Note. The scale for each measure was 1.00-5.00. * *p* < .05

based on committee member suggestions.

In summer 2001, a pilot study was carried out with nine representatives of community agencies, using a preliminary form of the data collection instrument. Information gained from the pilot work helped refine the interview protocol and scoring procedures.

The primary researcher conducted interviews from May 2002 to November 2002. Participation in the project was solicited in person, or via phone or e-mail. Potential participants were informed they would receive an incentive for participating, such as a gift certificate to a local restaurant or store.

Participants were individually interviewed using a structured survey format. Before beginning the interview, the participant was provided a copy of the protocol to follow along with the interviewer. Participants were asked to respond to questions focusing on their experience during the most recent semester that they had participated in the service-learning program. The participant was informed that he or she had the opportunity to skip an item if it was irrelevant to their particular situation. Interview times ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. Respondents were asked to rate responses using numeric scales included in the interview protocol and to elaborate on their responses as desired. Follow-up questions were asked as necessary to obtain full responses from the participant. Interviews were audio-taped.

In fall 2002, a focus group was held to inform research participants about the study findings and to obtain their feedback. This conversation, which is summarized in the Discussion, contributed to the interpretation of findings.

Results

This section focuses on the results obtained from the quantitative measures of the community agency members' responses. The section begins with the means and standard deviations of the measures and their intercorrelations used to evaluate the hypotheses. Supplementary analyses of the effect of agency and program characteristics on the outcome variables follow. The qualitative responses provided by

participants are summarized in the Discussion as an aid in interpretation of the findings.

Table 3 displays the means and standard deviations of the measures. The mean scores were all fairly positive, with mean scores ranging from 3.77 to 3.95, where the maximum possible rating was 5.00. Table 3 also displays the intercorrelations of the measures. Statistically significant positive correlations were shown between *Agency Benefit* and three other measures: *Agency Voice*, *Interpersonal Relations* (with or without *Diversity* items), and *Perception of the University*. Figure 1 shows how these findings support the proposed model of constructs assessed in the study. As indicated there, *Agency Voice* correlated with perceived *Agency Benefit*, and *Agency Benefit* correlated with *Perception of the University*. The *Interpersonal Relations* measures were related to *Agency Benefit*, but were independent of both *Agency Voice* and *Perception of the University*. Finally, *Agency Voice* was not directly related to *Perception of the University*.

Table 4 displays the correlations of agency characteristics with perceptions of *Agency Voice*, *Interpersonal Relations*, *Agency Benefit*, and

Figure 1
Intercorrelations of Measures Represented in Table 3.

*Note. *p* < .05

33
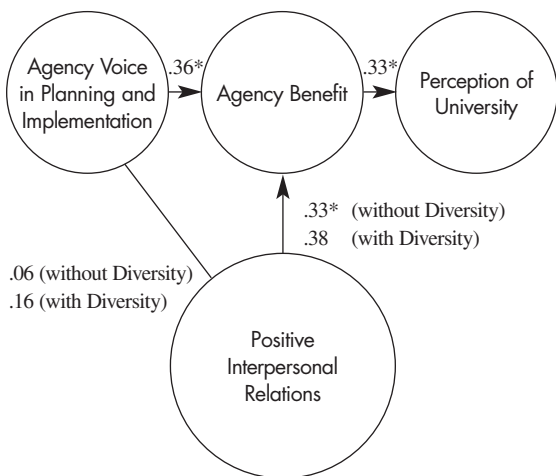
Table 4
Correlations of Measures with Agency Characteristics

Measure	Semesters Service-Learning at Agency	Semesters Supervising Service-Learners	Number of Service-Learners at Agency	Hours of Student Service
Agency Voice	.34*	.22	.11	-.22
Interpersonal Relations	-.05	.03	-.23	-.21
Agency Benefit	.20	.24	.21	.16
Perception of University	.11	.08	.33*	.20

Note. * $p < .05$

Perception of the University. The number of semesters that the agency had participated in service-learning significantly correlated with *Agency Voice* ($r = .34$, $p = .05$). This indicates that the longer agencies have been involved with the service-learning program, the more agency members contribute to the program's planning and implementation. After controlling for the number of semesters, the relation of *Agency Voice* and *Agency Benefit* was slightly reduced to $r = .30$ ($p = .09$) from $r = .36$ ($p = .05$). This indicates that the length of time an agency has been involved in the service-learning program influences the impact of *Agency Voice* on the agency member's perception of *Agency Benefit*. Regression tests were conducted to determine possible moderator effects of the descriptive characteristics of the agencies on the relation between *Agency Voice* and *Agency Benefit*. None of the moderator effects reached statistical significance.

The number of service-learners at the agencies was significantly correlated with agency members' *Perception of the University*. The more students placed at a site, the more positively the agency members regard the University. After controlling for the number of students placed at the agency, the correlation of *Agency Benefit* and *Perception of the University* was also slightly reduced to $r = .30$ ($p = .08$) from $r = .33$ ($p = .05$). This indicates that the number of students placed at an agency influences the relation between *Agency Benefit* and *Perception of the University*. The number of students involved at an agency may have been taken by respondents to be an index of the commitment of the University to the agency, something that would bear on both perceived benefits and perceptions of the University.

Analyses were conducted to determine whether agency types (Education, Health, Environmental, etc.) varied in agency members' perceptions regarding their experiences. None of the results reached statistical significance, partly due to the small numbers of participants in each group.

Discussion

This study answers the call for more research assessing the impact of service-learning on community agencies. Specifically, the study addresses several methodological considerations including community contribution to research methodology, theory-driven research, reliability and validity of measures, and generalizability of findings. Rather than relying on office reports or student accounts, the sources of the data collected in this study were supervisors of community agencies participating in the service-learning program of a University. Furthermore, members of these agencies contributed to the development of the study's measure and to the interpretation of the study's findings.

Social-exchange theory was supported as the theoretical framework for this research. The benefit that the University receives from participating in a service-learning program is apparent from findings of past research and the fact that the University is participating in the program. This study sought to assess the benefit that community agencies receive and to determine the extent to which mutually rewarding relationships exist between the University and the community. The results of this study suggest that overall, agency supervisors are quite well satisfied with the service-learning experience.

As expected, those participants with a voice in program planning and implementation perceived benefits from the service-learning experience (Hypothesis 1). In addition, those agency partners who perceived positive interpersonal relations between agency members and students also perceived benefits from the program (Hypothesis 3). Finally, those participants who experienced benefits from the program had a positive view of the University (Hypothesis 4).

The hypothesis that agency voice in program planning and implementation would contribute to positive interpersonal relations (Hypothesis 2) was not supported. Students and agency members may interact positively at a site regardless of the extent to which the agency member has a voice regarding the program's planning. Individual characteristics of the students and agency members undoubtedly contribute to the quality of the interpersonal relationships. At some sites, the participant in the study acted as the supervisor of the students but was not

necessarily the agency member who had initially set up the program. In addition, many nonprofit agencies face the problem of high employee turnover. Future research must address the perspectives of multiple members of the agency as well as determine the role of turnover in the impact of service-learning programs on community agencies.

The hypothesis that a linear relation would be demonstrated in which agency benefit mediates the relation between agency voice and the perception of the University (Hypothesis 5) could not be tested because the correlation of agency voice and perception of the University was not statistically significant. During the interviews, many participants revealed views of the University independent of their experiences with the service-learning program. For example, some participants had always regarded the University positively before they began working with the program. On the other hand, some participants had experienced a negative relationship with the University, but indicated that this previous experience had not affected their desire to work with the service-learning program.

A meeting was held with some of the study participants to obtain feedback on the study's findings and methodology. Participants were asked to comment on the constructs assessed in the study. In general, the participants agreed that assessing *Agency Voice* in program planning and implementation was important to determine the benefits of the program to community agencies. Specifically, the participants suggested that the sites with more experience with service-learning may be better able to orient students to the agency and more understanding of student work habits, and that this understanding may contribute to a greater perceived benefit of service-learning. This idea helps to interpret the significant correlation between *Agency Voice* and the number of semesters an agency had been involved in the program. This supports the proposals by Jacoby and colleagues (2003) that time is an essential element of partnership development.

The participants also discussed the role of diversity in the context of service-learning. The participants were asked to comment on the finding that despite the racial, cultural, or socioeconomic differences between the students and the agency members, the interviews revealed minimal observations of discomfort on the part of the students or site members. For example, all of the study's respondents reported that students caused no harm or discomfort to agency members because of their insensitivity about race, social class, or cultural differences. In addition, 92.5% of the agency members perceived that the students "enjoyed" or "greatly enjoyed" working with people of a different race, social class, or culture than their own. The participants suggested that students who are more open to issues of diversity may "self-select" into service-learning. In addition, the participants felt that the training students received about issues of race, class, and community may have stimulated their thoughts about these issues.

Agency members were willing to reveal their genuine level of satisfaction with the service-learning program. Most participants described concerns and criticisms of the service-learning program as well as benefits. For example, lack of follow up by the OSL staff mid- and post-semester was noted as one concern. These concerns are important, but are beyond the scope of the current study and may be a subject for future research. The fact that participants were willing to express concerns about the program counters the suggestion that community agency members may report positive opinions of the program regardless of their true perceptions because they wish to maintain ties or in the hope of gaining access to other university resources (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000). Moreover, the offer of an incentive to participate in the study did not seem to affect participant ratings. Most participants expressed their desire to participate in the study independent of receiving an incentive because they appreciated the opportunity to give feedback to the OSL. Many participants were reluctant to accept the incentive or stated that they would share it with other members of their staff.

Considerable support was shown for the reliability and validity of the scales used to measure community perceptions. With regard to reliability, we demonstrated adequate internal consistency of the four measures, as indicated above. With regard to validity, this study is unique in seeking community input at three points in the development of the work: (a) during initial item creation, (b) through pilot testing and revision of the scales, and (c) as findings were obtained and interpreted. Such strong community input, from varied sources, contributes powerfully to the content validity of the measures. Further, correlations in Table 4 support the construct validity of the measures. For example, the length of time an agency has been with the service-learning program correlates with the amount of input the agency has in the planning stages of the program because agency members become more familiar with how the program is run and program coordinators become more familiar with the agency over time. Thus, agency members have the opportunity to contribute to the program planning and implementation.

Limitations

The number of participants in this study placed limitations on the interpretation of the data. The statistically significant correlations were fairly low (e.g., .33, .35), most likely due to the low number of participants. In addition, sophisticated statistical analyses could not be conducted. Furthermore, some relations that did not reach statistical significance (e.g., *Interpersonal Relations-including Diversity* and *Benefits*) may have been affected by the small sample size.

The relationship of the researcher to the participants is important to consider when interpreting findings. Though the researcher had the opportunity to establish rapport with some of the participants prior to the interviews, that she is a representative of the University and specifically, of the service-learning program, may have reduced the level of objectivity possible in this study. The presence of the researcher during the quantitative portion of the study may have negatively affected the willingness of participants to respond honestly. However, the reverse may hold true as well, in that the researcher's presence may have conveyed the message of the genuine intent of the research to obtain quality information regarding the participants' experiences. In fact, several participants indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in such depth. They were appreciative of the interest of the program in learning about the community perspective.

The researcher's racial and socioeconomic background may have adversely affected the willingness of some participants to discuss issues of diversity. Although several participants were very open about discussing these issues, others appeared to be more guarded. Individual characteristics of the respondents, such as general interest in discussing issues of diversity, may have been a factor in such discussions as well, particularly considering that some participants elected not to respond to questions concerning diversity issues.

Although this study took place at a single University, the larger number of participants in this study, compared with the number in some previous studies (e.g., Gelmon et al., 1998; Jones & Hill, 2001), allows the possibility for the findings to generalize to other programs. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with findings from past research in the importance placed on the constructs assessed in describing community participants' experiences. A future direction of the research may be to conduct a comparative study of service-learning programs at other universities. Because there is no consistent way in which programs are carried out across universities, the responses from community members participating in programs at other universities may be more variable than those reported in the current report. Future research will need to assess whether the results presented in this study apply to service-learning programs on other campuses.

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