

# **Service-Learning and Community Engagement: Student Participation at Ohio State**

Center for the Study of Student Life

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## INTRODUCTION

Service-learning is an experiential approach to education that promotes learning and development by engaging students in a combination of community service and structured reflection (Jacoby, 1996). Although the specific characteristics of service-learning programs vary, the overarching pedagogy is one of learning through experience, reflection and reciprocity (Einfeld & Collins, 2008). Service-learning and other forms of community engagement are associated with a range of learning outcomes, from cognitive outcomes such as the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills to civic outcomes such as a greater sense of civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999).

In order to develop a better understanding of the culture of community engagement at The Ohio State University, the following document summarizes data regarding the rates of participation in service-learning and other community engagement activities among Ohio State students.

## METHODS

### Data Sources

Data summarized in the following report were sourced from three surveys, each distributed to a random sample of Ohio State students within the past three years.

- The *National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)* measures student engagement both within and outside of the classroom during the spring of their first and senior year of college. One set of engagement indicators examines students' participation in High Impact Practices (Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2001), including service-learning. This report utilizes NSSE data from 2013.
- The *Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL)* is an international survey that investigates the extent to which higher education institutions develop student leaders. It contains a range of measures investigating student attitudes and experiences, including their level of involvement in different types of community engagement activities during college. This report utilizes data a random sample of undergraduate respondents to the MSL in 2015.
- The *Student Life Survey (SLS)* is an annual survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Student Life to investigate topics related to student engagement, co-curricular involvement, belonging and satisfaction with Ohio State. Questions have been included to assess rates of participation in community service and service-learning during the past academic year. This report utilizes SLS data from 2015.

Data Source	Year	Sample	National Comparison Available
National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)	2013	n = 961 first-year students n = 495 fourth-year students	Yes
Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL)	2015	n = 1,224 undergraduate students	Yes
Student Life Survey (SLS)	2015	n = 1,039 undergraduate students n = 282 graduate/professional students	No

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

## FINDINGS

Data from each survey were analyzed to develop a deeper understanding of participation in service-learning and community engagement activities among Ohio State students. Findings are summarized in three sections. The first section describes average participation rates in service-learning among Ohio State students, followed by descriptive statistics regarding participation in community engagement activities. The third section explores demographic and academic differences in service-learning and community engagement participation.

### PARTICIPATION IN SERVICE-LEARNING

Different surveys have reported very different rates of participation in service-learning among Ohio State students. How service-learning participation is defined, what time frame is specified, and sample characteristics may all influence the reported participation rate. The following table summarizes service-learning participation rates reported by each survey, along with a description of how service-learning was defined.

Survey	Participation Rate	Definition of Service-Learning
NSSE 2013 – First-Years	35.0%	Reporting that at least some of the classes they have taken at their current institution included a community-based project.
NSSE 2013 – Seniors	50.0%	
MSL 2015 – Undergraduates	4.9%	In the average month, spending at least 1 hour participating in community service as part of a class.
SLS 2015 – Undergraduates and Graduate Students	20.7%	Participating in “an academic course with a service-learning component” during the current academic year.

**Time Frame.** Each survey specifies a different time frame in their measurement of service-learning participation, leading to discrepancies in the reported participation rates. The NSSE definition of service-learning has an open timeframe, asking students to report if any of the classes they have taken at their current institution have included a community-based project. Both the SLS and MSL provide more restricted timeframes, asking students to report service-learning within the academic year (SLS) and “in the average month” (MSL). The low participation rate suggested by the MSL data may be due to the fact that service-learning is not an activity in which students are typically involved “in the average month.” Meanwhile, the SLS findings indicate the number of Ohio State students enrolled in a service-learning class in a given academic year.

**Sample Characteristics.** There are also differences in the respondent characteristics that could lead to discrepancies in participation rates between surveys. Whereas the NSSE reports data for only first-year and senior students, the MSL includes undergraduates of all levels. The SLS includes the responses of undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, and findings from comparisons of these groups indicate that they demonstrate significantly different service-learning participation rates (see p. 6).

**Conclusion.** Altogether, these findings suggest that:

- Approximately one-fifth of Ohio State students, both graduate and undergraduate, participate in service-learning in a given academic year (SLS 2015).
- Approximately one-half of Ohio State undergraduate students experience some type of community-based learning by the spring of their senior year (NSSE 2013).

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In addition to collecting data about service-learning participation, the MSL and the SLS collect additional information about various types of community engagement, such as community service or participation in community organizations. The following section reports selected data points from each survey indicating the extent to which Ohio State students participate in community engagement activities.

### Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership: Community and Civic Engagement

Although the MSL definition of service-learning only indicates the amount of time that students spend engaging in community service as part of a class “in the average month,” there are other measures of community engagement that indicate how frequently students are involved within the community during college as a whole.

#### Community and Civic Engagement during College

Response				
Performed community service ( <i>n</i> = 1,089)	23.8%	17.3%	43.9%	15.1%
Worked with others to make the campus or community a better place ( <i>n</i> = 1,078)	39.5%	17.4%	31.9%	11.1%
Worked with others to address social inequality ( <i>n</i> = 1,079)	59.8%	17.0%	17.2%	6.0%
Short-term service immersion ( <i>n</i> = 1,045)	88.3%	6.4%	3.9%	1.3%

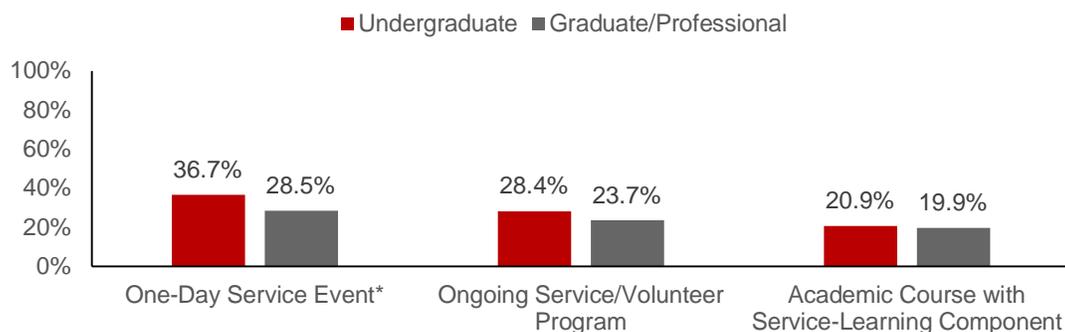
Data Source: MSL 2015

Findings indicate that while over three-quarters of Ohio State undergraduate students have performed community service at some point during college, only 11.7 percent have completed a short-term service immersion program. However, 60.5 percent of students have worked with others to improve their communities and 40.2 percent have worked with others to address social inequality.

### Student Life Survey: Community Service

Data from the 2015 Student Life Survey indicate that around one-third of Ohio State students participate in some type of community service each year, although undergraduate students are more likely to report participating in one-day service events than graduate/professional students.

**Students Reporting Community Service Participation within the 2014-2015 Academic Year (SLS 2015; *n* = 1,205)**



\**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001

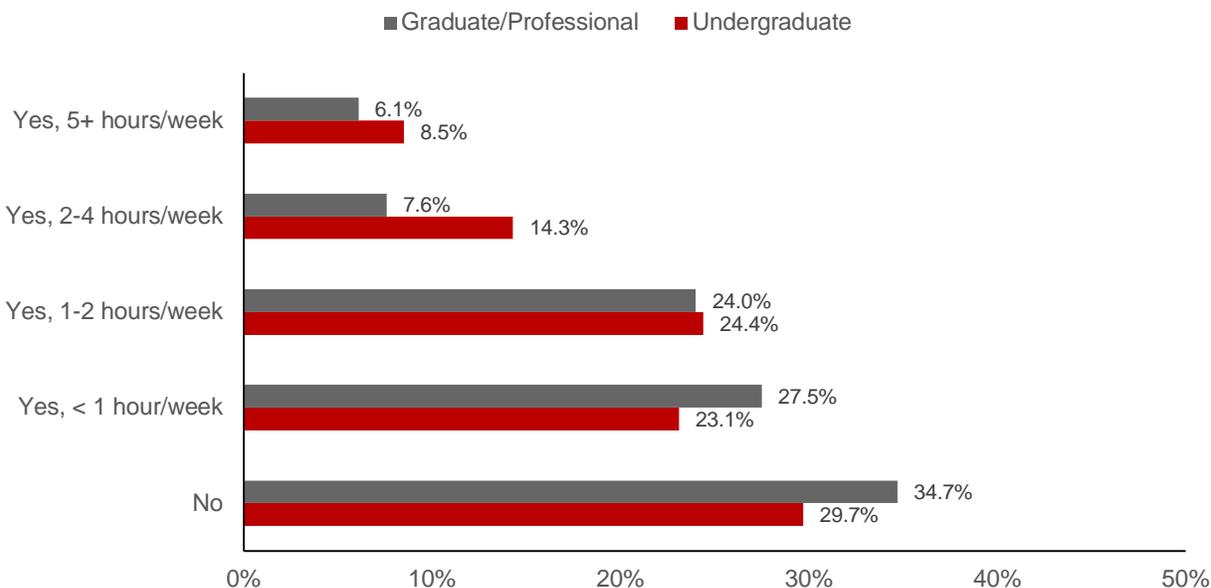
In addition, findings from the SLS 2015 survey suggest that many students may complete community service through involvement in a student organization. Of the students who indicated being involved in a student organization:



These statistics indicate that student organization involvement may be one vehicle through which students become involved in community service and civic engagement.

In addition, the SLS 2015 data suggest that 69.3% of Ohio State students anticipated participating in community service within the next six months, although the number of hours they anticipated participating varied.

**Anticipate Participating in Community Service within 6 Months\***  
(SLS 2015;  $n = 1,233$ )



A higher percentage of graduate/professional students planned to spend less than one hour participating in service within the next six months. However, around one-fourth of both graduate and undergraduate students planned to spend 1-2 hours participating in community service during this timeframe.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

## INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN SERVICE-LEARNING PARTICIPATION

Individual differences in service-learning participation and community engagement were assessed by comparing participation rates between students with different demographic and academic characteristics.

### Differences in Service-Learning Participation among Senior Undergraduate Students (NSSE 2013)

Demographic differences in service-learning participation among Ohio State undergraduate students were examined using chi-square tests of independence and logistic regression. Only the senior/4<sup>th</sup> year sample of students was selected for analyses, as this group is more likely to represent overall opportunities for service-learning participation while attending Ohio State. The table below summarizes these comparisons.

Group			
First-generation ( <i>n</i> = 122)	59	48.4%	
Not first-generation ( <i>n</i> = 253)	126	49.8%	
Female ( <i>n</i> = 262)	136	51.9%	
Male ( <i>n</i> = 151)	71	47.0%	
Traditional age (18 to 23, <i>n</i> = 318)	150	47.2%	
Nontraditional age (24+, <i>n</i> = 57)	35	61.4%	*
Domestic ( <i>n</i> = 351)	168	47.9%	
International ( <i>n</i> = 19)	15	79.0%	**
White ( <i>n</i> = 299)	143	47.8%	
Student of color ( <i>n</i> = 64)	38	59.4%	
In a sorority/fraternity ( <i>n</i> = 41)	165	49.2%	
Not in a sorority/fraternity ( <i>n</i> = 335)	20	48.7%	

Data Source: NSSE 2013

a) Statistical significance determined using chi-square tests of independence

Findings indicate that nontraditional-aged students and international students were more likely to indicate that at least one of their courses at Ohio State had included a community-based project. There were no gender or racial/ethnic differences in service-learning participation, nor were there statistically significant differences among first-generation college students or students in a sorority/fraternity.

**Logistic regression.** To evaluate the extent to which demographic characteristics predict likelihood of participating in at least one service-learning course by a students' final year of college at Ohio State, a logistic regression analysis was conducted. A dichotomous variable representing whether a student participated in at least one service-learning course was the dependent variable, and the above demographic characteristics were used as predictors.

\**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001

After controlling for other factors, nontraditional-aged seniors had significantly greater odds than traditional-aged seniors of reporting service-learning participation at least once during their college career. International students also had greater odds of participating in a service-learning course than domestic students, although this difference was only marginally significant ( $p = .06$ ) after controlling for other factors.

### Logistic regression predicting service-learning participation from demographics (NSSE 2013)

Group		
First-generation	0.69	
Gender (Ref. = Male)	0.90	
Nontraditional Age (Ref. = 18-23)	2.38	**
International Student	3.46	
Student of color (Ref. = white)	1.19	
Sorority/fraternity	1.12	
Constant	0.92	

### Differences in Current-Year Service-Learning Participation among Undergraduate, Graduate and Professional Students (SLS 2015)

Following the same procedure, demographic differences in service-learning participation among participants in the SLS 2015 were also examined. Additional comparisons were conducted to determine whether students who had participated in a student organization or a Student Life sponsored program were more likely to report having engaged in service-learning than those who did not participate in these programs.

Group			
First-generation ( $n = 339$ )	78	23.0%	
Not first-generation ( $n = 714$ )	140	19.6%	
Female ( $n = 668$ )	160	24.0%	**
Male ( $n = 536$ )	89	16.6%	
Traditional age (18 to 23, $n = 911$ )	193	21.2%	
Nontraditional age (24+, $n = 294$ )	56	19.0%	
Domestic ( $n = 976$ )	198	20.3%	
International ( $n = 81$ )	21	25.9%	
White ( $n = 754$ )	145	19.2%	*
Student of color ( $n = 271$ )	68	25.1%	
Undergraduate ( $n = 949$ )	198	20.9%	
Graduate ( $n = 189$ )	28	14.8%	**
Professional ( $n = 67$ )	23	34.3%	
In a sorority/fraternity ( $n = 121$ )	29	24.0%	
Not in a sorority/fraternity ( $n = 1063$ )	216	20.3%	
Participated in a student org ( $n = 604$ )	149	24.7%	***
Did not participate in a student org ( $n = 595$ )	98	16.5%	
Participated in a Student Life sponsored program ( $n = 95$ )	36	37.9%	***
Did not participate in a Student Life sponsored program ( $n = 1089$ )	208	19.1%	

Data Source: SLS 2015

a) Statistical significance determined using chi-square tests of independence.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

While NSSE comparisons reflect differences in the percentage of students participating in a course with a community service component by their fourth year of college, the Student Life Survey reflects the percentage of students who report participating in a service-learning course during that academic year. Findings from the above comparisons suggest that a greater percentage of female students reported service-learning participation in the current academic year than did male students, and a greater percentage of students of color participated in service-learning than white students. Furthermore, greater proportions of students involved in a student organization or in a Student Life sponsored program reported engaging in service-learning within the current academic year than uninvolved students.

**Logistic regression.** To analyze the extent to which each of the above variables predicted likelihood of engaging in service-learning during the current academic year, after controlling for the impact of each other predictor, a logistic regression analysis was conducted with service-learning participation as the dependent variable.

**Logistic regression predicting current-year service-learning participation from demographics, academic level, and involvement (SLS 2015)**

Group		
First-generation	1.20	
Gender (Ref. = Male)	1.62	**
Nontraditional Age (24+)	0.93	
International Student	1.46	
Student of color (Ref. = White)	1.30	
Academic Level (Ref. = Undergraduate)		
Graduate	0.73	
Professional	1.71	
Sorority/fraternity member	0.86	
Student organization participant	1.40	*
Student Life program participant	2.22	**
Constant	0.14	***

Results indicate that gender, student organization participation, and participation in a student life program were significant predictors of service-learning participation. Females were 1.6 times as likely to engage in service-learning as males. Further, students who participated in a student organization or a student life program were 1.4 times and 2.2 times as likely, respectively, to participate in service-learning as students who did not engage in these programs. Other predictors were not significant after controlling for the influence of other factors.

To further explore the influence of these factors on community engagement, the same analysis was run with participation in one-day service events and ongoing service outside of the context of service-learning as dependent variables.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Logistic regression analyses predicting current-year participation in service events and programs from demographics, academic level, and involvement (SLS 2015)**

First-generation	0.77		0.92	
Gender (Ref. = Male)	1.46	*	1.53	**
Nontraditional Age (Ref. = 18-23)	0.76		1.20	
International student	0.69		1.30	
Student of color (Ref. = white)	1.20		1.37	
Academic Level (Ref. = undergraduate)				
Graduate	0.90		0.84	
Professional	1.46		0.94	
Sorority/fraternity member	2.33	***	1.75	*
Student organization participant	3.46	***	3.28	***
Student Life program participant	3.99	***	4.68	***
Constant	0.20	***	0.11	***

Results mirror those found for service-learning participation, with one exception. Whereas participating in a sorority/fraternity was not associated with an increase in the likelihood of participating in service-learning, students who participated in a sorority/fraternity were 2.4 times more likely to report participating in a one-day service event and 1.8 times more likely to report participating in an ongoing community service program than their unaffiliated peers. Students who participated in student organizations and Student Life programs were also significantly more likely to report participating in one-day service events and ongoing service programs within the current academic year.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

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