

“Can I Major in Service-Learning?” An Empirical Analysis of Certificates, Minors, and Majors

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Abstract

This article examines the rise of programs in higher education that award certificates, minors, and/or majors in service-learning. Using Vaughn and Seifer (2008) as a foundation, this study documented and analyzed a total of 31 academic programs that had service-learning at its academic core. Findings from this study suggest that there is indeed a coherent (though far from stable) “field” of service-learning. Moreover, the findings suggest that the strength and structure of a program is strongly dependent on its status; that is, there is a deep dividing line between certificate programs and minors and majors. This has implications for how service-learning scholars and practitioners talk about and thus organize themselves, their field, and their body of core knowledge. The article concludes by highlighting key programmatic and curricular features, examining the status of service-learning as a distinct discipline and drawing forth implications for institutions considering developing service-learning certificates, minors, and majors.

“Can I major in service-learning?” At almost any institution of higher education, such a query by an undergraduate student would seem unintelligible. Service-learning—the linkage of academic coursework with community-based service within the framework of respect, reciprocity, relevance, and reflection (Butin, 2010a)—has long been theorized and enacted as both a pedagogy and philosophy that can be superimposed on all aspects of the academy. From institutional homepages to alumni magazine covers, and across academic disciplines ranging from anthropology to zoology, service-learning has been positioned as a critical component to the revitalization of civic and political engagement on college campuses (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2007; Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007) and an important marker of deep learning in the undergraduate experience. One *does* service-learning; one doesn't *study* it.

Yet at two dozen or so institutions, such a question is legitimate and commonplace, because these institutions offer certificates, minors, and/or majors in service-learning (or a comparably named program such as “community engagement”). On a limited level, this realization—of seemingly coherent academic programs—raises an immediate question of *in* what do these students actually major? What do they learn and how do they learn it? At a deeper level, the ability to ask whether one can major in service-learning raises a host of questions about the status, viability, and institutionalization of service-learning in higher education.

This article explores both of these types of questions. It does so, moreover, against the backdrop that even as service-learning gains increasing visibility and currency in the academy, recent scholarship has become more critical of its impact in higher education (Keen & Hall,

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2009; Stoecker & Tyron, 2009). As a recent report (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009) has noted, the civic engagement movement has stalled, due, in part, to its being inadequately conceptualized and highly fragmented; it verges on “stand[ing] for anything and therefore nothing” (Saltmarsh et al., 2009, p. 4).

This article thus examines the question of the value and positioning of service-learning in higher education by inverting how the institutionalization of service-learning is traditionally conceptualized. Namely, rather than depicting service-learning as something simply done across higher education, it presents what service-learning may look like when it is deeply embedded in an academic program such as a certificate, minor, or major. Its purpose is to foster curricular and co-curricular discussions about what students, faculty, and institutions of higher education are actually doing when they “do” service-learning.

This is an important discussion for the higher education field. Vaughn and Seifer (2008) have documented 25 programs in higher education that award certificates, minors, and/or majors in service-learning (or a similarly named program), which reveals an important and unacknowledged dilemma: if service-learning is being positioned as worthy of academic investigation, and even as equivalent—given its status as a minor or major—to traditional academic fields, what is one studying about and majoring in? To ask “can I major in service-learning?” raises a host of new questions about its status in higher education (see, e.g., Battistoni, 1997).

In part questions about its status are due to the fact that academic disciplines and fields teach undergraduates specific and distinctive habits of thinking (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Becher & Trowler, 2001). Ways of looking at and studying the world are radically different in, for example, economics, physics, anthropology, and women’s studies. To claim a program major in service-learning is thus to posit that there is a distinct academic mode of thinking and being that fosters undergraduates’ awareness in a fairly distinctive way that goes far beyond service-learning as pedagogical method or philosophical orientation. For a student can major in economics, but not in quantitative research; in education, but not in cooperative learning; in women’s studies, but not in feminism. By positioning service-learning as a major (or a minor), scholars suggest that there is an explicit, coherent, and bounded field of knowledge. The question is what exactly this may be.

But to a larger extent, the existence of these concentrations, minors, and majors raises a thornier issue for the service-learning movement regarding its positioning in higher education. The recent Carnegie Foundation’s (Carnegie, 2006) creation of a voluntary classification of “community engagement”—by which postsecondary institutions can demonstrate how community engagement and outreach permeate every facet of institutional life from its mission statement to curricular offerings to tenure and promotion proceedings—is but one prominent example of the idea of service-learning as a social movement across higher education. Yet the continued construction of several dozen academic programs focused on community engagement and service-learning suggests that alternative modes of conceptualizing service-learning exist and, indeed, potentially thrive.

I have argued a similar point from a theoretical perspective: that there is a strong and untapped potential for “academizing” service-learning by creating “academic homes” in academic programs (Butin, 2006a, 2006b), whereby service-learning begins to be thought about as both an “intellectual movement” and more commonly a “social movement” (Butin, 2010b). Such “disciplining” of service-learning, I have suggested, may more thoroughly and fruitfully institutionalize it into higher education, for if

service learning cannot discipline itself, and if it cannot gain the professional and social legitimacy to control its own knowledge production, develop its own disciplinary

boundaries and norms, and critique and further its own practices, it will be unsustainable as a transformative agent within higher education. (Butin, 2006b, p. 59)

I have, moreover, offered multiple examples—for example, women’s studies, Black studies—of social movements that have transformed themselves into intellectual movements in order to demonstrate a potential complementary model of an “academic home” for how service-learning may begin to reconstitute and rethink its own relationship to the academy (Butin, 2010b).

This article examines this issue through an empirical analysis. Specifically, it describes a study which examined 31 already existing programs in higher education (using Vaughn and Seifer [2008] as a foundation) that award certificates, minors, and/or majors in “service-learning” (or a comparable term such as “civic engagement”) as its academic core. Put otherwise, it takes the on-the-ground reality of the numerous and expanding group of academic programs in service-learning and examines them through a specific theoretical lens in order to determine whether there is indeed a common core—be it programmatic, curricular, and/or instructional—that informs an academic program focused on service-learning.

Given the inductive nature of the data—that is, arising from each specific academic program—no claim is made of formal comparability across programs. Rather, what holds these programs together as worthy of analysis is instead their self-defining as coherent academic programs. Such self-definitions create multiple limitations to the findings: it is unclear to what extent programs with the same or similar names have similar conceptualizations of their practices, and numerous programs may have not been included that do not self-define in this way or use slightly different terminology to define themselves. As the conclusion to this article makes clear, though, such a limitation is actually a manifestation of the way that the service-learning field has organized itself and the consequences thereof. Finally, this study’s findings are limited both by the small number of programs analyzed and by the fact that the unit of analysis was the documents (e.g., departmental websites, syllabi) and not actual faculty practices or student beliefs.

Nevertheless, this article suggests that it is possible to engage the question of “Can I major in service-learning?” in a productive manner in order to highlight the convergences and distinctions across service-learning programs and what this might mean for the state of the service-learning movement in higher education. The findings from this study suggest that there is a coherent (though far from stable) “field” of service-learning. These findings have implications for how service-learning scholars and practitioners talk about and organize themselves, their field, and their body of core knowledge. Moreover, the findings suggest that the strength and structure of a program are strongly dependent on its status; that is, there is a dividing line between certificate programs and minors and majors. This division has implications for institutions considering developing service-learning certificates, minors, and majors. Finally, linking these two implications is the realization that scholars in numerous fields are already “disciplining” service-learning helter-skelter based on their particular contexts and specializations. It may thus be time to bring more scholarly attention and consideration to this phenomenon in order to better understand it and guide it.

Theoretical Framework

The empirical analysis of majors, minors, and certificates is premised on the notion that the crucial unit of analysis for knowledge construction, legitimation, and transmission in higher education is the academic program, and, more specifically, the academic department. This notion has its basis in classical sociology of knowledge, that is, organizational differentiation of knowledge and labor is determined by and linked to the structure and particular social context of

bureaucratic institutions (e.g., Weber, 1948). The “new” sociology of knowledge, and specifically the sociology of higher education, has in turn focused this insight on the mediating function of particular organizational units as impacting the functioning of higher education (e.g., Gumpert & Snyderman, 2002; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991).

Thus Light (1974) has persuasively shown that “the knowledge base for each profession is its discipline” (p. 259) and understanding the functioning of higher education is dependent on the realization that “academics are possessed by disciplines, fields of study, even as they are located in institutions” (Clark, 1987, p. 25). Such a perspective of the functioning of higher education avoids the over-generalizations prone to macro perspectives of entire institutions while at the same time allows for a theory generation above a micro analysis of individual practices.

Clark’s (1987) classic argument that the academic department is “the basic unit of organization because it is where the imperatives of the discipline and the institution converge” (p. 64) may be seen, for example, in the recent emphasis of the public scholarship movement’s (Ellison & Eatman, 2008) focus on a similar strategy for change:

Why are we so interested in chairs, deans, and directors? Departments, and the units with which they interact, are where tensions arise about the value of publicly engaged scholarship at the point of promotion or tenure. They are where all the work of promotion gets done and where the potential for real change is greatest. We are reaching out to department chairs in this report because they have been overlooked as key partners in public scholarship. (p. v)

The academic department may be seen as the primary site for the creation, legitimation, and transmission of knowledge and knowledge categories within higher education. While these departments, and the faculty within them, are part of larger nested academic communities (e.g., their home institutions, their disciplinary fields, the funding streams of private and public grant-making authorities), the micro-workings of particularities are played out within the academic department, for example, decisions about the focus of tenure-track hires; the structuring of core requirements; and the articulation of relevance to college stakeholders. All of these daily practices and rituals (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) build up to structure, solidify, and maintain a field’s relevance and legitimacy. Put more formally, the specific settings and practices shape “the content and forms of ideas” in higher education; and specifically,

the ritualization of knowledge categories occurs through the creation and maintenance of departments and degree programs. In these settings, the knowledge categories and their labels contribute to what counts as knowledge. They not only provide a location where participants generate local knowledge of departmental procedures and program completion expectations, but they also designate the knowledge most worth knowing within the field. (Gumpert & Snyderman, 2002, p. 379)

Such knowledge generation—at both the local and global levels—cannot be assumed to occur naturally in higher education, especially not for fields often initially deemed non-academic (see, e.g., the development of diverse social movements such as “Black Power” or feminism into, respectively, Black studies and women’s studies as intellectual movements [Frickel & Gross, 2005; Rojas, 2007; Stanton & Stewart, 1995; Wiegman, 2005]). Rather, Metzger (1987) suggests that such academic transformations occur through “subject dignification,” whereby new areas of academic study in higher education gain currency through mimicking traditional academic models and nomenclature in order to “overcome an initially ignoble reputation” (p. 129). This study will examine how service-learning majors, minors, and certificates take on the key attributes of curriculum, instruction, and structure as found in traditional academic departments. This

theoretical framework both allows a focus on the structuring of academic programs—majors, minors, and certificates—in service-learning and provides insights into how to analyze such structuring.

This perspective of the “disciplining” of service-learning is antithetical to almost all analyses of the institutionalization and structuring of service-learning in higher education. As noted earlier, the service-learning field conceptualizes itself as able to span both horizontally across academic departments and vertically across organizational structures (Brukardt, Holland, Percy, Simpher, on behalf of Wingspread Conference Participants, 2004; Furco, 2002; Saltmarsh et al., 2009). The “home” for service-learning is viewed as the entire higher education institution. Yet as I have argued (Butin, 2006a, 2010a), there is now a large body of empirical and theoretical evidence that raises doubts of the viability of such a perspective. As such, it becomes necessary to investigate the academic department as the crucial unit of analysis.

Methodology

Vaughn and Seifer (2008) list 25 programs that offer certificates, minors, and/or majors that recognize service-learning. (Since Vaughn and Seifer [2008] do not offer a methodology for the compilation of their list, it must be assumed that it was through self-definition and self-disclosure.) To these I have added four other programs (based on research by Butin, 2006b) that appear to have very similar types of academic focus. My own research made use of web-based searches for typical phrases—“service-learning,” “community engagement,” and “community service”—linked to the word “major” or “minor” within “.edu” domains. Results were investigated for all “hits” to determine whether in fact they were actual departmental majors or minors or institutional concentrations. Of the 29 programs, two (Emory & Henry College and Providence College) had both a major and a minor; I counted them as separate programs because they had distinct sets of requirements. Table 1 provides an overview of these 31 programs.

The actual analysis included two distinct strands. First, each program’s requirements were analyzed through a web-based examination of an institution’s and program’s webpages, academic catalog listing, and other relevant institutional materials (e.g., program checklists). Data were gathered on the requirements for type and length of field-based experiences, whether an introductory course was required, whether and what type of capstone experience was required, and the number of courses required for the program. These data informed the first key question of how such majors, minors, and certificates were structured. Additional contextual data were gathered on the size of the institution, its residential type, its Carnegie classification, and whether it was a public or private institution. All of these data were deemed as independent variables that potentially influenced a program’s structure and format and a simple Pearson correlation was run to determine potential relationships across these variables and whether variation existed across and within the types of academic programs.

The second strand focused on the question of whether there were points of commonality or convergence in the specific curricular content and instructional methodologies employed. All programs with a required component—be it an introductory course or capstone experience—were contacted by email to gain the syllabi for these courses. This contact included a total of 19 programs. Nine programs responded by providing current syllabi of their introductory courses. The high response rate (47%) and seemingly random distribution of respondents and type of program that responded suggest a strong degree of validity to the data and implications below. One program (Portland State University) sent two different syllabi (from two different professors) for the same introductory course. The analysis was thus conducted on 10 syllabi, which are summarized in Table 2. Specifically, a content analysis of each syllabus was conducted to determine

TABLE 1. Overview of All Programs with Concentrations, Minors, and/or Majors in Service-Learning.

Institution	Program type	Title of program
Assumption College	Minor	Community Service Learning
Bryant University	Major	Sociology and Service-Learning
CSU-Monterey Bay	Minor	Service Learning Leadership
College of St. Catherine	Minor	Civic Engagement
Colorado School of Mines	Minor	Humanitarian Engineering
DePaul University	Minor	Community Service Studies
Emory & Henry	Major	Public Policy and Community Service
Emory & Henry	Minor	Public Policy and Community Service
George Mason University	Major	Concentration in Public and Community Engagement
Humboldt State University	Minor	Leadership Studies
Indiana University	Minor	Leadership, Ethics, and Social Action
Kansas City Art Institute	Certificate	Community Arts and Service-Learning
Murray State University	Certificate	Service Learning Scholars Certificate
Northwestern university	Certificate	Civic Engagement Certificate Program
Portland State University	Minor	Civic Leadership
Providence College	Major	Public and Community Service Studies
Providence College	Minor	Public and Community Service Studies
Saint Louis University	Certificate	Service Leadership Certificate
San Jose State University	Minor	Service-Learning
Salt Lake Community College	Certificate	Service Learning Scholars Program
Slippery Rock University	Minor	Community Service and Service-Learning
SUNY-Stony Brook	Minor	Community Service Learning
University of Baltimore	Major	Community Studies and Civic Engagement
UCLA	Minor	Civic Engagement
University of Kansas	Certificate	Service Learning
University of Massachusetts-Boston	Major	Community Studies
University of Missouri	Minor	Leadership and Public Service
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill	Certificate	Public Service Scholars Program
University of San Francisco	Minor	Public Service
University of Wisconsin-River Falls	Certificate	
Vanderbilt University	Major	Concentration in Community Leadership and Development

TABLE 2. Syllabi of Required Introductory Coursework.

Institution	Title of course
DePaul University	CSS 201 Perspectives on Community Service
Emory and Henry	PPCS 100 Intro to Public Policy and Community Service
Indiana University	LESA 105 Beyond the Sample Gates
Northwestern university	SESP 202 Introduction to Community Development
Portland State University	PA 411 Foundation of Citizenship
Providence College	PSP 101 Introduction to Service in Democratic Communities
University of Missouri	HCCIP Honors College Community Involvement Program
University of San Francisco	POL 118 Intro to Public Administration
Vanderbilt University	HOD 2600 Community Development Theory

commonalities and divergences across required readings, modes of assessment of student work, requirements of field experiences, and assumptions (either explicit or implicit) of the academic field of service-learning and the practice of service. Such a content analysis involved both simple frequency counts (i.e., “how many syllabi required field experiences?”) and more interpretive analysis of, for example, the level of specificity of what counts as legitimate community engagement.

Findings of Structure of Service-Learning Programs

Vaughn and Seifer (2008) document 25 programs that focus on “service-learning, leadership, and/or community service” through majors, minors, and certificate programs (p. 1). These programs, they argue,

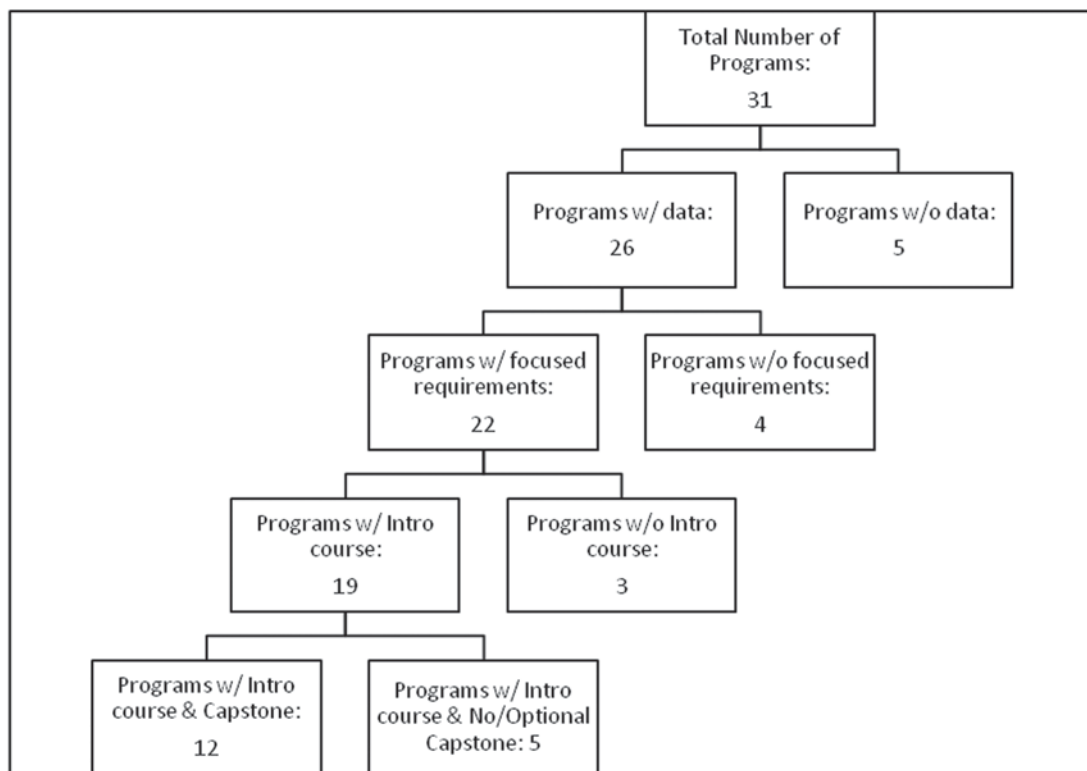
tend to focus in one of three areas: 1) A minor or certificate earned by engaging in community service and service-learning activities, 2) A minor or certificate earned by learning about the theoretical roots of service-learning and engaging in service-learning activities and 3) A minor or certificate focused on leadership and social change, for which a requirement is engagement in service-learning activities. A small number of higher education institutions offer a major area of concentration that focuses on service-learning. (p. 1)

Vaughn and Seifer suggest that the commonalities in all of these programs are their commitment to students’ engagement in service-learning activities. But the deeper issue that is left unexamined is the larger point of how and why some programs have developed their programs as they have. Constructing a certificate, minor, or major program in higher education is a slow and deliberate process that requires multiple stages of academic review, from curriculum committees to Provost’s approval to other departments’ consultations. To construct a program focusing on service-learning requires scholarly articulation of the focus and content of such a program and how it differs from or expands upon existing academic programs.

I suggest that Vaughn and Seifer leave unexamined the commonalities and distinctions across these programs above and beyond their program type, that is, there appear to be distinctions across programs between those that simply use service-learning and those that examine service-learning within the context of traditional academic formats. Figure 1 provides an overview of the descriptive findings of the programmatic structures of the 31 programs cited above based on key distinguishing characteristics above and beyond their use of service-learning within their programs. The 31 programs include 8 certificate programs (26% of the total), 16 minors (52% of the total), and 7 majors (22% of the total).

Almost all programs—22 out of 26 (85%)—had some type of formal academic requirement that focused on the theory and/or practice of the service-learning experience. For many programs (19 out of 22) this requirement was an introductory course. Other programs required a capstone experience that took the form of a senior seminar or an individualized project such as a portfolio, senior thesis, or a community-based project or field experience. Twelve programs (46% of all programs) required both an introductory course and a capstone experience. This split among programs—that is, between programs with formal “book-end” structures of introductory and concluding requirements and programs without such formalized requirements—was in fact quite pronounced and obvious. It may thus be helpful to describe two programs on either side of this divide to make the differences visible.

FIGURE 1. Overview of Program Structures.



The University of Kansas offers a “Certification in Service Learning” through its Center for Service Learning (University of Kansas, 2008). The certification is gained once a student completes four distinct components: a classroom experience, which requires the completion of an approved course that incorporates service-learning; directed readings, which include three articles and a report to be used “as a resource in the final reflection paper” (p. 1); an independent project, which may be another course with service-learning, an alternative break, or additional volunteering or leadership experience; and reflection, which may be fulfilled either through attending “two one-hour reflection sessions” (p. 2) or a written paper of 8–10 pages that focuses on the “what?,” “so what?,” and “now what?” of the students’ service-learning experiences.

The UNC-Chapel Hill program is structured in a similar manner. Students in the Public Service Scholars program are required to complete 300 hours of service, take an approved course at the college with a service-learning component, complete four “skills training” sessions, and write a “senior portfolio” that is to be a reflective 750-word essay (UNC, 2008). The “skills training” component is meant to foster skill sets such as advocacy, ethics, and organizational leadership and may be fulfilled by attending a wide variety of conferences, workshops, or courses. Similarly, the approved course can be from across the college or may take the form of an alternative spring break trip or an independent study.

What is indicative of these programs is the lack of a coherent and deliberate engagement with what constitutes service-learning. Service-learning is viewed as a given, a taken-for-granted process and product that needs no guided deliberation or debate. Both programs allow students to take any course that fulfills an institutionally approved course with the moniker of service-learning. Both programs allow flexibility in accomplishing such tasks, with immense scope

ranging from an alternative spring break to leading a student group. And both programs allow students to write, without the context of a course or professor, a short reflection on their experiences.

The issue at present is not one of quality or rigor. Rather, the issue here is the lack of a deliberate and sustained engagement with what it means to be engaged in the process of service-learning. Two other examples—Northwestern University’s certificate program and the minor in Leadership, Ethics, and Social Action at Indiana University—mirror more structured programs.

Northwestern University’s Civic Engagement Certificate program requires students to take five courses, 100 hours of community service, a set of reflective seminars that occur on a bi-weekly basis throughout the five academic quarter sequence, and a capstone project (Northwestern, 2008). The required courses include two academic courses—Introduction to Community Development & Leadership and Community Decision-Making—as well as an approved course with a service-learning component and two independent studies that function as the capstone experience. The capstone project, either in groups or as an individual, should “have relevancy to the sponsoring organization’s mission and goals” (p. 3) and is presented to the larger academic community in a public forum.

Indiana University’s minor in Leadership, Ethics, and Social Action (Indiana, 2008) provides another common model for programs with minors and majors. All students must complete a required introductory course, choose three electives within concentrations of ethics, social organizations, and social action, and complete a capstone project and seminar. All of the courses incorporate service-learning, and the capstone project includes an 8–10-page paper, a reflective journal, and a public presentation that is linked to the student’s service component and the faculty member’s readings.

The contrast of these two programs with the former two reveals several key distinctions. Specifically, these latter two programs have—above and beyond required field-based service-learning and discipline-based coursework that incorporate service-learning—deliberate coursework and sustained inquiry that focus on the topics and issues inherent within the service-learning experience. The required courses in both programs provide all students entering that particular program with a coherent set of common texts, perspectives, and analytic tools by which to make sense of their future coursework and field-based experiences. Moreover, both programs culminate in a capstone experience that has a public component and integrates the student’s previous experiences.

The distinction between the programs—University of Kansas and UNC-Chapel Hill versus Northwestern University and Indiana University—lies in a fundamentally different perspective of how to think about and thus engage with the practice of service-learning. The University of Kansas and UNC-Chapel Hill, much like the 14 other programs without formal coursework and capstone requirements, function with service-learning as practice simply to be done. The other programs view service-learning as something to be examined. This situation is reminiscent of Boyle-Baise, Bridgwaters, Brinson, Hiestand, Johnson, & Wilson’s (2007) argument that we must be prepared to reverse our terminology and learn about service before we can fruitfully do service-learning.

The formal requirements (or lack thereof) are the embodiment of a program and institution’s implicit and explicit assumptions and visions of what constitutes service-learning. This point aligns with Hartley’s arguments (Hartley & Soo, 2009; Morphew & Hartley, 2006) that even when institutions and programs use similar rhetorical elements and structures, there are notable differences and distinctive features across different institutional types. For example, Morphew and Hartley (2006) found that institutional mission statements varied primarily by institutional control (public versus private); Hartley and Soo (2009) found that program documents submitted to the Carnegie Foundation for the “community engagement” classification varied

primarily by Carnegie classification (liberal arts, masters, and doctoral). In this study, notions of service-learning appeared to be distinctive across program structure.

To analyze this distinction more formally, it was necessary to determine whether alternative explanations—above and beyond the program structure—impacted how service-learning programs were organized. For example, it is possible that the formal requirements (or lack thereof) could also be dependent on the particular and idiosyncratic cultural and historical contexts and policies of each particular institution and department: the size or type of the institution; the type of student body; the institution's stated level of commitment to service-learning. An exploratory correlational analysis was thus conducted.

Each of the programs was coded according to a host of variables (with supporting data found through the Carnegie Foundation's classifications): private/public; size of institution; traditional Carnegie classification; residential status of students; and whether the institution had gained the Carnegie "community engagement" voluntary classification. A Pearson correlation was run to determine whether a program's formal requirements correlated to any of these variables. The requirement of a capstone experience had no statistically significant correlations. The requirement of an introductory course had a single statistically significant relationship: to program type. Table 3 provides the correlation table.

This finding is surprising. It suggests that an institution's size, achievement of the Carnegie Foundation's "community engagement" classification, public or private status, or the residency status of its student population does not matter to the requirement of introductory coursework. One could imagine a host of rationales for why institutions would require formal introductory coursework: institutions were already committed to strengthening service-learning (as documented by the proxy variable of the Carnegie classification) or institutions were smaller and/or more focused on serving traditional student populations (as documented by proxy variables such as size, residential type, public/private, and Carnegie classification).

Instead, the dividing line falls squarely and cleanly across program type. This finding buttresses the theoretical underpinning that it is the distinctive academic unit, and not the institution as a whole, that impacts the format and direction of particular knowledge formation and diffusion. Table 4 clarifies this finding by showing that required introductory coursework is only required in just one certificate program (Northwestern University's, as described above), whereas 19 out of 21 programs with minors or majors require such an introductory course.

This finding clearly extends the theoretical underpinning of an academic program as the space within which knowledge is developed and transmitted. Minors and majors are the programmatic structures by which disciplinary fields signal that there is a coherent and distinctive body of knowledge, and an introductory course is the standard means by which a field thus begins to introduce students to the nomenclature, issues, and goals of its distinct body of knowledge and ways of viewing the world. Yet this realization also draws two immediate responses. The first—which will be examined in more length in the concluding section of this article—is the meaning and implications of (a lack of) introductory coursework, particularly at the certificate level. The second—which will now be taken up—is the question of what exactly is it that a student is majoring (or minoring) *in* when he or she enters a program in service-learning?

Findings of Content of Service-Learning Programs

Program structure is connected to, at minimum, an introductory course that is potentially linked with a formal capstone requirement. Such a formalized "book-end" structure constitutes a standard and traditional model for an academic discipline. The question of what actually

TABLE 3. Pearson Correlations of Institutional Variables and Service-Learning Program Types.

	Required SL intro course
Required SL intro course	
Pearson correlation	1.000
Sig. (two-tailed)	
<i>N</i>	28
Type of program	
Pearson correlation	0.671**
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000
<i>N</i>	28
Community Engagement classification	
Pearson correlation	0.050
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.801
<i>N</i>	28
Minor is linked to major	
Pearson correlation	0.175
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.372
<i>N</i>	28
Public or private	
Pearson correlation	0.254
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.201
<i>N</i>	27
Size of college	
Pearson correlation	-0.194
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.322
<i>N</i>	28
Residential type	
Pearson correlation	0.075
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.717
<i>N</i>	26
Carnegie classification	
Pearson correlation	-0.358
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.061
<i>N</i>	28
Required SL capstone	
Pearson correlation	0.272
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.178
<i>N</i>	26

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed).

is taught within these programs now becomes relevant: namely, what is it exactly that students study when they pursue a formalized path within the service-learning field?

An initial finding of the content analysis of the 10 submitted syllabi from nine distinct institutions is the wide variance in the focus and disciplinary leanings of the courses. Three of the courses (DePaul, Indiana, Missouri) focus on community involvement; two of the courses (Northwestern, Vanderbilt) focus on community development; two of the courses (Portland, Providence) focus on issues of citizenship/democracy; and two of the courses (Emory & Henry,

TABLE 4. Cross Tabulation of Type of Program by Program Requirement of Introductory Course.

	Required SL intro course		Total
	No	Yes	
Type of program			
Certificate	6	1	7
Minor	2	12	14
Major	0	7	7
Total	8	20	28

University of San Francisco) focus on issues of public policy. Although an overarching theme throughout might be “community” and “democracy,” neither of these terms is analytically distinct enough to presume a focus of study for the service-learning “field.”

A sampling of each course’s objectives and statements of purpose makes clear, in fact, that each course is distinctly positioned within a specific literature and academic frame of analysis. The course overview of Northwestern University’s introductory syllabus, for example, states that “This course will examine both historic and contemporary community building efforts, paying special attention to approaches that were shaped by Chicago” (i.e., Jane Addams, Saul Alinsky). DePaul University’s introductory course, alternatively, minimizes and even avoids any notion of activism or community organizing to focus instead on more neutral notions of community engagement: “In this course, we will explore together the uniquely American perspective on community service beginning with its historical foundations in the U.S. to recent attention on national community service programs.” And Vanderbilt’s syllabus takes a third approach by offering “an introduction to the field of community development by exploring diverse forces that influence urbanization and community development processes.”

Many of the syllabi do indeed explicitly address issues of citizenship, service, and community through the lens of leadership and/or public policy. Indiana University’s course states that, “In this class you will learn about acting in public life by participating in your community”; Portland State University’s course states that “In this course we will examine the place and function of leadership in democratic societies and the ways in which people put conceptions of civic responsibility into practice”; and Providence College’s course states that “the course will focus on three concepts that are central to our ‘studies’: service, community, and democracy” (which incorporate issues of equality and social justice).

Yet even this policy perspective is not a central or common theme across these diverse courses. Rather, the frame and focus of service-learning are interdisciplinary, as topics such as leadership, citizenship, and public policy can be approached from distinct and distinctive analytic perspectives. To approach the notion of community from the grounding of community development is fundamentally different from approaching it from a perspective of public policy and leadership or historically. Each decision about the lens to be used impacts the readings, the community-based activities, and the lessons learned by students, faculty, and the communities involved.

What does stand out is the emphasis on academic scrutiny and critique. Although this may appear obvious in the setting of an academic course, it is far from obvious if one returns to the examples of University of Kansas and UNC-Chapel Hill. What all 10 syllabi articulate clearly is the need to engage carefully and critically with the specific issues under examination. Thus Indiana University’s syllabus continues that the “acting in public life by participating in

your community” is fundamentally “. . . a foundation in the organizing skills they [the students] will need for the capstone project in the minor . . . Most importantly, you will be encouraged to follow your own questions to a deeper level”; likewise, Portland State University’s syllabus continues by stating that “Students will be challenged to examine the promise and challenges of community building and leadership development in the context of our evolving democratic society” and Providence College’s syllabus informs students that,

Each concept [service, community, and democracy] will be explored from three different perspectives . . . (1) concrete and practical experiences or “case studies” . . . (2) critiques of the concepts (i.e., the challenges/criticisms posed for those interested in promoting service, community, or democracy); (3) good ideas and “best practices.”

An academic course is thus the site for the careful examination of specific concepts and ideas, with such examination entailing scrutiny and critique. Such scrutiny is most likely balanced by additional readings and discussions of “best practices” and positive implications of the specific issue under examination; nevertheless, the key point here is that students are exposed through readings, lectures, and the instructor’s setup of the course to probe the potential limits, contrary perspectives, and unintended consequences of the so-called reform in question whether it be leadership, citizenship, or service.

This point can be clearly seen when one does a deeper content analysis of the syllabi. Namely, both the readings and course assessments in each class presume a critical and analytic stance to the particular course topics under investigation. Although there are very few course readings in common (an issue addressed in the concluding section of this article), those in common do suggest a core of critical perspectives on notions of citizenship and service. Likewise, the means of assessment across courses is typical and skewed to gauging formal analytic competence of its students.

The required readings in each syllabus were coded by both author and text. Edited volumes as well as co-authored texts were broken out by individual authors and excerpts in order to capture the diversity of required readings. A total of 162 unique authors representing 173 unique texts were found across the 10 syllabi. (Different texts by the same author were used across courses, accounting for more texts than authors.) The authors and readings ranged from the famous and well known (e.g., Martin Luther King, Jonathan Kozol, the Bill of Rights) to the highly specialized (e.g., Tracey Smith’s “Trashing Appalachia”; Murphy & Carnevale’s “the Challenge of Developing Cross-Agency Measures”). A startling finding—that will be addressed in the next section—was that just over 10% of the authors could be found in more than one syllabus, only four authors could be found across three syllabi, and only a single author—Robert Putnam—was found in four syllabi. Table 5 provides a synopsis of every author who was found in more than one syllabus.

The most commonly used authors and readings—Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*, Benjamin Barber, and De Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*—appear natural choices for issues of citizenship, service, and democracy. Yet of particular interest for the present is that most of the other common readings have a critical edge toward examining these very same notions. The readings by Jonathan Kozol, Barbara Ehrenreich, Thich Nhat Hanh, David Hilfiker, and Paul Loeb all question, to one extent or another, societal will and ability to serve all citizens equally and equitably. Likewise, the readings of Peggy McIntosh, bell hooks, Michael Ignatieff, Ivan Illich, and John McKnight question whether the act and desire for equal and equitable citizenship are possible given the deeply gendered, racialized, and classist society we live in.

In fact, several of the readings—such as Illich, hooks, and McKnight—seemingly undercut the ability of community engagement and service-learning to be a powerful and positive

TABLE 5. Frequency Count of Authors and Texts within Service-Learning Syllabi.

	Number of occurrences (total N=10)	Title of text, if same
Putnam, Robert	4	Excerpts from <i>Bowling Alone</i>
Barber, Benjamin	3	Diverse readings
De Tocqueville, Alexis	3	Excerpts from <i>Democracy in America</i>
Kozol, Jonathan	3	Diverse readings
McIntosh, Peggy	3	“White Privilege”
Ehrenreich, Barbara	2	Diverse readings
Hanh, Thich Nhat	2	Diverse readings
Hilfiker, David	2	Excerpts from <i>Not All Of Us Are Saints</i>
hooks, bell	2	Diverse readings
Ignatieff, Mchael	2	Diverse readings
Illich, Ivan	2	“To Hell with Good Intentions”
Kretzman, John	2	Diverse readings
Loeb, Paul	2	Diverse readings
LeGuin, Ursula	2	Diverse readings
McKnight, John	2	“Why Servanthood is Bad”
Morton, Keith	2	Diverse readings
Neusner, Jacob	2	Diverse readings

TABLE 6. Frequency Count of Modes of Assessment of Coursework in Service-Learning Syllabi.

Assessment mechanism	Number of cases (total N=10)
In-class participation	9
Exam(s)	7
Reflection paper/journaling	7
Analytic paper	6
Group project	5
Community service requirement	2

change for the better. And such readings are far from unique. Other syllabi used texts by, among others, Max Weber, Hannah Arendt, Stanley Fish, Harry Boyte, and Paulo Freire to make similar points that the practices and goals of the particular class—be it leadership, service, or community development—are never straightforward, self-evident, or naturally good. As with any academic endeavor, the limits and boundaries of the object under examination had to be probed and tested.

Such an academic stance can also be seen in the academic requirements and assessment practices of the syllabi. Unlike with the required readings, there was a high degree of commonality for how students would be assessed for completing course expectations and outcomes. Table 6 provides a summation of a simple frequency count of assessment requirements in a syllabus that directly impacted a student’s grade.

None of the assessment mechanisms are in and of themselves noteworthy. Grades based on in-class participation, examinations, and reflective and analytic papers are standard fare in the undergraduate classroom (Angelo & Cross, 1993), which is, in fact, what is noteworthy: namely, these courses presume that a course that fulfills the programmatic requirement for service-learning be structured much like any other academic course. The emphasis on traditional

academic requirements makes clear that students must hold to the expected rigor and expectations of the particular instructor. Such service-learning courses are thus not simply and solely about talking and reflecting and dreaming of a better world. They are engaged in the common practice of higher education of critical thinking, careful attention to detail and data, and respect for expert knowledge.

Conclusions and Implications

To return to the question at the start of this article, it appears that, yes, it is possible to major in service-learning. In fact, gaining a minor or major in service-learning appears to be very similar to gaining a minor or major in any other interdisciplinary field, be it women’s studies, Black studies, or computer science.

The vast majority of the service-learning programs examined that are structured as minors or majors have a formalized and coherent structure, beginning with an introductory course and building up over the semesters with field-based experiences, reflective opportunities, and culminating in a capstone experience. Moreover, service-learning programs within such a disciplinary tripartite structure—introductory coursework, field-based experience, capstone—had the telltale signs of academic legitimacy: standard academic coursework and readings within the standardized format of students’ expectations and outcomes. Each program certainly approached the content matter through its own disciplinary particularity (e.g., political science, history, etc.). But this is a given (much like with any other interdisciplinary field) in that service-learning is not *sui generis*. All academic analyses and examinations build upon existing literature strands and theoretical contributions.

To major or minor in a disciplinary field is to undertake a programmatic study—constructed by a particular group of faculty within the sphere of a more or less constrained body of knowledge that has come to be constituted as a field. The actual contours of a field may of course be constantly up for debate, and even guiding principles may come under question. Yet a major or minor so constituted presumes a consciously structured and sequenced program.

But the bigger picture that the research of this article demonstrates is that the majority of existing service-learning programs are in fact not structured in this way. Service-learning programs that are not structured in minors or majors (which constitutes the majority of those listed in Vaughn and Seifer’s [2008] compilation) have minimal means by which to shape the academic and social narratives of what constitutes as service-learning and community engagement. The extreme flexibility—of coursework options, self-guided reflection, and stand-alone field-based experiences—may facilitate a shallow institutionalization. But it does so at the expense of being able to engage with the issues raised, the goals attempted, and the means used. This point aligns with and supports my claim (Butin, 2006a) that solely maintaining the notion of a social movement (be it feminism or service-learning) as a change agent ultimately undermines the analytic opportunity to engage with its own limits and possibilities. Service-learning programs without structured academic requirements thus function as little more than placeholders (for both students and faculty) of already-formed and already-limited notions and beliefs about the value of community engagement.

It is possible to first describe four basic tenants of academic programs that functioned as “academic homes” for service-learning and then draw several implications for the field. First, such existing programs offered students a sequential and integrated curriculum that, minimally, had an introductory foundational course and concentrations or tracks that aligned with existing programs (e.g., sociology, anthropology, political science, public policy). Students were introduced to issues surrounding engagement with the community (be it in the form of service,

development, or organizing) and built upon such knowledge through future coursework. Such a structure is exactly how undergraduate education can facilitate students' growth and understanding of complex issues and their own place and voice in such learning (AAC&U, 2007; Baxter Magolda, 2009).

Second, many minors and majors made use of particular methodologies that structured how students came to examine such community engagement. Northwestern University's certificate program required a course on "Leadership and Community Decision Making" as a means to follow up on the introductory course's focus on community development. Vanderbilt University required a course on "Action Research and Program Evaluation" that built upon the introductory course's focus on community development theory. It is acknowledged that, in theory, the interdisciplinary nature of service-learning may preclude a singular methodology. Nevertheless, not to grapple with issues of methodology is to succumb to a default position of again presuming a (false) transparency of experience and practice.

Third, all minors and majors required a field-based experience. This requirement may be an obvious aspect of service-learning programs; what is not obvious, though, is that many of the structured programs constructed sustained, immersive, and consequential experiences. Students in these programs had to spend multiple semesters with a community organization, develop a project that was developed (at least in part) by the community organization, and construct a final project that was public either through its presentation or implementation.

Finally, structured academic programs required some form of capstone academic experience. Whether this was a senior seminar or independent thesis, students were required to reflect on and synthesize academic coursework and field-based experiences that spanned multiple semesters within the context of a culminating experience to the overall program's goals.

The structure of a service-learning program matters. But even such programs, at present, have minimal coherence above and beyond the particularities of their specific academic and institutional contexts. As noted earlier, there was a wide variety of ways by which different programs appropriated and made use of notions of service, democracy, and community. While this wide variety may augur a prime opportunity for developing a common core of theoretical frameworks, methodological orientations, and pragmatic practices, it currently suggests that there is minimal alignment across programs that all claim to be focusing on the seemingly same service-learning experience. This minimal alignment impacts and has implications for how service-learning scholars and practitioners talk about and organize themselves, their field, and their body of core knowledge.

Although it is beyond the scope of this empirical analysis to draw out conclusively such implications, some tentative steps can be articulated. First, there are some core and coherent curricular, instructional, and theoretical foundations to the "academic field" of service-learning. Put otherwise, it is possible that the service-learning field has the potential to construct its own academic discipline distinct and distinctive enough from other academic disciplines and fields. Numerous programs are already doing it and can serve as "early adopters."

Second, the strength and structure of a program are strongly dependent on its status. There is a dividing line between certificate programs and minors and majors. The latter category of programs is able to define and delineate to students what counts as knowledge. The former category of programs is not. This conclusion has implications for institutions considering developing service-learning certificates, minors, and majors.

Linking these two implications supports the claim that scholars in numerous fields are already "disciplining" service-learning helter-skelter based on their particular contexts and specializations. Better structuring service-learning programs and more clearly and coherently articulating the theoretical common core for such a structuring are not abstract ideals. As this article has described, there are currently numerous scholars in numerous fields already at work

in structuring and defining their particular programs and models. The larger issue for the service-learning field is that such practices are occurring haphazardly and without formal and deliberative dialogue across scholars, programs, and organizations. Put otherwise, the service-learning field is already becoming disciplined; the problem is that it is occurring in an un-disciplined manner. It may be time to bring more scholarly attention and consideration to this phenomenon in order to understand it better and guide it.

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