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Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly published online 3 April 2012

DOI: 10.1177/0899764012438698

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What is This?

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Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly
XX(X) 1–22
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sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0899764012438698
<http://nvsq.sagepub.com>



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Abstract

College student volunteerism and interest in community-based learning are on the rise. Are communities ready for them? This article examines the “supply side” of student engagement: nonprofit capacity to accommodate students. Our analysis of a large random sample of nonprofit managers in two contrasting communities finds that many of the volunteer management (VM) functions assumed to be important in any volunteer context also are important to student engagement. We also find role differentiation between interns, service learners, and general volunteers in the VM tools used to engage these students and the outcomes that can be expected. Despite variation in reported outcomes, nonprofit managers consider some aspects of VM to be essential to all campus–community partnerships. We find that each type of student involvement contributes to organizational capacity in specific ways and that student engagement depends on adequate VM capacity (VMC). Our conclusion discusses how the findings challenge service learning as presently formulated.

Keywords

volunteer management capacity, service learning, student–community engagement

Introduction

College student–community engagement and experiential education take many forms: internships, *practica* and other forms of field experience; volunteerism and

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community service; and community-based service learning and educational activities attached to college courses. Given its diversity in purpose and form, student–community engagement can be viewed through at least three lenses: as a form of student learning, as a public policy instrument to promote civic engagement, and as a service delivery tool involving unpaid labor.

In contrast to the focus of much of the prior literature on student outcomes, we ask whether the rapid increase in campus and student demand for these experiences nationally has been matched with equal attention to community capacity to provide these experiences (Bailis & Ganger, 2006; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Bushouse, 2005; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Edwards, Mooney, & Heald, 2001; Imperial, Perry, & Katula, 2007; Jones, 2003; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999; Worrall, 2007). In other words, we suggest there is value in understanding the most equitable balance between the “demand” side of the equation, where campuses and policy makers push for more student engagement (Butin, 2006), and the “supply” side, particularly community capacity to engage and manage students. Such a perspective is consistent with the volunteer management (VM) literature and also with the substantial literature on student–community engagement, where experts observe that community organizations represent an essential constituency that must be afforded reciprocal benefits and included in outcome measurement (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Civil society scholars may be especially attuned to an interdisciplinary perspective on student civic engagement, which must consider both its pedagogical value, the public policy benefits, and the coordination challenges.

Literature Review

As community volunteers, students are a valuable, yet challenging, group for community agencies. Nationally, more than 30% of college-aged youth volunteer (Dote, Cramer, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006; see Griffith, 2010, 2011 for further analysis of student volunteer rates), while the volunteer rate among high school students has doubled in the past 15 years, to 28% (Grimm et al., 2006). The 2009 annual survey by the Higher Education Research Institute finds nearly one third (31%) of college freshmen indicating a very good chance of participation in community service while in college, and an additional 41% indicating at least some chance that they would participate (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Palucki Blake, & Tran, 2009). Many students became involved in community activities during high school, and they enter college eager to serve and to learn. Only a portion of this service is required through courses, and the amount of voluntary student service is increasing (Griffith, 2011). Many agencies are keen to attract these students to their volunteer ranks.

In this article, we use the term *community-based student engagement* to describe all forms of student–community engagement, including service learning, professionally oriented experiential learning such as internships and *practica*, and other community volunteering in which students engage on their own or through campus organizations. Service learning represents a distinct subgroup of experiential learning in which

students are involved in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs through a course or other credit-bearing assignment. Many of these activities, including both service learning and internships, address more than community objectives because they also expect the experience to help students develop an understanding of course content, appreciate their discipline, or enhance their sense of values and civic responsibility (Bringle, Hatcher, & MacIntosh, 2006). However, the potential burden such learning goals place on host agencies is not well understood.

This article is organized to assess the managerial dynamics of student involvement in a nonprofit agency. Student involvement can impose additional responsibilities on organizational staff and leaders when students enter an organization as a learner. However depending on the activity, agencies might tap additional campus resources to share the responsibilities of student coordination and may achieve additional organizational benefits through student involvement.

They might also face additional challenges. Staff may need to supervise a variety of student types who are involved in different aspects of the organization's work (as volunteers, on class projects, and as interns). Faculty may ask agency staff to design meaningful projects that can be completed in 8 to 16 weeks. Staff may need to supervise student projects, often on a tight, semester-length deadline, and possibly devote more time and staff resources to student learners than other volunteers. Our past research suggests that host organizations perform a variety of additional managerial functions for interns or service learners that they do not necessarily provide for other volunteers, including reflective activities (Gazley, Littlepage, & Myers, 2007). We also found that organizations may feel external pressure to involve student service learners even when the activity is not entirely in line with internal organizational needs and priorities. In addition, as Bringle and Hatcher (1996, p. 222) have observed, "unlike practice and internships, the experiential activity in a service-learning course is not necessarily skill-based," meaning agencies may embark on a relationship with potentially weaker programmatic benefit.

College students' expectations and expertise vary widely. Agency staff may find that reluctant students facing a class requirement require extra effort to motivate or supervise. An assignment made as part of a class also may increase the likelihood of a mismatch between the student and agency, compared with activities for which students volunteer on their own. Agencies may have to screen students differently than other volunteers, if they are offered the option of screening at all. When (and if) faculty perform the screening function, agencies are left with less control over volunteer resources and with a potentially weaker match between student qualifications and agency needs.

With respect to the potential benefits, many student–community activities, particularly when they are credit-based, bring campus administrative resources with them, so that community organizations can sometimes rely on campus personnel to manage record-keeping, supervision, and other managerial tasks. Students might also bring scholarly resources that reinforce organizational learning.

We note that although we have taken care to define the variation in community-based student learning activities using the well-developed scholarship on service learning, the distinction we make between service learners, interns, and volunteers may be more obvious from a pedagogical or university perspective than from a community perspective. Agency staff neither recognize the difference nor differentiate among various kinds of student involvement in their organizations, nor even care. We describe students as both “learners” and “volunteers” in this article. This practice does not work in all contexts, as sometimes the students are “volunteered” by their professor rather than by themselves, or the learning opportunities are weak. Nonetheless, we believe this is an appropriate perspective to take when we seek to understand the ability of agency staff to supervise young adults who are eager to gain community experience to supplement their education. Regardless of their motivations for being there, we suggest that all students have some implicit or explicit learning objective and that all host agencies have some implicit or explicit responsibility for managing them. Our challenge, then, is to find an appropriate framework for understanding the managerial responsibility and results.

Student–Community Engagement From a Volunteer Management Capacity Perspective

Volunteer administration has developed as a distinct theory of organizational and human resources management due to the unique nature of volunteerism as unpaid labor with its own set of rewards, incentives, and sanctions (Leete, 2006). To the extent that the volunteers in question are serving within formal institutions (“institutional volunteerism”), they can be coordinated or managed with approaches that are roughly similar to those used with paid labor. These activities can include job design and job descriptions, formal recruitment methods, screening, orientation, training, supervision, risk management, insurance, performance evaluation, promotion and dismissal. Formal methods also can include practices to develop an organizational culture that is welcoming to volunteers (Brudney, 1990; Connors, 1995; McCurley & Lynch, 1996).

Although some organizations find that a formal, managerial approach is incompatible with their culture or mission, research suggests that public agencies and charities implement most of these VM practices to some degree. Two studies find that roughly 75% to 80% of governmental or nonprofit institutions employ at least some VM techniques (Gazley & Brudney, 2005; Hager & Brudney, 2004). The research on VM practices and outcomes concludes that the effective involvement of volunteers (i.e., the recruitment and retention of volunteers who can support organizational objectives) requires some commitment of human, capital, and financial resources. In particular, the literature recommends careful attention to screening and matching volunteers with tasks. Rogelberg et al. (2010) find that employees in organizations where volunteer screening takes place are more receptive to volunteers.

The “Supply Side” of Student–Community Engagement

Many charities express a willingness to engage more volunteers even with insufficient support systems or operational capacity (Ellis, 2002; The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service, 2003). In the context of student involvement, we might describe this as the “supply side” of the volunteer involvement equation because of the campus expectation imposed on community agencies to find community-based learning activities for students. We take no position here on whether this expectation is appropriate (see our Summary section for more discussion). Rather, we suggest that at present, the student–community engagement literature overemphasizes the demand side—the institutional and political efforts to promote more community-based opportunities for student volunteers and service learners. More recent literature has begun to address questions of community capacity and community outcomes (see, for example, Porter, Summers, Toton, & Aisenstein, 2008; Worrall, 2007). For example, the National Human Services Assembly (2004) has called for a greater investment in VM, with specific mention of colleges, universities, and national service programs as the principal suppliers of volunteers in many communities. The central focus of this research project therefore becomes volunteer management capacity (VMC), defined as “a function of both staff support of volunteering and adoption of administrative practices necessary for the management of volunteers” (Hager & Brudney, 2004a, p. 3). In the context of student engagement, VMC can address how agencies structure themselves to involve students and to work with educational institutions or departments in support of experiential learning, and whether agency leaders believe that they benefit from working with student learners.

The Benefits of Relating Volunteer Management Practices to Student Engagement

There is both pedagogical and theoretical value in understanding the effective community management of student learners (Giles & Eyster, 1998; Jones, 2003). Volunteers will not continue to serve at an organization if they are not effectively managed. Even for service learners, who are engaged for a finite time period such as a semester or summer, organizations may still have an interest in encouraging students to stay beyond their initial assignment. In addition, organizations can have other objectives that depend on an effective student experience, including a desire to introduce those entering the same professional area to certain programmatic principles, or an intention to screen student volunteers for future employment.

Furthermore, although Hager and Brudney (2004) found wide variation in the frequency with which charities and religious organizations adopted common VM practices, they found a positive correlation between the amount of organizational investment in various VM tools and the perceived benefit that these organizations derive from voluntary activity. In an example particularly germane to student engagement, organizations may overlook the importance of training staff in how to work with certain kinds of volunteers.

Finally, behind most forms of student–community engagement activities are myriad relationships among faculty, administrators, and nonprofit organizations. As Morton (1995) has noted, successful relationships can become both transactional (in the sense of a volunteer labor supply exchanged for learning opportunities) and transformational (in the sense of building deeper interorganizational relationships or achieving more lasting community value). We suggest that transformational relationships also require a strong understanding of how these partnerships are best organized and sustained if they are to result in reciprocal and equitable benefits such as a better capacity to collaborate, a deeper understanding of and greater ability to meet community or academic needs, and a sense of shared purpose.

Research Questions and Model

In this study, we raised the following questions: How are students managed? Are there differences in how they are managed according to the roles students take (interns, service learners)? And is there a connection between how student volunteers are managed and nonprofit outcomes?

We also attempt to fill a gap in prior research. The national, generalizable studies of volunteer patterns are not detailed enough to distinguish among specific forms of student involvement. Also, the research on experiential learning tends to focus on campus, rather than community, outcomes. Furthermore, prior service-learning studies tend to be too focused on existing community partners, particular service sectors, or academic institutions to collect generalizable information. They often rely on convenience samples, which introduce response bias and do not capture the full range of attitudes toward student volunteers. Therefore, we suggest there is value in using a representative sample of nonprofit agencies to obtain detailed information about how students are best engaged in nonprofit activities. We offer three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Nonprofits engage students using common VM practices regardless of the role students take in organizational activities.

Hypothesis 2: The ability of nonprofits to engage students in any role will depend on the organization's VMC.

Hypothesis 3: The perceived benefits of student engagement by nonprofit managers will be positively related to their organization's investment in VMC.

Data and Method

Data come from a random sample of all nonprofit and religious organizations in two counties (Marion and Monroe) within the state of Indiana. Marion County ranks in size among the top 15 metropolitan areas nationally and is home to a large and diverse nonprofit community. Monroe County includes a large college community with a tradition of campus–community engagement. The 2 counties comprise 28% of all college students in the state (students in these counties might attend any 1 of 11 com-

munity colleges, universities, seminaries, or 4-year colleges). Sampling two counties with different profiles increases the generalizability of our conclusions. Prior to administering the surveys, we spent 3 years conducting focus groups in these counties, developing case studies, and tapping the knowledge of community agencies and service learning experts to design a research agenda (Gazley, Littlepage, & Myers, 2007). Generalizability is limited to the extent that nonprofit organizations or students from our two selected counties do not reflect characteristics found in other geographical areas. We note, for example, that volunteering rates are higher in this state and that some of the campuses involved are leaders in student civic engagement practices.

The data collection involved two stages. At the screening stage, a survey research firm attempted to reach by telephone 2,874 organizations. These included 100% of the organizations in Monroe, the smaller county (a) and a sample drawn via a random number generator in Marion, the metro area county (b), for an overall sample representing 26% of all documented nonprofit and religious entities in the two counties. The nonprofits identified for the survey included all tax-exempt categories, an approach that allowed us to capture student involvement in a range of organizations including both secular and religious institutions, and noncharitable organizations such as political organizations and fraternal associations.¹ Of the identified nonprofits, 1,071 did not have an operational phone number, 784 did not return calls, and 1,019 responded. Of these respondents, 672 or 66% reported they involved college students in some capacity (the findings on the scope of student–community engagement are reported at length in Littlepage, Gazley, & Bennett, 2012). Those who involved students were asked to complete an email or paper survey, which 43% accomplished ($n = 290$). Of the 290 respondents, 59% identified themselves as senior staff, 14% as volunteer coordinators, and the remainder held another staff role.

For comparison, the varying missions performed by nonprofit organizations have been categorized for many years into the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE). Our distribution of sampled nonprofits by NTEE classification is similar to that of the state as a whole, except that we surveyed more religious organizations and fewer human service and public-benefit organizations. To the extent that this distribution influences our results, we effectively undercount involved students because our findings reveal that religious organizations were less likely to involve students than human service and public-benefit organizations. This means that our results do not represent operational nonprofits statewide in certain NTEE classification areas. We did not have adequate information to weight the organizations to correct for these differences. However, based on computed margins of error generated for our random sample, we believe that our samples adequately represent the counties we surveyed.

The survey questionnaire asked respondents to describe college student involvement in their agencies, focusing on three categories: (a) interns, practicum, or preservice students who work independently to fulfill degree requirements (such as nursing, social work, education), (b) course-based student service learners, meaning students who are assigned by their instructor to volunteer for a community organization to meet educational objectives for a specific course (such as public relations, a

language course, a human development course), and (c) general volunteers or students who volunteer on their own alongside other community members. Among respondents, 52% reported engaging undergraduate students and 89% involved graduate students in any of these roles. A comparison of management practices across these three groups allows us to test the proposition that role differentiation matters. If it did not, agencies would treat all three groups the same. We note, however, a small chance that individual students might occupy more than one category at the same time.

VMC is measured in four ways in this study: dedicated staffing, management activities, organizational size, and reports of challenges to volunteer involvement. As a function of an organization's reliance on formal VM tools, VMC is reflected in staffing (i.e., presence of a paid or unpaid person who is responsible for VM) and in functional activities such as screening, training, recognition, and evaluation activities. VMC also relies indirectly on organizational size and financial resources. Finally, limitations on VMC can be identified by asking organizations directly what keeps them from involving volunteers. We note these are mutually reinforcing and overlapping organizational characteristics of VMC, meaning that it is difficult to use them jointly in statistical models due to the likelihood of covariance. Thus, we principally examine their impact on student outcomes separately through bivariate analysis.

Findings

Organizational Approaches to Managing Students: Testing the VM Model

We first address the question of whether student experiential learners are involved and managed by agency staff in ways that are similar to other agency staff and/or nonstudent volunteers. When agencies employ similar management approaches for students, they are taking a VM approach to student involvement. Such an approach could have benefits for students if the student enjoys more organizational support as a result.

Table 1 describes the frequency with which students are involved in any of these three capacities, and also the frequency with which organizations apply VM tools to their activities. To facilitate recall, we asked respondents only to report on students they had involved in the past 12 months. Responses from our survey participants suggest that all students are involved using some VM practices, but the role students play may determine the effort that nonprofits expend on managing them. Overall, we find that student service learners, when compared with regular volunteers and student interns, are subject to fewer VM practices, but in some cases were treated more like volunteers than were interns. For example, agencies were more likely to have a written agreement for interns (36%) than for either volunteers or service learners (19%). There is a similar pattern with access to professional development or training, with interns (45%) more likely to receive it than volunteers (28%) or service learners (23%). Agencies were less likely to keep a record of student hours for service learners and general volunteers (58%) when compared with interns (70%). Agencies were more

Table 1. Volunteer Management Tools Employed With Students (*n* = 245)

	Community volunteers of any kind	Interns, practicum, and preservice students	Course-based student service- learners
Overall frequency with which organizations report involving students in this role (among agencies that involve students)	79%; (<i>n</i> = 194)	64%; (<i>n</i> = 157)	40%; (<i>n</i> = 99)
Volunteer management tools reported ^a			
Job description	72.7%	79.6%	51.3%
Screening, training, orientation, or other intake process to place volunteers	71.1%	75.8%	54.0%
MoU or written agreement on deliverables	18.6%	35.7%	18.6%
Recognition in nonprofit publications or at events	71.6%	47.1%	40.7%
Final report or reflection on the meaning of their service	13.4%	51.6%	30.1%
Training for staff to work with this kind of volunteer	30.4%	36.3%	22.1%
Access to professional development or training opportunities for volunteers	27.8%	45.2%	23.0%
Keep records of volunteer hours	57.7%	70.1%	58.4%

Note: Sample includes only respondents reporting student involvement in the past 12 months. Even with this adjustment in question wording to facilitate recall, 5% to 13% of respondents in each category could not identify the kind of students they involved. We report here the more conservative figure. If missing values are omitted, responses are 83%, 69% and 46%.

^aFull question: "Please indicate the ways in which your organization generally manages volunteers, both students and nonstudents. Please check a box if you regularly use this volunteer management tool, and feel free to skip boxes for types of volunteers you don't involve." Responses have been adjusted to report management practices only for those involving a particular kind of student in the past 12 months.

likely to employ a screening or other intake procedure with general volunteers (71%) and interns (76%) than with service learners (54%). In addition, nonprofits were substantially less likely to recognize service learners publicly (41% compared with 72% for volunteers).

We note that our study may have overlooked other means by which service learners are managed or recognized. We can partially test this proposition by comparing the mean amount of management tools used against the method by which the partnership was managed, with the assumption that leadership of the partnership would be associated with an increase in managerial practices. However, we found little difference in the mean amount of managerial practices directed at interns, general

volunteers, and service learners depending on who led the partnership (professor, agency, student, or shared responsibility); the only findings of note were a minor increase in agency managerial practices directed at general student volunteers when faculty directed the partnership, and a minor but nonsignificant increase in agency management of interns when the agency directed the partnership. We did not find any similar associations with service learners (results not shown as samples are quite small at this level of analysis). These results require further investigation but may indicate that agencies do not substantially adjust their management of students depending on the presence of faculty leadership.

Any differences in management activities among the three student groups may reflect differences in the amount of time students provide to nonprofit activities. Fewer hours may be expected from service learners. Differences also may signal that some agencies do not recognize student service learners as volunteers. For them, service learners are effectively a third and distinct student group with a different management model based partly at campuses. We note that agencies report the most common ingredients of a service-learning model—the reflection activity—is practiced less than one third of the time (30%). In comparison, reflection and reporting activities are practiced much less frequently for general volunteers (13%) and considerably more frequently for interns (52%). We also find that agencies are most likely to apply VM practices with student interns compared with volunteers or service learners. Agencies used all of the management practices much more frequently with interns: from 36% to 80% of the time. The results suggest that with student interns, who are often treated as pseudoemployees, these practices have greater salience. However, as to whether our findings reflect less attention to service learning overall or rather a decentralized management model (where, presumably, the reflection activity occurs on campus), further research is needed.

The Impact of Student Involvement on Nonprofit Outcomes

Respondents offered quite positive assessments of how student efforts had supported organizational outcomes. Results suggest a sizable benefit for organizations that engage students (see Table 2), comparable to those derived from more general volunteer involvement. Nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents found student involvement in any capacity had increased their nonprofit's visibility in the community to some or a great extent, nearly two-thirds (64%) believed that student involvement had increased nonprofit visibility on campus, and two-thirds (67%) reported that students had continued to volunteer beyond their initial commitment. An equal proportion of respondents (61% each) reported that students had helped to build campus–community relationships or improved client relationships.

Although the survey question did not ask respondents to distinguish one type of student involvement from another in assessing relative benefits, some differences in response patterns can be tested through cross-tabulations using Kendall's tau-c statistics to determine nonrandom differences. The results that achieve statistical

Table 2. Reported Outcomes of Student Engagement

“Have students helped your agency achieve these results?”	To no extent	To some extent	To a great extent	Don't Know/ NA	Total	Likelihood of outcome increases for (significance level, Kendall's tau-c)
Increased our agency's visibility in the community	15.9%	53.1%	18.4%	12.7%	100%	General program volunteers (.001), Service learners (.020)
Increased our agency's visibility on campus	18.0%	39.6%	24.1%	18.4%	100%	General program volunteers (.021), Service learners (.001)
Continued to volunteer after their initial commitment	18.0%	51.4%	15.1%	15.5%	100%	General program volunteers (.001)
Improved client services	12.7%	42.0%	19.2%	26.1%	100%	
Made program recommendations that we have implemented	19.6%	44.1%	13.9%	22.4%	100%	Interns (.036)
Increased agency program capacity	23.3%	35.5%	18.4%	22.9%	100%	
Helped build campus–community relationships	20.4%	39.6%	21.2%	18.8%	100%	Service learners (.036)
Been hired as result of their experience with the organization	37.6%	30.2%	8.2%	24.1%	100%	Interns (.001)

Note: *n* = 245 respondents from agencies with student involvement.

significance are displayed in the right-hand column in Table 2. Respondents whose organizations involved students as general program volunteers and as service learners were more likely to report that students increased their nonprofit's visibility in the community and on campus. Agencies involving students as general program volunteers were more likely to report that students continued to volunteer after their initial commitment. Those involving students as interns, preservice, or practicum students were more likely to report students made program recommendations that were

implemented and to report hiring students as a result of their involvement. Those involving students as service learners were more likely to report students helped to build campus–community relationships.

Table 3 describes the frequency of responses to a question about limits on student-related VMC. Here, managers are asked about the factors that might limit student involvement. As this question was asked of all respondents, the answers can be sorted according to whether the organizations engaged students in the past 12 months or not. Managers could check as many responses as they wished. The greatest limitations on student involvement appear to be related to staffing, followed by lack of space and agency priorities. For example, more than half of the respondents shared concerns about time constraints or noted the absence of paid professional staff to supervise students. A further 41% noted the lack of a volunteer coordinator. Lack of space was a concern for 35% of respondents, whereas 26% observed their agency priorities make it difficult to engage students. Just 7% cited resistance from staff. When comparing organizations involving students to those that do not, time constraints and lack of staffing are more important considerations for those organizations involving students, whereas incompatible priorities are more of a concern for those organizations not involving students.

As Table 3 reveals, agencies rely somewhat on volunteer coordinators to manage student involvement. In Table 4, we compare the relationship between student engagement and formal methods of volunteer coordination. In Table 5, we seek to understand how various VM tools, including staffing, might contribute to effective campus–community partnerships.²

According to the data displayed in Table 4, agencies with no student involvement report fairly equal reliance on no volunteer coordination, an unpaid coordinator and a paid coordinator. By comparison, agencies involving students are more likely to employ a paid volunteer coordinator (reported by 63%) and less likely to report an unpaid coordinator (15%, compared with 34% for those agencies not involving students). Agencies without a volunteer coordinator were less likely to engage students. The results are not surprising in that agencies with volunteer coordinators are more likely to welcome students. We note, however, that in agencies not reporting a volunteer coordinator, student and volunteer engagement can still occur in an ad hoc, informal way. Nonetheless, it does seem apparent that student involvement is driven in part by staffing capacity. In fact, we also found that organizations were more likely to report volunteers were critical to meeting agency objectives when they had paid or unpaid staff in the role of volunteer coordinator. A good demonstration of the sector's general undercapacity to involve volunteers is reflected in our finding that nearly half (44.9%) of respondents reporting they had no paid or unpaid staff person whose responsibilities included management of volunteers also reported that volunteers were critical to their programs (results not shown).

The responses displayed in Table 5 suggest that many of the VM functions assumed to be important in any VM context also are important in the context of student engagement. Three fourths of respondents describe recruiting, screening, and matching

Table 3. Agency Factors That Might Make It Difficult to Engage Students

		Have you had any college students participating in any way in your programs?		Total frequency of response
		No	Yes	
What agency factors might make it difficult for you to engage students? (Please check all that apply, regardless of whether you presently work with students.)	Time constraints	41.0% ^a	58.7% ^a	56.6%
	Lack of paid professional staff to supervise students	35.9% ^a	54.3% ^a	50.6%
	Lack of a volunteer coordinator	48.7%	40.4%	41.2%
	Lack of facilities, infrastructure, or space	35.9%	35.0%	35.2%
	Agency priorities	41.0% ^a	22.9% ^a	25.8%
	Resistance from staff or other volunteers	10.3%	6.3%	7.1%
	Other reasons	10.3%	11.7%	12.0%

Note: *n* = 264-287 respondents from agencies both with and without student involvement.

^aStatistically significant differences between organizations involving students and those that do not (*p* < .05).

Table 4. Comparison of Organizations According to Whether They Engage College Students in Any Capacity and the Level of Volunteer Coordination the Organization Employs

			Types of volunteer coordination: paid, unpaid, or none			
			None	Unpaid	Paid	Total
Has your organization ever worked with college students as volunteers, interns, through class projects, or in any other capacity?	No	Count	77	74	67	218
		Percentage	35.3%	33.9%	30.7%	100%
	Yes	Count	130	92	382	604
		Percentage	21.5%	15.2%	63.2%	100%
Total	Count	207	166	449	822	

Note: *n* = 822 respondents from agencies both with and without student involvement. Pearson chi-square = 70.883 (*p* < .001).

activities as “very important” or “essential.” The majority also note the value of assessment and coordination activities. It is interesting to note that the “reflection” activity common to service-learning pedagogy is also valued by agency staff. Perhaps this tool, assumed principally to support student learning, can also be understood as

Table 5. Responses to the Question, “What Supports Success? Based on Your General Experience With Student Volunteers in Any Capacity, and Your Experience Working With College Campuses, How Important Are These Factors in Achieving a Successful Community–Campus Partnership?”

	Not important	Somewhat important	Very important	Essential	Don't Know/NA	Total
Match of student skills to agency needs	1.6%	13.9%	48.6%	29.8%	6.1%	100%
Training and orientation of student volunteers	1.2%	16.3%	47.8%	29.0%	5.7%	100%
A volunteer coordinator or manager is available to coordinate student work	6.1%	21.2%	40.0%	24.9%	7.8%	100%
Ability to choose the students we work with	6.9%	25.3%	34.7%	25.7%	7.3%	100%
Assessment of partnership process and success	3.3%	28.2%	42.0%	13.5%	13.1%	100%
Opportunity for student reflection	4.5%	31.4%	42.0%	12.7%	9.4%	100%
Formal agreement or memo of understanding between agency and faculty/student	13.1%	29.8%	31.4%	15.1%	10.6%	100%

Note: $n = 245$ respondents from agencies with student involvement.

a means of evaluating the success of the partnership or the program in which students were involved. A formal agreement or memorandum of understanding (MoU) is less valued, but still considered very important or essential to nearly half of respondents.

What Do Students Help Organizations to Achieve?

Our final analysis addresses more specifically how management practices support positive outcomes. We find first, through tests of covariance, that the eight outcome measures we include in our study can be understood as both distinct and related measures. A test of their internal reliability if they were destined for use in a scale instrument returns a robust Cronbach's alpha value of .82. As their internal bivariate

correlations were not consistently strong (ranging from .18 to .63; results are not shown), we present another way of categorizing the outcomes.

A principal components analysis of the eight measures suggests that, in the context of their experience with student volunteers, community agencies report three distinct outcomes (Table 6). The first factor we describe as a set of “external benefits” (reflecting 45% of explained variance). These include reports that student involvement has increased the organization’s visibility either on campus or in the community and has helped to build town–gown relationships. The second factor explains 13% of the variance and describes outcomes of mainly “internal benefit” to the nonprofit, including improved client services, increased program capacity, and employment of students as a result of their service experience. The last factor, explaining 10% of the explained variance, mainly reflects the frequency with which respondents reported that students continued to volunteer with them, an outcome that can be interpreted as “sustained volunteer capacity.”

A correlation analysis of these factors (bottom portion of Table 6) suggests that reported outcomes are associated in part with the kinds of students involved. Service learners were most closely associated with increased visibility for the agency. The involvement of interns was most closely associated with outcomes related to internal and programmatic benefits. Agencies involving students in volunteer capacities were most likely to report sustained volunteerism. The presence of some negative associations between variables also suggests that heavy reliance on certain kinds of students can limit the achievement of other kinds of benefits even when some intended outcomes are produced. In other words, outcomes are driven by specific goals and are perhaps most readily achieved when agencies are able to place students in the right roles.

Summary and Implications

This analysis uses a large, random sample of nonprofit organizations to understand patterns of college student engagement in two contrasting communities. Particularly, we sought to understand from a comparative perspective the extent to which interns, student volunteers, and service learners are supported with VM practices and the value organizations place on a VM approach to student engagement. We find only partial support for the null hypothesis that organizations engage students using common VM practices regardless of the role students take within organizations. Rather, our analysis suggests nonprofits use some VM tools for all students, but that they differentiate considerably between interns on the one hand and service learners on the other in terms of the amount of management attention they expend.

The implication of such a distinction among student groups is difficult to forecast without accounting for agency expectations of these students as well as alternative explanations on how the managerial function might occur. It is possible that these students enjoy sufficient supervision from faculty and campus administrators. Our additional analysis to test whether managerial practices varied according to who was

Table 6. Principal Components Matrix for Reported Outcomes

	Component matrix		
	Outcomes related to external capacity	Outcomes related to internal capacity	Outcomes related to sustained volunteer capacity
Increased our agency's visibility in the community.	.696	.244	.281
Increased our agency's visibility on campus.	.886	.111	.114
Continued to volunteer after their initial commitment.	.110	.118	.931
Improved client services.	.402	.619	.345
Made program recommendations that we have implemented.	.328	.580	.148
Increased agency program capacity.	.247	.705	.316
Helped build campus–community relationships.	.830	.212	–.029
Been hired as result of their experience with the organization.	.002	.818	–.116
Bivariate correlations ($p < .05$ or less)			
Service learners	.369	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
Interns	<i>ns</i>	.311	–.243
General volunteers	<i>ns</i>	–.199	.255

^aVarimax rotation with Kaiser normalization. A three-component analysis explains 69% of the variance. Note: The coefficients in boldface help to identify the strongest relationship between each survey response and component.

“in charge” of a service-learning activity did not yield a clear finding that agencies cede the managerial activities to faculty or campus resources such as a community engagement office. Yet even so, a community-based VM approach achieves objectives that campus personnel cannot meet. One can certainly conjecture that those students who enjoy the least agency attention and engagement are the least likely to continue to volunteer beyond their initial assignment or to carry the beneficial experience of a successful civic engagement activity into other volunteer efforts. The achievement of Morton’s (1995) transformational goals may also be limited in the sense that these students may have less opportunity to absorb important lessons about the agency’s mission and programs.

Secondly, we tested the notion that successful student engagement depends on an organization's VMC. We found support for this hypothesis in a comparison of patterns of student engagement against various forms of VMC. Most notably, organizations without a paid volunteer coordinator were less likely to engage students in any way. In addition, 20% to 60% of those engaging students also identified time, space, and mission constraints on student involvement. The implications of this finding are strongest for policy makers and campus planners. They suggest that the expansion of student–community engagement activities requires greater attention to the staffing capacity of community agencies that supply students with learning opportunities. A next logical step in this research stream would be to determine the extent to which campuses compensate for absent community VM resources (such as by performing volunteer recruitment and screening activities on campus).

Finally, we sought connections between managers' perceived benefits of student engagement and their agency's investment in VMC. We first found that the benefits of student involvement are shared widely among community agencies, but that student roles may determine the specific outcomes organizations can expect. Service learners can build external capacity through greater agency visibility and stronger campus–community relationships but have weaker connections to the achievement of internal objectives such as program expansion or improved client services. Such a finding can help to explain why some nonprofits continue to involve students even when they require more effort, whereas other organizations eschew student engagement. An understanding of the specific goals that student engagement will achieve through a conversation with faculty and campus administrators in advance of student assignments would help nonprofits understand what they can expect from students. Such a discussion could also be initiated internally, to help organizations define the rationale or strategy for student engagement with their own stakeholder groups before they involve students. It is unlikely that all community organizations set out to involve service learners with “visibility” as the goal. Visibility may be an indirect benefit and accommodating service learners may, in fact, be the cost nonprofits incur to gain campus visibility.

Although we suggest that more sophisticated managerial techniques may help organizations match campus and community objectives, particularly with respect to service learners, organizations may not have the luxury of accommodating students in any other way than as volunteers who are supervised by a volunteer coordinator. Our general conclusion that agencies have a somewhat limited capacity to engage students is reflected, for example, through the finding that nonprofit staff had less training in how to work with service learners than with volunteers and interns. So, where there are differences between student roles worth paying attention to—for example, where campus partners expect students to achieve learning goals—community organizations may not be trained to recognize the differences.

Our analysis is somewhat limited in the generalizability of its conclusions beyond the two counties we cover and the lack of specificity with which we extracted information about student-learning activities. In particular, additional analyses might go

further in comparing student engagement practices and outcomes against the specific goals of community and campus partners. We also suggest greater attention in future research to how differences in service-learning models influence community outcomes and organizational VMC. Some models bring with them sufficient campus resources and faculty training to support an effective partnership with community members. More nuanced conceptual approaches can be used when the research shifts to a focus on service learning alone (e.g., Zlotkowski's matrix of service-learning modalities that distinguishes those focusing on community value from those with a pedagogical emphasis). Nonetheless, our findings would seem to suggest some independent effect between differences in student types (intern, volunteer, service learner) and outcomes, and this effect is not based on the types of service-learning models that faculty use. Rather, a broader, comparative model such as ours avoids the messy ground of differences in service-learning modalities by suggesting that *despite* the variety in models, there is still an overall difference in agency outcomes between service learners and other types of student learners.

Given the growth in an understanding of student preferences for certain community outcomes over others (such as direct service work), we also see value in future research that compares student and community interests and outcomes with particular attention to instances where they can be aligned (Bingle, Hatcher, & MacIntosh, 2006; Moely, Furco, & Reed, 2008). Finally, our research is also limited in capturing only one perspective on student management—that of community agencies—but it is a perspective we deliberately sought given its absence in past research. Future research efforts might take a comparative angle to test our propositions on understanding the best *combination of campus and community VM resources*.

We acknowledge that our three-lens perspective is substantially broader than that taken within the higher education field where service learning originated (Butin, 2006). Our perspective “packs a whole wardrobe of theoretical and epistemological challenges to the status quo” (Zlotkowski, 1998, p. 82). We have a distance to go to bridge the managerial and educational disciplines and reach common ground even on such minor matters as terminology (the management field uses “volunteers” and “management” when many in higher education are more comfortable with “community-based learners” and “coordination”). But as much scholarship already demonstrates, a more balanced perspective on student civic engagement is overdue if we are to understand how to successfully create fully reciprocal and mutually beneficial campus–community partnerships.

A balanced perspective can also be achieved by acknowledging the ideological differences still in play regarding the proper role of students as community members. Service learning may face community resistance so long as it places most of the emphasis on host agencies serving students' educational needs. Our research approach should not be misconstrued to suggest that we think communities *should* provide learning experiences for students. Rather, we set out to challenge such a normative assumption by asking whether agencies indeed benefit from student labor as it is presently formulated in institutional practice. Indeed, our conceptualization of “supply”

and “demand” to mean that agencies supply learning opportunities demanded by campuses could be reversed in future practice so that campuses recognize their obligation also to supply students to meet community needs. The solution therefore becomes not only better VM by nonprofits but also better training and preparation of faculty and students to work in communities, and a willingness for all involved to be accountable for improving community welfare.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank Indiana Campus Compact, the IUPUI Center for Service and Learning, IUPUI Solution Center, and the Indiana University Public Policy Institute for their support of this project.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. The list of nonprofits was extracted from a database created to provide comprehensive baseline information about a state’s nonprofit sector. The inclusive methodology combines a variety of data sources (e.g., IRS records, state incorporation records, phone books) and is the preferred approach for our purposes as it incorporates the largest number of nonprofit organizations that might engage students (this practice is used in Grønbjerg, 2002; Grønbjerg & Clerkin, 2005). We observe, however, that such an approach leaves out public (governmental) agencies and business entities where students might also be involved in volunteer or pedagogical activities. Nonetheless, as the majority of community volunteers work in nonprofit organizations rather than other sectors of the economy, this approach is valid to capture the connection between student–community engagement and volunteer involvement.
2. This survey question offered more response options than are reported here. Response options addressing faculty practices are reported in other publications.

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