

**CROSSING BORDERS FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY
OF SERVICE-LEARNING'S PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES**

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Service-learning initiatives often serve as higher education's approach to achieving institutional goals of fostering students' civic growth. Alternative Spring Breaks (ASBs), defined in this study as short-term immersion trips developed to engage college students in direct service experiences, have been understudied as service-learning programmatic options in higher education, thus leaving little to no indication of the larger context of the service experience, nor its participant outcomes in terms of civic engagement (Jones, Robbins, & LePeau, 2011).

This study addresses gaps in researcher and practitioner understanding of ASBs, by uncovering long-term effects of these widely utilized, yet under-researched programs. Through a narrative inquiry methodology, this study captures the stories of five alternative spring break participants from a mid-sized suburban private institution which organizes two domestic ASBs yearly. The respondent narratives speak to service-learning's ability to not only engage students in cross-cultural experiences, but to also cross internal borders within themselves, challenging pre-conceived notions of otherness and social issues. This study highlights the aesthetic and emotive meaning participants ascribe to their service experience long-term, noting shifts in their

civic mindfulness and cultural sensitivity as well as propensity to civically engage post-graduation.

By studying students' experiences with border-crossing, challenging pre-conceived notions of difference, and individual civic responsibility development, this study unpacks the alternative spring break participant perspective shift and development experience. Through the use of Dewey's philosophy of education and Giroux's theory of border-crossing, this study sheds light on the blind spots of service-learning, specifically ASBs, generating critique of the pedagogy in the hope of advancing the field, and ultimately the experience for future alternative spring break participants.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Jennifer Mann, and my father, William Mann, who have challenged me and cheered me on throughout my entire educational career. Thank you for always believing in me, even when I couldn't believe in myself. Your unwavering support and love means more to me than you could ever know.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Honnet and Poulsen (1989) argued that service, when combined with learning, increases the value and transformative ability of both. The acceptance of this argument has led to an increase in higher education programming focused on civic engagement (O'Brien, 1993). However, while civic engagement is arguably a hot topic in the field of higher education, with civic engagement initiatives such as service-learning programming gaining support at institutions across the nation, very few institutions agree on what civic engagement is or how it should be integrated into academic curricula or co-curricular programming. Moreover, institutions struggle with developing measurable outcomes for civic initiatives. Even though many universities tout their civic-mindedness and investment in local and global community development through the creation of active and engaged citizens, institutions are still unaware of how service-learning experiences affect their student participants over the long term.

With no field-accepted definition of civic engagement, institutions implement and interpret civic engagement initiatives for various reasons. Without a standardized definition and structure, institutions' civic initiatives are created based on their own standards and for their own benefit. Most often, service-learning initiatives are higher education institutions' answer to achieving their institutional civic goals and mission of developing students' sense of community.

The growth in popularity of service-learning programs in U.S. higher education is an outgrowth of the creation of organizations, such as Campus Compact, a national coalition supporting college student civic development, and funding organizations such as Learn and Serve America, a federal initiative of the Corporation for National and Community Service (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008), as well as the general public's expectations of higher education institutions to provide meaningful experiential learning opportunities for students (Butin, 2006).

A lack of agreement exists as it relates to a standard model and implementation strategies for service-learning (Jacoby, 1996), leaving much variability to this commonly implemented and researched pedagogy. Without concrete definitions of desired participant outcomes institutions not only lack an understanding of how their students make meaning of their service-learning experiences, but also fail to provide student participants with an articulated expectation for their participation in the program or initiative. This disjointed approach positions practitioners at a disadvantage, as they are unaware of how participants' interpretations of their experiences align with institutional goals of civic engagement, not to mention the purposes and goals of their specific service-learning initiatives, leaving participants alone to interpret their experiences in light of institutional civic engagement frameworks. Dan Butin (2006a) references this issue as the "blind spot", or underbelly, of service-learning, arguing that while most researchers do not like to admit it, service-learning has its own "unacknowledged and unexamined assumptions, and its own oppositional narratives" (p.1).

Alternative spring breaks, defined in this study as short-term immersion trips designed for college students to participate in direct service experiences (Breakaway, n.d.), have been understudied as service-learning programmatic options, (Ivory, 1997; Jones, Robbins, & LePeau, 2011; Rhoads & Neururer, 1998), leaving little to no indication of the larger context of the

service experience nor its participant outcomes related to civic engagement (Jones, Robbins, & LePeau, 2011).

This dissertation study addresses gaps in researcher and practitioner understanding of alternative spring breaks (ASB), adding to the literature surrounding service-learning and participant meaning making in an attempt to add to the sparse literature while uncovering long-term effects of these highly utilized, yet limitedly researched programs. By studying students' experiences with border-crossing, or the act of stepping out of one's comfort zone to not only empathize with others, but to also challenge pre-conceived notions of difference, this study addresses participant perspective shifts and civic responsibility development. By adopting a conceptual framework grounded in John Dewey's theory of education and Henry Giroux's theory of border-crossing, this study drills more deeply into students' individual experiences as well as my own personal journey through the use of narrative inquiry and border-crossing as a critical framework, examining respondents' perspective shifts based on the ASB trips. By doing so, individual experiences speak to the larger concept of service-learning, thus explicating the meaning of alternative spring breaks, a popular and standardized service-learning initiative within higher education institutions, from the student and professional perspective. By unpacking this meaning through the use of Dewey's philosophy of education and Giroux's theory of border-crossing, this study serves to shed light on the blind spots of service-learning, generating critique of the pedagogy in the hope of advancing the field and, ultimately, the experience for all participants.

1.2 DEFINITIONS AND TERMS

This study will work to unpack service-learning from the ASB participant perspective. While each individual's experience will be unique, a glossary of terms that will be utilized throughout the study. The following section defines ten of the most common terms included in this study.

Alternative spring breaks, known in this study as **ASBs**, are defined as a weeklong direct service-learning trip where students educate themselves, and each other, through hands-on work with a non-profit agency partner focused on a specific social issue (Breakaway, n.d.). In the case of these particular respondent narratives, the ASB trips have a focus on poverty, as well as food and housing security in both the rural and urban sectors.

Border-crossing, is defined as the process of developing an awareness of social inequities and systems of power, better understanding otherness, and creating a more informed sense of self, other, and community (Hayes & Cuban, 1997). Regarding the participant narratives in this study, the act of border-crossing is both physical, as well as inter- and intra-personal, as students visit diverse communities to participate in direct service opportunities while engaging in dialogue about difference with others, while simultaneously challenging their own pre-conceived notions of diversity.

While **service-learning** initiatives vary by institution, a baseline definition adopted by this study is a teaching and learning method directly connected to meaningful community service via organized reflection that focuses on generating knowledge with, and for, diverse communities (Keen & Hall, 2009; Lo Re, DeSimone, & Buddensick, 2011).

Civic engagement is defined as the level of engagement one has with the given goals and interests of their community, or the actions they take to work towards a common good (Barrett &

Zani, 2014). In this sense, one's level of civic engagement can be based on institutional, personal, or societal standards.

The following three terms—civic identity, civic knowledge, and civic skills, are the measures of individual **civic mindedness**, which is defined in this research study as one's ability to understand cultural concerns, community issues, and social justice concepts, as well as their effects on communities and individuals (Einfeld & Collins, 2008). **Civic identity** refers to one's ability to see oneself as an important member of society who is capable of contributing to positive social change (Hatcher, 2011). In other words, if an individual has a civic identity, they see themselves as an agent of change within their community, as well as the world at large. **Civic knowledge** is defined in this study as one's understanding of the government, political action, and social movements (Hatcher, 2011). Therefore, this term relates to an individual's ability to understand how their government works in regard to its policies, procedures, and hierarchies of power. The final measure of civic mindedness, **civic skills**, is defined as the skills that support one's ability to engage civically (Hatcher, 2011). These skills include communication skills, both verbal and written, time management skills, leadership skills, organizational skills, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving skills. These traits are viewed as the skills necessary to allow individuals to question and address social problems and concerns.

Civic responsibility is a term relative to civic mindedness and its associated measures, as it refers to one's inclination to utilize their civic skills and knowledge to engage with their community. In this sense, civic responsibility refers to one's sense of individual responsibility to participate in acts to benefit society (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Mayhew & Engberg, 2011). In short, civic responsibility is the level of personal accountability one has to their local or global community, and in turn, their propensity to serve in the hopes of attaining a common good.

The final term in this study's glossary is **cultural sensitivity**, or one's ability to recognize their culture as one of many, and therefore, acknowledge and respect other perspectives as valid (Bennett, 1993). Based on Bennett's (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, cultural sensitivity refers to one's ethnocentric perspective, or their ability to accept, adapt to, and integrate difference into their community and life.

1.3 GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Although service-learning has been studied for decades, there is still an arguable lack of information pertaining to the subject as it relates to the individual experience, particularly surrounding co-curricular initiatives (Keen & Hall, 2009). While evaluation studies and assessments allow for generalizations about service-learning's effects on participants, researchers tend to overgeneralize outcomes as they both over- and under-utilize data, prohibiting individual student stories to breathe (Billig & Waterman, 2003). Service-learning's intricate structure, coupled with its idiosyncratic nature, provides a challenge to researchers as they struggle to assess participation outcomes (Billig & Waterman, 2003). Therefore, service-learning research has not yet accounted for community agency partner dynamics, community cultures, or individual student interests and abilities, which alter participant perceptions of experience.

This study explores service-learning through a narrative methodology, showcasing individual stories as aids to understand and capture the meaning making experience of participants. Using a framework grounded in Dewey and Giroux, this study examines how student participants view themselves, others, and their relationship with the world around them

based on their alternative spring break service experience. This study was built around the following questions:

1. How do students narrate their personal story of ASB participation and ascribe meaning to their ASB experience at least one year post-trip?
2. What role do students view their ASB service experience playing in their personal understanding and participation in civic engagement?
3. How do students see their ASB experiences shift their notions of civic mindedness and cultural sensitivity?

Through conducting an inquiry focused on these questions, data was collected beyond the rhetorical, affording the researcher specific knowledge of participant experiences as it relates to service-learning and best practices for the field of higher education civic engagement initiatives.

1.4 THE STUDY

My previous service-learning research culminated in a qualitative journal article on the transformative potential of service-learning experiences for student participants (Mann & DeAngelo, 2016). In that study I conducted focus groups, coded qualitative data, and generated code themes to assess the overall participant experience. The process of writing that article was beneficial to me as a practitioner, as well as a researcher. While that experience was a great learning opportunity for me, when thinking about my dissertation, I wanted to challenge myself to engage in a different research process than I had used in the past.

As a member of a study group with tenured academics and experienced researchers and practitioners, I was challenged to think about the potential method of inquiry and research genre

my dissertation would entail. As I was overwhelmed by the possibilities, the members of this study group encouraged me to reflect on my interests as a practitioner, academic, and individual. By reflecting in this way, I came to realize that I have always been interested in the narrative aspects of qualitative research, especially in storytelling as a tool for learning about phenomena and individuals.

In addition, I came to realize that my favorite books are memoirs, and I find great pleasure in sharing stories with individuals, both friends and strangers alike, about life experiences and individual perspectives and opinions. I explored the possibility of utilizing an interpretive approach to my research with a personal narrative genre instead of the phenomenological method I had originally intended to utilize, which would have simply extended the research agenda of my supervised research project.

My research experience thus far has been qualitative. I am comfortable with conducting observations, as well as individual and group interviews, to inform my understanding of theories related to service-learning and its effects on student participants. This research strategy, however, is not the typical approach for analysis related to service-learning and civic engagement in the field of higher education. There is a limited body of empirical research to support the much written-about social and theoretical justifications for service-learning (Giles & Euler, 1998). Most studies focus on the easily measurable aspects of engagement: for example, how many hours students are serving, how many college-aged students regularly participate in service work, and how many agency partners are engaged in a given year?

On the rare occasion that service-learning research includes data from the student perspective, it is limited to short anecdotal text from reflection journals or abbreviated quotes from focus groups (Howard, 2003). While these data are helpful in understanding service-

learning's general effects on participants, they often ignore, or only superficially touch on, the concept of civic engagement. This lack of depth is best captured by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), advocates for narrative research in education, who argue that when experiences such as service-learning are quantified, the phenomena become void of their ultimate richness and unique expressions and interpretations.

As a practitioner who spent seven years coordinating service-learning opportunities for students, I am aware that student participants come to serve from different perspectives and motivating factors. Moreover, I have also witnessed how one service experience may transform one participant's perspective while seemingly barely influencing another participant. This disparity in participant perspective shifts has always intrigued me, as no research has extensively examined the discrepancy in the learning experiences of participants. My own professional observations suggest that these perspective shifts occur in patterns, but I have not had full access to students' perspectives in order to explore them fully.

This research study thus served as an opportunity to allow individuals to share their stories, explaining how they have made meaning of their service experience, as well as a chance to afford individual narratives the opportunity to inform the practice of service-learning. By generating this knowledge, this study worked to provide a richer understanding of perspective shifts for participants. I viewed this experience as an opportunity to add a unique text to the scholarship of the field. Therefore, I chose to utilize narrative inquiry, as defined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000): i.e., sharing individual stories to make meaning of specific events, in this case service-learning programs.

After collecting and analyzing the participants' narratives, I began to reflect on my own meaning-making experience, not only in the context of coordinating these trips for participants

for seven years, but also in the context of participating in these trips as a professional, working and living with the participants in fellowship and service. In this sense, I realized that, even beyond this study, I had been involved in moral conversations with students for years, “in learning spaces connecting with one another, and educating through honest give-and-take conversation” (Nash & Jang, 2014, p.101). Just as I had learned about their experiences from serving and dialoguing with them, they have learned from me, and I too had learned about myself during the process. Therefore, this study also includes a scholarly personal narrative, a “self-interrogation,” to make narrative sense of my own experiences with alternative spring break programming, which ultimately adds depth and understanding to my overall interpretations and implications (Nash, 2004, p. 18).

Narrative inquiry was the best methodology to achieve these goals, as it is not only a method that enables researchers to explore individual experiences, but it also affords researchers the opportunity to self-reflect (Eaves & Walton, 2013). The interpretive process was influenced by both my personal perspective as well as the perspectives of the respondents (Eaves & Walton, 2013), adding to the complexity and richness of the data and the overall narrative.

My research approach took a constructivist/interpretivist epistemological stance (Crotty, 1998; Eichelberger, 1989; Glesne, 2011). Understanding that knowledge is crafted within the social milieu, I attempted to understand the respondents’ lived experience and perception of meaning surrounding their experience through their reflections and stories regarding their alternative spring break trip. Therefore, as a constructivist researcher, I explored the meaning participants attributed to their ASB experience with the epistemological understanding that the inquiry will be an interactive process (Eichelberger, 1989), and that respondents, including myself, have the power to construct meaning for themselves (Nash, 2008). The data was

collected via authentic and reflexive interviews and interpretations were crafted by both the respondents and myself.

As Glesne (2011) describes it, an interpretivist argues that reality itself is temporal and socially constructed. In this sense, while institutions may construct a purposeful service-learning program with desired transformative learning outcomes for participants, it is more important to understand how participants interpret and make meaning of their experience, altering their thinking or actions due to their experience and participation in a service-learning program. By doing so, practitioners are able to analyze how individuals reflect and adjust their perspectives and levels of cultural awareness and civic engagement as they relate to the goals of the institution, as well as to the wider field of higher education and service-learning. Providing a venue for individual story sharing creates the opportunity to illustrate the unique dilemmas, complexities, and opportunities of service-learning programming in higher education (Glesne, 2011), thus cultivating a greater understanding of the breadth of the student experience.

This research seeks to share the stories of individual participants, shedding light onto the delicate and varied intricacies, perspectives, and backgrounds of participants in order to gain a rich understanding of the reflexive perspective of each individual, taking into consideration the concepts of power and privilege, as well as perceptions of and inclinations toward service and civic engagement. By doing so, this study aids in identifying new areas for service-learning scholarship, establishes a long-term emphasis on service-learning planning, invites a connection between higher education goals and a richer notion of civic engagement, and invites a border-crossing lens to service-learning literature.

This study is divided into six individual chapters. Chapter two provides a review of the literature surrounding not only the study's epistemological stance, rooted in a Deweyan

perspective of education, as well as border-crossing theory, but also the literature on civic engagement and service-learning. Chapter three provides a description of the study's research genre and procedures, detailing the methodological approach of the study, as well as a description of the participants, the study's trustworthiness, and overall limitations. Chapter four offers the individual narratives of the participants, as well as a scholarly personal narrative, sharing the details of their service-learning experience as well as an account of their personal meaning-making process surrounding their experience and the trips' reflective component. The fifth chapter affords a space for my analysis, interpreting the individual narratives in regard to their themes, as well as interpretations from the collection of narratives. The study then ends, with a sixth chapter focused on the study's main interpretations and implications, as well as suggestions for further research and recommendations for practitioners in the field of service-learning and civic engagement.

1.5 RATIONALE FOR STUDY

Researchers justify their studies in an effort to share what they hope to find or understand through their research efforts. Clandinin (2013) argues that narrative inquirers should justify their purposes more clearly so as to not have studies "dismissed as merely anecdotal or personal" (p. 35). While the overall goal of the study, as a narrative inquiry, was to gain a description of the participant experience while simultaneously adding meaning to the experience, and "adding to the content and the quality of the experience" for the researcher and the respondent, this study also served additional purposes (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p.44). Clandinin (2013) argues for

justification on four levels: personal, practical, social, and theoretical. Therefore, the contents of this section are laid out as such.

1.5.1 Personal

As a practitioner in the field who began working in service-learning when research on service and civic engagement was only beginning to unfold, I have direct experience related to the struggle of uncertainty. As a young professional, I started my career planning service-learning programs for undergraduate students. This process began as an experience of trial and error, as literature surrounding service-learning theory and best practices was only beginning to develop while I constructed programs based on desired learning outcomes and programmatic standards, such as daily reflection.

My first service-learning initiatives, in comparison to my most recent programs, seemed poorly executed and minimally engaging. I was not adequately prepared to lead deep, thoughtful reflection, and I had not yet developed a method for assessing participant outcomes and program effectiveness. However, as my career advanced and the body of research surrounding service programming grew, my programs developed into more engaging, transformative opportunities for students.

I conducted this study as a way to enrich the field, to improve the future experiences of practitioners and student participants alike so as to aid in the improvement of programs such as my early attempts at service-learning. Clandinin (2013) argues that narrative inquiry is the appropriate vehicle for initiatives such as this, as narrative studies utilize individual experience in the larger context of the world and others' experiences, which encourages the transformation of experience for the respondent as well as others. In this sense, this study has allowed me to

understand the story beneath the story of the ASB service experience, civic engagement, and cultural awareness, as they stand alone and as they align with others' stories, including my own.

1.5.2 Practical

While service-learning programs are becoming highly popular in higher education, there are still gaps in the research (Eyler, 2011; Giles & Eyler, 2013; Holsapple, 2012; Whitley, 2014). To clarify, there are studies that highlight the transformative potential of alternative break programs; however, there is still minimal understanding as to the meaning students make of their ASB experience. This gap in the research leaves practitioners wondering about students' experiences, understanding that a change has, or could possibly occur among participants, but not knowing what exactly that means. Moreover, there is a severe lack of understanding in regard to what it means in terms of long-term personal influence (Jones & Abes, 2004). My hope is that this final research text, comprised of stories related to individuals' experiences, as well as an overarching story of service-learning, will engage audiences of practitioners to rethink the ways they engage students in service. My goal is to have this purposeful reflection on service challenge practitioners to restructure their practice, leading to more engaging and meaningful experiences for their students. By paying attention to the personal conditions of meaning-making, I have attempted to add to the discussion of social conditions related to participant outcomes and service-learning, drawing attention to the environment, forces, and stakeholders which inform and effect the individual participants' experience (Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). This study, therefore, has the potential to affect positive change on not only my practice, but also on the practice of service-learning and student affairs professionals in general.

Moreover, the practical rationale for this study transcends the field of service-learning. The interpretations have afforded me the opportunity to expand the literature related to higher education and student programming, pushing past the anecdotal research of the field, offering deep data and insight into the student meaning-making process. Jones and Abes (2004) argue that while service-learning literature is littered with discussions regarding the importance of reflection; little attention is paid to the complexities and concerns brought forth through reflection. Therefore, the researchers are arguing for a deeper understanding of the student experience and perspective so that practitioners are better capable of crafting meaningful reflection opportunities and programs. This study answers this charge as it also addresses student perceptions related to cultural sensitivity and civic mindedness, providing narratives on how participants navigate difference, as well as social issues and structures of power.

1.5.3 Social

Working from the notion that narratives afford the opportunity to understand knowledge and individual context, thus linking to an understanding of identity (Clandinin & Huber, 2002), this research serves to add to the larger dialogue surrounding student-centered research. By better understanding the context in which the border-crossing process occurs for service-learning participants, viewing the participants' experience as both narratively lived and constructed (Clandinin & Huber, 2002), this study aids in informing practitioners of the significant connections between participants and their relationships with the individuals they serve, the agencies they serve with, and the communities in which they are serving.

As service-learning programs most often situate students in direct contact with communities and individuals they are unfamiliar with, this study provides knowledge and

understanding of the student experience to ensure that these highly relational experiences are understood and that their structure provides opportunities for socially just interactions. This holistic understanding is crucial, as the lived service experience is a shared experience, leaving the individuals' stories and their experiences inextricably linked to others' and the greater social context (Clandinin, 2006). By better understanding the nuances of the individual experience, practitioners will be better suited to serve students as an increased knowledge of individual effects will aid in the creation of a more efficient and beneficial service experience for all students, leading to the creation of a more just programmatic ASB structure.

1.5.4 Theoretical

The knowledge created from this study also helps to advance theoretical understanding related to civic engagement, service-learning, and border-crossing. Much of the literature surrounding service-learning theory has a focus on the impact and implementation of service-learning as pedagogy, or as an "anecdotal description of service-learning programs," rather than as empirical research (Whitley, 2014). This study serves to fill the gap in the research, answering scholars' call for the use of theory to improve service-learning practice (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Bringle, Clayton, & Hatcher, 2013).

Border-crossing theory is concerned with the development of a democratic philosophy in which difference is not only acknowledged, but also respected, in order to work towards a betterment of life for all citizens (Giroux, 1991). By utilizing service-learning pedagogy as a tool to engage students in border-crossing, this study serves to inform the conditions in which students engage as border-crossers, furthering the literature surrounding border-crossing theory to understand the strengths and limitations of service-learning as a method to foster border-

crossing. This knowledge not only makes visible the student meaning-making process surrounding border-crossing, but also offers language and implications for practice related to establishing new boundaries for students participating in ASB programs and thus creates richer scholarly literature to add to the field.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter provides a thorough description of this study's epistemological stance and its conceptual framework in civic engagement, as well as a detailed description of service-learning as a higher education programming initiative, providing readers with the opportunity to understand the background of service-learning, its desired outcomes, and its limits as a pedagogical process.

2.1 EPISTEMOLOGICAL STANCE

The following sections provide a detailed description of the conceptual and theoretical framework of this study: a Deweyan (1910/1916/1938) understanding of service-learning, as well as a theoretical foundation grounded in border-crossing theory (Giroux, 1984/1991).

2.1.1 Dewey

The educational philosophy of John Dewey is often considered the foundation of service-learning in the United States (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008; Saltmarsh, 1996). As this study investigates individual interpretations of meaning surrounding ASBs, a service-learning program type, a conceptual framework inclusive of John Dewey's notions of experience and education is

necessary, as Dewey fostered the development of progressive educators and theorists who challenged the traditional classroom setting and eventually led to the development of service-learning as we know it (Cesar & Rhoads, 2001; McLaughlin, 2010; Rocheleau, 2004; Saltmarsh, 1996). Dewey argued that the concepts of experience, education, citizenship, and democracy are inseparable, maintaining that schools function as agents of change for society, producing educated and skilled individuals (Dewey, 2009). Dewey's philosophy speaks to the moral responsibilities of the educational system within the realm of the democratic society (Hatcher, 1997). Moreover, Dewey argued that education must encourage and foster student participants to engage in their communities as active citizen contributors (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008).

While Dewey himself never explicitly called for service-learning (Dewey died in 1952 and service-learning as a concept did not enter the realm of higher education until the early 1980's [Barber & Battistoni, 1993]), his theory of education aligns with the pedagogical goals and community-based methodology of service-learning (Rocheleau, 2004), as he argued that the key to knowledge construction and attainment is the interaction of knowledge and skill-sets with real-life experience (Hatcher, 1997). Dewey viewed reflection as the key to unpacking experience and obtaining knowledge from situations and challenges (Rocheleau, 2004). In addition, Dewey's challenge to abandon traditional educational methods in exchange for experiential, progressive education supports and entuses service-learning's reflection-based active education format. Dewey pushed for an educational system to challenge students to grow and develop not only academically, but also in their social intelligence and moral growth, thus fostering students' potential to actively benefit society as informed citizens (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008; You & Rud, 2010). Dewey advocated for this model, explaining that knowledge was the ultimate tool to create and maintain a just society (Hatcher, 1997).

Dewey argued that learning occurs when students become involved in their own education, engaging with others outside of the traditional classroom setting, escaping its structure and power dynamics (Dewey, 1910/1938), a process that service-learning not only encourages but provides. Dewey viewed inquiry as a process of individual development, allowing reflection and observations to inform thought processes, generate new ideas, and serve as a foundation for growth (Xu & Connelly, 2010). For Dewey, reflection is a chance to explore actions and consequences in order to stimulate a level of ethical thinking (You & Rud, 2010). In this sense, with reflection as the distinguishing factor of service-learning, and experience and reflection as foundational concepts for narrative inquiry, Dewey's philosophy of experiential learning serves as an appropriate conceptual framework for this study as he argues that constant cycles of action and reflection foster the greatest levels of learning and development (Whitley, 2014).

Dewey's (1916) understanding of democracy as a system that challenges citizens to lead active lives in pursuit of a good that benefits themselves and others also coincides with the framework of service-learning. This ethic of democratic involvement, just as Dewey's notion of reflection as a crucial concept to knowledge and development, pervades his scholarly writings and informs the foundation of modern service-learning, engaging students in meaningful, active education that encompasses learning about oneself, others, and the community or world at large (Rhoads, 1998; Saltmarsh, 1996). Dewey's charge to engage students in meaningful reflection surrounding their active education has led to the adoption of Dewey's educational philosophy in U.S. higher education through a renewed focus on civic responsibility and service-learning (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008), as students are challenged to develop a moral imagination where they assess old beliefs and behaviors, determine what is problematic in light of their experience, and re-adjust their perspectives based on their new understanding (You & Rud, 2010). This

Deweyan understanding of service-learning serves as a jump start to moral imagination, encouraging students to think critically and develop innovative solutions to social issues, and helps to construct this study's framework and understanding of service-learning and the multidimensional experience it offers participants.

2.1.2 Border-Crossing Theory

While Dewey's educational philosophy has certainly informed the practice of service-learning, his theory does not serve as a comprehensive framework for this study, as his theory of experience inadequately addresses issues regarding community engagement and cultural sensitivity. Dewey has been criticized for an overemphasis on students' cultural assimilation. In addition, Dewey's framework does not address the common critiques of service-learning and, therefore, a frame to address otherness or cultural awareness needs to be incorporated into this study as well. In order to better understand the perspective shift of ASB participants in regard to their civic mindedness and levels of cultural sensitivity, this study will also utilize border-crossing as a theoretical framework.

Border-crossing offers individuals a self-reflexive space and time to empathize with others and develop a larger understanding of themselves and others within the social milieu. This process is crucial, as often, the voice of the other is pushed to the "margins of existence, recognition, and possibility" (Giroux, 1984, p.68) in situations of engagement with difference. Therefore, border-crossing makes societal hierarchy visible, giving voice to individuals who may often feel forgotten by society. Anzaldúa's (2012) poem, "Life in the Borderlands Means You," articulates the challenges and conflicts associated with border-crossing, stating:

...In the Borderlands

you are the battleground
where enemies are kin to each other;
you are at home, a stranger,
the border disputes have been settled
the volley of shots have shattered the truce
You are wounded, lost in action
Dead, fighting back...
To survive the Borderlands
You must live *sin fronteras*
Be a crossroads. (pp. 216-217)

In this piece, Anzaldúa speaks to the challenges of navigating cultural differences, urging border crossers to live *sin frontera*, without borders, encouraging individuals to be open minded and tolerant. Anzaldúa was specifically speaking to her struggles as an individual of mixed race and ethnic background, articulating the struggle of a woman attempting to be a part of multiple cultures at once. Anzaldúa argues that one cannot simply define oneself by one race, or part of oneself, as biracial individuals are comprised of multiple cultural, racial, and ethnic components, which make them unique. In this sense, Anzaldúa is rallying against the binary, rejecting the idea of an either-or perspective, and encouraging individuals to be aware of their conflicting and complementary identities in order to reach new and enlightened perspectives.

While Anzaldúa's argument is focused on the particular border issues or concerns of individuals from mixed racial backgrounds, her argument transcends her own definition of border-crossing and relates to a postmodern understanding of the concept as well. Anzaldúa is particularly speaking out against the violence that occurs in the borderlands against individuals

viewed as others, positioning border-crossing as an act of resistance. In other words, as individuals choose to navigate their intersectional perspectives, they may begin to identify and confront issues of difference, developing a culture of awareness, rather than ignorance.

While Alternative Spring Breaks do not pose a direct threat of violence, there is a sense of danger in postmodern border-crossing, and subsequently in ASBs, as students navigate socio-cultural differences in an unfamiliar community. Navigating these differences can not only be challenging to process due to concerns related to culture shock, but can also lead to harsh realities and disjointed perspectives, leaving both students and community members feeling confused or angry.

Service-learning can make borders visible. The engagement of service with and for community members positions participants as border-crossers, “moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power” (Giroux, 1984, p.72). This immersion process of ASBs challenges students’ previous homogenous experiences as they work and learn from individuals and communities unlike those they are familiar with, often struggling with racial and economic disparities (Chesler, Ford, Galura & Charbeneau, 2006; Jones, Robbins, & LePeau, 2011). Moreover, this process encourages the development of civic mindedness and cultural sensitivity as the act of border-crossing, paired with the mandatory reflections of service-learning, engages students in a critique of their personal beliefs and experiences, the stories of the community they are working with, and the dominant culture in which they live (Giroux, 1984).

Hayes and Cuban (1997) offer the critical postmodern interpretation of border-crossing as the space in which the ambiguity of conflicts of perspective both generated through and brought to life by service-learning foster the development of new thought processes related to class and

cultural boundaries. Hayes and Cuban (1997) argue that border-crossing is a process of developing an awareness of social inequities, systems of power, and otherness, and creating a more informed sense of self, other, and community. Therefore, the act of physically crossing community borders and entering a new cultural context may help to foster the construction of new mental borders related to thought processes and perspectives of self, others, and the world in which ASB participants live.

2.2 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

It is crucial to understand the concept of civic engagement and its foundation and relevance to individual fields of study, in order to implement programs and initiatives that responsibly answer the previously mentioned call to action of institutions of higher learning to engage in civic initiatives. The following section breaks down the concept, offering standards and theoretical components to thoroughly describe civic engagement as it is understood in higher education and in this study.

Americans have participated in civic engagement since the United States was founded. Scholars argue that “in the absence of a strong national state” citizens choose to voluntarily collaborate to work towards a shared goal or vision for good (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999, p.32). In other words, individual citizens assemble collectively along the lines of their salient identity characteristics such as religious affiliation, political affiliation, or heritage in order to work towards society’s overall betterment. However, while movement was initially occurring at this individual level, industrialization fostered the growth of large-scale organizations, which slowly absorbed the civic agendas originally driven by individual citizens, as organizations and

businesses had more social capital than individuals (Skocpol, 1999). This trend has continued today as political groups, nationally recognized service groups, and even institutions of higher education lead the task of mobilizing individuals to work towards a common good, rather than encouraging individuals to self-organize for a purpose. Often these institutions are charged with this task, whether directly or out of a desire to compete, thus connecting many civic initiatives to larger agendas or ideologies.

Formulating a generalized plan to answer the call is a challenge as civic engagement has been defined in a variety of ways. It can be said that the standard definition of civic engagement pertains to the process of aligning one's actions within a framework of responsibility to both the local and global community, working for change through the promotion of social justice (Lenzi, Vieno, Pastore, & Santinello, 2013; Musil, 2009). Civic engagement has often been referred to as simply the methods in which citizens participate in action with their given community and government (Adler & Goggin, 2005). Civic engagement has also been described as the level of engagement one has with the given goals and interests of their community, or the actions they take to work towards a common good or community concern (APA, n.d.; Barrett & Zani, 2014). Furthering this line of thought, the Civic Engagement Rubric (AACU, 2009) defines civic engagement as actions taken to increase the quality of life for a community through both political and non-political actions.

2.2.1 Frameworks for Civic-Minded Behavior

While these definitions create a basic understanding, when attempting to develop a deeper knowledge or a richer definition of civic engagement, consensus among scholars is hard to find. Civic engagement, as a concept, is highly subjective and the person constructing the definition

influences the nuances of the term. However, researchers and theorists have attempted to develop frameworks for understanding civic engagement by working to create a shared framework between individuals and fields of study.

Adler and Goggin (2005) explain that existing research typically offers four realms through which civic engagement is assessed: community service, collective action, political involvement, and social change. While the intricacies of these realms are hard to define, especially when one domain may overlap with the next, researchers name the spectrum of activities that encompass civic engagement as the Continuum of Civic Engagement (see Figure 1; adapted from Alder & Goggin, 2005).

The Continuum lays out the different dimensions of civic engagement, noting dichotomies within the system. The first of these dichotomies is informal or private action versus formal or public action. Informal action is the unstructured behavior one chooses and implements on their own, such as donating to charity or helping a sick friend. Formal action, however, is one's participation in a structured or organized initiative alongside like-minded individuals. Examples of formal action may include volunteering with a local food pantry or serving on a non-profit or governmental board.

The vertical axis of the figure lists the dichotomy of involvement types: community activities versus political activities. While both activity types can range from informal to formal, community activities relate to community development initiatives, such as neighborhood watches or street cleanups, while political activities relate to formalized societal politics, including participation in elections and local political initiatives.

Informal/Private			Formal/Public		
<i>Individual Action</i>			<i>Collective Action</i>		
Community Activities	Helping a neighbor	Contributing to a charity	Joining a community group	Occasional volunteering	Sustained, intensive service
Political Activities	Having a political discussion	Voting	Advocating for a policy	Active participation in an interest group	Running for public office

Figure 1. Continuum of Civic Engagement

While these individual realms overlap, they also highlight the diverse and broad understandings of civic engagement, as each area of study or social group has its own particular area or focus of concern. When civic engagement is assessed as a whole, these individual realms highlight the range of activities and initiatives that civic engagement encompasses, showcasing the concept’s ability to appeal to a variety of individuals and areas of study.

2.2.2 Standards of Engaged Citizenship

In addition to the indicators described above, civic engagement has theoretical components that serve to create standards for behavior representative of civic-minded individuals. This foundation of civic engagement consists of three main components: civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic identity (Hatcher, 2011; Lenzi et al., 2013). Together these components help to forge the holistic understanding of civic knowledge as a social concept. Figure 2 highlights how these components come together to holistically develop and inform an individual.

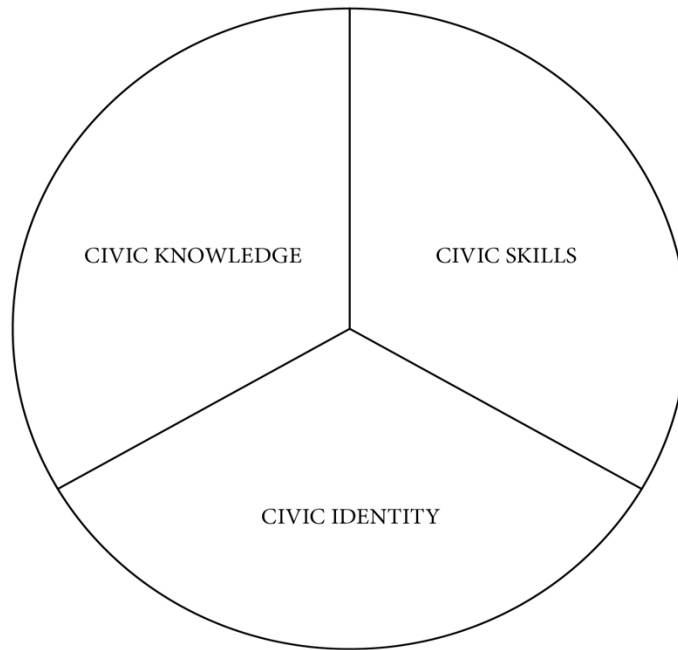


Figure 2. The Engaged Citizen Wheel

The first component, civic knowledge, refers to one's understanding of the government, political action, and social movements. It also refers to a theoretical understanding of knowledge as power and action, capable of creating change in society and fostering social capital as it is co-created among all community members (Hatcher, 2011). In this sense, civic knowledge relates to one's understanding of how society functions. More specifically, civic knowledge relates not only an understanding of formal political governing organizations, but also to the act of engaged citizenship and the process of change-inducing action. Students with civic knowledge will understand how nonprofit organizations function within society's corporate business realm, the role of collective action and advocacy, as well as the principles of democracy. The goal, then, is

that by participating in civic engagement initiatives, individuals become equipped with hands-on experiential knowledge about democracy, civic action, and social problems (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

The second component, civic skills, refer to the skills that support one's ability to engage civically. These skills include communication skills, organization skills, decision-making skills, interpersonal skills, and critical thinking skills (Hatcher, 2011). These critical skills are ideal traits of individuals participating in a civic engagement opportunity, as they aid in the identification and framing of a social or political problem (Eyler & Giles, 1999), making participants and their actions more impactful. The acquisition of these skills position individuals as capable of understanding the perspective of others, navigating the political system and its power hierarchies, and organizing for positive change. According to this thinking, a student with civic skills will have the ability to listen and manage a diverse group of individuals, generate informed opinions related to public issues, and organize and persuade others to become involved. In short, when honed, these skills groom individuals to critically examine not only their actions, but also the actions of their fellow citizens, the government, and organizations within the society in which they live.

The final component, civic identity, refers to one's ability to see oneself as an important member of society who is capable of contributing to positive social change (Hatcher, 2011). The process of discovering one's civic identity through experiential learning has been referred to as the consciousness bridge, as its discovery requires the participant to unpack their service experience and then apply that meaning to their individual experience and self (Jones, Gilbride-Brown, & Gasiorski, 2005). This aspect of one's identity gives an individual purpose, encouraging positive societal participation. A student with a strong civic identity will not only

experience strong intellectual development, but will also possess a clear ethical code and empathy for others. Civic identity, therefore, helps one to reflect on one's role in society, assessing how to participate in the community in ways that align with one's personal beliefs and values.

2.2.3 Theoretical Components of Civic Engagement

For decades scholars have argued about the theoretical foundations of civic engagement. These individual scholars, or scholar groups, have failed to reach a consensus about what effect civic engagement has on individuals and society, as well as what aspects of civic engagement foster its transformative ability for stakeholders. While there are many different theories pertaining to civic engagement, due to the lack of an agreed upon definition, these theories tend to fall within three theoretical realms of understanding: social capital, rational choice, and historical institutionalism (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999).

The social capital theoretical frame focuses on the shared norms and adopted societal goals for an ascribed common good that motivates citizens to action. Scholars from this perspective, such as Putnam (1993), explain that social capital is fueled by a sense of social trust, arguing that as citizens become more engaged with one another, they are inclined to work together to solve societal issues. In short, as individuals work together in a geographical network, the existence of interpersonal trust, norms of reciprocity, and social engagement develop and foster the generation of social capital and, ultimately, community engagement (Carpiano, 2006). Social capital and increased community engagement then have the potential to create an overall positive effect on society as a whole, which is then projected by their feelings as they relate to their overall culture, their government, and its associated politicians.

Scholars that adhere to a rational-choice perspective, however, are concerned with the “unintended effects” of citizens’ civic behavior on the political system (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999, p. 13) and how civic behavior is incentivized, asking the overall question, “What kind of civic engagement, by whom, to what ends?” (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999, p.14). Rational-choice theorists, when analyzing civic engagement, refuse to assume all forms of engagement are positive, choosing to assess initiatives and projects individually to determine whether collective actions are occurring for the common good, or rather for the allied self-interest of participants. Rational-choice theory, therefore, offers a more thorough critique of civic engagement, removing the veil of romanticism placed on the concept that clouds the judgment of civic action by so many individuals and institutions.

The final theoretical framework, historical institutionalism, is also concerned with the evaluation of engagement activities. Historical-institutional theorists assess changing political patterns and societal structures based on their effects pertaining to civic engagement. For these theorists, civic engagement participation functions as social leverage, not necessarily for public good or the development of trust (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). In other words, sometimes an individual’s choice to actively engage as a civic-minded citizen may be for individual desires or motivations concerned with the good of a select group of individuals, rather than the community at large. Therefore, while historical institutionalists assess individual actions and associations as social capital theorists do, historical institutionalists are more concerned with organizational patterns and resource distribution. This evaluation occurs in an effort to understand why, and for whom, individuals organize. Historical institutionalists are particularly interested in the effects on lower members of society, those with minimal if any social capital, as historical-institutionalism theory acknowledges that society is not always, if ever, equitable.

While it appears that these primary theoretical foundations of civic engagement are at odds, they are all valid frameworks to utilize in the study of civic engagement. Therefore, rather than viewing these individual theoretical foundations as contradictory, this study utilizes all three realms, understanding the social capital frame as the desired dynamic, while also validating the critique of service-learning initiatives through the rational choice perspective, and assessing higher education's institutional realm of service-learning through the historical institutional framework. Through this three-pronged approach, a more holistic understanding of civic engagement and service-learning is developed as a framework for this research.

2.2.4 Civic Engagement in Higher Education

While civic engagement was initially a concern for the political realm, it has become an area of focus for modern day institutions of higher education as well. This shift of focus has not only been implemented by institutions themselves, but also by many political organizations, as well as by non-governmental organizations that have encouraged the movement within colleges and universities. This transition is logical, as universities, now more than ever, are functioning as political entities themselves as they network with community and governmental stakeholders for resources and support in order to survive in an unstable economy (Jacoby, 2009). The number of designated service-learning courses, the number of faculty members engaging in service-learning projects, and the number of institutional support mechanisms for service-learning have all increased over the last three decades, indicating a crucial shift towards a civic focus in the field of higher education (Hartley, Harkavy, & Benson, 2005).

Civic engagement in the field of higher education refers to a different understanding and method of engagement than in the political realm. In the context of higher education, civic

engagement refers to members of the educational institution working within the communities they are a part of (Moore & Mendez, 2014). This form of civic engagement encompasses administrative participation on community development boards, faculty engagement in community-based research, and student engagement.

One example of how this focus plays out in terms of institutional initiatives comes from the University of California, Berkeley. This institution, even in the 1990s, had a registered list of over 300 different civic-related activities, including volunteer and charity work, educational outreach, open-houses to the public, community-based research, and community-development activities (Brint & Levy, 1999).

In terms of education, civic engagement is said to have three separate lenses: the social psychological, the socio-cultural, and the systemic (Newton & Norris, 2000). Within the social psychological lens, institutions are focused on providing students with cognitive and developmental skills to foster engaged citizenship (Egerton, 2002). These skills range from critical thinking and analytical skills to organizational and communication skills.

In the socio-cultural lens, however, attention is paid to the connection between individuals' levels of education, their socio-economic status, and their level of civic engagement (Egerton, 2002). This lens utilizes Bourdieu's (1997) understanding of social capital by looking at how those students from higher socio-economic levels, who ultimately have higher levels of social capital, have the ability to make a greater impact socially, thus fostering a deeper level of civic engagement among members of this group. The socio-cultural lens, therefore, brings to light the intricate dynamics between demographic groups and their propensity to engage civically. In this sense, this lens expands upon Putnam's geographically-based understanding of social capital and looks beyond the immediate network of individuals in one place, rather than

focusing on social capital as the collective of resources that groups and individuals can draw from to pursue and achieve goals (Carpiano, 2006).

The final lens, the systemic lens, focuses on institutional programs and initiatives created to promote engaged citizenship (Egerton, 2002). This lens is focused on institutional support for civic programs and the incentives or benefits provided to university community members who actively participate in civic initiatives. With this framework in place, civic engagement in higher education is viewed as a holistic concept, involving all stakeholders and concerning the overall community through these three separate areas of focus. In this sense, these lenses can be viewed as higher education's answer to the previously discussed charge for civic engagement, mobilizing students in an effort to develop responsible citizens.

In terms of this study, these lenses build upon Figure 2, serving as the overlay to the original image as they are the methods in which an institution mobilizes and engages students to achieve the institution's civic initiatives and goals for students' civic development. Figure 3 represents this connection. The systemic lens informs institutional efforts to provide students with the civic knowledge of their society's political structure and their institutional structure, informing them of policies and initiatives needed to actively engage as citizens. The socio-cultural lens supports institutional initiatives in challenging students to reflect on systems of power and privilege, engaging students in order to aid in their development of a civic identity so that they can determine how to best enact change while unpacking their own levels of privilege. The final lens, social-psychological, aids in focusing institutional programs and initiatives in developing critical thinking, analytical, and decision-making skills to enable students to successfully engage civically.

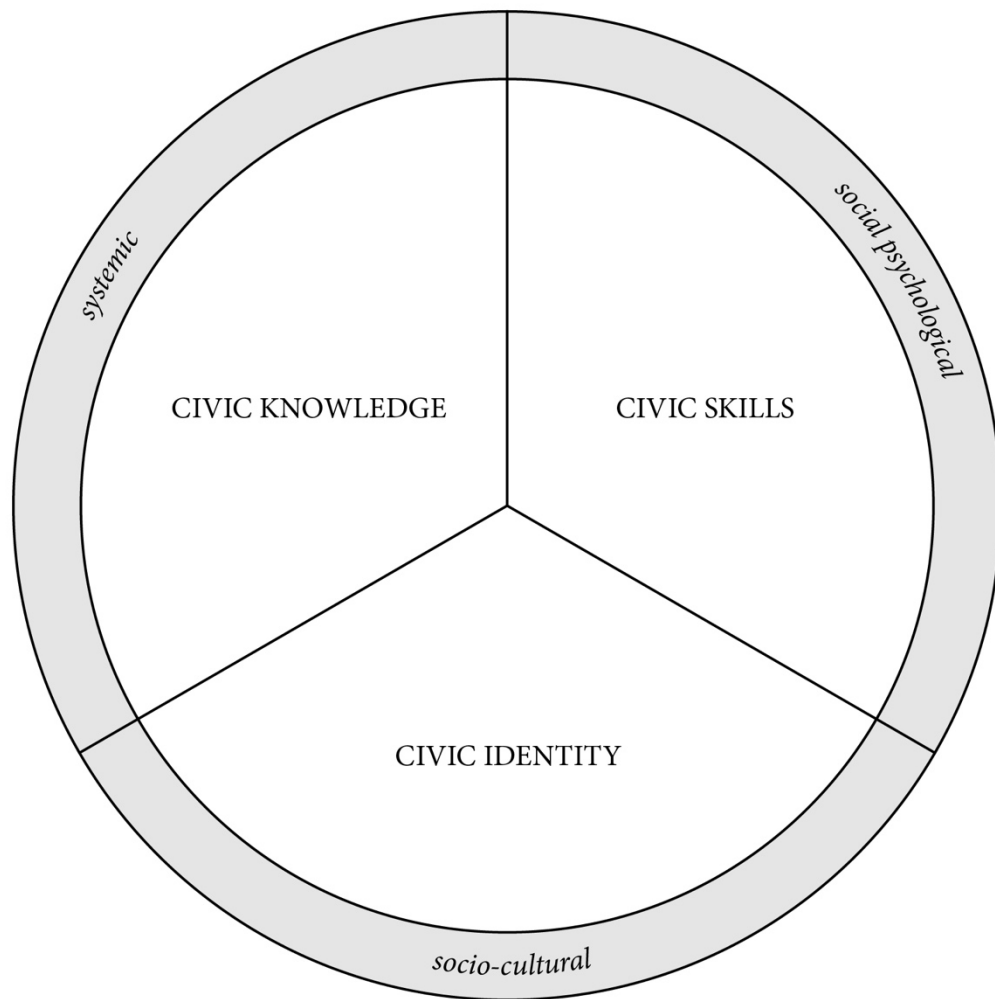


Figure 3. Engaged Citizen Wheel with Higher Education Focus

Positioned as such a critical concept with these lenses, civic engagement is becoming a primary focus for institutions of higher education. Advocates of civic mindedness are putting pressure on institutions to not only become more civically focused, but to also focus on producing civically minded individuals from graduates. Reports, such as the *Civic Mission of Schools Report*, called for institutions to play a major role in boosting student civic engagement

(Carnegie Corporation of NY & CIRCLE, 2003). Reports such as this advocate for a co-curricular approach to civic engagement, encouraging students to not only learn about their civic responsibilities as citizens, but to also actively participate in civic initiatives. These initiatives allow students to connect academic concepts to their direct service experiences (Moore & Mendez, 2014). Therefore, institutions are implementing initiatives, such as service-learning, to not only encourage civic engagement among student participants (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Hatcher, 2011), but to also simultaneously boost student-learning outcomes (Moore & Mendez, 2014; Steinberg, Hatcher, & Bringle, 2011). Service-learning initiatives, in this sense, serve to mobilize students in organized service projects focused on particular learning objectives while affording them the opportunity to simultaneously reflect on their service, their role in society, and their personal values.

While many institutions are implementing civic engagement initiatives informally, formal processes and systems of recognition have also been put into place. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, for example, has a voluntary designation called the “Civic Engagement Classification,” a designation designed to promote the importance of civic engagement on campuses nationwide (Sandmann, Thornton, & Jaeger, 2009). This designation speaks to the trend of institutions of higher education not only engaging students in civic engagement during their educational career, but also focusing institutional initiatives on community involvement and impact.

The RAND Evaluation of the Corporation for National Service’s Learn and Serve Higher Education (LASHE) program is another example. LASHE distributes grants to colleges and universities to support the development and implementation of service-learning courses into their course offerings (Eyler & Giles, 1999). As this trend continues to grow, so does the societal

expectation that college-aged students will have performed direct service as part of their college experience (Adler & Goggin, 2005).

Another example of large-scale formal implementation has been the creation of Campus Compact, an organization started by three university presidents in 1985 to foster the development of service as a crucial part of the higher education experience (Howard, 2003). This organization now has more than 900 institutional members and 30 state offices that provide assistance and training in service-learning and civic engagement for students, faculty, and administrators (Hartley, Harkavy, & Benson, 2005). Initiatives such as this have been created over the last three decades in an effort to formalize service-learning and civic engagement within the field of higher education.

2.3 SERVICE-LEARNING

Service-learning, as a pedagogy for engaging college students, has been defined in a variety of ways. Eyler and Giles (1999) explain that the vast array of definitions of service-learning—there are 147 recorded definitions in the field’s literature—lead to a multitude of engagement programs and initiatives falling under this one standard term. This vague understanding leaves service-learning without a tight definition, but rather with a broader understanding that different programmatic structures will attach to specific institutional goals. However, in an attempt to vaguely define this complex concept, Eyler and Giles (1999) chose to broadly identify service-learning’s “central claim of the field,” stating that service-learning adds value to all stakeholders by offering learning “through a cycle of action and reflection,” allowing students to make meaning of their experience as it relates to their classroom studies (p. 7).

Other scholars have further explained that service-learning can be defined as a teaching and learning method directly connected to meaningful community service via organized reflection that focuses on generating knowledge with and for diverse communities (Keen & Hall, 2009; Lo Re, DeSimone, & Buddensick, 2011). In this sense, service-learning connects community service to academic instruction, thus linking formal study and analytical reflection, affording participants the opportunity to fully engage, learn, and grow from their experiences (Caruso, Bowen, & Adams-Dunford, 2006; Kuh, 2008). This mutually beneficial model, where students work with and for members of the community whom they are serving, while also learning from the community and its members, makes service-learning a unique engagement opportunity that enhances students' intellectual development and critical thinking skills while encouraging them to acknowledge their civic responsibility (Caruso, Bowen, & Adams-Dunford, 2006; Mayhew & Engberg, 2011). Service-learning serves as a vehicle for institutions to mobilize students to engage in civic engagement initiatives, operating as a powerful pedagogy as it not only introduces students to praxis based education, but also affords opportunities for cognitive and affective learning (You & Rud, 2010).

2.3.1 Desired Outcomes of Service-Learning

There are several desired outcomes of service-learning for program coordinators, some even tailored to specific courses, programs, or service sites. Rhoads and Neururer (1998) argue in a case study about service programming, which analyzed participant behavior and reflections, that service-learning leads to one's ability to comprehend community and diversity. Rhoads and Neururer (1998) further explain that this situation leads to an "awakening or re-awakening of personal values," allowing the participant to transcend the materialistic realm and focus on issues

of morality and ethics (p.108). Moreover, research has also provided evidence that participants experience increased levels of self-confidence, social responsibility, civic mindedness, and personal efficacy, among other traits (Hèbert & Hauf, 2015; Kezar & Rhoads, 2001). These changes are often ascribed to service-learning's ability to challenge participants to reflect on their values and belief systems in ways that they may have never before (Jones & Abes, 2004).

Transformative learning theory explains that these changes may be epochal, or drastic, an immediate call to action fostering sudden student idea reorientation, where a student would exhibit a complete reorientation of perspective. However, participant changes may also be incremental, where participants develop in gradual stages, utilizing small action steps to foster an overall shift in mindset, such as regular reflection with the use of critically reflexive questions (Mezirow, 2000).

While multiple outcomes of service-learning exist, this specific study is focused on exploring participant perspective shifts in terms of civic mindedness and cultural sensitivity, concepts that are described below. These particular outcomes are of interest, not only as they are characteristics of civically minded citizens, but also because they also signify sustained and refined perspective shifts, rather than the short-term immediate outcomes that are more typically studied in service-learning research.

2.3.1.1 Civic Mindedness Civic mindedness relates to one's ability to understand cultural concerns, community issues, and social justice concepts, as well as their impact on communities and individuals (Einfeld & Collins, 2008). Service-learning affords students the opportunity to think about civic mindedness issues as they participate in immersion experiences in underserved communities and are confronted with firsthand accounts of individuals and their social concerns. Typically, these experiences are the first time that students grapple with social

and cultural issues unlike those that they experience in their personal lives, as service-learning is most often “mostly white students at predominantly white institutions serv[ing] mostly poor people of color in urban settings” (Green, 2003, p.277).

This often-present dichotomy has led to the argument that the core value of service-learning programs is not the service itself, but the dialogue surrounding difference (Keen & Hall, 2009; Rhoads, 1998). This experience with difference is eye opening for many participants, as it is often the first time they will reflect on the concepts of whiteness and class privilege (Jones & Abes, 2004), thus shining a fresh light on civic issues, allowing them to explore civic concerns while also navigating their varying personal perspectives. This exploration and reflection often affects mindsets and perceptions related to these concerns, as participants begin to unpack systemic issues surrounding social issues for the first time (Amna, 2012; Flanagan & Levine, 2010). In this sense, the community service-learning experience, coupled with thoughtful reflection, can create a movement in participants to change their thoughts on service and society in a fundamental way (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Institutions of higher learning have missions and strategic plans driven by the previously mentioned societal expectation and thus have a responsibility to produce an engaged and informed work force, as well as active and informed citizens (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Prentice, 2007). Mission statements of “nearly every institution” in higher education feature a reference to the education and development of moral and good citizens (Kezar, 2001, p.18). It is no surprise, therefore, that institutions are creating civic missions, as a plethora of funding opportunities through higher education organizations, disciplinary associations, and governmental organizations exist to support service-learning initiatives (Birge, 2005; McLaughlin, 2010; Rhoads, 1998) as part of the charge for a greater commitment to service-

learning and community service. Institutions that are committed to these civic missions implement regularly scheduled programming for their campus community, which typically takes the form of organized service, community-based research, study abroad opportunities, and partnerships with community-based organizations. Out of the initiatives described, service-learning programs are the option that serves as a practice which highlights education's civic focus, enabling the linkage between society and education to become even more apparent (Einfeld & Collins, 2008).

As students begin to participate in direct service opportunities, they engage in dialogue connecting their immersion experiences with concepts pertaining to educational and social philosophies and theories, thus positioning the institution in a manner that allows it to strengthen the link between democracy, citizenship, and education for student participants (Eyler & Giles, 1999). This argument, therefore, positions service-learning programs as tools to enhance student empathy and interest in communities outside of their own, as well as their connected social issues. Service-learning participants have exemplified this enhanced level of understanding and citizenship through their involvement in community affairs, such as event planning, serving on local governments, or joining social reform movements (Hèbert & Hauf, 2015; Prentice, 2007). In this sense, civic-minded students are equipped with the tools necessary to positively contribute to the betterment of their communities through their ability to generate solutions to social problems and their economic activity (Moore & Mendez, 2014; Toews & Cerney, 2006). This outcome is purportedly crucial for the betterment of society, as a community's ability to develop based on previous successes and the engagement of its citizens creates sustainability (Amna, 2012).

Eyler and Giles (1999) argue that this direct exposure to cultural issues ultimately leads to the creation of “expert citizens,” people who are able to think critically in order to solve social or political problems (p.154). The concept of expert citizen is what is represented in Figure 3, a student who has been engaged and educated and has the ability to reflect on the experience. Simply put, an expert citizen showcases the informed difference, the ability of a student to ask, “What causes poverty in our society?” rather than “Why is everybody in this community poor?” (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002).

This construction of a civic-minded life has been described as moving past knowledge and subjectivities, focusing on “attitude, personal efficacy, acceptance of new ideas, diversity, and opposing opinion” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 156). This real perspective shift allows students to engage with concepts of social justice and grapple with disconcerting social constructs related to the communities and individuals they are serving. The unpacking of issues pushes participants to think beyond the superficial assumptions and prejudices of communities and issues, such as poverty, to examine the systemic issues at hand, making the situation they are witnessing possible in the first place. Moreover, civic-minded behavior has been defined as the utilization of “political talk, thinking, judgment, and imagination to create the capacity to act thoughtfully and prudently on critical public issues” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p.156), positioning mindedness as a method for achieving a more informed mindset. Once armed with this information, students can then engage as active citizens, as they are aware of the extensive social issues, such as poverty, hunger, and homelessness, that they experienced while performing direct service and have thoughtfully explored the causes and concerns surrounding these issues (Bowen, 2011).

This development begins when students first engage in direct service with a community unlike their own. Through these experiences, students complete tasks, such as serving meals at a local soup kitchen or completing minor home repairs for a disabled individual. These projects not only allow students to interact with an individual who is different from them, but also to encounter social issues, such as poverty, hunger, and homelessness, within a real-life context. This exposure then generates student discussion and critical thinking, often resulting in a participant shift from ideals of charity, or merely providing a service to someone, to an ideal of justice, with students working as agents of change in their society to correct social issues, discussing systemic cultural concerns, and challenging troublesome cultural norms (Amna, 2012; Flanagan & Levine, 2010). This shift is the result of facing an issue in-person as opposed to simply reading about social justice in a course text. As relationships are formed between the community members and the students, the interpersonal desire to directly serve the community and its members, as well as to fix the systemic roots of the social problems at hand, sets in.

This sense of duty is one way civic mindedness often manifests itself, a way that has been termed civic responsibility. Civic responsibility has been defined as one's sense of individual responsibility for participating in acts to benefit the larger community or society (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Mayhew & Engberg, 2011). By becoming an informed citizen, participants view themselves as a meaningful, or a crucial member of society, individuals who are "part of the social fabric," and, therefore, must be cognizant of social issues, taking action when necessary and appropriate (Mayhew & Engberg, 2011, p. 20).

This understanding of larger social issues, fostered by participation in service-learning and its reflections, positions service-learning as a method of building a strong national community, fighting against the individualistic mindset that has been critiqued by many. As

individuals actively participate in the work and initiatives of a community, through the thoughtful and constructive method of service-learning, which is framed within an overall purpose for the common good, students are able to participate in a manner that meets local, national, and personal needs (Prentice, 2007).

This enlightenment, or fully formed understanding of what it means to be an active, engaged, and responsible citizen, is the ultimate goal of service-learning programs, and thus, the prized outcome of higher education's civic initiatives for students. In this sense, the ideal goal of a civically-responsible student completes the model, which has been expanded upon from Figure 2. Figure 4 displays how the standards of engaged citizenship inform the civic practices and initiatives of higher education to achieve the paramount goal of fostering a civically responsible citizen. This model, hereon referred to as the Wheel of Civic Responsibility, will serve as a speculative framework for this research, aiding in my collection, interpretation, and representation of data related to the student border-crossing experience with ASBs.

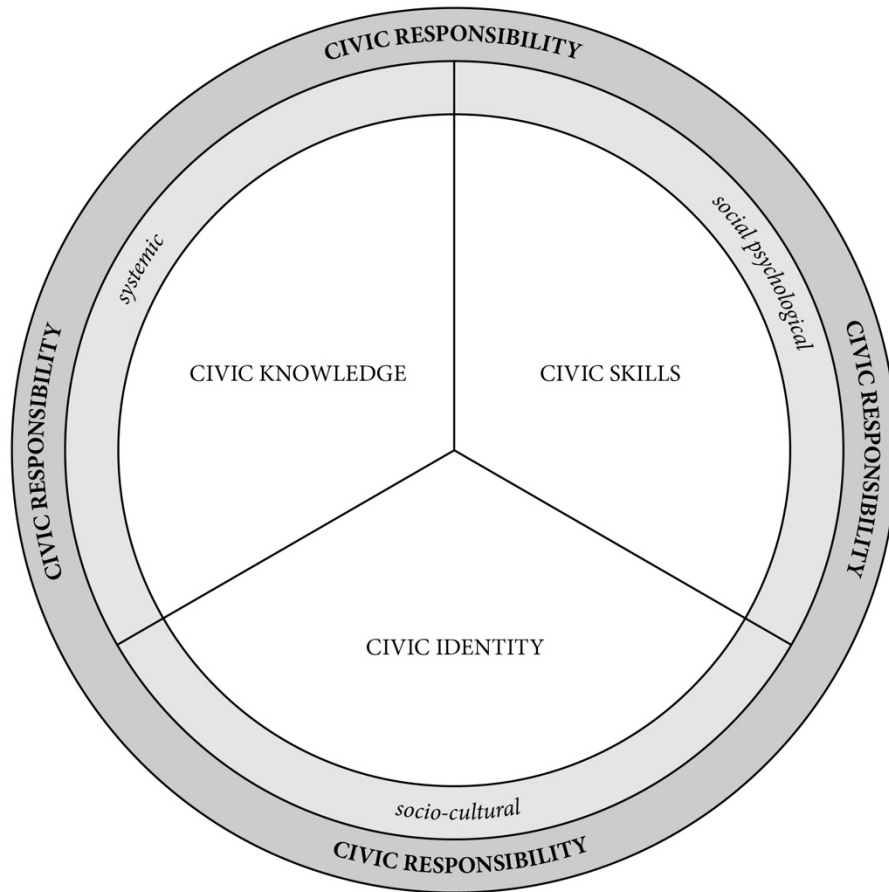


Figure 4. The Wheel of Civic Responsibility

2.3.1.2 Cultural Sensitivity In addition to becoming more civically minded, students who participate in service-learning experiences also tend to exhibit increased levels of cultural sensitivity post-experience. This is explained theoretically by Bennett (1993), who articulates that after difference is experienced and subsequently processed, awareness affects change in an individual's level of intercultural sensitivity. Bennett's (1993) model (see Figure 5) has two stages of development: ethnocentric, which ranges from denial to minimization; and ethnorelative, which ranges from acceptance to integration.

Ethnocentric Stages			Ethnorelative Stages		
Denial	Defense Reversal	Minimization	Acceptance	Adaptation	Integration

Figure 5. Bennett’s (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Service-learning, within this theoretical understanding, fosters participant transformation, as it creates disorienting dilemmas for students, where participants are challenged to question their preexisting assumptions and stereotypes, forcing them into a level of cognizance related to their own values and assumptions (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Eylar & Giles, 1999). Through students’ engagement with metanarratives, they are constantly encountering society’s ambiguities and navigating the complexity of dilemmas created by a society with expansive spectrums surrounding socioeconomics, power, and privilege (Butin, 2005). Service-learning places students in an environment, outside of the classroom, where participants are interacting with individuals that are “economically, socially, ethically, and/or culturally different from themselves.” Here, students begin to interact with the *other*, people that represent social or demographic groups that, up until this point, participants had assumptions about others based on media or political coverage (Westrick, 2004).

Through this experience, students are placed in a situation where they are forced to interact and generate their own opinions related to these individuals and their communities, opinions which often expose previous biases or prejudices (Butin, 2005; Einfeld & Collins, 2008). When these interactions are combined with service-learning’s reflective component, service-learning is capable of providing students with an experience that fosters deep engagement with cultural issues and one’s own meaning-making process surrounding them. Unpacking social and cultural dilemmas through critical reflection creates a new understanding

for participants, as they often lead to restructuring their perspectives and mindsets surrounding diversity, service, and community based on their service-learning experience. Participants reach a level of ethnorelativity as they recognize their culture as one of many, and begin to acknowledge and/or respect other perspectives as valid (Bennett, 1993; Kezar, 2002).

Participants are often aware of this perspective shift, which occurs during or after their service-learning experience (Brown, 2011; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jones & Abes, 2004; Kezar & Rhoads, 2001; Markus et al., 1993; Simons & Cleary 2005). Often students speak candidly about the power of their service experience, noting the personal perspective shift they noticed within themselves due to their experience (Everett, 1998; Jones & Abes, 2004; Keen & Hall, 2009). This shift can take shape in the form of participant enlightenment, resulting in civic action for social reform; however, it often manifests itself in increased awareness and sensitivity (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Toews & Cerney, 2006).

This latter type of transformation is not directly linked to action, but it still affords participants the opportunity to learn about an issue, such as poverty, explore its systemic issues, and then analyze the ways in which society works to remedy or reinforce the situation (Eyler & Giles, 1999). This understanding leads to care for others as humans and the realization of global interdependency, which aids in the development of one's values and ethics. While this type of perspective shift does not necessarily lead to continued engagement in direct service, it is still an important outcome as it fosters participant enlightenment and awareness (Caruso, Bowen, & Adams-Dunford, 2006).

The evaluation of one's society and culture generates the development of critical thinking skills, as well as self-awareness, as participants examine their preconceived notions and cultural systems of power and privilege, challenging their current levels of understanding and awareness.

The process affords participants the opportunity to become more aware of their own culture and the perceptions and prejudices that they hold due to their own upbringing (Milofsky & Flack, 2005). Typically, conversations about difference, namely ethnicity and gender, are not common within the undergraduate classroom (Davis, 2009), as institutions are still struggling to welcome and celebrate diversity on campus. This struggle is related to the concept of diversity's level of complicity, having to balance individual perspectives while navigating subtle and unsubtle forms of biases and prejudice.

This challenge often leads to difficulty for faculty in terms of deciding how to best approach the complicated, confusing, or uncomfortable topic of diversity or difference inside the classroom, if at all (Davis, 1999). Service-learning experiences facilitate dialogue, engaging students in work that often forces participants to grapple with these loaded concepts, as they are confronted with real-life scenarios concerning social justice issues stemming from interactions with community members from unfamiliar communities over the course of the project. By challenging students to engage in these conversations through the humanization of social justice issues, as students engage individuals suffering from issues such as poverty, service-learning projects not only allow students to analyze the cultural dynamics of communities outside of their own, but also challenge them to critically analyze themselves and their culture. This dual method of analysis encourages an examination of the concept of community as a whole (Rhoads & Neururer, 1998), fostering critical thinking skills and the development of a level of self-awareness among participants (Toews & Cerney, 2006; Youniss, McLellan, & Mazer, 2001).

These transformative outcomes are not limited to a specific subset of student participants. Boyle-Baise and Binford (2005) argue that regardless of participant demographics, including race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, students are able to experience shifts in their

perceptions of social justice concerns due to their participation in a service-learning experience. This transformational shift occurs as the student's service-learning experience functions as their new frame of reference pertaining to topics related to cultural and social issues, regardless of their background, thus aiding participants in the process of solidifying their own values and political ideologies (Eyler & Giles, 1999). As students begin to grow and develop their newly informed perspectives, they achieve a focus and purpose; they define their values and personal code of ethics.

By building their own identity, students are then driven to civic engagement via the joining of community or political groups, which align with their personal beliefs (Crocetti, Jahromi, & Meeus, 2012; Gallant, Smale, & Arai, 2010; Youniss, McLellan, & Mazer, 2001). This trajectory also affords participants with personal and psychological benefits, as participants achieve a level of personal awareness through this process, which simultaneously grants them a purpose and place within society (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

2.4 LIMITS OF SERVICE LEARNING

While service-learning generates positive outcomes, there are some potential downfalls, or limits, as well. These limits pertain to service-learning as a pedagogy, the structure of initiatives, and the individual participants themselves. These limits must be addressed in order to not only holistically understand the concept of service-learning, but to also acknowledge the complexity of the experience's effects as they relate to individual programs, initiatives, and participants. This understanding and acknowledgement will ultimately aid in a better comprehension of the individual participant narratives, as well as the overall interpretations of this study.

2.4.1 Pedagogical

As a pedagogy, it has been argued that there is no singular, or best practice, for implementing service-learning initiatives, as the act of defining requires the consideration of the needs of both an institution and a community agency partner, which will change from partnership to partnership. Rather, it has been argued that service-learning involves “intersubjective deliberations made for particular local perspectives with particular local goals” (Butin, 2005, p. 97). Service-learning is a pedagogy entangled in unique complexities surrounding partners, participants, and the meaning they are making from their experiences and the world in which they are operating. However, while there is no designated “best” way to implement service-learning, there have been critiques of the process found in the literature (Hollis, 2004).

As an indicative process-based pedagogy, faculty often view service-learning as a less rigorous approach to education, and are thus wary of implementation in course curriculum (Morton, 1996). There is a fear of implementation as it could be viewed as “diluting the discipline” by those who do not see its value (Morton, 1996, p. 229). Moreover, if a faculty member decides to forge ahead and implement a service-learning initiative into their course work, there is an added pressure of selecting an appropriate community partner, requiring enough service hours for students, while also balancing other course requirements, all the while determining how to properly evaluate students for their efforts. These concerns, combined with the amount of resources required to properly implement a service-learning component—such as time, money, and human power—often leaves this engaging pedagogy’s potential unrealized for faculty members already overwhelmed by their duties.

2.4.2 Structural

In critiquing service-learning Sementelli (2004) explains that the dichotomy of service and learning inherent in this model creates tension between those providing and those receiving aid. In this model, students are charged to serve, positioning them as socially and economically superior to those receiving the aid, generating a savior dynamic or a blaming tendency (Hollis, 2004; Morton, 1995; Sementelli, 2004). Typically, recipients of service are society's disadvantaged, while those most often completing service, in this context especially, are young people with more advantages than the community members they are serving (Nieto, 2000). Therefore, when implementing service-learning into a course or programming structure, often it serves as a supplemental component, rather than as a tool to engage students in critical thinking surrounding their civic and cultural awareness (Sementelli, 2004).

In this sense, students are thrust into this environment without direction or meaningful discussion, which often fosters a detrimental giver-receiver relationship, as the focus is on the treatment rather than on addressing systemic issues of social injustice. This lack of perspective leads students to interpret their service-learning experience as charity, or basic volunteering where they merely provide a service or assistance, rather than the engaged learning experience service-learning was designed to be, which should foster dialogue surrounding societal constructs and concerns (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002; Endres & Gould, 2009). This negative mindset can foster damaging behavior to both the participants as well as the community if thoughtful reflection and dialogue are not implemented (Jones, 2002); this occurs due to previous assumptions and privileges being uncovered, leaving students feeling exposed and subsequently resistant as they do not feel prepared to tackle the social issues at hand. This sense of anxiety results in emotional disengagement from the experience, ultimately limiting its transformative

ability (Jones, Gilbride-Brown, & Gasiorski, 2005), and thus prohibiting civic engagement from occurring.

2.4.3 Participants

The final category of service-learning critiques pertains to the individuals involved in the service project. The pedagogy of service-learning, along with its theoretical framework, assumes that participants share common values, goals, and experiences, which may not be the case. One could even argue whether or not human beings are even capable of operating in such a manner. It has been argued that service-learning is grounded in assumptions about the human race that in theory, are attractive, but in reality, are “pragmatically unattainable” (Murphy, 2004, p.123). This is problematic in the sense that educators are constructing curriculums around a student and cultural mindset, which may not exist, thus allowing little to no learning to occur. In other words, service-learning requires a level of mutuality, an openness to new cultures, and a willingness to not only give to a community, but to learn and take things back from a community as well (Rhoads & Neururer, 1998).

This openness is not always attainable for participants. Professionals need to be aware of students’ backgrounds and any possible sensitivities or complex emotions related to differences in cultures and opinions, as they could lead to a breakdown of communication, prohibiting the service-learning project from becoming a reflective and life-changing experience for participants. Therefore, practitioners should not expect that service- learning projects will spur a perspective shift for all participants, but should rather focus on creating an environment where it is possible for all participants to grow and learn from the experience in some way (Bowen, 2011).

If practitioners put pressure on participants or the experience to deliver transformative outcomes, then the project has the potential to become void of all meaning or significance (Butin, 2006b). The act of subjective reframing in transformative learning requires individual critical reflection, which can often leave participants disoriented or anxious as they are challenging longstanding beliefs and habits (Mezirow, 2000). By putting pressure on the student and the project itself, practitioners run the risk of removing the transformative capability from the experience, and therefore should actively work against increasing pressure on students' transformative process.

Student participants will have different experiences based on their own position. For example, participant race, socioeconomic status, gender, and sexuality, among other characteristics, could alter the perspective or meaning one makes and gains from the experience (Butin, 2006b; Green, 2003). Therefore, scholars argue that a blanket generic approach to service-learning is detrimental to participants, as it does not afford students the opportunity to speak to their own personal experiences. Practitioners, therefore, need to encourage students to have difficult conversations about race, gender, etc., as the social issues students are typically engaging with during their service projects need to be discussed and/or dismantled (Green, 2003).

One example of how a failure to encourage debriefing could become detrimental to the experience and the individual participant is victim blame attribution. Blame attribution is when an individual looks for a source of a wrong. This process becomes problematic when an individual begins victim blaming or associating social problems and conditions as "personal troubles and blame is attributed to the characteristics of affected individuals or the cultures in which they live" (Hollis, 2004 p. 578). Without the ability to reflect and evaluate their

experience through thoughtful reflection, students can easily fall into the trap of blaming individuals, cultures, or systems for social issues, simply generalizing a situation rather than taking the time to review the issue and examine systemic issues and foundational issues related to the concept (Hollis, 2004). This thought process can lead to negative feelings, harsh judgment, and even hate and aggression. Hollis (2004) provides a matrix of blame attribution, which analyzes blame attribution from the individual, cultural, and systemic perspectives.

If practitioners fail to provide students with allotted time for debriefing, they may potentially foster a system of classism or racism, rather than challenging it and forcing their students to take a critical or analytical approach to this unique learning experience (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002; Endres & Gould, 2009). This dynamic creates a culture of voyeurism surrounding the service experience, where students are merely visiting an outside community, or culture, and simply experiencing otherness, rather than truly assessing issues at hand (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002). This sense of voyeurism generates exoticism of other and positions individuals, such as the homeless, as exhibits to see, rather than as individuals to know, understand, and serve (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002).

Practitioners and faculty implementing service-learning components into their classes or programming should be mindful of student backgrounds and demographics, as well as of different participant perspectives, acknowledging that the service experience will not be the same for every student (Endres & Gould, 2009; Green, 2003). Without doing so, practitioners are ignoring crucial elements of social issues, such as race and class, which intersect to inform the ways in which communities behave and interact within the greater society. By failing to tailor service-learning programming to specific groups, higher education practitioners may fail to provide students with truly meaningful and relevant service-learning experiences.

There is also literature that speaks to the negative post-experience effects on participants. It is not uncommon for service participants to experience readjustment issues post-experience, as they find it difficult to articulate their experience to others, leaving them feeling disconnected from fellow students (Ivory, 1997). As these experiences are typically the first time that students are able to truly immerse themselves in a culture or community outside of their own, many participants explain that the immensity of the experience left them with questions or concerns about cultural and political issues that they cannot quite articulate (Ivory, 1997). This inability to communicate their feelings or experiences post-service often leaves participants feeling distant or isolated.

2.5 ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAKS AS SERVICE-LEARNING

This chapter has discussed this study's epistemological stance, as well as the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of service-learning, addressing desired outcomes along with critiques. This final section now looks at the particular mode of service-learning that this study's sample has engaged in, the Alternative Spring Break (ASB). While ASBs encompass the intricacies and challenges previously described in this chapter, they also offer a unique programmatic format to engage students in civic engagement initiatives.

BreakAway, a national nonprofit organization that provides support, such as training and partner matching, to institutions implementing ASBs, define ASBs simply as trips where college students participate in week-long direct service experiences focused on a specific social issue. Through ASB programs "students educate themselves and each other, then do hands-on work with relevant organizations" (Breakaway, n.d.). This education is developed from ASBs'

required training related to service projects, as well as the nightly reflections that occur on each day of the trip. Due to these requirements, ASB projects serve as an immersive form of service-learning, involving students in regular reflection and service for an entire week as they work and live among the community members in which they are serving. In this sense, ASBs serve as an excellent case study of service-learning for this research, as they not only require a substantial commitment from the student participants, but they also include a substantial number of hours both on-site and in reflection.

ASBs draw on traditional service-learning frameworks and methods, adhering to the service-learning tradition of linking learning and service to community well-being. They provide students with the opportunity to immerse themselves culturally in underserved communities as they address social issues via direct exposure to social problems (Bowen, 2011; Ivory, 1997). Bowen (2011) defines the archetypal format of an alternative spring break in an article discussing such programs, stating that typically, service-learning projects take place in underserved communities so that student participants are able to immerse themselves culturally as they address social issues. By introducing students to difficult social justice issues, as well as to individuals who are less fortunate than themselves, whom they would never have interacted with otherwise, practitioners create an environment that affords ASB participants opportunities to broaden their view of where learning can take place (DuPre, 2010).

Most studies of ASBs are evaluative studies of campus-based programs and do not measure participant perspective shifts post-experience (Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Ireland, Niehaus, & Skendall, 2012). Exceptions include Gumpert and Kraybill-Greggo's (2005) assessment of growth following ASB participation using a 37-item survey and descriptive statistics. Findings indicate that participants experienced attitude shifts, although the use of a closed item

survey limited the study's findings. In addition, Jones and Hill's (2003) study of student perceptions of their participation in community service featured ASB student participant interviews. Respondents mentioned enjoying these eye-opening experiences, and an increased desire to serve; however, a discussion of whether said desire was retained long-term was not available through Jones and Hill's (2003) study. Moreover, my previous research has shown that students are drawn to alternative spring break trips for a variety of reasons, from civic goals or religious desires to the choice to travel affordably over break with friends (Mann & DeAngelo, 2016).

3.0 RESEARCH GENRE AND PROCEDURES

This study examines participant perspectives related to a popular co-curricular service-learning initiative for colleges nationwide: the alternative spring break. Participants who were involved in ASB trips were ideal subjects, as ASB trips are often one of the most formalized and intensive service options in terms of structure and duration (Jones & Hill, 2003); therefore, providing a sense of commonality to the sample. While alternative spring break programs range in site partners, group size, social concern focus, and length from institution to institution, there is a standard structural format that exists from program to program. Staples of the structure include immersion in the community (i.e., having students temporarily live where they serve), mandatory daily reflection, and direct service experiences (BreakAway, n.d.). Therefore, by utilizing a sample of ASB participants, this study not only ensures that respondents participated in an intensive service experience, but it also ensures a baseline, or foundation, of expectation for the participant experience, as the ASB structure provides a sense of commonality from trip to trip that one-time service projects would not afford. In addition, my professional background in ASBs afforded me the opportunity to add to the overall narrative of service as well.

3.1 FRAMEWORK REVIST

As explained in Chapter Two, this study was informed by previous research and literature in order to develop a rich understanding of the student meaning making experience related to service-learning. A constructivist/interpretivist epistemological stance, discussed in Section 2.1, guided this study's process. The educational philosophy of John Dewey, which is inclusive of the notions of experience, citizenship, and education, and informed service-learning's practices, also informs the understanding of service-learning in this research. This study utilizes the Deweyan understanding of service-learning as a multi-dimensional student experience capable of encouraging the critical development of students to construct the framework for this research.

Border-crossing theory complements the Deweyan framework in this study, framing participant perspective shifts in terms of cultivating awareness of social issues, systems of power, and diversity. Moreover, the Wheel of Civic Responsibility (Figure 4) aided in my interpretation of the data by providing an understanding of how higher education's service-learning initiatives, along with service-learning's foundational goals, manifest in participant border-crossing experiences.

In order to accomplish this task, this study utilized individual narratives in which ASB participants reflected and unpacked their experience, an important aspect of examining service experiences (Bowen, 2011; Ivory, 1997; Jones, et al., 2012; Rhoads & Neururer, 1998; Rowan-Kenyon & Niehaus, 2011), as they examined the habits and perspectives they have retained from their ASB experience at least one year after their trip, specifically noting shifts in civic mindedness and cultural sensitivity.

3.2 METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a narrative inquiry methodology in order to capture students' reflections upon their experience (Xu & Connelly, 2010). As the goal of this study was to better understand students' perceptions of their involvement with civic engagement and the meanings they ascribe to their ASB experience, narrative inquiry was a suitable methodology, as it functions as "relational inquiry" (Clandinin, 2013, p.22). By gathering the detailed stories of participants, I not only developed a knowledge of their experience, but also a relationship with them as a respondent, thus adding a level of richness to the collected texts (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Creswell, 2012).

Dialoging with the participants, asking them to share the story of their experience as well as the meaning they made from it, allowed me to know more about each respondent as an individual—how they view themselves, and how they viewed their experience. This process illuminated my understanding of the respondents as students, as well as my practice as a student affairs professional. Narrative inquiry thus positioned respondent narratives as a "portal to experience," affording me the opportunity to understand the respondents and their perspectives surrounding their service, as well as the ability to view the experience through their eyes as they reflected and shared (Xu & Connelly, 2010). This relational inquiry also extended to the relationships between myself and the narrative of service-learning and higher education. The dialogue with respondents challenged me to think narratively about my practice, as well as about the field of service-learning and higher education, furthering my relationship with these concepts as well (Clandinin, 2013). Therefore, I found it necessary to provide my own narrative through the form of a scholarly personal narrative (Nash, 2004) in order not only to explore my personal concerns and interests surrounding service-learning, but also to share my own process of

meaning-making in regard to ASBs (Nash, 2012). This process allowed me to fully embrace my constructivist epistemology, positioning my leading and learning experience and personal narrative as fundamental in the creation of knowledge fostered by this study, thus allowing the respondent narratives and my personal narrative to help develop my personal and professional understanding of service-learning and ASBs (Nash, 2008).

3.3 RESEARCH FOCUS

Narrative inquiry has been described as a methodology that challenges traditional understandings of truth, reality, knowledge, and ways of knowing (Eaves & Walton, 2013). In order to do so, narrative inquiry utilizes shared stories and their perceived meanings to construct a shared narrative and knowledge (Bruner, 1990).

As explained in Chapter 1, this study was concerned with students' stories of the relationship between their participation in an alternative spring break program and their levels of civic engagement, namely their notions of civic mindedness and cultural sensitivity. Milner (2007) argues that critical analysis and reflection of self, others, and society provide the opportunity to assess how people make meaning of their world and those they are surrounded by, as well as of the actions they take. In this sense, through one-on-one interviews with respondents who reflected on their ASB experience and the utilization of border-crossing theory in conjunction with the Wheel of Civic Responsibility, I learned about participants' meaning-making processes surrounding their ASB service-learning experience, and subsequently, the perspective shifts related to civic mindedness and cultural sensitivity that they experienced as a result.

3.4 PARTICIPANTS

Similar to Woodson and Pabon's (2016) narrative study on black male educators, this narrative inquiry explored the life experience of participants through their voice, as the service-learning experience is often generalized for participants, leaving contradictory or challenging narratives unheard. A total of five respondent narratives were used for this research study. A small sample was ideal in order to afford me the opportunity to provide a detailed narrative for each individual respondent.

While a small sample size was ideal, originally eight respondents were recruited and interviewed. Three of the collected narratives are not represented in the dissertation, as the narratives from these respondents lacked a level of depth and meaning to contribute additional themes for this particular study. One respondent would not provide a description of the meaning made from the experience, offering only vague or disconnected recollections of the week-long experiences. Regardless of probing questions, this respondent was only able to provide brief details of the trip specifics, eliminating all personal meaning-making process descriptions out of the discussion. It was unclear whether no significant meaning was made, or whether the meaning made from the experience was simply too personal for this individual to share with me. An interview with a second respondent appeared disingenuous—as if the respondent was providing the researcher with responses that were expected or desired. The retelling of the ASB trip from this participant featured overly positive feedback, with no mention of struggles, concerns, or growth, simply a tale of a “fun college experience.” While this respondent has always been a relatively upbeat and positive person, the intensity of the description of the meaning made and perceived impact of participation seemed staged, and more importantly, did not align with past discussions I had had with this respondent regarding the trips. I was unsure

of whether this was an issue of nerves surrounding participation in the study, or an assumption of responses I wanted, or needed, from participants. The final narrative not included was one in which the participant only had a vague recollection of their ASB experiences. While only two years post-trip, this respondent could not provide specific details of participation, nor could participate in deep reflection, as memories of the trip and subsequent feelings surrounding the experience were vague, as if the individual had not purposefully engaged during the ASB program. In this sense, while these three narratives speak to a reality of service-learning that not everyone has a positive or impactful experience, and added to the overall study's analysis, they were not thorough narratives capable of adding to the collection of narrative representations, and were subsequently removed. They do serve as an educational moment for myself as a researcher and a professional, as they showcase the fact that not all respondents, or student participants in ASBs, are capable of deep reflection—whether due to personal issues and concerns, or simply a lack of perceived significance as it pertains to the experience. These individuals still serve as examples of the spectrum of ways that the relational component of ASBs and narrative inquiry work, as well as the potential outcomes of participation in service-learning, and are therefore just as relevant to my overall understanding as the five included narratives.

Respondents are graduates of a small liberal-arts university and participated in an alternative spring break at least two times during their undergraduate experience. This level of intensity was required for respondents as research suggests that the longer the duration of service, and thus the more regular the contact with community members and the service site, the greater the meaning of the relationships and ultimately of the experience for participants (Einfeld & Collins, 2008). In addition, by selecting individuals who participated in an ASB more than once, I was able to determine that the individual motivation for participation was beyond

institutional service requirements, as one trip would have satisfied the required threshold of service hours for a participant with that sole desire. Therefore, by selecting repeat ASB participants, I had the opportunity to examine the experience of individuals who had not only an intensive service experience, but also had a better chance at experiencing a perspective shift.

In addition, I selected individuals who participated in alternative break trips during the 2011-2015 academic years, as they are the years in which I supervised the program. By implementing this criterion, I had a familiarity with the trip itinerary and the service partner that the respondents referenced. This familiarity allowed me to delve more deeply into respondents' personal experiences and meaning-making processes, focusing less attention on trip specifics, as I was already aware of the specific trip details, such as trip location, program learning objectives, participant duties, and agency partner program structure and goals. Moreover, having led the excursions and subsequent guided reflections, I had an understanding of student expectations pre-trip, student concerns and reflections during the experience, and immediate student reflections from post-trip focus groups. This intimate level of understanding contributed to a positive rapport with respondents. This pre-existing rapport also aided in my ability as a researcher to not only know my subjects, but to also co-construct meaning with them.

The study utilized the epistemological notion of Lorraine Code (1995), where I, the researcher, not only learned about the respondents, but also sought to understand their experience and concerns, thus fostering a stronger relational dynamic as we both added to the knowledge construction process. This dynamic allowed me and the participants to offer mutual construction and critique in order to generate a larger understanding for the final narrative and overall study (Gunzenhauser, 2006).

I interviewed individuals who were at least one year out from their experience so that adequate time had passed for personal reflection and possible changes in perspective. The immediate positivity and superficial feedback collected through my previous research studies (see Mann & DeAngelo, 2016) was thus able to be more deeply assessed, allowing time for the romance to wear off the experience and a more genuine, or critical, reflection to take place. With institutional missions surrounding lifelong civic engagement of students, and therefore graduates, an understanding of the sustainable effects on participants is necessary to determine whether the goals of these institutional initiatives are being met and the ideal responsible citizen is being generated.

3.5 INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval with a category exemption for the study prior to data collection. Regardless of the study's exempt status, all participants were read an introductory consent agreement prior to the beginning of their interview, and given a copy to take home, as the researcher's and IRB contact information were included in the take-home document. By proceeding with the interview, participants acknowledged their voluntary participation in the study (see Appendix B for Introductory Consent Script).

3.6 FIELD TEXT COLLECTION

Participants joined me in one-on-one conversations based on their ASB service-learning experience. I used open-ended semi-structured questions (see Appendix C) to encourage participants to reconstruct and retell the story of their ASB experience, as well as to explore their process of meaning-making during and after the ASB experience. These conversations allowed the stories of the experiences to be created and heard (Clandinin, 2013). The process relied on the retelling of illuminating epiphanies from participants, as they reflected on their service experience to share the meaning of the process, as well as of the insights and transformation it encouraged and provided (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). I also utilized probing questions to encourage participants to further share and understand their experience as they interpreted it at least one year after the initial trip (Faraday & Plummer, 1979). An example of this occurred in Tommy's interview, as he was explaining his current understanding of diversity. Tommy stated, "We need diversity. You have to have it in order for like people to grow and be better." I challenged Tommy to expand on this idea by asking, "How does diversity create growth? How does it make people better?" Tommy then clarified his statement, providing descriptions of personal experiences with diversity, explaining that he has "learned so much about life and how people live" by pushing himself to make friends and engage with people who are different from him. Particularly, Tommy recounted stories of a friendship with a girl from India who has shared stories of her childhood and culture with him, which has encouraged him to learn more about India, and has inspired him to "want to see [India]." By encouraging Tommy to share additional details through the use of probing questions, I was able to gain a better understanding of how Tommy viewed diversity as connected to his personal growth.

Conversations were audio recorded and transcribed in order to keep an accurate record of respondent feedback. I paid attention not only to the respondents' actual words during the conversations, but also to their non-verbal communication, as well as their verbal patterns and tendencies in order to collect a rich data set from each respondent (Clandinin, 2007), making note of moments of silence as well. In addition, the Wheel of Civic Responsibility (Figure 4) helped to guide data collection as these themes and conceptual areas were present in the dialogue with respondents, thus informing both the collection and the eventual analysis of data.

Interviews occurred over a five-week period between June and July of 2016. They took place in cafés across Allegheny and Butler counties, based on participant location and convenience. The interviews ranged from 55 to 120 minutes in length and consisted of respondents' retelling of stories related to their experiences on ASBs, as well as unpacking the meaning they made from said experiences.

These stories then became the "data" for the inquiry, referred to as a field text (Clandinin, 2013), as the researcher co-composed a cohesive story of the participant's experience based off of the conversation. Attention was paid to capturing the exact words of participants wherever possible, mimicking Woodson and Pabon's (2016) study in order to provide readers with the opportunity to hear the participants' stories in their own terms. To check for accuracy, I reviewed all transcriptions prior to sharing them with the respondents, making necessary corrections to the initial transcripts. These interim research texts were then shared with participants to complete member checking (Cresswell & Miller, 2000); allowing space for dialogue yet again between the researcher and the respondent to ensure that the portrayals are adequately recorded and the interpretations are accurate.

In sharing the interim texts with Susie, she was particularly nervous about her perceived decreased comprehension and utilization of the English language, apologizing for her behavior, stating “I guess I need to keep practicing my English more often to improve it, I do have too many mistakes.” After reassuring her she had nothing to apologize for, Susie thanked me for the opportunity to participate in the study and share her story of service from an international perspective. She felt that she was adequately represented, even if she was slightly embarrassed about her grasp of the English language. While Susie did not have any requested changes to the text, the follow-up conversation with her helped me to yet again gain her perspective on her participation in the study, as well as better understand any apprehension she may have had during the initial interview.

3.7 DATA REPRESENTATION

Utilizing Josselson’s (2011b) method of narrative analysis, the stories were assessed separately in order to understand the foundational border shifts of each individual experience. Each individual transcript was read and coded to highlight threads of narrative related to the guiding research questions. Dedoose was used as a software tool to assist in coding. Coding was based on experiential themes, as well as on the themes from the Civic Responsibility Model. In addition, individual interviews were also read for stand-out, or unique moments, to ensure that each individual’s personality and true experience shined through in their narrative. After this initial coding was conducted, I utilized a memo-writing approach to construct an initial narrative for each individual respondent. This draft highlighted themes within the respondents’ stories, while also allowing me to begin to unpack overarching themes across the narratives.

After each interview was analyzed individually, the individual data was combined. By combining the field texts from all respondents, I looked for areas of overlap between stories, assessing commonalities to determine threads of experience between the stories while also taking note of the unique instances to highlight moments while still maintaining the individual voices in the research text. This process was crucial, as it “makes visible the multiplicity of our lives, as well as the narrative coherence and lack of narrative coherence, of our lives, the lives of participants, and the lives we co-compose in the midst of our narrative inquiries” (Clandinin, 2013, p.49).

After determining the shared and individual themes of the data, I crafted a larger narrative of service-learning, specifically of alternative spring breaks, which framed the individual narratives I crafted, highlighting the respondents’ transformative shifts. In this sense, this narrative analysis process resulted in a larger story of narrative, produced by individual respondent data, including the surrounding personal events and happenings (Polkinghorne, 1995), resulting in the creation of an underlying narrative that each individual respondent would not have been able to generate on his or her own (Richards, 2011).

This process allowed me to interpret the larger meaning-making takeaway for researchers and practitioners alike. In this sense, this final narrative is a co-produced work from myself and the respondents (Josselson, 2011a). Through the process of text construction, I was able to understand the participant experience, and therefore, its implications for readers (Josselson, 2006), thus providing a narrative of civic engagement and service-learning through the perspectives of my respondents, as well as of myself as a practitioner and scholar.

3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

In order to demonstrate that the main interpretations of this study are sound, rooted in a confirmable and credible study, the following section describes the efforts taken by the researcher to ensure the study's trustworthiness. Member checks occurred after the initial field texts were created. I asked the respondents to review their transcripts and provide feedback on any concerns they had in regard to missing details, as well as any further commentary that they might want to share after reflecting upon the first interview. This process ensured that the participants felt they had shared all necessary details related to their ASB experiences.

After the initial individual respondent coding process, I asked participants to provide additional feedback via a follow-up phone interview. The goal of this interview was to ask participants about the accuracy of my initial interpretation of their stories, while also encouraging them to share anything that they may have forgotten to share during the initial interview (see Appendix E for Follow-Up Interview Question Route). However, of the five participants, only three participants provided clarifying information related to their individual narrative. The remaining two respondents felt their representation was adequate.

After these follow-up interviews, I again reviewed each individual transcript, ensuring that the respondents' newly shared interpretations and additions were captured in the updated narrative, appropriately portraying their experiences with the ASB program. By refining the data through both researcher-created analysis structures and consistent member checks, this study was able to confirmed dependability and credibility with all stakeholders.

3.9 CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is critical to studies, and this dissertation was no exception. In order to maintain the safety of individuals, who shared not only their thoughts related to their experience, but also their thoughts related to controversial issues such as diversity and social issues, as well as personal outcomes and medical issues, pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of participants. Each participant was given his or her own pseudonym, assigned at random. In addition, the names of other individuals mentioned in the interviews and specific references to community agency partners or their sponsoring institution were excluded. All data that includes the actual names of participants was and will continue to be maintained in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet and password protected computer drives, including email communications with respondents and transcript data.

3.10 METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study leads to limitations for the research. As the study sample was limited to graduates from one institution during a specific five-year span of time, the interpretations are not generalizable to all participants of the ASB program at this given institution, nor are they representative of the experience of participants of alternative spring break programs at other institutions of higher learning.

The limitations of the sample specifically relate to the elimination of participants who participated in only one alternative spring break trip, or those who participated under a different coordinator, thus eliminating different program structures and focus areas, which could

ultimately have affected the participants' experience. This limitation is important, as interpretations and discussion do not relate to all participants of the institution's ASB program, thus only representing a small sub-population of ASB participants.

Given the nature of narrative inquiry, the interpretation of the data from both the participants, at least one year removed from their service experience, and myself, interpreting the experience second-hand, is open for alternative interpretation. This is due to the fact that not only the respondents' interpretation, but also my own interpretation, are rooted in the specific moment in time in which we are currently (Creswell, 2003). In this sense, if respondents were to share the meaning of their experience in the ASB program at a different point in time, it could change, as could my interpretation of their narrative.

4.0 NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS

This chapter is broken up into sections providing a narrative account for each individual respondent. These narrative accounts allow for each individual narrative to exist on its own, while simultaneously pulling forward narrative themes pertaining to alternative spring break programs and participant experiences. These themes are then discussed and analyzed in the following chapter. They are delivered in order of researcher familiarity with the respondent, as respondent Lillian had no prior relationship with the researcher and respondent Angelica has known the researcher for years in both a professional and educational context. This ordering allows the readers to see how the narratives develop as the researcher's rapport with the respondent grows deeper.

The chapter begins with my own scholarly personal narrative to explore the overlap between the respondents' meaning-making experiences and my own (Nash & Bradley, 2011), thus affording me the opportunity to reflect on my work in service-learning while also assessing my role within the research process. This process allowed me to investigate the ASB experience holistically, while examining my inner thoughts and beliefs to ultimately draw insights and implications for the field and readers (Nash & Bradley, 2011).

4.1 NARRATIVE OF THE RESEARCHER

My professional career and personal journey with service-learning began more than seven years ago. I have spent my time in higher education implementing both academic and co-curricular service-learning programs for undergraduate students at institutions across Pittsburgh. However, it was not until I changed jobs in 2011 that I began crafting short-term immersion service-learning, or alternative spring break trips for students. I found this programming challenging yet exciting. Working with limited funding options, it was always a process to find an agency partner for service that was affordable, while still providing a meaningful cultural engagement experience for participants. During my time in this position, I managed to create a diverse network of agency partners, mostly located in Appalachia, although the program did travel as far as New Orleans, Louisiana for an ASB trip.

As explained in the literature, service-learning experiences have the ability to focus on social justice issues. However, in regard to my particular program, I chose to focus on food and housing insecurity: primary issues related to lower-income communities. My rationale for focusing on these concerns was twofold. The first was accessibility. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of community agency partners in the region; however, the largest and most equipped for housing and organizing service projects for a dozen students are typically tied to hunger and homelessness. In this sense, the most readily available and affordable partners with ample opportunities for direct service and resource options were focused on issues related to social class dynamics in our society.

The other primary reason why these trips focused on hunger and homelessness was participant population understanding. At this institution, service-learning was an initiative housed within the Division of Student Affairs rather than an academic initiative implemented

into various departmental curricula. Therefore, there were no course or departmental curricula to rely on when developing a program's learning outcomes. I had to meet the students where they were in terms of their understanding of social issues. While some students were knowledgeable in a variety of social concerns, such as environmental issues, women's issues, and international or global issues, the majority of students were either unaware or only superficially aware of their existence, much less the intricacies of their social implications. In this sense, I had to select a program focus that was approachable for all students, that would still allow them to learn and grow, challenging their preconceived beliefs and understandings. Hunger and homelessness appeared to be the logical choice, as the majority of students had at least a general understanding of what it means to be homeless, or impoverished, and therefore could navigate the initial reflections and discussions pre-trip, so that I could ensure that they were best situated and prepared to participate in the program. The students who entered the program with prior service experience were not disadvantaged by this choice; rather, this challenged them to help inform their peers, as well as to personally push past their initial understanding to acquire deeper knowledge surrounding hunger, homelessness, and impoverished communities.

It was not until conducting this study and listening to respondent tales of border-crossing that I realized how significant this focus was for participants. As a practitioner, I had just been concerned with creating an approachable and meaningful program with a familiar focus for a variety of students in a community outside of the one our institution resided in, mostly so that they could experience difference. I had not considered the deep personal outcomes participation could have for students. As the following narratives show, this experience proved worthwhile for individuals from all levels of understanding, as respondents noted moments of reaffirmation

of their beliefs, as well as challenges to their understanding and values, both ultimately leading to significant meaning-making experiences and personal growth.

While my work and research had me entirely focused on service-learning, soaking up all the literature I could to improve upon my scholarship and practice, as I began to craft this study, I also became aware of all that I did not know. As explained in Chapter One, the research that exists on service-learning provides insight into the general outcomes of service, the generalizable ways in which participants navigate their experiences with community members outside of their own. However, I was interested in more. I wanted a deeper understanding of the findings: why were an increasing number of college students participating in service? Did they buy into the field's beliefs that it made them better students and, ultimately, better citizens? Was there anything besides positive outcomes? This study allowed me to delve into these questions, although I admit it was not easy to do.

Part of the fun surrounding alternative spring breaks is the travel with students, affording them the opportunity to travel, meet new people, and often learn a new skill that they might have never tried before, such as laying a roof or building a decks. I rarely had negative experiences on the trips with students and, when I did, they were typically surrounding issues of homesickness or personality conflicts among group members, and they quickly subsided after two or three days.

Through dialoguing with these respondents, I was confronted with the grittiness of alternative spring breaks and service-learning. I learned that sometimes the act of border-crossing can open old wounds within participants that they might not even know they had. In addition, the act of working for a "common good" can have serious ramifications on an individual level, such as Angelica's story of contracting a serious and potentially deadly disease

from direct contact with an individual of lower socioeconomic status. Moreover, the participants who seemed to have learned or grown from the experience in immediate post-trip reflection can easily transition to a negative perspective or an utter lack of meaning after a greater amount of time has passed, as showcased by the dropped interviews.

These instances challenged my personal level of comfort and familiarity with service-learning, allowing me to see its underbelly and challenging me to come to grips with the fact that not every individual student will note profound meaning from their experience; it is actually quite possible that two students who attend the same trip will have drastically different experiences while on the trip, as well as reflections on its meaning post trip. Moreover, some students may experience negative effects after having participated, regardless of the amount of time and effort I personally put into planning a safe and meaningful project. In this sense, regardless of a uniform model or prescribed learning outcomes, the individual experience varies from participant to participant, as exemplified by the following student narratives.

If I am being honest, it took some time to digest these thoughts. Not only because the research has projected a positive view of service-learning for practitioners, but also because of the discrepancy between respondents. It was hard to make sense of it all. However, as shared in the following sections and chapters, there is still substantial meaning to be taken away from all interpretations, and thus, all of the data is meaningful, regardless of whether it aligns with previous research or expected outcomes. In this sense, the following narratives allowed me to add to the literature, uncovering some long-term effects of participation, namely a better understanding of the significance that the relational component of the service-learning experience has on participants and their journey towards engaged and responsible citizenship.

While each student entered the program with their own unique level of civic mindedness, the narratives highlight the ways in which each individual respondent was able to process their participation in the ASB program in order to challenge their underlying assumptions and biases in order to grow as an individual and an engaged citizen of the world. These interpretations are helpful in not only my personal assessment of my previous programs, but also in thinking about how to better organize and implement future service-learning initiatives.

4.2 NARRATIVE OF LILLIAN

Out of all the respondents, Lillian was the individual with whom I considered myself the least familiar. Although she had participated in two ASB trips, just as the other respondents, I felt that I did not know as much about her background or her undergraduate experience. Because of this level of familiarity I felt I was lacking with this particular respondent, and I was nervous to interview Lillian. I was worried that she would not be as inclined to open up about her experience and share her stories with me, as she might not have felt as close with me as the other respondents had. In this sense, I was expecting a somewhat colder interview in comparison to the other discussions I had had with respondents.

Lillian began by describing herself as a “scrambled” undergraduate student, always busy, as she was “trying to make the most out of the college experience.” Due to this goal, Lillian found herself regularly involved with many things at once, but always with the goal of “having a positive impact,” as “doing something good always makes [her] feel good.” Lillian’s undergraduate pursuit of having a positive impact resulted in her enrollment in a nonprofit leadership certificate, so she could secure a position post-graduation in the non-profit field, as

well as her membership in several student clubs and organizations and participating in numerous service projects.

Out of all of the service projects Lillian was a participant in, she described her experiences on ASBs as being her “best” experiences. Lillian stated that she saw ASBs as offering students an “opportunity to not think about themselves” for a week. She further expanded upon this by explaining that ASBs gave students the opportunity to leave the city for their spring break and “get away from school.” Rather than solely for personal gain, participants take part in the trips to “benefit others, so they can realize that life is not always about what is best for you.” Lillian’s personal motivation for enrolling in ASB trips was to “do something productive with her break,” to “give back” and to carve some time out of her busy schedule that was completely dedicated to service, something very important to Lillian.

Lillian holds dearly two specific stories of her ASB experiences that she likes to share. The first is notable to her, as it was the first time she realized that people serve for different reasons and that her motivation may not align with her peers’ motivations. This experience occurred one workday on an ASB trip that took place in a southern community. The team of student participants had to be split in half due to agency partner capacity restrictions and needs, with one group of participants scheduled to help at an animal rescue facility, while the other group was scheduled to help at a senior care center.

Lillian was struck by the negative and somewhat aggressive feedback from several students who “did not get to go to the animal center,” as they were frustrated and angry to the point where they were causing conflict amongst the group. Three of the participants went so far as to yell at their trip mates in an attempt to force them to forfeit their spot at the animal rescue facility so that they could switch service assignments. The exchange became heated as

individuals did not want to switch groups, as they were beginning to bond with their trip mates and did not want to be pressured to switch assignments simply because one task was viewed as more desirable than another because it involved animal care. This behavior was troublesome for Lillian because “it was ridiculous that people were upset. We came to help with what we were needed to do, not what we wanted to do. It’s about making a necessary impact, not what’s fun.” Lillian realized how valuable the other half of the group’s service was at the senior center, as the residents were not only in need of their help, but were also appreciative of their time and enjoyed speaking with and getting to know the students. In this sense, Lillian felt as if herself, and her peers that were assigned to the senior center, had the more fulfilling service experience, as they were able to share in the “hands on and relational service” components that their peers at the animal care facility were not able to.

The other memorable ASB interaction was one Lillian had with a senior community member at a community lunch the group had attended during the same ASB trip. This particular lunch was held at a community center and was open to all senior residents of the community. For those that could afford a meal ticket, it was four dollars to buy lunch; however, individuals who were unable to afford a ticket were not turned away—they were able to eat with the rest of the group with their lunch expense being absorbed by the agency. At this meal, Lillian ended up eating next to a man named Calvin who talked about his experience in the community. Calvin had been a long-term resident of the area and had seen the effects of social and economic issues devastate his community, leaving himself and many other senior residents at the luncheon in negative living situations.

Regardless of his seemingly dire living conditions, Calvin was “exceptionally nice” and maintained a “positive outlook.” Calvin’s disposition was not the only thing that took Lillian by

surprise. Calvin wanted to treat Lillian to a soda pop at lunch, a 50 cent added expense to the cost of the meal, as a friendly gesture for sitting and speaking with him. Lillian felt “bad taking his money” and tried to deny the offer numerous times, until Calvin explained to her that it would mean a lot to him to share a treat with her. Lillian thought this exchange “was just so cute, ‘cause here’s this guy who doesn’t have anything, you know, and he just really needed to buy me a pop.” This act of kindness made Lillian reflect on her own levels of generosity and privilege, as well as on her preconceived notions of lower socio-economic individuals. In other words, it shifted Lillian’s understanding of “needy individuals.”

This was not the only way in which Lillian’s experience on an ASB trip shifted her perspective on others. Prior to this experience, Lillian had not had extended conversations or interactions with people from different cultures. Due to this lack of experience with others, Lillian explained she was “surprised” when she quickly made friends with Susie during her first ASB experience. Never having interacted with an individual from outside of the U.S., Lillian assumed she would not have anything in common with Susie. However, after being paired together on certain projects throughout the ASB trip, Susie and Lillian grew to know each other and found that they had a lot in common, as well “a lot they could learn” from one another.

This dynamic pushed Lillian to expand her horizons, pushing past preconceived notions to get to understand other people and other cultures beyond the superficial cultural norms or societal expectations. Lillian maintained a relationship with Susie well past the completion of the ASB trips. Even after graduating, they have both kept in touch, as Lillian came to realize she enjoys Susie’s company, as they not only have a lot in common but she also “learns a lot” from her conversations with Susie, noting differences of opinions, beliefs, and life experiences. Lillian also credits her ASB experience, inclusive of her friendship with Susie, was also the

reason why she ultimately ended up in a long-term relationship with a partner who is from a foreign country. Lillian admitted that if she had not had her cross-cultural experiences through the ASB program, which she credits with altering her perceptions of others, as well as developed a close-relationship with Susie through their shared participation in the ASB trips, she would have “never been open” to the thought of “entering an interracial relationship.”

Lillian’s ASB experience was also a motivator for her career path decisions, as she chose to pursue a position in the nonprofit sector after graduation. Lillian now works with an agency that provides in-home captioning services to individuals suffering from hearing impairments. Lillian is passionate about her work as she is able to serve individuals in need on behalf of a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving community members’ quality of life. In this sense, Lillian feels as if she was able to forge a career path that allows her to serve her community as she had during her undergraduate career. Due to these outcomes, which she attributes to her ASB participation, Lillian highly values her service-learning experiences.

4.3 NARRATIVE OF CHUCKIE

Waiting to meet with Chuckie, I was excited. I expected Chuckie to have rich insights to offer on his service experiences, as he was extremely active in the Office of Student Civic Engagement as an undergraduate. While waiting on Chuckie to come to the café, I reflected on my relationship with him when he was a student. I vividly remember meeting Chuckie his freshman year—he was significantly younger than his classmates, but appeared much more mature. He described his experience growing up in a rural community as part of a large biracial family, recounting stories of his participation in extracurricular activities at his small private

school and through his place of worship. Chuckie was an active community member back home, and he was driven to create the same type of relationship at his new campus community. He was an enthusiastic and passionate young man, always the first to register for service projects, eager to serve his local community and learn more about the people and places around him.

Upon entering the café, Chuckie approached the table quickly, waving from across the restaurant as soon as we made eye contact. He was obviously also excited to catch up, as we had not spoken since he graduated a year prior. Chuckie sat down and quickly began to update me on his current pursuit of acceptance into a physician's assistant graduate program, explaining that his current work as an EMT and phlebotomist only slightly satisfy his desire to "help people for a living," but do not necessarily challenge him in the ways in which he wants, and therefore, he is choosing to pursue a graduate degree in the medical field.

In describing his undergraduate self, Chuckie began retelling stories of his time in a fraternity, serving as a resident assistant, being a member of the honors program, and participating in regular service experiences. As he shared his stories of involvement, mentioning his "high self-expectations," I began to recall the young leader Chuckie grew into during his time as an undergraduate in college. Chucky further described himself as a driven individual who worked hard and was always willing to lend a hand for "anything that needed to be done." He enjoyed "hanging out with friends," but was also consistently looking for ways to challenge himself personally and academically to achieve his goals and grow as a person.

Chuckie recalled his experiences on alternative spring break trips to both New Orleans and North Carolina, explaining that at the time, he saw the purpose of the program as "giving students a constructive way to spend their spring break, seeing all the positive they could do in a week." However, Chuckie's initial personal motivation for signing up for an ASB was not really

to “gain” anything, but rather to “visit cool places” for an affordable price during spring break. Chuckie further explained that he did not expect to gain or grow much from the experience, as he was accustomed to participating in service projects when he was younger “through his church.” However, in participating in a service-learning program, rather than volunteerism projects as he had in the past, Chuckie quickly realized the value of “getting together and reflecting on what we did that day and how we helped...and how it impacted you.”

He was most surprised by “how people viewed [their experience,]” as he began to see how he was engaging in the same service projects with the same community members as his trip mates, but each individual was gaining a different perspective and ultimately experiencing the trip in a different manner. This was interesting to Chuckie, as he “knew what it was to see people struggle with some things,” as well as to have personally struggled through both his previous volunteer experiences and home community experience. Chuckie explained that the reflective component for ASBs allowed him to unpack “what [he] was doing and why [he] was doing it.” Chuckie was used to serving his local community, and therefore, he “didn’t feel any different about himself” having participated in the ASB program, as he had “done this kind of thing since [he] was in high school.” Reflecting on his ASB experience with his fellow participants, Chuckie felt he was able to strengthen his passion and ground himself in his ethical and moral roots, as he was able to remind himself of “why he serves.” Chuckie further explained, stating, “I wouldn’t say I had any like ultra transformative experience...so it was more just a time to remember why I’m doing what I’m doing and to press forward with what my goals were in the end.” By sharing stories of community members met, tasks and projects accomplished, as well as issues uncovered, Chuckie was able to better understand the purpose of the ASB trip overall as well as the part he played in the community’s development.

Chuckie was surprised to see that some people on the trip were not motivated to participate for faith-based reasons. Chuckie had been “exposed to religion from a young age,” and all of his previous experiences with service had been tied to his place of worship, and was surprised to learn that service was not exclusive to religious groups. While originally surprised by this realization, Chuckie was also happy to learn that he was surrounded by different individuals working towards a common goal, “even though they had little to nothing in common personally.” In this sense, Chuckie saw the ASB program as a way to “learn more about people [he] would not have interacted with otherwise.” This experience with difference also allowed Chuckie to view diversity as “deeper than census level demographics,” as he learned that similar backgrounds do not necessarily mean people will share similar mindsets, and that approaching service from a different viewpoint than a trip mate can lead to a deeper education than the main focus of the trip originally intended. Chuckie further explained that he felt that he now saw diversity as a more intricate concept, as people may “think differently than what they appear,” noting how preconceived notions relating to an individual behavior or mindset are often incorrect. Through his participation in the ASB trips, Chuckie realized that people who appear very different often have “varying degrees of similarities” to him, thus allowing him to better connect with people he once felt estranged from. Chuckie also learned how “refreshing it is to see somebody completely different than you working from a different angle on the same project and you guys coming together to find a solution.” By observing the way he could accomplish different tasks with a variety of differently, or unknown, individuals, Chuckie began to see the benefits of stepping outside of his comfort zone.

Chuckie also credits the ASB experience for improving his ability to accept and understand others. As he worked alongside individuals who were “different than [himself,]” he

began to realize the intricacies of others' cultures and belief systems. This challenged Chuckie to "learn new standards," or behaviors, with individuals to determine what was "socially acceptable." In this sense, Chuckie spoke of this experience as broadening his ability to empathize with others, as he was able to learn "where people were coming from," noting this was the first time he had reflected on his interactions with others, taking an "analytical approach" to assess his place in society.

Chuckie's participation in the ASB program also broadened his definition of service, because previously, Chuckie had only deemed direct hands-on work as service. However, after developing a rapport with community members, Chuckie began to see how "crucial the emotional component [is] to service," acknowledging that it is "just as, if not more important, than the actual labor." Chuckie described building such a rapport with a community member in New Orleans, describing the relationship he built with a homeowner he worked alongside for the duration of the trip. Chuckie found their conversations surrounding the work at hand as well as the community and the homeowner's individual struggles to not only be enlightening but also helpful in terms of contextualizing the project and trip in general. Due to this newfound understanding and appreciation for service, Chuckie described ASB programs as "instrumental for outside of the classroom experiential opportunities" for college students, as these programs force participants to "step out of your own personal bubble...way beyond your typical boundaries...because that's the only way you're going to get exposure to those who think differently than you and you don't have anything in common with."

While Chuckie described himself as a "civically minded individual," he has not been able to engage in service opportunities post-graduation, as he would ideally like to. Chuckie explained that he finds himself serving less as he would "have to take time off of work to

volunteer.” He has also found it more challenging to locate service opportunities, as accessibility to “networks and opportunities are not as readily available” post-graduation. This decrease in civic engagement appears to bother Chuckie. His tone of voice dropped and he began speaking more softly, almost whispering, when discussing his current lack of participation in service projects. His body language displayed a level of discomfort as he crossed his arms and pushed back from the table, sighing between sentences.

Chuckie described himself as a highly engaged individual during his undergraduate career. However, in discussing his current level of engagement, he was withdrawn, as if embarrassed at the difference in the decreased number of service hours he was now participating in. In an attempt to justify his decreased level of engagement, Chuckie explained that he “hadn’t given up” on service, explaining that while he “didn’t belong to service groups like [he] did in college,” which organized service projects for members, he still “works in the health field,” which is a “365 operation” and is therefore still “as dedicated” to service and his community as he was before, but “now just in a different way.” In other words, Chuckie sees himself as currently having the same level of civic mindedness, but is unable to act and serve in the same manner he did when he was an undergraduate student.

4.4 NARRATIVE OF SUSIE

I was excited, and also a bit nervous, to interview Susie, as she was the first graduate I was going to be speaking with for this study. I recall memories of Susie during my time as the Assistant Director of Civic Engagement, working with her on various projects, programs, and initiatives. I remember first meeting Susie, then a timid young international student, very uncomfortable in

her first year of study in America. I remember long discussions about the process of transferring, walking her through her different options as a student, and encouraging her to give herself time to adjust to school in a foreign country, as I realized her potential to develop into an active and engaged student and individual.

After many conversations and soul searching on Susie's part, Susie chose not to transfer institutions. However, Susie did not only choose to merely stay at her current school to finish her undergraduate degree, she chose to dive in—to engage to her fullest ability—thrusting herself not only into her engineering studies, but also actively pursuing extracurricular opportunities, especially service work. By the time she graduated, Susie had more than 600 hours of service throughout the local and regional community, not only earning herself many institutional awards and recognitions, but also creating a reputation for service, engagement, and selflessness for herself throughout the campus community.

It was memories such as this that drew me to ask Susie to participate in my study. We had not seen each other for almost a year, as I had switched jobs, and she was preparing for graduate school, navigating the visa process with her home country while also engaging in the application and interview process of graduate admissions. Unfortunately, Susie had to go back to her home country to get her international affairs in order, thus pushing back her start date for graduate school in the United States one academic year.

While we were unsuccessful in our attempts to connect in person before she left the country, Susie was happy to speak with me via Skype. When Susie's face appeared on my monitor she had her normal large smile on, stating she was happy to be invited to participate in this study, as her service experiences were a significant part of her overall college experience.

Susie had just finished celebrating the Holy Month with her family and was getting back to preparing for her graduate program by interviewing for scholarships through her national government. She was currently applying to train and volunteer throughout the summer with her local government as well, as her country has strict regulations about not only who can volunteer, but also about what type of organizations individuals may volunteer with. Susie had quickly grown familiar with the service system in the United States and found herself more appreciative than ever of the ease of connecting with local non-profit organizations in America, as the politics of serving in her home country were currently frustrating her, as access and opportunities are limited in comparison to the United States.

While she is enjoying her current position and looking forward to the future and her educational plans, Susie explained that her “first year [of college] wasn’t the best” and that she “wanted to transfer,” but didn’t have the choice because “she applied to a different big time university but didn’t get accepted to their program.” Since her transfer plans fell through, Susie was faced with the decision of whether to stay or to return to her home country. After weeks of deliberation she made the commitment to complete her degree in the United States and therefore, chose not to transfer. Susie felt that she needed to stay true to her original plans as she put forth a great amount of time and effort to further her schooling in the States, and therefore, felt it would be wasteful to turn back now. It took a substantial amount of time to not only secure funding and legal support, but to also gain agreement and support from her parents and family to study abroad. As a female, Susie had to work to convince others that she was capable of leaving her home country to study, so she did not want to negate all the work she had previously done by choosing to return home to complete her undergraduate degree. In order to make her experience more enjoyable, she “tried to be a part of the community around her,” creating her own

“supportive network.” This network was comprised of other students, both local and international, as well as different institutional departments, including the Office of Student Civic Engagement, where I worked.

Susie participated in hundreds of projects and initiatives through the Office of Student Civic Engagement; however, one experience she holds fondly is her participation in the Alternative Spring Break program. Susie’s personal motivation for participating in the ASB program was to learn “about different issues that the world is facing right now,” and to “get a lot of different skills and changing [her] perspective on how to think about problems, and trying to be a good person that will help the community.” This process did not excite her at first, but rather scared her. This fear stemmed from the fact that she was on a trip with people she did not know, and was wondering if “[she] was safe,” and “how much information [she] should tell her parents” about the trip, as they would be nervous about her interacting with homeless individuals in a foreign country.

Once Susie got over her initial fears related to the trip, she realized that the experience allowed her to grow as a person, working alongside her college peers as well as community members towards a common goal. Being an international student, Susie was not sure whether she would have much in common with her trip mates, or gain the respect from them that she desired. Susie was keenly aware that she was different than her fellow participants, as she “wore the scarf and took breaks to pray.” She was also unable to shake hands with male participants and community members. Due to these constraints, Susie was fearful that she would not only be an outsider in the community she was serving, but also within the group she was serving with. However, the ASB experience showed her that she “wasn’t so different” from her classmates, as they “came with the same group having the same goals and having the same purpose to serve the

community, and at the same time [they] were learning from each other.” Moreover, Susie explained that her understanding of diversity only grew deeper for her, thanks to her service-learning experience through her participation in alternative spring break trips.

Susie explained that she grew from someone who was afraid of others and the unfamiliar to someone who adopted the mentality that if “God creates us, if he’s gonna create us all the same, life would be boring...accepting diversity is to look for similarities and enjoy the differences.” Due to this mindset, Susie now seeks out diversity in “every single thing” she does, or experiences, rather than “looking down on others” who are different, which she used to do, stating she formerly found it hard to even “look homeless people in the eye.”

Not only did the ASB experience shift Susie’s perspectives related to her peers, but the ASB experience also changed the way that Susie saw and understood service. She articulated her shift in perspective post-ASB trips, explaining the difference between volunteering and service, stating, “if the people ask you to do something and you do it, that’s not service. You have to go and look for opportunities and actively participate in them...you have to ask what they need and do it.” Susie stated that she learned that service was about serving a need, rather than completing a task, such as “painting a wall or weeding a garden.” By engaging in conversations about what communities and individuals need, Susie began to see how serving “benefits both ways,” describing a level of mutual benefit present between a community and its volunteers. In this sense, Susie was speaking not only to the relational component she grew to enjoy throughout her ASB experiences, but also how she learned to volunteer with, not for, a community—becoming a part of the culture, serving with others, and developing relationships with people, “building love and respect between people.”

Susie's ASB experiences fostered a passion for service within her. She articulated this propensity to serve, stating, "By being a human and having health and wealth" it's her responsibility to help out. She explained further:

I believe life will have a circle. Maybe one day I become in their place and they become in my place. Like, you don't know. So I believe that if I can help today, I will help. Because I want to help.

Susie's understanding of the importance of service stemmed from her willingness to work through her fear related to serving the poor and homeless through the ASB program. ASBs, in this sense, allowed Susie to "help the homeless" while "helping herself" as she grew to learn about social issues and developed the skills necessary to "change her perspective and be a better person."

4.5 NARRATIVE OF TOMMY

Out of all of the respondents in this study, Tommy was the student with whom I was the closest with during his undergraduate years. Tommy was involved in service from the beginning of his undergraduate career, participating in two ASB trips, as well as countless hours of short-term service projects throughout the academic semester. Tommy was a regular volunteer with an intramural program for intellectually disabled youth, an avid supporter of the local Habitat for Humanity chapter, and a supporter of the local greenways initiative focused on creating sustainability initiatives and outdoor parks and recreational facilities in the community. Through these various initiatives, Tommy volunteered hundreds of hours a semester to his local community on top of participating in the institution's sponsored ASB program. Tommy was a

specifically unique student as he was not only a first-generation college student, but he was also a self-proclaimed “close-minded country kid,” growing up in a poor rural county outside of the city with his father and brother. Tommy grew up in a small blue collar community and had minimal, if any, experience with difference up until he went to college as the majority of his town and county was White. I vividly remember having conversations with Tommy after he had engaged in arguments with individuals who had different opinions or perspectives than him, or after he left a frustrating class discussion on social issues or race, gender, and class where he did not share the perspectives of others.

Tommy struggled with difference and was extremely set in his opinions and beliefs. Beginning midway through the fall semester of his first year of school, Tommy began to actively challenge himself, pushing his own comfort boundaries to begin to learn about others while simultaneously engaging in service alongside his peers. Throughout this process, I watched Tommy grow into a more accepting and open individual. He frequently reflected on his personal growth with me, explaining his embarrassment of previously held beliefs about others as well as his pride surrounding his ability to grow and challenge himself. In this sense, I was excited to speak with Tommy and to talk about his undergraduate service experience, learning about the meaning he places on his ASB experiences, as well as how he perceives himself in terms of his levels of civic mindedness and cultural sensitivity since he had graduated.

Tommy entered the café with a big smile on his face and immediately sat down, stating that he was “excited” to sit down and talk with me about his experiences, as his participation in service from college are memories he explains that he holds fondly. Tommy explained that he was always “eager to learn” as an undergraduate student and that he was highly engaged in an attempt to learn more about “[him]self, others, and the world.” This inquisitiveness, which

Tommy refers to as his “curious learner-self,” as well as his “desire to help others,” drew Tommy to service at the beginning of his undergraduate career. He saw his service-learning projects as ways to help others by “using the skills and knowledge” that he has to positively affect a community. Tommy also acknowledged that by working and serving in unfamiliar communities, he was able to “gain experience and knowledge in how people live, think, and act,” while also “making friends” with people who may not have met otherwise, a goal that Tommy saw as crucial to his personal development.

Tommy not only spoke of developing close-knit relationships with his peers and the staff on the trip, but also of developing relationships with the community members he was able to work with and for throughout the ASB trips as relational benefits to participation. Tommy specifically recounted one of his “favorite memories” of a community member, explaining that there was a “first or second generation Italian woman...in her seventies or eighties...who was just so happy that she was hanging out with a bunch of people, learning about other people, and getting the help she needed.” Tommy further explained that this resident greeted the students every day throughout the week with a smile, thanked them profusely for their help and hard work, and shared stories about herself, her family, and the town with the students as they worked. The resident even went so far as to “make an authentic Italian dinner” for the students as a thank you for their help that week. Tommy explained that the homeowner’s welcoming behavior resonated with him because “just as much as we were giving her, she was giving right back, and she had way less than we had.” Tommy further explained that developing an understanding of an individual and their community through dialogue and service, which was then met with deep gratitude from the homeowner, left him feeling “like the lucky one.” Tommy stated that prior to participating in these trips, he had negative preconceived notions of lower-

income communities and that getting to know these community members through the ASB program and having such positive experiences doing service helped him to challenge and change those previous negative perceptions he held.

Growing up in a rural homogenous community, Tommy had little to no experience with or understanding of cultural differences prior to his experiences with the ASB program. Reflecting upon the impact his participation had on him, Tommy explained that by engaging with others, he was better able to empathize with individuals, “understanding them and their struggle.” In addition, Tommy explained that participation in ASB programs allowed him to see that “the world really isn’t that bad,” as he had previously viewed communities in need as having a dire forecast for development or survival. Tommy saw situations as static—poor communities are forever poor and the rich are forever rich. However, after participating in the ASB program and witnessing the impact service can have on a seemingly helpless community or people, Tommy began to see “how he could and should do more” to help his community, realizing his potential as an agent of change, even while still in school. Tommy struggled with this realization at first, feeling guilty for the “privilege” he began to realize he held as he started to unpack concepts of systemic social issues. Tommy explained that these intensive ASB programs helped him not only to see, but also to understand “the causes, not just the problems.” Tommy also saw ASB trips as opportunities to challenge his thinking surrounding “how [he] could work to react [to the issues] and work to fix them.”

In this sense, Tommy credits the ASB trips for “maturing” his sense of civic mindedness, as his perspective has been broadened. He is no longer the “close-minded kid” who began his journey at college, but rather a mindful individual, “who is able to put himself in others shoes,” engaging with others across borders to better understand their perspectives and the community in

which he lives, a challenge he never previously posed to himself, as he was more content to remain “biased and judgmental.” In this sense, Tommy became capable of understanding cultural issues he was not particularly affected by, allowing him to empathize and connect with others.

While Tommy classifies his new enlightened mindset as a personal improvement, specifically now as a working professional in the emergency medical field, in regard to how he is able to relate to his patients “human to human,” seeing them as more than their superficial characteristics. Furthermore, he is not ashamed of how he formerly viewed others. Tommy explains that since he “lived that way, [he] can now understand others who don’t get it.” Tommy believes that as if he is able to help others in his profession and graduate medical degree program, as well as in his community, “open their minds and treat others with respect,” a task which comes in handy in the medical field, as people from all walks of life could one day be his patients. Tommy argues that this skillset, fostered through his participation in the ASB program, has made him better personally and professionally, as he is better able to “interact with people” and “address situations appropriately.”

Having such a positive experience with the ASB program, Tommy has continued to serve post-graduation. His levels of civic mindedness and civic engagement are reportedly “just as strong,” as Tommy not only views his profession as service, but also plans to engage in another short-term immersion trip through his graduate program. Tommy plans to journey to Peru for a week in the summer to provide medical care to communities in need for a week of service. When asked why he chose to pursue this additional service-learning immersion program, Tommy explained that his experiences with ASBs showed him “the value of service,” and now,

with increased skills and knowledge due to his graduate education and professional experience, he sees it as his duty to continue to serve others in need.

4.6 NARRATIVE OF ANGELICA

I was excited to speak with Angelica for numerous reasons, the first being, out of all the respondents, Angelica is the one that I have known the longest. In addition, she is also the furthest out from her undergraduate experience, and I was interested to hear how she views her ASB experience and its impact on her this far removed from her initial experience. Moreover, Angelica participated in an ASB program every year of her undergraduate experience, positioning her as the most “experienced” individual in terms of the short-term immersion service-learning experience. I was interested to see how all of these factors would influence the dialogue between Angelica and myself, in comparison to the other interviews.

Upon arriving to the café, Angelica was eager to speak, explaining “she still talks about her experiences on ASBs to this day,” so she was excited to unpack her experiences in a more formal way with me. Angelica’s best term to describe her personality during her undergraduate career was a “sponge,” as she was eager to gather as much information and experiences as possible. Angelica viewed herself during her undergraduate career as a troublemaker who spent the majority of her time “partying and working,” and while she did well academically, her main concern at the time was simply to “have fun” and “see things.” In this sense, Angelica positioned herself as the opposite of her peers in this study, labeling herself as a party girl or rebel, while the others identified as highly engaged do-gooders. This was amusing to me, as Angelica participated in the most ASBs possible during one’s undergraduate experience.

Due to these experience-seeking goals of hers, ASBs were attractive to Angelica, as she was able to go to different towns and communities, seeing new things and meeting new people. Angelica initially participated in ASBs as a way to learn about subject matter, such as the unique struggles of poverty in rural United States versus poverty in the United States' urban areas related to resources and visibility, while also "doing something meaningful" with her time. However, as she became inclined to serve throughout her time as an undergraduate student, Angelica grew to enjoy and appreciate the sense of usefulness her participation provided her, allowing her to use her time outside of class and work for something equally, "if not more," meaningful. Angelica explained that what began as a desire to perform service while expanding her repertoire of experiences turned into an "eye opening" life event.

While participating in ASB trips, Angelica was able to work in soup kitchens, rehabilitation facilities homes, and engage in advocacy initiatives all while learning about different communities' social issues, such as "systemic racism and cycles of poverty." While serving in the nation's capital, Angelica was surprised as she finally became aware of the visibility of our nation's disparity between social classes. Angelica explained that it was not until halfway through the trip that she realized that while surrounded by "fancy buildings" and notable wealth, there was also severe social injustice occurring throughout the prominent city related to both racism and poverty. In this sense, by participating in ASBs, Angelica was able to increase her awareness of systemic cultural issues while expanding her understanding and perspectives surrounding social issues and certain demographic groups, breaking through the positive and heightened perception she once had of Washington, D.C.

Angelica had two additional exceedingly specific shifts in perspective as it relates to her perception of others as well as herself on ASB trips. Angelica's second shift was experienced

while selling newspapers as part of a fundraising initiative for a hunger and homelessness focused community agency in Washington, D.C. Selling these newspapers on the busy streets of Washington was Angelica's "worst" experience on an ASB trip, as she had "never felt more insignificant." When Angelica was standing on the sidewalk asking passersby whether they would like to buy a newspaper to benefit the homeless population, she was either getting completely ignored or receiving nasty comments or looks. "If you've ever been put where you're so insignificant that people literally won't even look at you, that's what it's like." Angelica explained further:

I am damn near six foot, blonde hair, blue eyes, right? I get talked to regardless of whether I am actually talking to someone. So, to be put in a position where I'm insignificant...to be taken out of what I am used to and the status that I am used to being regarded with. And just being treated as a total piece of trash that's on the street that's not worth anything is like a shot in the gut. And I think it's a powerful shot in the gut. Like I still think it's important, 'cause I can still like, I can feel what that felt like and I don't ever want to feel that again.

While it was the most unpleasant experience she had faced on an ASB trip, it was also a learning moment for Angelica, as it forced her to realize the privilege she has, while also acknowledging that this sense of invisibility is routine for homeless individuals in D.C. as well as globally. Angelica therefore attributes this experience to strengthening her sense of empathy for the homeless and impoverished members of society.

The final standout experience of a perspective shift for Angelica occurred after participating in a rural poverty focused ASB trip. During this Appalachian excursion, Angelica was working with community members and fellow students on housing rehabilitation projects in

a community that looked similar to the town in which she grew up. Throughout the trip, as she engaged with community members and entered homes that looked familiar to the ones in her hometown, Angelica felt “upset, or off.” She could not explain it at the time but revealed that after months of reflecting post trip, she came to realize and come to terms with the fact that she had grown up in poverty.

Angelica came to realize that the people she had formerly referred to as “white trash” were no different than her neighbors and even her own family, as it wasn’t rare “to have the electricity shut off...or no heat in the winter.” She began to realize that while on the trip, “everybody [she] was interacting with could easily be transplanted to where [she] grew up and it would be the same across the board.” She was seeing her hometown from an outside perspective for the first time, acknowledging its struggles with food and housing security—social issues she had once associated with outside communities rather than her own. Due to her reflection on her childhood, her educational career, and her ASB experience, Angelica was “better able to understand her privilege” as well as how she and society “play a part in societal issues” due to misconceptions and judgments of individuals and communities. In this sense, even though the experience challenged her, forcing her to engage with heavy topics, Angelica still viewed her participation in an ASB trip as a positive experience.

Moreover, Angelica attributes her high level of cultural sensitivity to her participation in ASB trips as her experiences in various communities, particularly referencing engagement in dialogue and service surrounding cultural and social issues, helped her to better understand concepts of social justice and difference. Angelica “used to be closed off to certain differences,” naming one example as individuals from different faith backgrounds. However, through her regular interactions with different community members with different background and reflecting

and “processing her own prejudices,” she is now “able to respect differences and let things go that [she] doesn’t agree with,” rather than combating and judging other individuals or communities.

While this broadened perspective did not happen overnight, after participating in four separate ASB trips and regularly reflecting on those experiences throughout the programs, as well as on her own, Angelica was able to develop a sense of empathy and cultural sensitivity that she had not previously harnessed. This is an impressive feat, as Angelica had also, unfortunately, seen the negative effects of direct service, as she contracted a bacterial infection (tuberculosis), due to direct contact with the community members she was serving through various community initiatives. Not only did the initial discovery result in many hospital and doctors visits, it also caused Angelica to reconsider her future plans, as well as reflect on her service experience in a critical, or negative, manner. Angelica struggled internally as she faced coming to terms with the life-long illness she inherited while performing her life’s passion—grappling with not only how to not view her experiences as absolutely negative, but also with whether or not she wished to continue to serve her community in the same capacity she always had, a habit she had grown to love and a lifestyle she had come to define herself by. Refusing to let her diagnosis completely cloud her positive service-learning experiences, Angelica now recognizes that due to her participation in ASBs, she is better equipped to “empathize with others” while also “educating and informing” individuals who may hold biases as she once did. However, due to her diagnosis, Angelica sees her current role and civic duty as “more focused on advocacy work rather than hands on work,” as she has worked extensively with and for communities and people at risk, ultimately putting herself at risk, and now chooses to educate and challenge people to get involved and serve their communities in various capacities. While she is not as involved in

“hands on direct service” as she once was, Angelica still sees herself as heavily civically engaged through her career in clinical psychology, her research interests on at risk and protected populations, and her participation in advocacy work. In this sense, while directly affected by service work’s gritty or more negative side, Angelica is still able to see its positive effects on society and herself and therefore continues to civically engage, just now in a manner that makes greater sense to her health and safety.

5.0 ANALYSIS

While each narrative highlighted different experiences and meaning-making processes related to the individual ASB experiences, there were common interpretations revealed during the narrative analysis process. This chapter will break down those interpretations, discussing the study's findings related to the respective apriori themes from the literature and highlighting emergent themes and main interpretations from the respondent narratives.

5.1 MITIGATING RESEARCHER BIAS

As I was familiar with not only the respondents, but also with the program and experiences under study, I utilized a process of bracketing and reduction in order to best make sense of the data. Bracketing requires the researcher to remove their personal perspective, thus reducing the researcher's ability to access the data, in this case the narratives, through any pre-conceived notions or existing bias in relation to the experience, the respondent, or their response.

I used bracketing during the memo writing process, noting my own bias and subjectivity during the collection and analysis process. In this sense, I attempted to suspend my bias in order to mitigate the potential effects of my assumptions as they related to data coding and analysis (Tufford & Newman, 2012). When writing post-interview memos, I reflected on my own personal thoughts and interpretations related to the dialogues with respondents, noting spaces

where I may have inferred certain connections that were not explicitly stated. By reflecting in this manner, I identified my own subjectivities and inclinations related to the data that could possibly affect my interpretation of the interviews and, ultimately, of the implications for the study itself (Van Manen, M., 2002).

5.2 CIVIC MINDEDNESS

As depicted in the Wheel of Civic Responsibility (Figure 4), the individual components of civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic identity combine to create the most civically minded individual: a responsible citizen. The respondents in this study, while all service enthusiasts, did not reach the epitome of civically responsible citizen, as they continually honing their civic skills, developing their civic identities in light of their transition to becoming a working professional, and obtaining additional civic knowledge. However, the respondents all expressed different levels, or ranges, of mindedness, and subsequently described their process of development as it relates to the three individual components of the innermost ring of the Wheel of Civic Responsibility, the components of an engaged citizen. These interpretations are highlighted in the following three subsections that pertain to the elements of The Engaged Citizen Wheel (Figure 2): civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic identity.

5.2.1 Civic Knowledge

While at varying degrees of professional and personal progress post-graduation, the respondents had different perspectives and levels of understanding related to their civic knowledge. While all

respondents exhibited an understanding of the importance of service to our society at large only two respondents exhibited a clear sense or expression of civic knowledge during the course of their interview: Angelica and Susie. These two respondents credited their service-learning experience through the ASB program as allowing them to better understand how society functions, or in some cases, dysfunctions, noting the importance of political and social action to rectify pertinent societal concerns. Susie articulated this realization, stating:

For like almost two weeks I was thinking about [the ASB trip], and how basically it wasn't helping just the homeless. It was helping us as students too, or people living in the community, to understand the certain reasons and what the causes for some people to end up to be homeless.

As Susie explains, the ASB program challenged Susie to think beyond a given social issue's immediate context, such as witnessing a homeless person panhandling on the street, or an impoverished homeowner in need of assistance with housing repairs. By expanding her thought process, Susie was able to further explore the systemic causes of such problems, examining both her own situational privilege as well as the societal constructs which allow for, or foster, the existence of the issues she was witnessing while on the ASB trips. Susie was exploring the concepts of power and action through her reflections on her trip, grappling with the idea of social capital to better understand the social issues of focus on the trip.

Angelica described her journey towards attainment of civic knowledge in her discussion of an ASB trip to Washington, D.C. While preparing meals alongside community members in a soup kitchen, Angelica came to realize that she and her peers were working alongside "individuals who were recently released from prison." This surprised Angelica, as she was under the impression that she would have solely been volunteering with fellow students and nonprofit

staff members from the community agency partner. She did not expect to serve alongside members of society that are perceived to be dangerous or civically disengaged. However, by learning about the training program the nonprofit agency partner had implemented for these individuals, Angelica realized that the nonprofit, “was rehabbing people into society, by doing exactly what [she and her peers] were doing. But they were getting paid for it, which was cool.” This realization specifically stood out to Angelica, as she was able to “see the levels of bureaucracy going, and actually working,” as the agency partner was mobilizing individuals in need to serve a community in need while simultaneously receiving hands-on professional training.

This discussion was particularly interesting to me because Angelica was the most experienced ASB participant, having participated in twice the number of ASB programs as the other respondents. I was surprised to hear Angelica state that it was not until her third ASB trip that she had seen the “system work.” Although she had the opportunity to serve in various communities with different community agency partners throughout her undergraduate career, not until Angelica witnessed this outreach and training program within a community agency did she witness and understand how the layers of development and community action can take place to work to remedy social issues. This commentary highlights Angelica’s comprehension of nonprofit agency structure and function in society, as well as the roles of power and social action in communities—a clear example of her accumulating civic knowledge.

While all five respondents noted the development of civic knowledge, not all participants’ knowledge rose to the level of Angelica and Susie. Tommy, Lillian, and Chuckie articulated a newfound understanding of the importance of volunteerism and community development, whereas Angelica was able to express understanding of governmental and social

functions, political action, and social movements in regard to their effect on social issues. This variation in knowledge signifies ASBs ability to engage participants in the development of civic knowledge, regardless of their level of engagement prior to participation in the program. However, it becomes clear that the more experienced or aware a participant is, such as Angelica and Susie, the better able they will be to hone, or foster, a greater comprehension of civic knowledge. This finding is significant in light of the fact that the respondents were not expecting this knowledge or development as an outcome of participation. Students were expecting to serve a community, to benefit the lives of others, rather than to personally benefit from the experience. In this sense, through the attainment of civic knowledge, participant questioning of expectations in regard to the ASB program and its associated outcomes was also a theme throughout the respondent narratives.

5.2.2 Civic Skills

The development of civic skills was another thread throughout the narratives. All of the respondents stated that by participating in the ASB program, they were able to hone the skillsets they needed to successfully engage as a civically minded individual. The skillsets described by respondents as having either been attained or sharply crafted due to their participation in an ASB trip ranged from organizational and communication skills, to decision-making and listening skills, to the ability to work alongside and manage a diverse group of individuals. While some respondents felt they already had these skills and saw their participation in the trips as a way to enable them to fine tune their abilities, some respondents acknowledged that prior to the ASB trip they lacked these skills. However, those that felt they previously lacked these skills, such as Lillian and Tommy, also recognized their capacity to develop civic skills, which allowed the

ASB trip to instigate their development and growth of civic skills. In this sense, for some students who are new to civic engagement, ASBs can serve as the impetus for development or the incentive to pursue other growth and development opportunities instead of serving as the experience that wholly develops them into a civically minded individual.

Susie explained that serving alongside a group of individuals who were different from her in a country she was unfamiliar with not only helped her to develop critical thinking skills, to know how to not only react to what she was seeing on the trip, but to also absorb and reflect on the social issues she was witnessing through her service in a culture outside of her own. Susie explained that the ASB experiences helped her to “become more confident, and kind of like a leader,” as she worked to better herself while “trying to benefit the community and surround herself with others trying to do the same.” This serves as an example of another emergent theme from the data: the ability to identify and frame social problems to better understand the context one is in. Tommy articulated this ability as well, stating “I learned a ton about myself and other people and the world and how things worked.” It can be argued, therefore, that ASBs can foster the ability to critically analyze the communities in which participants live and serve, leaving students more capable of better understanding social issues and larger cultural contexts.

Angelica, conversely, explained that her ability to empathize and work with individuals who are different than her was not gained but rather honed during her ASB experiences. She attributed the ASB trips’ challenge of placing her in a situation where “[she] had to work with culturally different people, such as race, socioeconomics, education, etc.” to her ability to become “less guarded” and be able to work efficiently with individuals from varying backgrounds. Chuckie echoed these sentiments, explaining that “seeing somebody completely different than [him] working from a different angle on the same project and coming together for

a solution” was highly meaningful for him, shifting his perspective on different individuals he previously judged, and allowing him to become a better manager and leader as he was able to connect with individuals from all backgrounds.

Lillian too articulated her ability to better communicate with others due to her participation in the ASB program, as the trip challenged her to get out of her comfort zone and engage with others who were different from herself, helping her to “increase her potential” by enhancing her civic skills. In other words, the civic skills that the respondents were either attaining or further developing enabled them to navigate the concept of diversity, positioning them as better able to understand the perspectives of others. In this sense, the students are aware that their development in regard to the full attainment of a civic skillset is a process. They see ASBs as unleashing their ability to attain the initial skill base, while acknowledging that they still have room for growth post-trip.

Tommy explained that the sharpening of his civic skills aided in his professional development, as his ability to problem solve and critically analyze situations was fostered through his ASB participation, enabling him to “know how to react” in different situations where the context may be unfamiliar, or less than ideal. By participating in service projects with limited resources, Tommy found himself regularly problem solving in order to meet goals and maintain deadlines. In addition, as his fellow respondents also explained, Tommy noticed ASB’s effects on his communication skills, noting that he learned “how to address and talk to people differently depending on who they are and where they are from,” a skill he developed as he was challenged by ASB trips to quit operating from an ethnocentric perspective. This development, for Tommy as well as the other respondents, affords the ability to navigate varying political systems and power dynamics to not only efficiently interact with others, but to also make it

possible to engage in positive social change in order to effectively serve others, as he was able to identify and understand social patterns within communities outside of his own.

5.2.3 Civic Identity

There was a notable sense of civic identity evident amongst the respondents' narratives as a whole. The first emergent theme within the realm of civic identity is the individual ability to see oneself as an important member of society, an agent capable of producing change. While each respondent may have chosen to act on this civic identity differently, as everyone sees their role, or skills, pertaining to a specific area from a different perspective, all respondents spoke to the importance of civic engagement in their life, as they see it as "part of who they are." This engrained belief highlights the development of a purpose for the respondents that is intertwined with their service, a salient identity characteristic centered on their civic engagement through service.

Susie spoke of her inclination to serve as a duty, stating, "I believe that if I can help today, then I should help. Because I want to help." She explained that as someone with the means—in regards to finances, health, and capacity—she feels she has to serve, as a "member of a community." Susie further articulated that she was not raised with a strong civic identity, as service "is not part of the culture" where she is from. However, after living in the United States during her undergraduate career and becoming heavily involved in service-learning initiatives during that time, she came to recognize the "power of service," and how strongly she connected with it, viewing it as "something that all the humans should do." Due to her newfound strong civic identity, Susie views her participation in the ASB trips, as well as other service initiatives both past and present, as a way for her to "show the other side of the world that volunteering

should be a part of culture for all nationalities,” viewing herself as a representative of “her country and her faith” in the hopes of encouraging others to participate in service as well.

Angelica too has a strong civic identity; however, unlike Susie, she felt she entered into her ASB experiences already acknowledging the importance of civic participation as part of her personal identity. Angelica described her motivations surrounding participating in ASB programming as an undergraduate student by stating that she had a choice to make, explaining “I could go to the beach and get drunk for a whole week and make bad decisions. But I was like, I’ll take this route, [ASB] makes way more sense because of who I am as a person.” Angelica further explained that she was inclined to serve, over “party,” as she is the type to “have an objective,” to work towards something, and to make a difference because she “loves service.” Moreover, Angelica spoke often of her acknowledgement of privilege after participating in the ASB trips, and subsequently the development of an urge to give back, which manifested due to the development of her civic identity as well. Angelica described this desire to serve through the imagery of a ladder, explaining:

I serve because I’m a human on this planet and life sucks for other people and I want to help, even if for a second, I want to help. It’s kind of like, you ever realize that you are so far up on a ladder that all you need to do is like turn around and just help somebody else up? That’s literally my viewpoint [on service].

In this sense, Angelica views her social capital as a mandate for her, requiring her to use her position of privilege to benefit society. Her civic identity development highlights ASBs’ ability to foster growth in already civically engaged individuals, while the study also makes note through the narratives of respondents such as Tommy and Susie who had no prior experience

with civic engagement, that all students can be engaged in a way that fosters meaningful growth through participation in ASBs.

Chuckie also noted a pre-existing civic identity that was only strengthened through his participation in ASB trips. Chuckie explained that he was “always apt to serve,” as it was “just the way he was brought up,” noting his inclination towards service was rooted in his religious background, as most of his service opportunities pre-college were organized and managed by his chosen place of worship. However, having participated in a secular service opportunity through ASBs, Chuckie saw his ideas and habits of serving transcend the religious realm, thus expanding his understanding of what it means to serve.

Lillian echoed Chuckie’s sentiments regarding an existing inclination towards service pre-trip, noting her participation in service experiences with her family throughout her childhood. However, Lillian credits the ASB trip for empowering her to see herself as an agent of change, thus fully shaping her civic identity, explaining that while she had participated in service as a younger individual, her ASB experiences were “what really made [her] grow as a person,” as they forced her out of her comfort zone, and allowed her to reflect on how and why she “was always trying to make a positive impact in the lives around [her]” through service, ultimately grooming her civic identity. In this sense, ASBs provide an opportunity for participants to not only reflect on their trip and service projects, but to also take the time to analyze and assess their motivations for participating—examining their values and beliefs about service, community, civic engagement, and themselves.

Tommy also spoke of his civic identity, explaining that as he participated in ASB trips, he was able to develop a skillset and knowledge surrounding cultural issues, positioning himself as an agent of change in his community. These ASB experiences fostered a desire in Tommy to

“always be involved...and to give back.” Tommy described his motivation for serving, stating, “While I’m no expert in anything, I do know some things and if I can use any skill that I have to better the life of somebody then that’s what I want to do every time I have the chance.” Tommy explained that through ASBs he learned that there “is a lot we can do to help other people, and it might only take five minutes, or one week of something to just help out and make it better.” Tommy further explained that after reflecting upon his ASB experiences he realized that “every action matters,” and therefore, focused his actions and intentions throughout the course of his personal and professional life post-ASB experience to being mindful about his abilities and duties in regard to civic engagement, thus honing his civic identity. Therefore, it is possible that the ASB experience makes the idea of embracing a civic identity more attainable for participants. Often, prior to participation, students perceive social change as requiring grand-scale action from individuals. They do not perceive themselves as agents of change as they view themselves as insignificant, or incapable of making a noticeable impact on the world. However, after participating, just as Tommy explained, students realize that even the smallest tasks are appreciated and can lead to grand outcomes.

These discussions with respondents showcased the potential for development when one unpacks one’s ASB experience—contextualizing the experience to reflect on one’s position in society. The respondents connected their ASB experience to their larger life experience, acknowledging their position in society as well as its power structure, in order to understand their capacity as a civically engaged citizen. The meaning-making process of respondents showcased ASBs potential to challenge and engage participants of all prior levels of civic engagement, making the task of becoming a civically engaged and active citizen seem less daunting and more attainable for all.

5.3 CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

While respondents grew as individuals and developed a better understanding of their own place in society, privileges, and power to create change, they were also learning about other cultures and individuals. By participating in ASBs, the respondents stated that witnessed a shift in their perspectives of themselves, their capabilities, and their perceptions of others, as they simultaneously disengaged with societal constructs and prejudices to generate their own opinions of others.

Susie was perhaps the most self-revealing in her description of her previously held notions related to others, specifically homeless individuals, like alluded to before, but also explained elsewhere in the interview. She explained that:

I used to look down to others...my first year in Pittsburgh, I used to study English downtown, and there's a lot of homeless there. I didn't like to see them in the streets. I'm like, what are they doing here? They have to go to a different place...I avoided looking at them to be honest, but that changed.

Susie was upset, and almost apologetic, for having ever thought this negatively about people before she had the chance to know them. She explained that after she participated in her first ASB service trip, participating both in the pre-and post-educational components related to the trip, she began to better understand homelessness and the homeless community. Susie felt that she was able to "understand their needs, and some of the causes" of their homelessness. In this sense, the ASB experience encouraged Susie to unpack social dilemmas via critical reflection to reach a more engaged and knowledgeable understanding of the issue.

Chuckie too had a perspective shift related to impoverished individuals during his ASB trip. His unpacking of his experience was similar to some of the other respondents. However,

unlike Susie, Chuckie did not acknowledge a previously held negative view of others. His preconceived notions revealed themselves in his discussion of working alongside community members during an ASB trip. Chuckie described engaging with a southern homeowner, while working on a housing rehabilitation project, stating that he was surprised to find that the homeowner “actually knew quite a bit about construction and what needed done, he just really needed more hands to do it.” Chuckie explained his surprise:

It was great for me to see that it wasn't like people looking for handouts; it was someone that just needed help. He wasn't like, he wasn't incapable, he wasn't like incompetent, and he wasn't lazy. It was refreshing to see that somebody knew that they had struggled through something and was doing something about it; he just needed help doing it.

It was Chuckie's preexisting assumptions and accepted stereotypes of impoverished individuals that led him to believe that he would not be working alongside, or *with*, a community member, but rather *for* an individual, someone he assumed would be operating without the necessary knowledge or drive to complete the tasks at hand.

Chuckie had previously thought of people, such as this impoverished homeowner, to be lazy, uneducated, and perhaps even looking or waiting for a group of volunteers, such as Chuckie and his friends, to complete work for them. However, after working alongside this homeowner and realizing the knowledge he had of his home, its needs, and construction in general, while simultaneously sharing stories with one another about their lives and personal experiences, Chuckie was able to open his mind. This ASB experience challenged Chuckie to expand his understanding of social issues related to rural poverty, abandoning stereotypes he was not even sure he had and getting to know the homeowner as an individual with his own story to tell and skills to offer. This component of Chuckie's narrative highlights the fact that even highly

engaged students can hold some particularly prejudiced or biased interpretations of others without knowing or acknowledging it. The existence of these negative thoughts does not indicate personal malice or individual character flaws; it simply notes the opportunity for further growth and development.

Angelica discussed the development of a similar understanding, although her situation was a bit different as she entered into the ASB experience with a heightened level of cultural sensitivity in comparison to the other respondents. She still argued that she experienced a perspective shift, as she explained that before participating in ASB trips she had never witnessed extreme rural poverty. Angelica said it was eye opening to realize that “there are more voices in urban poverty than there are in rural poverty,” which is why she was never challenged to think of how the rural poor live prior to the ASB trip. Through her work in Appalachian communities, Angelica began to better understand the local culture, the community members, and the specific struggles they faced, which helped her to further expand her understanding of poverty in general, challenging the preconceived notions she once held related to the typical stereotypes one sees of impoverished individuals in urban America.

This understanding was particularly formative for Angelica, as reflecting on this experience helped her come to terms with her own experience growing up poor. Angelica explained that when she was young, her family was “just like everyone else,” but working with the rural poor, she came to realize the dire situation she truly grew up in, recognizing that “everyone I was interacting with could easily be transplanted to where I grew up and it would be the same.” She expanded upon the cues she received while serving: her family’s home being a trailer, makeshift home fixes with duct tape, and infrequent utility access as prime examples, explaining that she became humbled as she was reminded that “no matter what, [she’s] still

rooted in [poverty].” Angelica took time to process this realization, as it was a substantial perspective shift for her. She described grappling with the realization, stating:

I think as much as we don’t want to, like none of us want to look at our past and say like, none of us want to look at that like, the dirty parts of us and acknowledge like that there’s even a portion of me that could be like white trash. I think I fought against that identity so much solely because I’m not comfortable with it. I refused to be that person, and I think the [ASB trips], the multicultural exposure to socioeconomic issues and systematic issues across the board, helped me.

In this sense, the narratives highlight how ASBs can engage participants in examinations of their own cultural experiences and backgrounds, ultimately coming to terms with their own identities. Angelica’s example highlights the participant process of becoming culturally sensitive to even one’s own background and upbringing, serving as an example of the comprehensive approach ASBs have to engage participants in reflection and holistic growth and development.

5.3.1 Border-Crossing

The previously mentioned vignettes highlight the perspective shifts that the respondents recounted when describing their ASB experiences. The narratives highlight the respondents’ struggles with cultural dilemmas as they navigated the experiences of their ASB trips. ASBs engage participants in a period of literal border-crossing by engaging students in an outside community, but they also foster long-term acts of border-crossing as participants develop an awareness of systems of power and privilege and begin to create a newly informed perspective inclusive of opinions of self and others based on their reflections of their ASB experiences immediately post-trip and beyond.

As previous respondent excerpts allude to, the students crossed literal borders during their ASB experience, leaving their home communities to serve an external community in need. In addition, they crossed figurative borders as they began to transcend stereotypes they had of the individuals they were serving, negating preconceived notions of poverty, homelessness, and other social issues addressed through projects and interactions during the trips. However, there were other sectors of border-crossing, which the respondents did not expect to experience as part of their ASB trip. Respondents also acknowledged preconceived notions they had disproved about one another. Susie explained that prior to her ASB participation, she had negative perceptions of her peers involved in Greek Life. After reflecting on her work alongside Greek members who were also participants on the ASB trip, Susie stated:

We came with the same group having the same goals, having the same purpose to serve the community and the same time we are learning from each other. I changed my point [of view] about having all these sororities and fraternities in US Schools.

Susie's prior assumption and bias of Greek students solely participating in negative and unethical behavior was eliminated by the positive experience she had serving with both fraternity and sorority members on the ASB trips. Susie now counts some of the sorority women from the trip among her closest friends, joking that she is an honorary member of their chapter. This is an example of how the relational component among participants can be just as beneficial for students as their interactions with community members. Susie's experience is one example of prejudices held due to media stereotypes of her peers that was eliminated due to engaged participation in an ASB trip.

Lillian also experienced a similar border-crossing experience in regard to her perceptions of peers, as she explained in her retelling and reflection of her undergraduate ASB experiences.

By engaging in meaningful dialogue with Susie, Lillian worked through her perceptions of international students—choosing to look beyond her preconceived notions of Muslim individuals in order to get to know Susie as a unique person. This occurrence was “surprising” to Lillian as she “never expected [she] would be so close to a person from a completely different culture.” In this sense, Lillian’s border crossing involved challenging her own notions of others, in terms of peer to peer dynamics, as she worked to push herself outside of her comfort zone. While Lillian explained in her narrative that she continued her relationship with Susie outside of the ASB experience and thus further developed her level of closeness and understanding of Susie’s culture, she credited her ASB experience as fostering her ability to do so. In this sense, this story serves as another example of how ASBs open doors for participants, enabling them to grow and continue to cross borders well past the completion of their one-week ASB trip.

The respondents also experienced border crossing within themselves. As the students navigated dynamics with their peers, community members, and social issues, they also began to evaluate themselves, their value systems, and their assumptions about themselves and others. Tommy described his transformation in terms of self-perception stating:

I really felt kinda spoiled at some times. I mean, I even feel that way now, you know? I drive my dad’s leased car to a graduate program every day. I’m working hard and I’m studying, and I’m forever grateful for like all the people and my family and everybody who has been supportive of me, but it’s just like those other people, they don’t even have that. They don’t know what that is.

Tommy was, and still is, grappling with his privilege in terms of the communities he served on ASB trips, as well as the community in which he grew up. His civic skills and civic knowledge, paired with his education, position him as more privileged than even the members of his

immediate family—all of which has become evident to Tommy through his ASB experience and reflection process both immediately post-trip and in the years since.

ASBs, therefore, can be viewed as tools to challenge students to cross physical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal borders through both their direct service component as well as the reflection process. They engage students in dialogue and reflection, encouraging them to examine their preconceived notions of self and others, beginning the growth process for participants to reevaluate perceptions and biases related to communities and individuals both inside and outside of their hometown, including themselves. Through this process of navigation and reflection ASB trips engage participants in both physical and figurative border-crossing.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This purpose of this study was to explore alternative spring break (ASB) participant meaning-making processes to add to the sparse literature pertaining to the long-term effects of these prolific programs in higher education. The main interpretations of this study illuminate how participation in these short-term immersion service-learning experiences has influenced the behaviors and perspectives of students as well as their perceptions in regard to both their selves and others. This research is crucial as institutions nationwide have been increasing their implementation of service-learning initiatives (O'Brien, 1993) in an attempt to increase overall student learning and development (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989). As explained in previous chapters, while service-learning programs are becoming highly popular in higher education (Eyler, 2011; Giles & Eyler, 2013; Holsapple, 2012; Whitley, 2014), there is still minimal understanding as to the meaning students make of their experience. This specific dissertation study was crafted to thereby afford the opportunity to learn about the long-term personal influence of ASB trips on participants via their reflections on their experience post-graduation.

6.1 GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS REVISITED

Through the individual narratives and analysis process, this study was able to explore three research questions. These questions, along with their subsequent interpretations, are discussed in this section.

6.1.1 Ascribing Meaning to the ASB Experience

The first research question asked, “How do students narrate their personal story of ASB participation and ascribe meaning to their ASB trip at least one year post-trip?” As participants in this study, respondents were able to provide a narrative of their ASB experience, retelling stories of significant experiences or interactions on the trip while also reflecting on the significance of the trip during their undergraduate experience and now. The respondents described interactions with peers and community members with substantial detail—noting descriptions of individuals’ personalities and appearances as well as their own emotions during the interactions. These vivid descriptions offer an aesthetic appeal to the narratives as the descriptions paint pictures of the community and its members. Moreover, the rich descriptions of the dialogue that participants found meaningful provides an emotive aspect to the narratives as well, offering an essence of participant feelings surrounding the ASB trips, rather than an objective or sterile account of the experience. In this sense, by narrating their stories, participants were able to not only live their ASB experience, but were also able to share the story of it, creating meaning in their life surrounding their participation and reflection on their experience as well as working with the researcher to create a larger narrative of service-learning. The narratives, therefore, offer long views of participant meaning-making, sharing expectations

and surprises surrounding their experience and its effects on them at the time of the trip, and now. The narrative process, in this sense, aligns with Dewey's (1929) *Pedagogic Creed*, viewing learning as a social process, arguing that students learn from their interactions with their environment, thereby positioning language as social and education as an act of living and interacting. By offering a narrative of their experience, students not only receive an educational opportunity while on the trip, but also as they think and reflect upon their actions and experience.

Through the narratives, respondents also ascribe meaning to their ASB experience, explaining that they partly attribute their development as a civically minded and culturally sensitive individual to their participation in the alternative spring break program. Their participation in these short-term immersion trips challenged them as participants to cross borders—both internally and externally—contributing to their development as engaged and mindful citizens. This reflection and development was initiated on the trip for some students and increased for others who entered the program as more mindful and aware than other students. Dialogue with respondents showcased ASBs' ability to continue their growth and challenge their perceptions long after the week-long trip ends.

Respondents spoke of interactions with community members and peers challenging their perceptions of self and others, namely in terms of navigating preconceived notions of social class, as they credit these interactions with their ability to better comprehend social problems, and ultimately, hone the skills needed to create social change. The narratives provided in this study showcase the power of the relational component of ASBs for participants—as interactions with community members humanized social issues they had only read about up until this point. Their participation in the trips also challenged them to interact with people outside of their normal social circles and examine their previously held assumptions and biases of individuals of

lower social-economic status, due to their interactions on the trip and experience with homelessness, poverty, and food insecurity—issues surrounding lower social classes. This finding relates to the social capital theoretical framework described in Chapter Two, highlighting students' depth of understanding of social class. Putnam (1993) argued that as individuals begin to work together towards a common goal, for a common good they begin to develop a positive perspective about themselves, others, and society as a whole. This was exemplified in respondents' feedback and reflection on their positive experience serving in impoverished communities. However, participants began to see themselves as agents of change, got to know their peers on a deeper level, broke assumptions they previously held, and witnessed the effect of social issues on individuals of lower socioeconomic status, through ASBs' opportunity to contextualize concepts related to social justice, politics, and economics that students had only previously read about. In this sense, participants could dissect social class on a deeper level. This denser context relates to Bourdieu's (1997, 2013) understanding of social capital as economic, cultural, and social—examining access to resources and the potential for individual mobility in society. ASBs allowed and encouraged participants to examine social class in terms of social capital, namely power and privilege dynamics, to engage in a deeper learning and meaning-making process.

Therefore, the respondents echo the Deweyan notions of experiential education, noting their participation in ASBs as a chance to be a student in the world, rather than the classroom, ultimately realizing their ability to serve as a change agent for society upon reflection on their ASB experience. However, while participants' understanding of social capital was broadened to reflect an understanding of class differences and their social implications, respondents' subsequent reflections were not entirely in line with Bourdieu's understanding of social capital.

Bourdieu (2013) argued that, ultimately, the recognition of class differences will result in violence, whether symbolic or literal, as class and capital differences position individuals to jockey for recognition and authority. This study, however, speaks to a subtler understanding of social capital, as respondents took years to navigate their understanding of self and other within a larger social context. In this sense, Bourdieu's model of class-consciousness serves as a framework for understanding the participant process of habitus in this study. As previously explained, the participants in these ASB programs come from a place of privilege, with little to no experience in border-crossing. Therefore, participating in an ASB trip challenged them to begin to critique their own beliefs and assumptions. In this sense, I am not arguing that respondents achieved a level of trans-class consciousness, but rather began to explore their own dispositions, assessing how they perceive society and its structures. This process of unpacking social capital and coming to an understanding of one's personal place within a cultural system of power and privilege results in a process of developing a habitus—as participants take time to assess their experiences and their understanding of self and others, in order to reflect on the role of social capital in their lives. While their experience does not directly translate to Bourdieu's (2013) model, Bourdieu's concept of social capital aids in the analysis of participant service-learning experiences and their ability to afford participants the opportunity to see themselves as having habitus, ultimately engaging them in a personal critique of their own varied privileged positions in society. In short, although respondents were not collectively reaching an enlightened status, they were able to experience an initial shift in consciousness through habitus.

6.1.2 Role of ASB in Civic Engagement

The second guiding research question of this study asked, “What role do students view their ASB service experience playing in their personal understanding and participation in civic engagement?” As explained in the literature review, the concept of civic engagement in higher education initiatives is focused on three lenses: social psychological, socio-cultural, and systemic (Newton & Norris, 2000). These lenses relate to the attainment of cognitive and developmental skills which foster engaged citizenship (Egerton, 2002), utilization of social capital (Bourdieu, 1997; Egerton, 2002), and participation in civic initiatives (Egerton, 2002).

The ASB program that the respondents participated in utilized these lenses to engage students in service-learning initiatives to foster their civic development. All respondents attributed their civic engagement tendencies both during their undergraduate career and post-graduation to their participation in the ASB program, as it helped them to grow as civically engaged and mindful citizens. While the respondents entered the trips with varying degrees of civic engagement and currently engage in civic initiatives to varying degrees, they all cited ASB trips as a factor in their overall civic development. This crediting of ASB trips as one of participants’ motivators for civic development and knowledge creation aligns with Dewey’s argument for engaged learning methods as key to knowledge construction and attainment due to the interaction of knowledge and skill sets with real-life experience as they resonate with Dewey’s charge for all individuals to actively engage within their community. In this sense, ASB trips align with Dewey’s (1916) argument that education is a tool for which society can improve humanity. By fostering participants’ civic engagement both during and post-experience, ASBs are exemplars of the value of education in personal and democratic engagement, which Dewey’s theory of experiential learning valued. Through hands-on direct

service and reflection during and post-trip, students were able to unpack their experience with ASBs various situations and challenges in order to grow as a civically mindful and culturally sensitive human capable of producing positive social change.

Moreover, by analyzing the respondents' stories as a unit, I was able to assess the spectrum of attainment and refinement of the characteristics for the individual respondents as well as the group as a whole in comparison to the Wheel of Civic Responsibility (Figure 4). Through the students' description of their ASB trips—notably the various structures for reflection and hands on service, as well as the social issues being observed and discussed—higher education's focus on engaged citizenship became evident (Figure 3). As previously described, the three components present in the higher education component of the model represent the systemic, social psychological, and socio-cultural realms of civic engagement initiatives in higher education. Without realizing it, in sharing the details of their service trip, its structure, and community agency partner dynamics, the respondents were revealing the ways in which their institution utilized tactics to achieve the goals of the three realms of civic engagement to aid in the development of their individual civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic identity, ultimately crediting their ASB trip, and thus the institution, as a key experience in their personal understanding and participation in civic engagement. Their individual stories of growth and development complicate civic engagement theory because their interactions with the lenses and the salience of such interactions, varies not only by individual participant, but also by individual trip. As previously described in Chapter Two, these lenses are higher education's answer to engaging students in civic engagement initiatives in order to develop them as responsible citizens (Egerton, 2002; Newton & Norris, 2000). Whereas these efforts have merit, the narratives highlight that the depth of engagement and salience of the experience varies by

respondent, thereby challenging the notion or assumption of service-learning literature that all service-learning experiences are generally transformative, and thus positioning these narratives as examples of possible outcomes of participation, rather than guaranteed occurrences, or effects, for all participants.

6.1.3 ASBs' Effect on Civic Mindedness and Cultural Sensitivity

Respondents noted varying depths of developmental shifts in regard to their perspectives and habits related to civic mindedness and cultural sensitivity. In assessing individual narratives and meaning making experiences of participants in regard to their awareness of social issues and initiatives as well as awareness and acceptance of difference, this research study sought to answer the final research question, “How do students see their ASB experiences shift their notions of civic mindedness and cultural sensitivity?”

Respondents spoke of ASBS as often “eye-opening” experiences, challenging them to address their preconceived notions of cultural issues and differences. Respondents reported an increased understanding and awareness of cultural concerns and their effects on communities, which allowed them to engage in societal critiques and analysis of social issues both during the trip itself and post-trip as an engaged citizen. Moreover, several of the respondents noted recognition of personal privilege, due to the experience of grappling with concepts of power and societal class hierarchies during the ASB trip. As the literature explained, ASB experiences are often the first time when students examine these dense topics (Jones & Abes, 2004), as it is the first time these concepts are contextualized in a tangible and meaningful way. The respondents saw this component of ASBs as being directly linked to their development of civic mindedness and cultural sensitivity as it served as the launching point for dialogue and reflection surrounding

these concepts for them. That is to say, by engaging in informal dialogue with trip staff over the course of the day's projects and work, and formally with the entire group of trip participants, the students on the ASB trips are able to engage in daily reflection, thus challenging their perceptions of others and interpretations of community and social issues daily. Eyler (2002) argues that this is when the student receives the maximum value of the experience—through reflection before, during, and after their experiences with the community and its members.

But even so, this awareness and individual development of civic mindedness was experienced and revealed to varying degrees by respondents, as each individual participant enters the ASB program with their own personal story of understanding. However, regardless of the discrepancy in mindedness and sensitivity starting points for students, growth was present in all of the included participant narratives. By way of contrast, the three remaining narratives serve as a cautionary tale for practitioners. While it is not confirmed, the researcher speculates that the lack of a meaningful response from these three participants indicates a lack of salience in regard to the experience for participants. While the other respondents note grappling with the challenge of self-assessment via reflection on perceptions of self and others, these respondents did not share stories of the same engagement intensity. Rather than an introspective and meaningful experience, I believe these respondents perceived aversion to speaking of personal change related to the trip signifies that a challenge of beliefs and values did not take place for these particular individuals.

As the literature explains, these ASB service experiences have the ability to create dilemmas for participants as they cross borders literally and figuratively through both inter- and intra-personal realms, challenging them to be cognizant of their values and assumptions in the context of real-world experience and interactions with outside communities and individuals

(Einfeld & Collins, 2007; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Respondents explained throughout their narratives that by being given the opportunity to engage with others which they would not have been able to do without the ASB trip, they were able to eliminate assumptions about different individuals that they held, which were often fostered by media and biased news coverage with certain political leanings (Westrick, 2004). In turn, participants developed their own, first-hand, perceptions of others and social issues as they dialogued with individual members of communities they once judged or were afraid of. This personal creation of perceptions or notions crafted due to direct experience with other or difference, signifies a strengthening of civic mindedness and cultural sensitivity as participants challenge themselves to know others, understanding their struggle while searching for commonalities or points of harmony.

Further, these interpretations suggest that participants are capable of maintaining their levels of civic engagement and civic mindedness post-graduation. The respondents in this study maintained their high levels of civic mindedness and cultural sensitivity that they attributed to their participation in the ASB program. While the depth or salience of each respondent's civic identity, skills, and knowledge varied, it was still a present theme throughout each individual dialogue. Participants consider their ASB experiences to be a formative part of their undergraduate experience, and, ultimately, of their personal development because it allowed them to see themselves differently, as agents of change or civically informed individuals while also broadening their view of others.

Although the ASB trips themselves were immersive experiences, requiring students to live and work in an unfamiliar community for a week, they alone are not capable of challenging students to engage in border-crossing. The act of physically crossing borders does not guarantee self-reflection or perspective alteration for participants. It became clear after speaking to all of

the respondents that the locale of the trip itself (rural vs. urban, eastern vs. western, etc.) was not as important to the act of border-crossing as was the relational component of the trip. Based on respondent feedback, similarities also had a crucial role to play. This value set is unique to service-learning contexts specifically ASBs as the required modes of reflection, combined with the dialogue with peers and community members during the trip, encourage participants to continue their engagement in “more justifiable and socially responsible action post-trip” (Kiely, 2005, p.6). It was the dialogue that the students shared with community members during service projects and peers during reflection that encouraged them to navigate cultural differences and examine their systems of belief and place in society.

While students may witness social capital differences in their home or college community, in comparison to the community in which they are serving, respondents explained that it was not until partaking in personal interaction with community members that they finally began to examine their prejudices and gain an awareness of social inequities. Respondents explained that the act of hearing the story of someone’s struggle and hearing about what a day in the life of someone from a different community is like, was their impetus to finally begin to better understand and appreciate difference and recognize the importance of social action and civic engagement. In this sense, while participants may have crossed physical borders immediately upon beginning the ASB trip, it was not until their interaction with community members and group reflection with their peers that they actually crossed cultural and socially constructed borders. This process of literal and figurative border-crossing allowed participants to gain an understanding of cultural concerns and social justice concepts while learning to appreciate and respect other perspectives. This finding highlights ASB’s ability as a service-learning program to generate the greatest levels of learning and development in the reflective

experiential tradition of Dewey through cycles of action and reflection (Dewey, 1916). In this sense, the relational component between participants and community members paired with daily peer reflection, the two components of the ASB trips which respondents viewed as influential, engage participants in cognitive reflection and direct action to generate knowledge, and therefore, engage students in a learning experience within a broader, diverse context than the average classroom provides (Kiely, 2005).

6.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

6.2.1 Gaining Understanding of Long-Term Participant Perspective

As previously explained, service-learning initiatives, inclusive of ASBs, are higher education's answer to the achievement of institutional civic goals while fostering the civic commitment of students. However, colleges and universities across the nation are implementing service-learning initiatives without a true understanding of whether or not their programmatic goals and learning outcomes for participants are realized by the students. In other words, practitioners often develop and implement these programs with the best of intentions based upon the service-learning literature; however, there is little analysis post-experience to determine, specifically from the participant perspective, how the experience was executed and the lasting effects it had. In reflecting through the process of developing my own personal narrative for this dissertation, I came to realize that I, too, had failed to understand the deep meaning participants were ascribing to their trip, regardless of regular assessment of the program and routine reflection with

participants. It was not until reflecting on the individual narratives for this study that I came to a deeper understanding.

On the occasion that research is conducted to gain the participant perspective on the program and its outcomes, it is often limited to immediate feedback, typically in the form of reflection journals written while on the ASB trip, or via focus groups conducted immediately upon return to campus (Howard, 2003). This study was able to dig more deeply into the participant perspective to push past the initial reflections on the experience in order to revisit the meaning-making process for ASB participants, and to determine what salience the experience had, and still has, on their development one to five years after graduation.

By gaining an understanding of the long-term participant perspective related to ASBs, this study is able to examine whether the purported outcomes of ASBs are merely short term, only lasting for the duration of the students' academic year, or much less, for only the duration of the trip, or whether the development which occurs during and immediately post-trip has a lasting effect.

This study's main interpretations are significant as they not only shed light onto five individual stories of growth and development due to participation in a service-learning initiative as told by the participants themselves, but also reveal the ability of ASBs to affect positive long-term change on participants, thus positioning service-learning as a meaningful and influential pedagogy. This is significant in regard to the further implications it has for student affairs practice.

As explained earlier, ASB trips are often implemented as co-curricular programming, leaving their coordination and management to professional staff members, rather than academic faculty members. While academic success and classroom learning objectives are often measured

and analyzed, as they are seen as crucial to student growth and development, co-curricular initiatives are not held to the same standard. This discrepancy exists, as individuals are more likely to conduct assessment when they fully understand what the assessment entails and how students will benefit (Volkwein, 2003). In this sense, it's easier to conduct assessment on student performance, instructional methods, and academic policy, than it is on co-curricular initiatives as they are not rooted in an established academic curriculum or institutional policy, and thus are not directly linked to measurable outcomes. However, with interpretations such as those discussed in this study, it becomes evident that the learning outcomes of student affairs based programs must also be critically assessed and evaluated as they too have lasting effects on students. This study's main interpretations suggest that students as far as five years removed from their undergraduate ASB experience still find meaning in their ASB participation, fondly recalling specifics of their interactions with others during the trip. Moreover, upon reflection, participants also view their ASB experience as formative to their development as a civically engaged and mindful member of society, positioning ASB experiences as a crucial developmental opportunity for participants during and post-experience, well into their young professional careers.

6.2.2 Significance of Community Member Interaction

The other significant implication from this study is the noted significance of community member interaction for participants. When asked to describe his or her most memorable or crucial moments of the ASB experience, each respondent recalled at least one interaction with a community member, indicating that the opportunity for one on one interaction with others is a crucial component of the ASB structure. Respondents were able to recall these interactions with

more detail and passion than other experiences on the ASB trips, including their own thought processes or conversations with friends. Participants oftentimes recounted these moments as meaningful as they were significant experiences of relations across radical difference. Students were able to relate to individuals they once held as either irrelevant or indescribably different than themselves. This concept is crucial to note, as the true assessment of personal privilege and biases can go uncontested until this point in the experience (Jones & Abes, 2004). In other words, this is the space where respondents noted the occurrence of real growth and attainment of knowledge as community members afford participants the opportunity to interact across difference, forging relationships with individuals from different cultures and populations while engaging in service (Holsapple, 2012). For practitioners, this is an important point to acknowledge, as ASB trips may vary by community agency partner selection choices, and therefore, it is crucial for practitioners to develop a trip structure that affords participants regular extended interaction with community members. Conversely, as the narratives highlighted, working alongside peers who are viewed as other, or different than the participant, also provide a promising outlet for exploring personal privilege and biases as students share their personal stories with one another, navigating their differences together. In this sense, the regular interaction with others, or relational component of ASBs, is the factor of the ASB trip structure which transforms social issues from the abstract to tangible, offering participants first-hand experiences and interaction with otherness rather than the detached concepts they are presented with from course texts and media (Kiely, 2005). Therefore, through these interactions across difference, ASB trips are able to achieve the service-learning ideal of engaging students in “first-hand experiences of diversity and multiculturalism” (Soukop, 1996, p.9)

6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR SELF

As previously explained in section 4.1, my scholarly personal narrative, this study challenged me to evaluate my role in the student meaning-making process, as well as determine the effects that my participation in ASBs had on my professional and personal development. In reflecting on the interpretations of this study, I have come to realize the implications that these interpretations have had on myself.

As an ASB practitioner, this study challenged me to think about the loaded meaning in every logistical decision made for the trips. As mentioned before, I chose to focus on food and housing insecurity due to accessibility and participant familiarity. By doing so, I was capable of essentially mapping the trajectory of the student experience. While, as the narratives show, every students' meaning-making process will vary in depth, the discussions on border-crossing show that due to the trips' foci, the participants were reflecting on concepts related to social capital. Therefore, it became evident through this study, that practitioners have the power to challenge students to navigate different concepts based on seemingly minor logistical decisions. In this sense, it is crucial that practitioners are mindful of desired learning outcomes and institutional goals in order to guide and inform their selection of agency partners, trip locations, and project work in order to align with and complement these goals.

Since the beginning of this study, my professional role has changed. I no longer manage ASBs or service-learning programming, but rather serve as the Dean of Student Engagement within a Student Affairs Division at a small private Catholic institution. While my immediate job responsibilities are no longer related to this study, the interpretations still hold meaning for this next chapter of my professional career. This study's focus on the significance of the relational component of programming is relevant for all student affairs programming. As participants

noted significance in their interactions with community members during their ASB program, I find it important to challenge students to interact with and serve within their larger community for all co-curricular programming offered by my division, challenging participant understanding of their larger global impact and purpose—ultimately reflecting on their role as an engaged and responsible citizen. Encouraging students to think about their place within society, whether related to the campus community or beyond, will be a crucial focus of my work moving forward, as this study has shown its importance in terms of individual development.

In addition, this study's interpretations of the significance of reflection will serve as a guidepost for my future work. In thinking about the importance of student reflection and debriefing of the service experience both during the trip and post-trip, I believe that engaging students in reflection related to all of their co-curricular experiences is crucial. Giving students space to discuss the importance of interactions, challenges, and experiences will serve to not only afford student participants with an opportunity to grow and learn, but will also provide me with the opportunity to evaluate my practice, and the practices and procedures, of my staff and Division, as this study allowed me to do for my ASB work.

6.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study's main interpretations and implications, as well as the Wheel of Civic Responsibility, lead to larger questions about the ways we study and understand the participant experience in alternative spring break programs. Recommendations for future research are included below.

6.4.1 Extended Participant Feedback

The respondents for this study varied from one year post-graduation to five years post-graduation. While this range of years may seem like a significant amount of time to have passed from a service experience that occurred during one's undergraduate career, the respondents still had vivid memories of the ASB experience in regard to: fellow participants, community agency partners, social justice focus, project work specifics, and personal mindset during the trip. While these memories were certainly helpful in providing a rich description of the trip, the experience is still within the respondents' recent pasts, thus making it not only easier to recall, but also leaving a smaller amount of time between the ASB trip and the current moment. This shorter gap between experience and interview makes it difficult for this study to gauge the long-term effects of participation in regard to one's propensity to serve, one's cultural sensitivity, and one's civic responsibility.

Consequently, to advance research on the meaning students make of their ASB experience, as well as the salience of the experience and its given learning outcomes, future research should focus on the narratives of participants at a minimum of six years post-ASB trip. This longitudinal data would allow for researchers to identify the lasting effects of participation, and whether the data from the years immediately following the ASB experience are as significant as during the years almost one decade after the experience. This research would enable the contextualization of the service experience, gaining an understanding of the long-term participant benefits and takeaways from the participant perspective.

Further, as the narratives included in this study exemplify, great meaning and knowledge can be made, which benefits both students and the field, through the narrative process. Narratives should be conducted regularly with ASB participants, as the responses from five

interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the meaning-making process for students. At the same time, the three narratives which were not included in this study highlight the importance of participant feedback in order for practitioners to understand where opportunities lie for improvements. These narratives, while not represented in the study, hold significance, as they represent a research quandary. As these narratives represent three alternative experiences to the general sentiment shared in the five included narratives, they lead me to question whether a larger sample would position these alternative experience as a normative experience in a larger service-learning context—opening up a space for literature surrounding problematic service-learning outcomes. By engaging with participants who have had negative or less meaningful experiences, practitioners and researchers alike may understand the rarely researched, less impactful side of service-learning, therefore developing a more comprehensive understanding the variation in student experience. In this sense, the collection of individuals’ stories of their ASB trips into a narrative of the overall experience provides a “consolidated wealth of ideas and emotions” (Dewey, 1929, p. 291), while also acknowledging the potential for the experience to offer little to no impact on other participants.

6.4.2 Acknowledging Varying Degrees of Engaged Citizenship

As explained earlier in the study, the respondents for this particular research study were involved in a minimum of two alternative spring break trips. Therefore, participants in this study were involved in a minimum of two trips in which they were required to participate in seven straight days of hands-on direct service while living in fellowship with community members. This level of immersion is substantial, as it results in the accumulation more than 300 immersion hours in a single community.

As described in the previous chapter, the results of participants' in-depth service-learning experiences was an increase in their engaged learning characteristics, essentially leading to the development of their overall status as a civically engaged individual. While the respondents in this study shared stories of significance to themselves in terms of the personal developmental impact from their ASB experience, in comparison to their peers they are highly civically engaged individuals. Not only did the respondents participate in a substantial amount of service during their undergraduate career, many continue to serve in their current communities and have even chosen career paths that afford them the opportunity to continue to serve, such as non-profit agencies and the medical field. That being said, future research should be conducted with individuals with less service-learning experience to determine whether or not the effects of participation in ASB programs transcend into less extreme service engagements, namely the realm of individuals who participate in one ASB experience, or those with regular participation in short-term service projects, rather than immersion trips. Additionally, such research should delve into the discrepancy between effects on participants from service-learning experiences varying by engagement and immersion levels. Accordingly, this research would afford a deeper, more holistic understanding of service-learning experiences on a varied demographic of participants. In this sense, this future research could answer the concerns of the deficit of literature surrounding the specific contexts of service-learning that lead to reported outcomes (Kiely, 2005) as data would then exist to navigate the variance between participant experience based on depth and type of engagement.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

Through discussions with the respondents, as well as analysis of the data, a few suggestions for practice were revealed. This section will focus on discussing the implications for practice revealed through this research, as well as on recommendations for implementation.

6.5.1 Extended Participant Reflection

As discussed in the literature review, there is a lack of understanding of the long-term participant effects of participating in an ASB trip. This is connected to the fact that there is little opportunity for practitioners to engage with participants months, or even years, out of the service experience to gauge the long-term effects of their participation. This lack of longitudinal data also signifies a lack of opportunities for participants to formally unpack their experience and reflect on their meaning-making process after having participated, as most ASB experiences call for reflection and debriefing sessions during the trip itself, as well as immediately after the experience. Niehaus and Rivera (2016) explain that the most noted component of a “quality service-learning” program is reflection, as written and oral group and individual debriefing often facilitate the development of outcomes for participants (p. 346).

After dialoguing with respondents for this study, it became evident that they appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their undergraduate service experience and assess the impact that their participation had on them at the time of participation, as well as on their current life. After sharing their own stories, they asked questions about their trip mates, wondering aloud what they were up to and whether or not they shared the same sentiments as them in regard to the trip and its lasting effects on them. After conducting this narrative inquiry, it is evident that the answer is

both yes and no, as some respondents spoke of the trips fondly, attributing their civic development to their participation, while other respondents did not place as much, if any, significance on their ASB experience. Moreover, after I thanked them for having participated, after the interview had concluded, each respondent subsequently thanked me for the opportunity to share their story and reflect on their past life experience.

Based on the positive feedback from respondents, the enlightening experience I also had in reflecting upon my own experience with the program, as well as on the excitement and enthusiasm projected throughout the discussions, I am recommending that practitioners take the time to extend their reflection periods for ASB trips for both the participants and themselves. The traditional reflection process, either occurring during or immediately after service (Bringle & Hatcher, 2003), is still helpful for participants to unpack their experience while they are navigating the process of adjusting to life back on campus. However, this study's interpretations suggest that through long-term reflection opportunities a richer understanding of the meaning the ASB trips hold for participants, as well as recommendations and suggestions for change in addition to insights into highly beneficial trip components, are obtained. Therefore, regular reflections, even less-formal reconnection meetings and/or socials should occur throughout participants' undergraduate career to allow for additional dialogue and reflection in the long-term post-experience. By incorporating continued reflection, practitioners could provide participants continued development of knowledge, skills, and cognitive capabilities (Eyler, 2002), thus better enabling them to navigate complex social issues, further developing themselves as civically minded and culturally aware citizens.

6.5.2 Interactive Community Agency Partner

As mentioned in the analysis chapter, respondents appreciated their time spent alongside community members. Not only did they find working alongside community members on a project to be rewarding, as they were able to discuss the specifics of the project, as well as come to learn the impact it would have on the community and the individual, but they also enjoyed the relational aspect of their service-learning experience. All of the included narratives noted the substantial amount of meaning they placed on being afforded the opportunity to get to know someone from a culture different than their own. Respondents spoke of the power inherent in the conversations with individuals from the community in which they discussed the social issues present within their town. Respondents felt that reading about and discussing the social issues present within the community were not as eye-opening as having a personal conversation with someone who has seen and personally experienced those concerns.

Moreover, the learning that occurred due to interactions with community members was not limited to social and economic issues, it also allowed students to push past their comfort zones to get to know someone, and a culture, which they were unfamiliar with. This act of engaging in regular dialogue with community members afforded participants the opportunity to border-cross, rather than to simply observe. By working alongside these community members, eating with them in their homes, listening to them as they shared their stories of challenges and struggles, students were able to have a first-hand experience in a community outside of their own, while being forced to confront social issues, as well as any pre-conceived notions they may have held in regard to individuals or communities.

Due to the richness these interactions afford, I am recommending that practitioners work to create partnerships with community agencies that not only work for, but *with* community

members, engaging them in direct service alongside student participants so that students are afforded the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the community. By carefully vetting partner service programs, staff structures, available resources, and service areas, practitioners can determine whether their ASB goals align with the agency's service-learning program and structure. As agency partners mobilize community members in service and allow homeowners to help manage their housing rehabilitation projects, agencies are not only fostering a cooperative structure, but they are also fostering the mutually beneficial environment, which is important to service-learning initiatives. (Howard, 2001). Therefore, by purposefully selecting a community agency partner practitioners are able to better position their ASB trips as meaningful and engaging, as they work to incorporate increased amounts of community member interactions, thereby providing students with ample opportunities to engage with others and challenge their previous understandings of social issues and different communities.

6.5.3 Alumni Accessibility

As described in the analysis chapter, the respondents in this study were highly engaged as undergraduate students. They participated in a minimum of two alternative spring break trips, as well as various other service-learning opportunities through their various courses and club affiliations. However, in describing their current levels of engagement with direct service, several respondents spoke of a lack of access to service opportunities post-graduation.

All of the respondents reported a current level of civic engagement, typically through philanthropic and advocacy initiatives. Four respondents who are currently employed also spoke to their chosen careers, in both the non-profit and medical fields, as their outlet for community service post-graduation. However, while these individuals felt that they were civically engaged,

some also acknowledged a lack of formalized service opportunities available to them as a graduate, and spoke of a desire to serve in the capacity in which they once did as an undergraduate student. Chuckie explained this struggle to find service opportunities after graduating, stating, “I don’t belong to a lot of groups outside of college that readily welcome people to come and do those things, you know organize those things, to go see and serve other people.”

Knowing that the graduates who were once civically engaged students are still seeking out service opportunities, I recommend that practitioners establish ways for alumni to engage in service opportunities. Based on the commentary from this study’s participants, initiatives that afford opportunities for former ASB participants to serve with one another post-graduation would be well received. In addition, I believe the dynamic between alumni and current students would afford an opportunity for rich reflection and dialogue during a service experience, as alumni engagement aids in the development of more engaged and supportive students (Daniel, Bellani, & Marshall, n.d.), and, therefore, I suggest that service initiatives for current and past students to engage in service with one another be implemented into institutional service initiatives.

6.6 CONCLUSION

Service-learning has been argued to increase participants’ inclination to serve and academic achievement (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989). Often, institutions of higher learning implement service-learning initiatives to increase students’ sense levels of civic responsibility, as well as to satisfy institutional initiatives surrounding civic mission and goals. One common program type

that institutions implement to satisfy these goals are alternative spring breaks. However, these short-term immersion service trips for college students are understudied as far as service-learning initiatives go (Ivory, 1997; Jones, Robbins, & LePeau, 2011; Rhoads & Neururer, 1998), and, therefore, there is little indication of the larger context of the service experience and its subsequent participant outcomes (Jones, Robbins, & LePeau, 2011).

This research study addressed this gap in both researcher and practitioner understanding of ASBs, shedding light onto the participant meaning-making experience. Through the use of a conceptual framework grounded in John Dewey's theory of experiential education, in which experience and social situations inform one's understanding of the world in which they live, and Henry Giroux's theory of border-crossing, wherein individuals are challenged and ultimately developed by their movement between both literal and figurative borders, this study was able to examine the ways in which participants in an ASB trip develop a sense of cultural sensitivity, and a level of civic mindedness to reveal an ultimate status of a civically responsible citizen.

Giroux (1992) argued that border-crossing decenters students as they "re-map," "shifting the parameters of place, identity, and power" (p.72). While Giroux (1991) speaks of this occurrence with a sense of immediacy, calling for spaces for students to dialogue during the border-crossing process in order to engaged with their personal narratives and the border-crossing experience to assess "consistencies and contradictions" in their perceptions of others (p.75), this study challenges Giroux's understanding of time by highlighting the individual intricacies of understanding oneself within a larger cultural narrative. As this study's narratives show, sometimes this process of meaning-making is immediate, following Giroux's process. However, sometimes the individuals' reflection and subsequent understanding of one's place, power, and privilege comes years after the experience, or perhaps in some instances as the

dropped narratives show, the connection, or understanding, is never made. In this sense, this study provided an opportunity for individuals to share their stories as Giroux called for, reflecting on their personal development in terms of civic and cultural mindedness while on the trip, as well as confirming and critically engaging their experience as an adult post-trip. This study, therefore, shows the long-term effects of border-pedagogy, encouraging ongoing dialogue and reflection surrounding the experience and one's meaning-making process surrounding their participation.

In assessing the individual narratives, as well as the overall themes which carried on from participant to participant, this study utilized the Wheel of Civic Responsibility (Figure 4) to assess individual respondents' attainment of the components of an engaged citizenship, while also determining the ways in which the institutional ASB program fostered said components to generate the development of civically responsible citizens out of program participants. In doing so, the data showed ASB trips to be not only successful in challenging students in their perspectives and pre-conceived notions during the trip, but also in maintaining sense of civic mindedness post-graduation. The respondents spoke of continued reflection and assessment of social issues, as well as of individual social capital in regard to power and privilege. Respondents attributed their participation in the trip to the development of their levels of civic knowledge, civic skills, civic identity, and cultural sensitivity post-graduation.

Based on these interpretations, it has become evident that ASB trips have not only immediate effects on participants, but also have the ability to potentially foster long-term effects on individuals in both the personal and civic realms. Therefore, this study has implications for not only participants in ASB trips, but also for institutions of higher learning as to how they can best implement ASB programs, captivate ASB participants, and engage with and acknowledge

the development of participants once they finish their ASB experience and ultimately graduate. In this sense, this study opens the door to future research on the long-term effects of service-learning on participants, highlighting the rich data that can be retrieved through a narrative account given by the participants themselves.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT SOLICITATION EMAIL

Subject: Seeking Participants for a Study on Alternative Spring Breaks

Hello, my name is Jessica Mann. I am a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh in the Administration and Policy Studies Department of the School of Education. I am conducting research on alternative spring breaks, and I am inviting you to participate because you were a student participant in an alternative spring break program during your undergraduate college career.

Participation in this research includes a one-on-one interview with myself about your service experience as well as your perceptions related to its effects on you. Participation in the interview should take under two hours to complete. A consent document has been attached to this email to better describe the study, the collection of the information you will provide, and any associated benefits to your participation.

Upon reading the attachment, if you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at 724-816-7617 or jl318@pitt.edu.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. I greatly appreciate it.

Best,

Jessica Mann

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTORY CONSENT SCRIPT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The purpose of the study is to learn more about the transformative experiences of students who participated in an Alternative Spring Break program. This one-on-one interview will last roughly 90 minutes. All participants must be 18 years of age or older. If you agree to participate, I will ask you questions about your experience of participating in the Alternative Spring Break as well as your perceptions of how that participation affected you.

There is no direct compensation or benefits to participating in this study. In addition, there are no foreseeable risks associated with this project.

This interview will be audio recorded. However, the records of this study will be kept private and confidential—your responses will be anonymous and therefore not identifiable in any way. All data will be kept under lock and key or in password protected files.

You are welcome to share as much or as little as you wish. If you experience significant discomfort, you may leave the interview at any time.

This study is being conducted by Jessica Mann, who can be reached at 724-816-7617 or jlm318@pitt.edu, if you have any questions.

If you wish to contact the University of Pittsburgh's Institutional Review Board (IRB) about questions or concerns related to this study, they can be reached at 412-383-1480 or irb@pitt.edu.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTION ROUTE

- 1) Tell me a little bit about your current self?
 - a. Age
 - b. Career/Education
 - c. Hobbies
- 2) Describe your undergraduate self for me?
 - a. Involvements: clubs, organizations, service, etc.
 - b. Major
 - c. Hobbies
- 3) Tell me about the Alternative Spring Break Program you participated in?
 - a. What was its purpose?
 - b. What was your reason for participating? What did you hope to gain?
 - c. Where did you travel? Site Partner? Work details?
- 4) Think back to your participant experience; is there any event(s) that stand out? Can you describe them for me?
 - a. What about experiences with community members?
- 5) How did you feel after you got back from your alternative break program trip?
 - a. About yourself
 - b. About your service
 - c. About the world/community you live in
 - d. About your institution
- 6) How do your views about yourself, service and the world now compare?
- 7) Looking back on your experience now, how do you feel about your participation in the ASB experience?
 - a. Positive? Negative? Why?
 - b. Personal outcomes/impact

- 8) How do you currently define diversity
 - a. How does this differ from your understanding of diversity when you participated in the alternative spring break program
- 9) How did this ASB experience affect your ability to work with individuals from different backgrounds?
- 10) How do you currently define service
 - a. How does this differ from your understanding of service when you participated in the alternative spring break program
 - b. How have your tendencies to serve changed since your ASB experience?
- 11) Can you describe your current level of civic engagement?
 - a. Can you tell me how this level has changed since your ASB experience?
- 12) Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in the alternative spring break program?

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT MEMBER CHECKING EMAIL

Subject: Thanks for the Interview—Please Review!

Hello xx,

I hope this email finds you well. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me about your experience with the Alternative Spring Break program. I have attached a transcript of our conversation. If you feel that you have been quoted in error, have additional comments to add, or would like to discuss something in greater detail, please let me know. If I do not hear from you by xx,xx 2016 I will assume that you agree with the document and have found no errors in the transcription, and therefore, have no changes to make or comments to add.

If you have any other questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to email me. Thank you again for your time--I greatly appreciate your willingness to help me with my study.

Best,

Jess Mann

APPENDIX E

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTION ROUTE

1. Describe your initial thoughts about the interview transcript and my initial interpretation.
2. Can you explain if there is anything significant missing from the document?
3. Can you explain whether there is anything in the document that you disagree with? Or have concerns about?
4. Is there anything else, based on your overall experience with the study, that you wish to be added to the document or shared with me?

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