

2017

# 2015-2016 Service-Learning Impact Measure Report

Samantha Poelstra  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/community\\_resources](http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/community_resources)



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

2015-2016 Service-Learning Impact Measure Report. Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Retrieved from [community.vcu.edu](http://community.vcu.edu)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Division of Community Engagement at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Division of Community Engagement Resources by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact [libcompass@vcu.edu](mailto:libcompass@vcu.edu).

---

# 2015-2016 Service-Learning Impact Measure Report

## **Abstract**

The VCU Service-Learning Office distributes the Service-Learning Impact Measure (SLIM) at the end of every semester to evaluate the impact of service-learning classes on student learning. Results are used to guide professional development opportunities, as well as to further improve the quality of and recruit additional tenure-line faculty members to teach designated service-learning classes.

## **Keywords**

service-learning, community, community engagement, high impact practices, experiential learning, higher education, service, civic engagement

## **Disciplines**

Higher Education

# 2015-2016 Service-Learning Impact Measure Report

June 2017

Prepared by:  
Samantha Poelstra



# VCU

Community Engagement

# Table of Contents

---

Executive Summary .....	3
Methodology .....	4
Findings .....	4
Qualitative Data .....	10
<b>Common Positive Themes</b> .....	11
<b>Common Negative Themes</b> .....	15
<b>Suggested Improvements</b> .....	17
Summary and Next Steps .....	30
Appendix A .....	32

**Recommended Citation:**

2015-2016 Service-Learning Impact Measure Report. Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Retrieved from [community.vcu.edu](http://community.vcu.edu)

## Executive Summary

---

The VCU Service-Learning Office distributes the Service-Learning Impact Measure (SLIM) at the end of every semester to evaluate the impact of service-learning classes on student learning. During the 2015-2016 academic year, 3,635 graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in 180 designated service-learning classes. Each of these 3,635 students received the SLIM by email as an online survey. Of those, 896 students completed the SLIM for a 25% response rate. Data from Banner, the university's information system, showed that the majority of service-learning class instructors in 2015-2016 were female (68%) and non-tenure line faculty members (69%).

Students who responded perceived service-learning classes very positively. Respondents reported that their learning benefited from the service component of the class, from the reflection activities, and from interactions with the instructor and their classmates. Respondents also reported that their skill level in 17 different skills increased as a result of their service-learning class participation. In particular, the students who responded to the survey believed that their service-learning class participation improved their ability to work collaboratively in groups, their awareness of needs present in the community, and their capacity to have an impact on social problems.

The VCU Service-Learning Office will use these results to further improve the quality of service-learning classes. Strategies will be employed to increase the SLIM response rate. Professional development offerings will be tailored to reach term (i.e., full-time non-tenure line) and adjunct faculty members, as these groups make up the majority of current service-learning instructors. Efforts will be made to recruit additional tenure-line faculty members to teach designated service-learning classes.

## Methodology

---

At the end of the Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 semesters, the VCU Service-Learning office implemented the VCU SLIM (Service-Learning Impact Measure) for all service-learning students using REDCap. This electronic survey was emailed to all 3,635 graduate and undergraduate students enrolled for credit in designated service-learning classes during those semesters, and 895 students (25%) completed the survey. To increase the response rate of the SLIM, the office began offering a small raffle incentive (\$10 Starbucks gift card and a t-shirt) to those who completed the survey. This year's response rate is comparable to the 2014-2015 SLIM survey response rate (26%) and surpasses the 2013-2014 SLIM survey response rate (19%) by six percent.

## Findings

---

**Course Demographics:** There were a total of 180 designated service-learning class sections offered during the fall and spring semesters. Of the 112 instructors who taught these classes, 35 (31%) were tenure line faculty members. Of these 35 tenure line faculty members, 22 (63%) were tenured. Forty-five (40%) of the 112 instructors who taught service-learning classes in 2015-2016 were term faculty members (i.e., full-time, non-tenure line faculty members) and 32 (28%) were part-time adjunct instructors. The majority of instructors were female (68%).

**Student Demographics:** According to the survey data, less than 1% of respondents were non-degree seeking students. The majority of respondents (76%) were female. The group of respondents was a racially mixed group, with 53% percent of respondents identifying their racial background as white, 16% as African American, 13% as Asian, 5% as Hispanic, and 7% as biracial or multiracial. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and International each made up less than 1% of respondents. Nearly 5% of respondents chose not to identify their racial background. Thirty-two percent indicated that they are first-generation college students, and 25% of respondents indicated that they are Pell grant recipients. Detailed demographic information is on the following page. Please note that the data excludes summer semester data.

<b>2015-2016 Gender Demographic Data</b>			
<b>Gender</b>	<b>SLIM Survey Respondents</b>	<b>Students enrolled in Service-Learning courses</b>	<b>VCU Demographics</b>
Male	21%	32%	42%
Female	76%	68%	57%
Prefer not to answer	1.7%	0.002%	0.01%
Transgender	0.34%	Not available	Not available
Other preferred descriptor	0.11%	Not available	Not available

<b>2015- 2016 Racial Background Demographic Data</b>			
<b>Racial Background</b>	<b>SLIM Survey Respondents</b>	<b>Students enrolled in Service-Learning courses</b>	<b>VCU Demographics</b>
White	53%	50%	51%
African American	16%	19%	16%
Asian	13%	13%	12%
Hispanic	5%	7%	7%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	< 1%	< 1%	< 1%
Native American	< 1%	< 1%	< 1%
Two or more races	7%	6%	5%
International (i.e., visa holder)	1%	2%	6%
Prefer not to answer	4%	< 1%	1%
Other	< 1%	3%	4%

\* Numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2015-2016 Representation of Pell Grant students			
Pell Recipient?	SLIM Survey Respondents	Students enrolled in Service-Learning courses	VCU Demographics
Yes	25%	24%	21%
No	68%	76%	79%
Not sure	7%	Not available	Not available

\* Numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2015-2016 Representation of 1 <sup>st</sup> Generation students			
Racial Background	SLIM Survey Respondents	Students enrolled in Service-Learning courses	VCU Demographics
1 <sup>st</sup> Generation	32%	16%	14%
Not 1 <sup>st</sup> Generation	66%	53%	44%
Not sure/Unknown	1%	31%	43%

\* Numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

**Types of Community Partners Served:** Fifty-two percent of respondents reported that their service-learning class community placements were in an educational setting. Health organizations represented 27% of placements, and 9% of students were placed at environmental agencies. Slightly more than 6% of students served at arts-oriented organizations, and 4% of placements fell into the economic development category.

**Intent to Continue Serving:** When asked whether they have any desire or plans to continue volunteering at the location where they had their service placement after their service-learning class ended, 76% of students said “yes” and 24% said “no.” This response pattern clearly indicates the potential impact that service-learning has for community partners in terms of future volunteer service. Of those who responded that they didn’t have plans to continue volunteering at the organization they served, many



noted that although they had no interest serving in that particular location, service-learning helped them to realize that they would enjoy volunteering elsewhere in the future.

**Reflection:** Reflection is a required component of all VCU service-learning courses and reflection activities take various forms. Students were asked to identify all methods of reflection used in their service-learning class. The two most common forms of reflection used in service-learning classes this year were reflection papers (69%) and class discussions (66%). Additionally, 47% of students reported that class presentations were used as reflection activities in their class, and 39% reported that written journals were used. Twenty-one percent of students completed blogs, 20% gave community presentations, 17% interviewed community service recipients, 15% interviewed their professor or TA, and 7% completed other activities ranging from zine production to digital video editing.

**Benefits of Class Components:** The VCU SLIM survey asks students to rate the degree to which they found reflection, community service, interactions with their instructor, and interactions with their peers to be beneficial to their learning in the class. Ratings used a 7-point scale, where 1= NOT BENEFICIAL AT ALL to 7= VERY BENEFICIAL. Students indicated that all four components were beneficial to their learning in the class. Detailed descriptive statistics for each item are shown in the table below.

	N	Mean Rating	SD
How beneficial to your learning were the reflection activities/assignments of this class?	895	5.11	1.651
How beneficial to your learning was the community service component of this class?	895	5.62	1.640
How beneficial to your learning were your interactions with the instructor of the class?	895	5.57	1.650
How beneficial to your learning were your interactions with the other students in the class?	895	5.58	1.521

(7-point scale)

**Interaction with Others:** The survey asks students to rate the degree to which their interaction with others during their service-learning class made them feel welcome. Ratings are on a 7-point scale, where 1= NOT AT ALL and 7= VERY MUCH. For all outcomes, average ratings fell between 5.91 and 6.09. These results speak to the kind of positive interactions that students experienced with other students, with community members, and with instructors in the 180 service-learning classes offered during this period. This question was only included in the Spring 2016 survey and reflects a sample of 308 respondents.

	N	Mean Rating	SD
How welcomed/included did the community partner/community site make you feel?	308	5.98	1.295
How welcomed/included did the other students in the class make you feel?	308	5.91	1.243
How welcomed/included did the instructor of the class make you feel?	308	6.09	1.415

(7-point scale)

**Professional Development:** The survey asks students to rate the degree to which their service-learning class allowed them to apply skills and knowledge to new situations, to understand how people within a profession think and behave, and to recognize how theories and conceptual models can be applied in real-world situations. Ratings are on a 6-point feeling thermometer which ranges from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, and includes Neither Agree nor Disagree as an option. Overwhelmingly, students selected Strongly Agree and Agree, which indicates that service-learning experience translates directly to professional skill development.

(6-point scale %)

“This service-learning course enabled me to...”	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
...apply my skills and knowledge to new situations.	1.6%	1.8%	3.0%	39.8%	48.7%
...understand how people within the profession think and behave.	2.2%	3.3%	2.9%	42.9%	42.1%
...recognize how theories and conceptual models can be applied in real-world situations.	2.1%	2.7%	3.2%	42.9%	42.1%

“This service-learning course enabled me to...”	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
...develop a network of professional contacts and/or mentors.	3.5%	7.5%	7.0%	35.4%	34.7%
...better understand my own strengths and weaknesses.	1.5%	3.1%	3.7%	38.1%	46.9%
I experienced positive growth in my level of empathy (e.g., ability to walk in another’s shoes and understand their perspective) as a result of my service-learning course.	1.6%	3.5%	10.9%	42.0%	41.7%
I experienced positive growth in my level of morality (e.g., understanding right and wrong) as a result of my service-learning course.	2.1%	4.6%	18.6%	37.0%	37.6%
I gained the appropriate skills and experienced for my desired career as a result of my service-learning course.	3.2%	5.5%	15.2%	38.0%	38.2%

**Service-Learning Outcomes:** The survey asks students to rate the degree to which their service-learning class helped them develop each of 15 areas. Ratings are on a 7-point scale, where 1= NOT AT ALL and 7= VERY MUCH. For all outcomes, average ratings fell between 5.28 and 5.87. These results indicate that students in more than 150 service-learning classes believe that they developed a range of important skills as a result of their service-learning experiences. Detailed descriptive statistics for each item can be found in the table below.

As a result of this class, I am better able to...	N	Mean Rating	SD
Connect my learning to societal problems or issues.	895	5.58	1.656
Connect my learning to things I have learned in other classes.	895	5.55	1.578
Examine the strengths and weaknesses of my own views on a topic or issue.	895	5.63	1.610
Be more aware of local, state, national, or global issues that need to be addressed.	895	5.62	1.786
Be more aware of some of my own biases and prejudices.	895	5.41	1.744
Work effectively in a group where people from different backgrounds feel welcomed and included.	895	5.87	1.550
Clarify my career or professional goals.	895	5.28	1.613

As a result of this class, I am better able to...	N	Mean Rating	SD
Be an active and informed citizen.	895	5.55	1.567
Consider different cultural perspectives when evaluating different social problems.	895	5.68	1.547
Be more committed to using the knowledge and skills I have gained in college to help address issues in society.	895	5.66	1.682
Be a role model for people in the community.	895	5.65	1.790
Feel comfortable interacting with people from a cultural group that is different from my own.	895	5.79	1.496
Develop a personal code of values and ethics.	895	5.54	1.534
Better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from their perspective.	895	5.78	1.506
Rate the degree to which this service-learning course challenged you to do your best work.	895	5.59	1.568

**(7-point scale)**

## Qualitative Data

Near the end of the VCU SLIM, students were asked to **“Tell us in your own words what you got out of your service-learning experience.”** Student responses to this open-ended question were overwhelmingly positive. Of the 598 responses received 92% (554 responses) reflected positive comments and 8% (44 responses) were negative. None were neutral, i.e. not able to be categorized as clearly positive or negative.

Through thematic coding of the 598 responses, 10 common categories were determined, five positive and five negative. (Responses may include more than one theme.) The frequency with which themes occurred were counted; this frequency, as well as representative comments in each thematic category, are included in the section below.

<p><b>Common Positive Themes</b> <i>From 554 positive comments</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy Cultivation: 26%</li> <li>• Professional Development: 25%</li> <li>• Civic Engagement: 14%</li> <li>• Leadership Development: 28%</li> <li>• Generally Positive Comments: 7%</li> </ul>	<p><b>Common Negative Themes</b> <i>From 44 negative comments</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack Of Relevance to Their Major: 43%</li> <li>• Unclear Instructor Communication: 20%</li> <li>• Lack Of Participation: 18%</li> <li>• Unclear Communication from Community Partner: 9%</li> <li>• Generally Negative Comments: 10%</li> </ul>
---	--

## Common Positive Themes

---

**Empathy Cultivation:** (142 occurrences, 26% of positive responses) Students mentioned feeling strong ties to others, new perspectives and ways of looking at the world, and a deeper sense of patience and calm in the face of uncertainty.

*“This experience definitely opened my eyes to the challenges that can be experienced when working with someone of a different cultural background. Each week was different and I have had to go in hoping for a good day while bracing for a bad one just in.”*

*“This class has helped me to better understand people that have very different backgrounds than me. It taught me to be more understanding, and it has taught me how to better connect with children.”*

*“Service-learning allows me to be an active member in my community and apply the lessons that I learn in my classes in the real-life experiences. By being a mentor I have learned how to be patient, accepting, and savvy. Trying to combine having fun, school work, and still being seen as a friend and positive role model is not the easiest thing. But through my experience at [service location], I feel more prepared to be in leadership positions, and I understand how to place myself in others shoes.”*

*“A significant lesson I got out of the service-learning aspect of the class, that other than it is a brain washing class for somewhat good endeavors, I took from it that if you have the power and capability to help those that can't help themselves, then you have the responsibility to do what you can”.*

*“A better understanding of myself, my community, and older adults.”*

*“Although I did not have a good experience at the location I mentored, I had a very good experience with the child I mentored. I can honestly say that just knowing him for 3 months has changed me as a person. I am so thankful that I was able to meet such a lovely caring kid who really wants to succeed in this world, even at such a young age. I think that the purpose of us doing service-learning was to have an experience like the one I had. I am very appreciative that I was able to use a lot of*

*the techniques that I learned in [course name] with my mentee.”*

*“The most important thing I've learned from my service-learning experience is that the student I mentored and I are both in a similar stage in life. I just have a little more wisdom to share with her and I think that was a special lesson to learn for the both of us.”*

**Professional Development:** (140 occurrences, 25% of positive responses) Students in this response category mentioned relevance to their future career path, a deeper understanding of their chosen field, and practical experience and professional contacts that will help them obtain future employment in their chosen field.

*“My service-learning experience caused me to imagine myself in the real world. I could actually be this person in 5 or so years. It is crazy to think about. Honestly, it has caused me to rethink my career path. Do I really want to do this? I am thankful for this opportunity that VCU has given me because it has opened the door for future volunteer opportunities. It has helped me to get my feet wet in volunteering. I'm thinking about continuing to volunteer not just because it is something that I enjoy, but because it helps me to imagine what it is I want to do with my life for the future as well as learn more about my strengths and weaknesses.”*

*“I never thought I would make a good teacher because I tend to be so impatient. My class at [service location] is the class that has had the highest attendance the entire semester, and I've noticed marked improvements in my students. This has made me not only feel more capable in terms of teaching, but also made me appreciate the amount of work that goes into being a teacher. Lastly, but certainly not least, my students have been the biggest reward out of this entire experience. I'm normally a very high-strung person who comes off as gloomy. You can see just how much my class makes my day by their own perceptions of me: 'You are never sad!' and 'You are always very happy!' I've listened to many of my students' stories, and this really gives me a glimpse into their lives and the realities of their situations.”*

*“As an engineering student entering [service location] for the first time, I was anxious. But over time, the multidisciplinary environment strengthened my understanding of the role of an engineer when relating to architects, artists, urban planners and many more specializations.”*

*“Service-learning has allowed me to enhance my real-world practice of pharmacy. I am grateful for these experiences which solidify my education from the classroom. In addition, I greatly enjoyed working with students from other health disciplines as they thought me different perspectives of patient assessment different from that of pharmacy assessment. Finally, service-learning serves as a breath of fresh air for me. All too often I get bogged down in the stress of studying and grades. Service-learning makes me remember why I started pharmacy school in the first place.”*

*“This service-learning experience has challenged me to collectively work as a group for a common cause. Personally, it has challenged me to take chances and think outside of the box about what's next professionally.”*

*“Practical, hands-on experience with work in the field I am studying. Opportunity to work with organizations that I wouldn't normally have and had a better understanding of how they operate.”*

*“It was definitely an eye-opening experience and such a privilege to a part of an amazing team of medical professionals. Not only was I able to grow professionally, but I also learned so many things that helped me grow as a person.”*

**Civic Engagement:** (76 occurrences, 14% of positive responses) Students in this response category mentioned a newfound desire to be engaged in community issues and a desire integrate themselves more deeply into existing community activism.

*“I would like to see more students participate in service-learning because I felt that a lot of students lack a full understanding of Richmond as a community. You can know that there are people living at the poverty level, but to really understand what that is like you have to be out there talking with them. I think the project was great preparation for planning interventions in the community setting or otherwise after I start working as an RN. I was able to experience the hurdles and speed bumps involved in its execution and I will be wiser the next time around. I also loved the interdisciplinary aspect since we don't usually get a chance to sit down with medical, social work, and pharm students. We learned the scope of each other's practices and were able to share information.”*

*“During my service-learning I've learned how much behind the scene work goes into making an impact in the community. I've learned so much history, culture, and issues within the Richmond community. It helped me realized what steps are needed to take in order to efficiently serve those in need in the community. I've*

*also learned different avenues to serve the community as well.”*

*“Ethnobotany allowed me to be more aware of the struggles of conserving the cultural roots of the [service partner]. This was most effective through the drafting of a harvest garden using plants used by the tribe itself and drafting an educational garden that will be used to teach others about the culture of the [service partner].”*

*“I believe that volunteering and working with children of immigrants allowed me to learn about Hispanic culture and communities, and to understand social issues within the US and around the globe. I also feel that I have built skills in the areas of communication, teamwork, and leadership, and I have another a professional network of people that I can connect with later for future jobs or internships.”*

**Leadership Development:** (157 occurrences, 28% of positive responses) Students here experienced greater confidence speaking and presenting in front of others, being a leader in their classroom environment, and stepping up to lead when it was necessary.

*“After the service-learning class I speak more confidently in front of a group of people and I am more comfortable being a leader.”*

*“A chance to network and meet amazing people.”*

*“I've worked with [service partner] in the past and I'm very glad that [course name] required that I continue with it. I believe that it's a good introduction to teaching (albeit on a small scale) and can help us learn to understand students' individual needs and interests. It's as much about supporting a student as it is learning from them. Working with my student has challenged me to understand my strengths and weaknesses and improve upon all of those aspects. Mentoring isn't exactly teaching, but it's very helpful to make that connection and begin to teach some small things, even if there aren't real lessons. And of course, it's nice to see the student's growth over time and to encourage them.”*

*“My service-learning experience was extremely positive. I enjoyed the seminar with [professor] very much; she is a wonderful instructor who really encourages discussing and is willing to help students with their tasks at hand.”*

*“My experience was so great that I am becoming a UTA next semester. I am very excited. I have always been passionate about helping people, but working with*



*[service partner] has made me more passionate about it. I am also hopefully becoming an intern at [service partner]."*

## Common Negative Themes

---

A relatively small number of student comments reflected negative feedback experiences, with only 8% of the total number of comments categorized as negative. Communication problems and perceived lack of connection between the service offered and the students' major were the most often cited negative experiences. Representative student quotes are provided below.

**Lack of participation:** (8 responses) Much of this feedback was related to community partner participation. Students felt that their experience wasn't as hands-on as they had hoped and/or didn't feel supported by their chosen community partner.

*"Unfortunately, this experience was not as I had hoped for. I thought when we would be working with a non-profit client, we would have actual meetings to establish what the client needs and ways we can help. We instead had a google hangout that gave a very broad overview of the organization we would work for, and we have not received any feedback on the massive project for are creating. The client may or may not use what we produce. I know that is supposed to be a learning experience, but without having a one-on-one conversation with the client, it is hard to establish how we can help. In addition, there are ten different groups helping one organization...why not give each group a different client so that they can feel they have a personal connection?"*

**Unclear instructor communication:** (9 responses) Students in this category desired instructor communication to be transparent from the beginning of the semester. They wanted more instruction, grading clarification, and a more concrete plan for the semester's activities.

*"I did not get much out of this class. It was very unorganized and the entire class was constantly confused."*

*"The service aspect of the course was basically self-guided. As students, we had to coordinate our own transportation, the times we were to meet up, and how many*

*hours we were going to get on each trip. When we got to the [service site] the project was basically all on us. We were to develop a garden but we didn't have much direction or support from our instructor or members of the [service site], therefore we didn't get the full essence of what this service-learning course was supposed to be about."*

**Lack of relevance to their major area:** (19 responses) Students in this response category didn't feel that their service-learning course had relevance to their chosen area of study and wanted to be in a class that was major-specific.

*"I did not get much out of my service-learning experience. It has nothing with what I want to do career wise and if anything, it just reminded me how much I dislike [service activity]."*

*"Nothing much. I don't understand why are we taking this course since it has nothing to do with my major."*

*"It was 20 hours of forced community service. I really didn't get that much out of it. I had already done community service before VCU and will probably do some after. There's no real learning component associated with this."*

**Unclear communication from community partners:** (4 responses) Students in this response category wrote that community partners were difficult to contact and organize with or that the experience wasn't what they expected based off the information given to them. They desired better communication when working with community partners.

*"With my service-learning experience, I didn't get much out of it, and it wasn't because of this class, it was because with whom I was volunteering with. They weren't what I was expecting, I was expecting since it was, or we were told, a food pantry, that I would be working with a lot of food, and be working with people and helping them with what I could, as well as interact with them. However, I didn't do anything. I mostly just sat at the front desk, and put information into a computer, I didn't really interact with anyone that would come to the organization at all."*

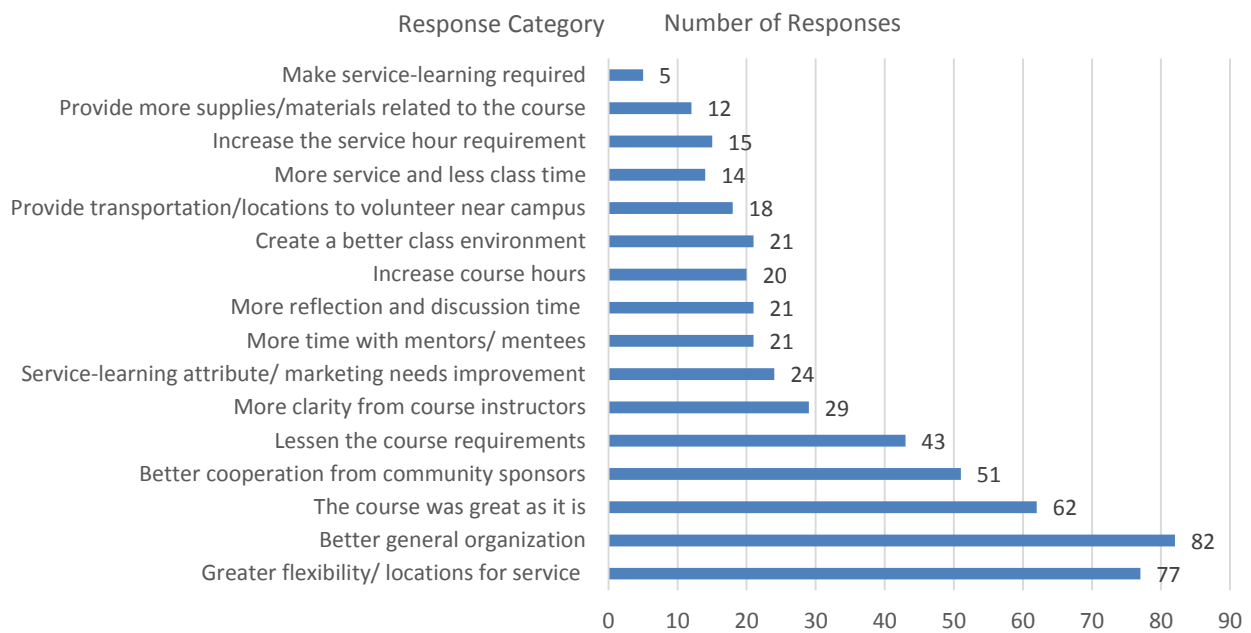
**Generally negative comments:** (4 responses) These comments were miscellaneous.

*“I am currently a teacher of 16 years. I feel that the interactions I have had for the last 16 years have me way more prepared than 20 hours in a mentorship. I have enjoyed spending time with the two students, however, I have gained more in my own classroom interactions over the years.*

## Suggested Improvements

The final question of the SLIM survey asks students, **“How could this service-learning course be improved?”** and garnered responses from 525 students (42% of the survey total). Responses to the question varied significantly and were broken down into 16 categories. They are listed in the chart below:

"How could this service-learning course be improved?"



Representative comment samples from students in each category are below .

**Better general organization:** Eighty-two students’ comments reflected a desire for their service-learning course to be better organized. Comments included the desire for such things as more direction from professors at the beginning of the semester, volunteer

opportunities earlier in the semester and assignments spaced more evenly throughout the course.

*“The [service site] was just starting up on the campus we were working at, so the positions to work were limited also. Furthermore, since I had a heavy course load and I was enrolled in another service-learning course, the amount of work done outside of class was impossible in order to complete the full 20 hours.”*

*“There needs to be a more set schedule for when the TA teaches the class and a way for the students to grow to be dependent of the TA and see them as people who can help.”*

*“Where to start? This class needs a lot of improvement. The course lacked organization and structure. We were instructed to perform tasks but we did not know if they were done correctly. We did not know when we finished doing one step of the process and when to start the next. The fact that I had to drive 1 hour away to get to the center was kind of annoying. I heard that other classes provided transportation to their service-learning sites. This is unfair! There were not enough supplies provided to us so we can do the work. When the whole class went some of us were not able to work. I don't appreciate how the professor had to pay out her pocket to provide the supplies necessary to do the work. I paid for three credit hours and a lab fee for this class! The money I paid for this class should have been used to provide me with the adequate supplies to perform the tasks I needed to perform. I pay so much tuition for this to happen? It just incredible how underfunded these service-learning classes are every year. Something has to change.”*

*“Service-learning can be improved by organizing events and volunteer opportunities just a little bit better. Sometimes it was difficult to keep up with what groups were*

*offering what and when.”*

*“Better planning. I feel like this course was made in the last few seconds. An hour log sheet would have been nice A clearer representation of what and where we should be getting our data Better communication.”*

*“With more direction and clarity. This course got confusing at times, so there needs to be improvements with the organization with in-class times.”*

*“Create new activities each semester and make sure that the schools are more organized when it comes to starting their after-school program that way we aren't in such a rush to go through the material throughout the semester.”*

*“It could be improved by making sure that all of the service-learning opportunities offer the same chances for students as far as gaining hours goes. For example, one course shouldn't have a wide range of opportunities due to not having to compete with other students whereas another one has limited chances for students.”*

*“Many of my classmates, myself included, found ourselves having trouble finding service-learning opportunities which worked directly with agencies that provide direct services to survivors of sexual and domestic violence. The main issue that limited our access were mandatory and extensive training to be able to volunteer for those agencies. VCU could implement a training program or partner with these agencies to provide students a shorter but still rich in information training so that they can volunteer at these agencies. Furthermore, training for these agencies were on specific time frames that most of us missed due to the semester dates of the class, so being able to provide training for students looking to volunteer would be extremely helpful!”*

**Greater flexibility/locations for service:** Seventy-seven students wrote that service-learning could be improved by offering greater flexibility for both service hours and service locations. They wrote about difficulty balancing their service obligations with their other school and work responsibilities.

*“The group work was kind of difficult to do because we were all very busy and on different schedules. We never had a great time to just all sit together and discuss at once.”*

*“The accessibility needs to be improved. It should be easier for VCU students to find places to volunteer. Broaden the variety of places to volunteer to make it easier.”*

*“Stronger relationship between the course and the organization, more opportunities to volunteer, more opportunities that make a positive impact.”*

*“Providing more options for community engagement that relate to prospective career fields.”*

*“It would be more beneficial if this service-learning class had more options for getting service-learning hours. It should try to work with more groups on campus.”*

*“I think that maybe offering more community partner choices could be beneficial. But overall I believe the course was really well organized and the service-learning portion was my favorite part.”*

*“There should be more service-learning options available and the instructors should be more flexible with students with a tighter schedule.”*

**The course was great as it is:** Sixty-two students wrote that they had nothing to suggest and that their service-learning course was a truly positive experience. Fewer comments are included in this section because most of them were very similar.

*“I don't see any need for improvement of this service-learning course.”*

*“I think it was great! I became more involved in the political world at VCU and learned more about voter registration and the importance of pushing people to*

*become registered not just to convince people to vote for the candidate or party you prefer.”*

*“It is perfect the way it is!”*

*“Not any areas I can think of.”*

*“I don't think there is much they need to improve.”*

*“I think this service-learning course is fine the way it is!”*

*“Nothing, it has been an awesome experience!”*

*“I loved it how it was!”*

**Better cooperation from community sponsors:** Fifty-one students commented that they felt they received inadequate communication from community partners regarding service-hours, availability, and the tasks required of them at their service site.

*“We did not work with our [community site] at all until the very end when we presented the power point presentation to them on our findings. I feel if we interacted with them more throughout the semester it would be much more beneficial.”*

*“I think that clearer expectations from the client might help, but I do understand that expectations take over time.”*

*“This class could be improved by having more involvement with the selected placement.”*

*“It would be more helpful if we had actually been involved with the organization in which we were 'working' with. We did not meet once with people who work there, nor did they acknowledge anything that we did. I understand that it is a 'hands off' learning course, but it would have felt like we were doing more had we been more involved with the people that work at the agency, and not necessarily the people that go there to seek help from them.”*

*“Sometimes communication with the sites is difficult. A few times the rotations*

*would either be canceled and would not inform us, or the site was not aware of changes made.”*

*“The main challenge I had during this service-learning course was being able to communicate with outside clients. I think informing clients beforehand about the responsibilities that we as students are serving would have clarified expectations.”*

*“This service-learning course could be improved by having better communication with the client. It would have been helpful to have scheduled meetings to better determine what the client wanted, in addition to checking the progress of the project. At the end of the project, it felt like the client was happy to accept whatever product the team delivered but I'm not certain the product was exactly what the client was searching for.”*

*“Have the organization dedicate more time to communicating with the students that are supposed to be assisting them during the period of the course.”*

*“The organization did not seem overly interested in keeping up with communication with us. Finding organizations that actually have specific desires and needs will help generate the flow of communication.”*

*“I think maybe if it was a different organization, or at least one that listens and applies our work to what they are doing now. It's not a good feeling seeing and working hard on our presentations and then the following semester, seeing that they've done nothing to improve or take our work into suggestion. That's the whole point of working on campaigns and research for them. It's to show that there are different ways to reach target audiences, especially coming from a younger point of view. If they're not taking suggestions or acknowledging that we do have good ideas, then what's the point? There's less motivation, which shouldn't be happening, especially at a class at this level.*

*“Much better communication between the classes and the client. More visibility in terms of the relationship that the client has with the class. Also, a point of contact that is readily available for prompt responses to student inquiries (with the professor not having to be the middleman).”*

*“Better communication with the client. I know that has been the repeat theme, they are busy and have more pressing matters than students at the university, but having an open dialogue or someone to email that responds quickly to questions*



*could greatly help out ability to cater to their unique needs as an organization and not be left guessing.”*

*“Enforce consistency for each of the community service-learning projects so that with each new group of students in each new semester, members of the community can foster greater trust in the students' initiatives.”*

*“I wish there was a permanent person in the community that could ease our contact with the residents.”*

**Lessen the course requirements:** Forty-three students felt that their service-learning course required too much of a commitment for the number of credit hours they received. They suggested making the course more credit hours or decreasing the number of service hours required.

*“Not require as many hours because then students focus more on completing hours than spending time learning about and caring for the community being served.”*

*“The required hours are difficult to complete. For example, I did the conversational partner route with VCU and my partners frequently canceled on me. This made me nervous of my grade. I had to pick up a third person late in the semester to meet my minimum hours. I barely made it.”*

*“There are too many service-learning requirements, it takes us away from clinic and our requirements.”*

*“Less presentations. It is an online class- it should be specified before people sign up that this class requires in-person meetings. It was way too much work for a 200-level class. The professors are also very slow with grading/feedback.”*

*“Don't make it service-learning. Trying to force group projects into a class where you're learning how to use software makes it so that if you're already good the rest of the group learns nothing.”*

*“Not so many hours or better options to complete the required hours. It makes no sense that all of my work in class means nothing because my grade will suffer due to the fact that I could gain enough hours.”*

*"I had to complete 20 hours for my class, and I think that it was a little excessive. Maybe doing 10-15 hours would be easier to complete.*

*"Not so many hours."*

*"Maybe fewer required service hours. As few as 20 hours seems to be, with almost all students in our class working and taking a full load of classes, the service hour requirement was a bit daunting and stressful."*

*"I was told at the beginning of the semester that we would only need 20 hours of service for the class. I work and I am a full-time student, so I arranged my schedule based on this time commitment. By the end of this semester I will have accrued 60 hours. We were told we would be given choices as to which organization we would be volunteering with, then pressured into choosing this particular organization that requires approximately 6 hours a week of our time in class, as well as 1-2 hours of lesson planning per week (that do not count towards our hours). We only found out about this time commitment after we had already gone to orientation for this organization, so it we couldn't really back out. I would appreciate it if the professor would have been more honest about the time commitment required of the organization we were told to volunteer with, seeing as how the professor used to volunteer with the organization and is all-to-familiar with the time requirements. I would not have committed to this organization had I known about the extent of the time commitment, but due to my integrity as an individual, I would not back out of a commitment I had already made, and I feel as if this was taken advantage of."*

**More clarity from course instructors:** Twenty-nine students wrote that, in the future, they would appreciate greater clarity from instructors regarding course assignments, grading and/or the service-component of the course.

*"More structure, and more instruction on the activities and/or assignments to do with the students."*

*"Clearer grading criteria or communication regarding grading."*

*"I would have appreciated more interaction with [professor] during the service portion of the class. It was hard to communicate with [professor] and at times it was unclear on what our next objectives were. However, it is also understood that our objectives were also created by the students itself and that we followed our*

*own guidelines.”*

*“Don't let the faculty hold our hands as much. Let us freely decide what and how we were going to interact with the community (with some guidance as necessary).”*

*“Better communication between the teachers and students. Clarify assignments and group presentations.”*

**Service-Learning communication/marketing needs improvement:** Twenty-four students wrote that they wished they had known that the course was designated service-learning when they registered and that they hoped in the future they would be given more information about service-learning before the semester.

*“Let us know if it's a service-learning-course before add- drop period.”*

*“I think that as students within the course we should be prepared to know what we're getting into with the magnitude and amount of work in our classes, so know if the first day of class that it was a service-learning course.”*

*“I can't see how service-learning itself could be improved. I may advocate more advertising of the classes so that more students can see the value of the experience.”*

*“An introduction to the service-learning component of the class should have begun near the beginning of the semester. Teams should have had more time to meet and discuss concepts earlier on. Instead, the professor was more focused on giving PR industry-related lectures at the beginning of the semester (our class started working our campaign in November) rather than introducing the service project”.*

*“During class registration, service-learning classes and class descriptions should be immediately available to students. Many of my peers were not aware of the service aspect when they signed up for the class.”*

*“Better description when choosing classes. A little bit more structured in terms of guidelines and communication of what's going on.”*

*“Specify what service-learning is for the new students who will be registering.”*

**More time with mentors/mentees:** Twenty-one students wrote that they would have benefited from extended time with their mentors, whether SLTAs or community partners, and those that had mentees wanted more time to build relationships throughout the semester.

*“I think that this course had a few minor limitations and setbacks. I would've preferred to spend even more time in person getting to know the students I worked with, and had a stronger relationship with them outside the class room. I think the course could've provided more in class time to review lesson plans with the students and build academic skills.”*

*“I think more one on one time with the inmates would help, especially in expanding the way we look at incarceration. The only way to gain any real education on this topic that is so important in today's society, is to talk personally with the inmates.”*

*“There could possibly be a mini assignment where we do less observing and maybe get to do a fun activity with the students.”*

*“There could be specific thing that a mentor is supposed to do with their child instead of it being free for all every time.”*

**More reflection and discussion time:** Twenty-one students wrote that they wanted more time in class to be spent discussing topics with other students in the course about their own service experiences.

*“More reflections maybe, but I enjoy debriefing on bus rides.”*

*“I think that this course could be improved by continuing to have class discussions about the subject we learn about because I feel like many students will benefit from learning how to be respect others opinions but also speak up when they might be shy to.”*

*“More classroom discussion.”*

*“While the in-class instruction as very informative, I would have liked to see a little more in class discussion rather than just lecture. I wanted to hear more from my classmates and how their service-learning applied to each conceptual theory.”*

*“Possibly having more discussions about the work we're doing in our service-learning within the classroom and hearing more examples from other students would be helpful.”*

**Increase course hours:** Twenty students wrote that they desired more time in class throughout the semester by increasing the credit hours and number of class meetings.

*“I honestly have no complaints about this course except that the class period is almost too short for some of our discussions! We always have good conversations and tackle a lot of issues relating to art and education. I'm grateful that my professor and (the majority of) the other students are very dedicated to this class and are curious about the things we discuss. It's very fulfilling and I wouldn't change a thing.”*

*“Increase the amount of different types of classes? Longer periods of time so there's one for the summer/fall and then one in the spring time because the class was too short. Although the topics covered in class was enough time, I enjoyed talking with people I would never have met and having a class where meeting peers at VCU with their own perspectives is cool.”*

*“Longer courses.”*

*“Having it more often.”*

*“A full year, 1 credit each semester? 3 credit service-learning course? Opportunity for students to present research”*

**Create a better class environment:** Twenty-one students wrote general comments regarding their experience within the environment of their specific class. It's important to note that each service-learning course is organized differently depending on the concepts being explored and the type of service being offered.

*“It was hard to keep the students on track because the room was filled with others doing their service-learning. It was very noisy.”*

*“I feel that veteran teachers should be accommodated in some way, as we have tons of experience in this area. I do understand that mentoring and teaching are different.”*

*“I would have enjoyed completing this project on my own, rather than as part of a group. Failure of some group members (online vs in-class) to understand the assignment and communicate within agreed upon timetables has proved very frustrating. For me, these factors have overshadowed the innovative, constructive nature of the project.”*

*“I think more opportunities like [community partner] would be good working in an office and throwing away book etc. isn't educational nor is it related to what my class was about. Although I understand that there are many parts to helping survivors I think the volunteer hours for service-learning should be more directly related to what you are learning about in class.”*

**Provide transportation/places to volunteer near campus:** Eighteen students wrote that they were frustrated by the lack of transportation provided by the course and found it difficult to find transportation to their assigned site.

*“Stop requiring so many out of class field trips.”*

*“I feel as though allowing service close to campus should count as well.”*

*“I don't have a car at VCU, so I have to rely on my classmates to help me get to my class.”*

*“Transportation to and from campus.”*

**More service and less class time:** Fourteen students wrote that they wanted more class time to be spent doing service together in order to lighten the burden of organizing time independently.

*“More hands-on than class lectures.”*

*“It was great the way it was. Maybe offer more hands-on experience in a real work place.”*

*“I would involve less class assignments (not including reflections) and more community engagement.”*

*“The class meetings felt quite pointless. We didn't do much besides talk, and I felt like I could have done more for the community if the class time were dedicated to volunteering.”*

**Increase the service hour requirement:** Fifteen students wrote that they wanted more time for service to be offered throughout the semester.

*“I wish I could have spent more time at [service site], and I'm very excited to be going back next semester. It can be tricky to work with a child's schedule and my own schedule when I have so many classes, and especially if I get a job next semester. I guess I wish the class I did the service-learning for was more accommodating for allowing me to use that class time to do more service work.”*

*“Require more interaction and work with community partner.”*

*“More hands-on activities that allow for me to actually interact with the agency that I was assigned.”*

*“Offer more time at the sites.”*

**More supplies/materials related to the course:** Twelve students hoped that in the future, lunches, compensation or a budget can be provided to courses in order to widen options for class projects.

*“If there was more of a budget for the course I could have done more projects.”*

*“The materials available were scarce and depleting. We ran out of all paint and a lot of paintbrushes, glue sticks, play dough, markers, and paper were either gone or ruined before the semester started. I would really ask if there could be more supplies donated for the kids so the mentors can do more activities with them.”*

**Make service-learning required:** Five students wanted to make service-learning courses required for all students.

*“If the school made it a requirement for every student to do one service week before they graduate.”*

## Summary and Next Steps

---

The results of the 2015-2016 SLIM indicate that students who completed designated service-learning classes at VCU perceived those classes positively. Students reported that the class reflection activities, their service in the community, and their interactions with classmates and the instructor all benefited their learning. When asked to identify areas of learning, students responded that they were better at understanding their own strengths and weaknesses, more able to understand other views by imagining how things look from a different perspective, and more able to identify their own biases and prejudices.

The survey provided valuable information for the Service-Learning Office to consider in efforts to improve and enhance program quality. The last question of the survey asks students, “How could this service-learning course be improved?” (See previous section.) While responses varied and were dependent on the structure of students’ specific course experience, these comments provide invaluable feedback for future service-learning courses. Students stated a desire for more organization within the class, such as hour log sheets and timelines, and more instruction on meaningful communication between themselves and with those they interact with during service. They also expressed frustration that service-learning classes are not immediately identifiable during registration, which caused some students to be unaware of the additional service component until already committed and caused friction between team members with different levels of commitment to service-learning. Students also desired more course organization and transparency regarding course expectations.

Methods of instruction are offered by the office to assist faculty in designing service-learning courses. These include working closely with faculty to ensure that reflection activities fit with course content and are meaningful learning tools and ensuring that there are opportunities in courses for students to have civil discourse with others on topics. The data indicate that the majority of service-learning instructors are full-time term (i.e., non-tenure line) and part-time adjunct instructors. Training should be tailored to this audience



and efforts should be made to recruit additional tenure-line faculty members to teach service-learning classes.

The SLIM will continue to be a tool for quality assurance in the Service-Learning Office and will be distributed to students at the end of each semester. In the future, the Service-Learning staff will work to increase the percentage of students that participates in the SLIM survey to ensure that results are reflective of the general student population taking service-learning courses. These efforts will include looking at the timing of the survey release to ensure it does not overlap too closely with institutional course surveys and providing reasonable incentives to students for completion. We are pleased to report that the demographic data of students taking the SLIM survey closely matches the wider demographics of both students enrolled in service-learning and the larger VCU community as a whole. (See the Student Demographics section for detailed analysis.) Additionally, the staff will continue to work with service-learning instructors and Service-Learning Teaching Assistants (SLTAs) to promote the SLIM survey to the students in their courses and encourage participation.

# Appendix A

---

## SLIM Survey Questions

### SECTION 1: ABOUT THE COURSE

Please select the service-learning course that you are evaluating:

Is this course:

- A required course for your major/minor.
- An elective for your major/minor.
- A general elective.

Did you know this course was a service-learning course when you registered for it?

Where did you do your service? (i.e. , Where or for what organization did you serve?)

Approximately how many total hours of service did you perform during the semester?

Which category best describes the type of organization where you served?

- Education
- Health or Healthcare
- Economic Development
- Sustainability (Environmental)
- Vibrant Communities (Arts)

Do you have any desire to continue serving at this location?

- Yes
- No

Which option best describes your experience?

Arranging transportation to the site where I did my service was:

- Very Difficult
- Somewhat Difficult
- Somewhat Easy
- Very Easy
- No transportation required

What reflection activities did you engage in as part of this class? Check all that apply.

- Written journal
- Reflection paper
- In-class presentation
- Class discussions
- Community presentation
- Blog
- Interview with service receiver
- Interview with professor or TA
- Other

If you selected 'other' please describe the reflection activities/assignments you completed.  
*For each item below, select the number that describes the degree to which this service-learning class has been beneficial in the areas listed. Use a scale of 1 to 7 where 1= NOT BENEFICIAL and 7= HIGHLY BENEFICIAL.*

How beneficial to your learning were the reflection activities/assignments of this class?

How beneficial to your learning was the community service component of this class?

How beneficial to your learning were your interactions with the instructor of the class?

How beneficial to your learning were your interactions with other students in the class?

*For each item below, select the number that describes the degree to which this service-learning class has felt welcoming and inclusive in the area listed. Use a scale of 1 to 7 where 1= NOT WELCOMING and 7= HIGHLY WELCOMING.*

How welcomed/included did the instructor of the class make you feel?

How welcomed/included did the other students in the class make you feel?

How welcomed/included did the community partner/community site make you feel?

*How much do you agree with the following statements? (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree)*

The service-learning course enabled me to apply my skills and knowledge to new situations.

The service-learning course enabled me to recognize how theories and conceptual models can be applied in real-world situations.

The service-learning courses enabled me to develop a network of professional contacts and/or mentors.

The service-learning course enabled me to understand how people within the profession think and behave.

The service-learning course enabled me to better understand my own strengths and weaknesses.

## **SECTION 2: ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE**

*For each item below, select the number that describes the degree to which this service-learning class has been beneficial in the areas listed. Use a scale of 1 to 7 where 1= NOT AT ALL and 7= VERY MUCH.*

Connect my learning to societal problems or issues.

Connect my learning to things I have learned in other classes.

Examine the strengths and weaknesses of my own views on a topic or issue.

Be more aware of local, state, national, or global issues that need to be addressed.

Be more aware of some of my own biases and prejudices.

Work effectively in a group where people from different backgrounds feel welcomed and

included.

Clarify my career or professional goals.

Be an active and informed citizen.

Consider different cultural perspectives when evaluating different social problems.

Be more committed to using the knowledge and skills I have gained in college to help address issues in society.

Be a role model for people in the community.

Feel comfortable interacting with people from a cultural group that is different from my own.

Develop a personal code of values and ethics.

Better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from their perspective.

Rate the degree to which this service-learning course challenged you to do your best work.

*How much do you agree with the following statements? (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree)*

I experienced positive growth in my level of empathy (e.g., ability to walk in another's shoes and understand their perspective) as a result of my service-learning course.

I experienced positive growth in my level of morality (e.g., understanding right and wrong) as a result of my service-learning course.

I gained the appropriate skills and experiences for my desired career as a result of my service-learning course.

### **SECTION 3: ABOUT YOU**

What is your student level?

- Undergraduate
- Graduate/Professional student
- Non-degree student

What is your age? (Please use numerals only.)

Which option best describes your racial background?

- White
- African American
- Asian
- Hispanic
- Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Two or more races (biracial or multiracial)
- International (i.e., visa holder)
- Prefer not to answer

Please specify your racial background:

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming
- Other preferred descriptor (Please specify below.)
- Prefer not to answer

Please specify your preferred descriptor for your sexual identity.

Does at least one of your parents or primary caregivers have a 4-year bachelor's degree?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Have you received a Pell grant (for high financial need) to attend VCU?

- Yes
- No
- Note sure

Tell us in your own words what you got out of your service-learning experience.

How could this service-learning course be improved?