



Campus Compact

RESEARCH BRIEF

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF SERVICE-LEARNING ON COLLEGE STUDENT RETENTION

Today, more students are entering college than ever before. However, according to the Education Trust, only 60 percent of students enrolled in a four-year college earn a degree within six years. Of the African-American and Latino students at these schools, more than half fail to graduate. Even more disturbingly, only 7 percent of young people from the poorest one-quarter of American families currently earn a bachelor's degree by age 26. In the face of this troubling trend, more colleges and universities are looking to service-learning techniques as a means to stem the tide of attrition.

RESEARCH STUDIES SHOW SERVICE-LEARNING HAS A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON STUDENT RETENTION

- “...Service-learning facilitates the intention to re-enroll for a second year of college by its ability to enhance the quality and quantity of faculty interaction and to promote positive academic experiences for students in their adjustment to college in the first year.”
Keup, 2005
- “Volunteerism and service-learning appear to enhance involvement and facilitate integration (both social and academic) during the first year of college, and these, research shows...are critical to student retention.”
Vogelgesang, Ikeda, Gilmartin, & Keup, 2002
- “...Active learning in particular may constitute an empirically reliable source of influence on social integration, subsequent institutional commitment, and departure decisions.”
Swail, 2003
- “Several academic good practices have been identified as playing a role in an institution’s ability to retain and graduate its students, including: ...providing students with opportunities to practice learned skills, encouraging students to engage in out-of-class interactions with faculty, and providing students with the opportunity to work collaboratively with other students.”
Woodard, Mallory and DeLuca, 2001

“Thanks to service learning, I know who I really am...I used to feel useless. I even felt as I wasn’t making a difference by attending college, but since my first day as a service learning student, I knew that I could really make a difference for my community and especially, my family.”

--A Southwestern College service-learning student

STUDIES OF SPECIFIC SERVICE-LEARNING COURSES ALSO DEMONSTRATE THE POWERFUL LINK BETWEEN SERVICE-LEARNING, VOLUNTEERISM, AND RETENTION

- Participants who took a first-year service-learning engineering course at the University of Colorado at Boulder were 6.83 percent more likely to graduate, and 13 percent more likely to remain a part of the engineering department.
Piket-May and Avery, 2001
- After taking a service-learning biological engineering course at Louisiana State University, 93 percent of woman and minorities remained in the discipline--a strikingly higher number than the national average retention rate of 70 percent.
Lima, 2000
- At ethnically and economically diverse Southwestern College, 78% of males and 83.6% of females remained enrolled after taking a service-learning English Composition course, as compared to 65.3% of males and 63.5% of females who took a non-service-learning version of the class.
Axson and Piland, 1999
- In a study of African American students who had attended Oberlin College, involvement in community service or volunteering was the factor most strongly correlated with graduation.
Oberlin, 1997

For more information on the impact of service-learning on retention, including an annotated bibliography of key research findings, please contact Jenn Meeropol, ISAS Project Associate, at jmeeropol@compact.org or 401-867-3950.