

Service-learning courses can positively impact post-graduate salaries, study finds

January 5 2016

Service-learning experiences in college can reach beyond the classroom—and help grow graduates' bank accounts once they enter the workforce, according to a recent University of Georgia study.

The study centered on a group of [college students](#) who graduated in 2010 and found that they made about \$4,600 more annually in their first full-time job if they had participated in service-learning courses while earning their degrees. They also received their first raises more than two-and-a-half months sooner than those who hadn't taken service-learning courses.

The results were surprising, said the study's lead author Paul Matthews, because previous research has indicated students who participate in service-learning courses may gravitate toward careers they're passionate about, but might not pay as well as other options.

"We were expecting that we might find people who had service-learning (experience) would actually have lower salaries," said Matthews, the associate director of UGA's Office of Service-Learning, which reports jointly to the vice presidents for instruction and for public service and outreach. "In that sense, we were surprised to find the opposite."

Service-learning courses link the academic content of the class with a real-world community need or issue. For the study, published in the most recent issue of the *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*, researchers looked at 44 unique pairs of

students, matching them from a larger sample as closely as possible based on major, gender, graduation date, GPA and SAT scores. One member of each pair had taken service-learning courses while the other had not.

The study didn't look at why service-learning students earned more, but Matthews has a few theories.

"We know from a lot of research that service-learning courses tend to lead to student outcomes that employers tell us they want," he said. "Students report they have enhanced teamwork skills, enhanced communication skills. They better understand the subject matter and how to apply it in the real world. In many service-learning classes they've done a project or activity in the [real world](#) they can put on their resume."

At UGA in particular, where the study occurred, more than 6,000 students took over 400 service-learning course sections during the 2014-15 school year. More than 4,800 of those students were undergraduates.

"There is a large body of evidence that students who participate in service-learning see many immediate benefits from the learning experience, particularly related to professional skill development or hands-on experience that could be an asset in the job search process," said Shannon Wilder, director of the Office of Service-Learning. "This study demonstrates what we have thought all along, and that is that service-learning also has many long-term career benefits for [students](#)."

More information: The study, "The Impacts of Undergraduate Service-Learning on Post-Graduation Employment Outcomes," is available at journals.sfu.ca/iarslce/index.../article/view/109/71

Provided by University of Georgia

Citation: Service-learning courses can positively impact post-graduate salaries, study finds (2016, January 5) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-01-service-learning-courses-positively-impact-post-graduate.html>

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