

# Barriers to enrollment in community service learning programs



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## Introduction

### Overview - What is CSL?

Community service learning (CSL) is an alternative educational program. In CSL students participate in a community placement (e.g., classroom assistant) to earn course marks that would otherwise be earned through more conventional methods of assessments such as midterms, assignments, or essays.

### Benefits of CSL

Research indicates that CSL can promote students' development in areas such as social responsibility, critical thinking, and personal development.<sup>[1]</sup>

### Why do some people not take part?

Despite the potential benefits that result from participating in CSL, given the option between CSL and traditional means of assessment, many students opt for the latter. Through a literature review, I contributed questions on barriers to participation in CSL to an online study investigating the impacts of CSL. I will also help lead a planned focus group for a subset of participants. This project hopes to uncover potential barriers preventing student from participating in CSL, and make recommendations that can help encourage student participation.



Many Hands Make Light Work

## Conclusion

CSL programs provide students with the opportunity to learn valuable skills pertaining to the related course through volunteering in the community. By analyzing the possible barriers preventing students from participating it is hoped that changes can be made to improve the program. The questionnaires used in this study will provide a ground work regarding the most prevalent reasons for not participating, while the focus groups (pending ethics approval) will provide a more in-depth explanation regarding the listed barriers. To make improvements to programs the weaknesses must be identified, therefore identifications of barriers present in CSL is the first step to improving the program so all students have equal opportunities to participate.

## Review of Literature

### What is the research saying?

#### Barriers to community service in high school<sup>[2], [3]</sup>

- Resources
  - Staff (teacher attributes and experience, limited school support and encouragement)
  - Finances
- Program difficulties in monitoring and supervision
  - Transportation and employer limitations
- Organizational structure, planning
  - Insufficient time to co-plan
- Student characteristics
  - Cultural and religious dynamics
- Self-dependency over school capacity

#### Barriers with university faculty<sup>[4], [5]</sup>

Faculty and classroom level

- Time constraints in the coordination of the service learning experiences
- Balancing class-room instruction
- Challenges in student assessment

Institutional level

- Lack of support from colleagues and administrative leaders
- Recognition of services learning during the promotion and tenure process
- Inadequate funding and lack of institutional support

#### Community service learning as viewed by minority university students<sup>[6]</sup>

- Students of colour who participated in CSL in impoverished neighbourhoods describe the experience as a biased or stereotypical portrayal of poverty
- These students were less likely to participate in discussions regarding CSL because they did not want to portray their race
  - Students also did not want to engage in racial discussions with classmates or respond to perceived naïve, inaccurate, or offensive perceptions
- Students felt a weaker sense of community

## Methods

### Study sample:

- Students from second and fourth year Psychology courses
- Approximately 120 -125 students

### Incentives:

- A course credit of 4% was compensated for completing the study

### Questionnaires:

- A series of the same questionnaires will be completed by the participants three times over the course of the CSL program (February, March and April) using the online survey software Qualtrics
- In addition to demographic questions the following question regarding possible barriers was created:

*"Did you enroll in the Community Service Learning (CSL) program at the University of Ottawa this semester? – if no, why didn't you enroll in Community Service Learning (CSL)?"*

Options included:

- It didn't sound useful to me
- It was too complicated
- I didn't have enough time because of work
- I didn't have enough time because of school
- It was time consuming compared to the standard course option
- I'm already volunteering with an organization
- I'm not interested in volunteering
- Other

## Results

Time 1 data was collected in February, and the study is presently collecting time 2 data, with time 3 data and focus groups set for late March and early April. Analysis of results will begin once Time 3 data is collected. Focus groups will explore the experience of minority students in greater detail.

## References & Acknowledgments

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Acknowledgements:

Special thank you to the UROP committee for allowing me to participate in the program and my supervisors Dr. Stuart Hammond and Robert Hill for their time and dedication. For further information or questions feel free to contact the following email: atalu041@uottawa.ca