The Effects of Community-Based and Civic Engagement in Higher Education

WHAT WE KNOW AND QUESTIONS THAT REMAIN

AAC&U

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INTRODUCTION

In 2012, through the US Department of Education's National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) published a foundational report, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*, in addition to a literature review on the evidence linking students' civic and community-based engagement with student outcomes (Finley, 2011).

At the time, the evidence on the efficacy of students' civic and community-based engagement was largely confined to research involving service-learning experiences. Very few meta-analyses existed, and studies conducted on a single campus, within specific programs, and/or within a small sample of courses often served as the primary source for indicators of efficacy. Additionally, national data (e.g., National Survey of Student Engagement, College Senior Survey) on students' civic and community-based experiences in relationship to student success outcomes primarily relied upon evidence from indirect measures of students' own perceptions. Although research on high-impact practices (HIPs) has expanded, as discussed below, higher education still has much to learn about the efficacy of community-based experiences, particularly in relationship to students' demonstrated civic capacities.

Within the past decade, significant advancements in research and assessment have reshaped the understanding of how higher education impacts the development of college students' civic and community-based skills. There are also greater means to explore the degree to which persistent equity gaps in student success outcomes extend to students' attainment of civic and community-based outcomes. The first advancement is a deepened understanding of the importance of HIPs on college and university campuses. Scholars and campus practitioners alike are far more aware of the magnitude of positive effects on student outcomes across HIPs as individual experiences (e.g., research on first-year experiences, research on service learning) and in aggregate (e.g., the cumulative effect of students experiencing multiple HIPs or the combined effects that stem from merging two or more HIPs). For example, recent research points directly to community-based HIPs versus those that are campus-based having a greater impact on student outcomes (Valentine et al., 2021). Furthermore, ten years ago, there were few studies in higher education that addressed equity gaps (e.g., by race, first-generation status, or socioeconomic status) in outcomes related to students' engagement in community-based experiences. However, subsequent research on HIPs has illuminated new opportunities for understanding how these practices affect equity across student outcomes (e.g., see Finley & McNair, 2013; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013).

This research synthesis aims to assess the state of research on the efficacy of HIPs in higher education broadly and with regard to the efficacy of community-based and civic engagement specifically. Unlike a literature review, which often takes a broad and inclusive approach to assembling evidence, the focus of this synthesis has been intentionally narrowed to highlight common themes across empirical studies that meet a defined set of criteria for methodological scope and scale to better aggregate available evidence and clarify new empirical gaps (Cooper, 2015; Cooper & Hedges, 2009; Price, 1965). The parameters for the synthesis are intended to address the lack of generalizability resulting from much of the existing research on community-based and civic engagement that is focused on a single locale (e.g., campus or program) and/or based on small sample sizes (i.e., fewer than one hundred students). As such, this research synthesis includes only studies with a degree of scale that enables greater generalizability of findings, such as those that span multiple years and/or involve multiple institutions or multiple cohorts at a single institution.

In Part I of this research synthesis, the authors review recent literature on the efficacy of HIPs on a range of student success measures. They do this for two reasons: first, the research on HIPs has expanded greatly over the past decade, particularly with studies that examine HIPs as a group of practices. Second, civic and community-based engagement are regularly included in any list of HIPs. As such, research related to community-based and civic engagement within higher education is a subset of this broad group of studies on student outcomes.

Part II presents an empirical analysis of the existing evidence on community-based and civic engagement specifically. The authors coded each research article examined by the outcomes addressed, the type of community-based practice(s) included, the form of data analyzed (i.e., indirect or direct), the locale (i.e., multi-institutional or single institution), and whether the study was peer-reviewed. The analysis reveals overarching themes across existing studies to illuminate ways in which future research can be improved and advanced, given the scope of current evidence. The authors conclude this examination with a discussion of implications and recommendations for future research.

Review of Research on High-Impact Practices

Educational practices known as high-impact practices (HIPs) are teaching and learning practices that "have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds," especially for those historically underserved by higher education (Kuh, 2008, p. 9). See Table 1 for a list of the most common HIPs and descriptions. Table 1 is organized to expand upon Valentine et al.'s categorization of "campus-based HIPs" and "community-based HIPs" (2021, p. 4).

National data indicate that participation in HIPs positively influences students' self-perceptions of their learning and engagement (Brownell & Swaner, 2011; Finley & McNair, 2013; Valentine et al., 2021). Research has shown students' self-perceptions of gains in their own learning to be significantly higher for those students who had participated in at least one HIP than students who had not participated in any HIPs (Finley & McNair, 2013). Further, participating in multiple HIPs has been shown to have cumulative positive effects on degree completion and students' perceptions of their learning (Finley & McNair, 2013; Valentine et al., 2021). In addition, some evidence suggests that combining HIPs within a single learning experience can lead to greater outcomes (Brownell & Swaner, 2011; Finley & Kuh, 2016).

TABLE 1

Descriptions of High-Impact Practices

HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE	DESCRIPTION
Campus-Based HIPs	
First-year seminars and experiences	Develop students' intellectual and practical competencies in the first year of college.
Collaborative assignments and projects	Promote learning from others and cooperative problem solving.
Common intellectual experiences	Bring intellectual coherence to the college experience; may include a set of required experiences or courses.
Undergraduate research	Practice systematic inquiry, empirical approaches to real-world problems, and literary or artistic endeavors.
Learning communities	Encourage integration of learning across multiple courses and/or disciplines.
Capstone courses and projects	Integrate and apply what students have learned through a culminating experience near the end of their studies.
Writing- and inquiry-intensive courses	Emphasize the repeated practice of writing at all levels.
ePortfolios	Visibly accumulate evidence of student accomplishment; prompt meaningful reflection.
Community-Based HIPs	
Diversity, study away, and global learning	Experience communities, cultures, and world views different from a student's own.
Internships and field experiences	Engage students in applied, experiential learning in a setting related to their career interests.
Service learning and community-based learning	Engage students in field-based applied learning with community partners.

Studies have differentiated the effects of participation in some high-impact practices (HIPs) from others, even as research on the outcomes of HIPs has remained siloed. For example, community-based HIPs—including service learning, internship/field experiences, global learning, community-based practices, civic engagement, community-based engagement, and diversity experiences—correlate strongly with students' positive perceptions, particularly of their gains in learning. Service learning has been linked with the largest gains among these community-based practices, while study abroad was shown to be associated with the smallest gains (Valentine et al., 2021). These results also showed variation for Black and Hispanic students and students 25 years and older.

Active and collaborative learning as well as undergraduate research have been found to have broad positive effects across multiple learning outcomes, such as critical thinking, need for cognition, and intercultural effectiveness (Kilgo et al., 2015). Several other HIPs—including study abroad, internship, service learning, and capstone course/experience—have shown moderate positive effects on student learning, while three other HIPs—first-year seminar, academic learning community, and writing-intensive courses—were not significant predictors of any of the studied learning outcomes.

Additionally, participation in at least one HIP is a significant predictor of future career plans and early job attainment (Miller et al., 2018). Seniors who participated in an internship, studied abroad, or completed a capstone project were more likely to seek employment after graduation. Seniors who had a leadership role on campus or participated in undergraduate research were more likely to attend graduate school than their counterparts who had not had these experiences. Learning community and service-learning experiences did not have a statistically significant effect on students' plans to attend graduate school or seek employment (Miller et al., 2018).

Table 2 provides a list of outcomes found to be associated with students' participation in HIPs.

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TABLE 2

Outcomes Associated with High-Impact Practices

OUTCOME	EXAMPLE MEASURES
Graduation and retention	Likelihood of re-enrolling
	Likelihood of graduating within six years
	Time to degree
	Number of credits completed
Intellectual and practical skills (AAC&U, 2021)	Inquiry and analysis
	Critical and creative thinking
	Written and oral communication
	Quantitative literacy
	Information literacy
	Teamwork and problem solving
Mindsets and dispositions	Intrapersonal development
	Awareness of diversity
	Motivation
	Empathy
	Work ethic
	Attitudes toward school and learning
Personal and social responsibility (AAC&U, 2021)	Civic knowledge and engagement (local and global)
	Intercultural knowledge and competence
	Ethical and moral reasoning and action
	Foundations and skills for lifelong learning
Learning	Students' perceived learning gains
	Exam and assignment scores
	Cognition measures
	Grade point average (GPA)
	Academic engagement
Post-graduation plans and career skills	Plans to attend graduate school
	Early job attainment
	Commitment to service-oriented career

Differential Effects of High-Impact Practices for Historically Underserved Students

Researchers have consistently argued that, along with attentiveness to quality (see Clayton-Pedersen & Finley, 2011; Kuh, 2009; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013), colleges and universities must implement and assess high-impact practices (HIPs) through a lens of equity (see Finley & McNair, 2013; Kuh, 2009; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013). Existing studies tend to focus on linkages between underserved students' participation in HIPs and outcomes associated with retention, graduation, and grades rather than effects on learning outcomes (Brownell & Swaner, 2010). Even so, studies indicate strong correlations between HIP participation and increased graduation and retention rates for both students in general and underserved populations in particular (Eynon et al., 2014; Eynon & Gambino, 2017; Tingle et al., 2021; Valentine & Price, 2021). Results have also indicated that students involved in HIPs were more likely to complete college within six years compared with peers who did not engage in HIPs, although the research found no other evidence of compensatory effects for underserved students (McDaniel & Van Jura, 2020).

Evidence of the learning effects of students' engagement in HIPs has been limited to indirect findings from national surveys. Nevertheless, findings indicate consistently positive effects on perceived indicators of students' learning, particularly relative to students in the same historically underserved group who were not engaged in specific HIPs (Finley & McNair, 2013).

Analyses that attempt to disaggregate effects across underserved populations, particularly by race, often paint a complicated portrait of how students' engagement in HIPs impacts outcomes (Finley & McNair, 2013; Valentine et al., 2021). For example, in a statewide study of HIPs and short-term retention, the largest positive correlations for underserved students overall were associated with first-year experiences and undergraduate research. For Black and Hispanic students, first-year experiences and ePortfolios correlated with the strongest retention benefits. For students over 25 years old, first-year experiences and learning communities had the strongest effects (Valentine & Price, 2021). In another study that focused on LGBTQ+ students, undergraduate research significantly and positively predicted students' academic development, with instructor relations mediating the effect. However, participation in internships, learning communities, senior capstones, and study abroad experiences did not significantly influence LGBTQ+ students' academic development (Kilgo et al., 2019).

While high-impact practices (HIPs) are in widespread use across higher education and have been shown to lead to a number of positive outcomes for students, limited research considers whether offering or requiring one or more HIPs within individual courses or for individual students improves institution-level outcomes, such as overall graduation or retention rates. One study of 101 four-year public colleges and universities in the United States found that the benefits individual students experienced from various HIPs did not translate to higher institution-wide graduation rates (Johnson & Stage, 2018). However, evidence has demonstrated that implementing certain HIPs (such as ePortfolios) across the curriculum correlates strongly with positive institutional change (Eynon & Gambino, 2017; Eynon et al., 2014). A study of eleven university-community collaborations in Europe, linked several positive institutional advancements with students' engagement with local urban community projects, including institutional implementation of collaborative and participatory pedagogies (Medved & Ursic, 2021).

As campuses seek to justify greater institutionalization and scaling of required HIPs for students, it stands to reason that institutional leaders would benefit from having more robust data on the connection between institutional outcomes and students' participation in such required experiences. Even as positive individual outcomes for students are clear, more research and assessment are needed to determine the institutional effects of broadly requiring one or more HIPs on campuses.

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Higher education institutions often use the language of "community-based" and/or "civic" engagement interchangeably on their campuses to refer to a diverse set of experiences and/or outcomes. Often, the language they use (community-based, civic, or both) says more about the campus culture than it does about the existence of a carefully parsed argument for why one term is used over the other. For the sake of clarity in the presentation of our findings, we use "civic" with the intent of referencing those experiences, behaviors, and attitudes directly related to an individual's role as a citizen and an agent of democracy. In contrast, we use "community-based" to indicate those experiences, behaviors, and attitudes pertaining more broadly to an individual's engagement in a local, national, or global community and as an actor within communal space. Although we do not view the terms "community-based" and "civic" as exactly synonymous, we do use them together to indicate an inclusive list of outcomes.

The correlation between levels of higher education and outcomes related to community-based and civic engagement is well documented, consistent, and robust. Research has consistently cast this relationship as highly correlative, although not causal (McAvoy et al., 2019). For example, each year of college and each degree earned correlates with increased levels of voting, volunteering, and donating to nonprofits (Doyle & Skinner, 2017; Newell, 2014). While one national study concluded that the positive association between a college degree and adult civic engagement has declined among student cohorts born since the 1960s (Horowitz, 2015), in general, each year of college increases the probability of voting by 7.7 percent (Doyle & Skinner, 2017).

There is limited research on whether institutional type or specific educational experiences such as high-impact practices (HIPs) correlate with increased community-based and civic engagement. National data suggest that students' academic programs, individual students' academic and extracurricular behaviors, and institutional intentionality toward civic engagement impact post-college civic engagement (Ishitani & McKitrick, 2013; Kisker et al., 2016). The differences in civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge, even among graduates of different programs at a single institution, can be stark, with programs such as engineering, math, and physical sciences demonstrating a negative relationship to post-college civic participation (Kisker et al., 2016).

Students who participated in training on project-based community research skills via a seminar or summer internship demonstrated stronger civic attitudes in general (Simeone & Shaw, 2017), and students who participated in at least one of six different HIPs—internship, undergraduate research, study abroad, community-based course project, capstone project, and mentoring within a program—had higher levels of civic engagement at age 26 (Myers et al., 2019). The latter finding was especially significant for students who entered college with low levels of pro-civic orientation.

Further, national data have shown that college diversity experiences and workshops are associated with increases in civic attitudes, behavioral intentions, and behaviors (Bowman, 2011; Bowman et al., 2016). These effects were consistent regardless of participants' race/ethnicity, gender, and institutional affiliation. The magnitude of these effects was greater for interpersonal interactions with racial diversity than for curricular and co-curricular diversity experiences (Bowman, 2011). The strength of the relationship between experiences with diversity and civic outcomes also depends on the type of civic outcome and whether changes in that outcome are assessed through self-reported gains or through longitudinal methods. For example, the average effect size, an indicator of the strength of the relationship between two variables, for self-reported gains in civic outcomes following students' engagement with diversity has been almost three times as large as the average effect size for longitudinal studies. This finding suggests that the self-reported gains may overestimate the actual impact of diversity experiences on civic outcomes.

Empirical Examination of Evidence on Community-Based and Civic Engagement in Higher Education

To further understand the scope of research that characterizes the evidence on community-based and civic engagement in higher education, the authors undertook a qualitative analysis of a sample of research studies. The sample (see Appendix) prioritized studies published between 2011 and 2021 that addressed outcomes related to community-based and civic experiences.

We located publications using several search methods: (a) keyword searches (e.g., civic engagement, service learning, community engagement, study abroad, community-based practices); (b) searches of two institutional library databases and archives of three relevant open-access journals (*Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, International Journal of Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement, and Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*); (c) bibliographic searches of citations within relevant publications; and (d) a review of publications solicited during an informational webinar related to this project. Further parameters for inclusion were:

• Full-text version available for download

• Meta-analyses and analyses of original data (rather than a summary of data analyzed in other publications

• Multi-institutional studies (two or more institutions)

• Single institution studies that were longitudinal or included data from multiple cohorts/ academic years

• Inclusion of at least one of a range of civic or community-based engagement experiences (i.e., service learning, study abroad, diversity experiences, global learning, internships, field experiences, community-based undergraduate research, community-based work-study)

• Analysis of at least one of a range of outcomes at the student and institution levels (see Table 2 for a list of outcomes associated with high-impact practices)

Studies did not have to be peer-reviewed publications; the authors included non-peer-reviewed publications such as organizational reports, book chapters, and dissertations.

Coding Methodology

To analyze the type and breadth of evidence in the sample of research studies, the authors identified a priori categories that aligned with the objectives of the research synthesis. Additional codes emerged inductively through the coding process. The final categories used for coding the research studies were: (a) the type of civic or community-based outcome(s) measured; (b) the type of civic or community-based engagement(s) studied; (c) the type of data collected; (d) the number of institutions represented in the sample; (e) if the research was found in a peer-reviewed publication; and (f) if the research examined findings for students historically underserved within higher education due to racial background, gender, first-generation status, or low-income background. See Table 3 for the full list of codes.

Two of the authors coded the sample of publications and employed interrater reliability to check for consistency. When an assigned code was questionable, a new code needed to be developed, or an existing code required revision to better reflect the data, the authors reviewed those decisions together. When a new code was developed or an existing code was revised, the authors reviewed all prior coding for consistency.

TABLE 3

Codes

CATEGORY	CODE
Outcomes	Graduation and retention
	Learning
	Underserved student success
	Mindsets and dispositions
	Personal and social responsibility
	Intellectual and practical skills
	Career
	Institutional
Community-based practice	Service learning
	Diversity experiences and global learning (e.g., study abroad)
	Civic engagement
	Community-based engagement
	Internship/field experience
Data type	Self-report
	Direct assessment
Number of institutions represented in the data	Multi-institutional
	Single institution
Publication peer-reviewed	Peer-reviewed
	Not peer-reviewed
Publication contains findings related to students from a historically underserved group (e.g., race, gender, first-generation status, etc.)	Yes
	No

Note. In many cases, publications were coded with multiple codes in a single category (e.g., both self-report and direct assessment data, multiple outcomes studied). Only the number of institutions studied, peer-reviewed publications, and findings for underserved students required a single code within the category.

Results

In total, the authors located fifty-three publications that studied at least one of a range of civic or community-based engagement activities that met the aforementioned criteria for inclusion in this research synthesis (see Appendix for a full list of publications). Of these, thirty-one were multi-institution studies (including three meta-analyses) and twenty-two were larger-scale, single-institution studies. Forty-four (83 percent) of these studies were published in double-blind peer-reviewed journals. As an earlier literature review on civic and community-based engagement (Finley, 2011) found, current literature still abounds with single-institution studies representing snapshots of individual courses or programs and/or based on small sample sizes gathered over a single semester or academic year. Although these studies provide important insights into the effects of community-based and civic engagement, this synthesis did not include them, as per the defined parameters.
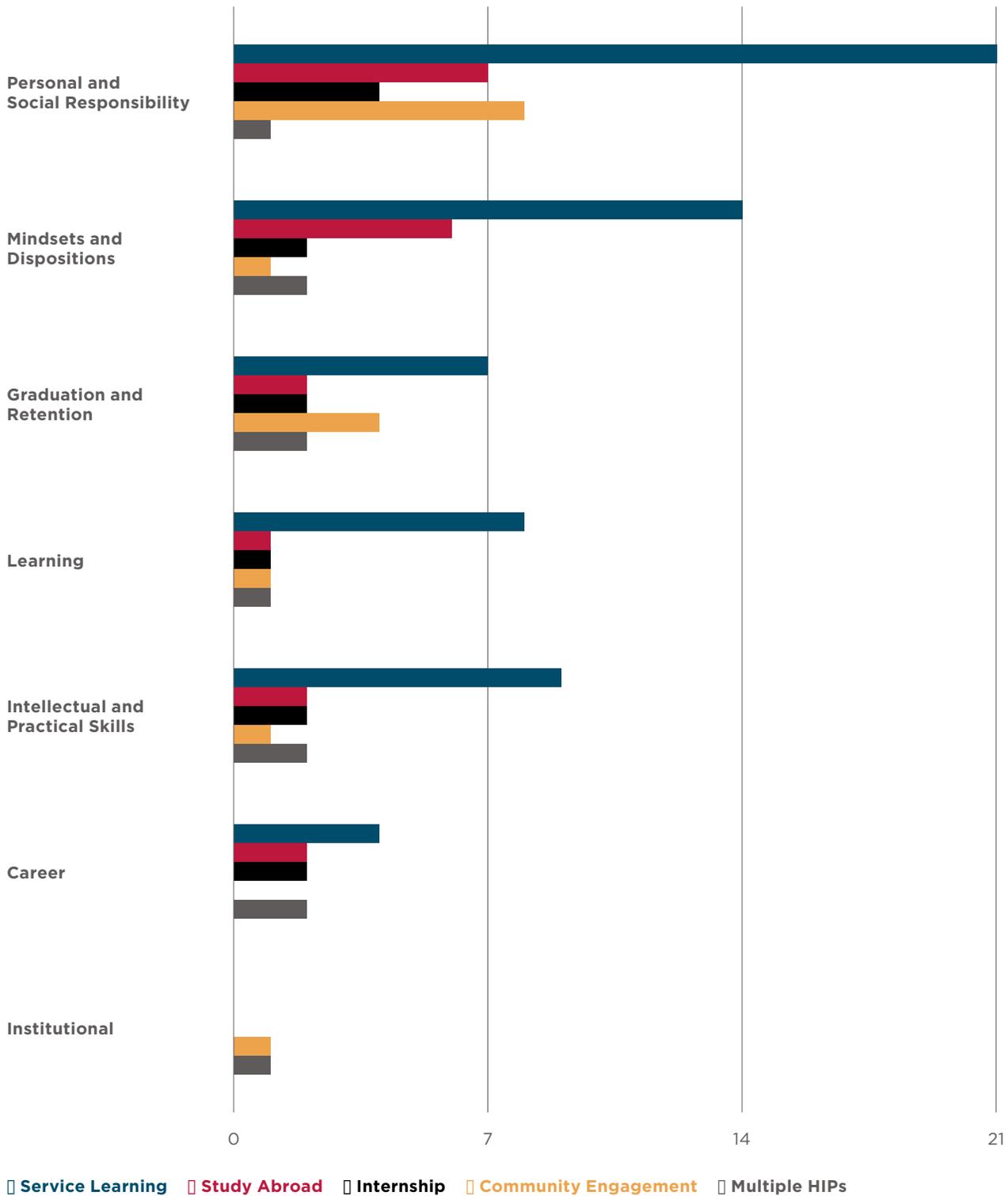
Echoing prior findings (Finley, 2011), most of the studies (68 percent) examined service-learning experiences. However, the authors also found relevant research on broadly defined community-based engagement (30 percent); diversity experiences and global learning, such as study abroad (28 percent); and, to a lesser degree, internships and field experiences (21 percent). In some studies, researchers investigated multiple community-based practices (e.g., Soria & Mitchell, 2018; Valentine et al., 2021). Other studies focused on a single community-based practice, most often service learning (e.g., Diaz et al., 2019; Painter & Howell, 2020). Figure 1 provides an overview of the community-based practices studied by outcome category.

Studies encompassed a range of outcomes, both at the student and institutional levels. Some of these outcomes have been previously well documented (e.g., see Finley, 2011), such as measures of personal and social responsibility, learning outcomes, and graduation and retention rates. For this analysis, the authors sought to include a wider range of outcomes (see Table 2) that included measures on mindsets and dispositions (e.g., motivation, intrapersonal development, awareness of diversity), intellectual and practical skills (e.g., critical thinking, communication, information literacy), institutional-level outcomes (e.g., institutional graduation rates, student participation), and career-related outcomes.

Across the studies included in this sample, 71 percent involved the collection of indirect self-reported data ($n = 38$), such as through surveys or interviews. The remaining 29 percent ($n = 21$) gathered evidence based upon direct assessment data (e.g., graduation rates, retention rates, grades or GPA, credits earned). Only a handful of studies (11 percent) used both self-report and direct assessment measures. Table 4 provides a synthesis of the research by outcome area.

FIGURE 1

Number of Community-Based Practices Studied by Outcome Category

☐ **Service Learning**   ☐ **Study Abroad**   ☐ **Internship**   ☐ **Community Engagement**   ☐ **Multiple HIPs**

Note. This figure includes the number of each type of community-based practice studied for each outcome category. As mentioned previously, many studies included multiple community-based practices, which are represented in this figure.

TABLE 4

Summary of Results by Outcome

OUTCOME	NO. OF PUBLICATIONS	SUMMARY OF RESULTS
Personal and social responsibility	28	Increased civic attitudes and civic mindedness
		Increased civic and community-based engagement (desire/goals, behaviors during and after college, perceived value)
		Civic learning
		Perceived civic and social responsibility
		Moral and ethical reasoning and actions
Mindsets and dispositions	17	Increased openness to and understanding of diversity
		Increased awareness of social issues and social justice
		Increased adaptability
		Positive self-perceptions of socially responsible leadership
		More positive attitude toward school and enjoyment of challenging tasks
		Increased self-efficacy and sense of belonging
Graduation and retention and other institutional outcomes	13	More likely to graduate
		Earned more credits
		More likely to re-enroll
		Institutional implementation of collaborative and participatory pedagogies
		Students practicing collaborative and mutual learning
Learning	10	Improved grades and GPA
		Improved test performance and assignment scores
		Self-reported general learning gains
Intellectual and practical skills	9	Improved interpersonal skills: communication, collaboration, and teamwork
		Increased problem-solving and critical thinking skills
		Increased academic content learning and skills such as research, writing, and mathematical analysis
Career	4	Better career exploration skills and increased career exploration in a field related to public service
		Increased career-related knowledge and skills
Findings for underserved students*	11	Findings are most consistently discussed in terms of race effects across student populations.
		Studies tend to focus on a small set of outcomes, such as cumulative GPA, retention rates, credits earned, and graduation rates.

Note: The total number of publications exceeds the sample size because many studies included multiple outcomes of focus.
* Where applicable, studies examining effects for underserved students are also addressed in summaries for each of the other six outcome categories.

Drawing from AAC&U's Essential Learning Outcomes framework, personal and social responsibility includes outcomes such as ethical reasoning, intercultural competence, civic engagement, and global learning. Personal responsibility has been defined as one's accountability for initiating action and accepting whatever consequences come from those actions (Rychlak, 1979). This construct involves acknowledging one's own needs and desires while also considering others' needs (Mergler & Shield, 2016). Social responsibility, on the other hand, focuses on one's concern for others in the community or society, and extends beyond one's own personal needs and desires (Gallay, 2006).

A total of twenty-eight studies (53 percent) investigated outcomes related to personal and social responsibility—the largest number of studies across any of the examined outcome categories for this analysis. Most of these studies focused on outcomes in relationship to service-learning programs (*n* = 21, 75 percent). Smaller percentages of studies explored community-based engagement more generally (*n* = 7, 25 percent), study abroad (*n* = 6, 21 percent), and internships and field studies (*n* = 3, 11 percent). The totals exceed 28 because some studies examined more than one community-based practice.

From this analysis, service learning was associated with a variety of outcomes related to personal and social responsibility, such as increases in civic attitudes and civic mindedness, civic and community-based engagement (desire/goals, behaviors during and after college, perceived value), civic learning, a sense of civic responsibility, and ethical and moral reasoning. Similarly, community-based engagement in general (as opposed to service-learning courses specifically) has been connected to increases in civic attitudes and civic mindedness; civic and community-based engagement, including increased perceived value of engaging with the community (Mitchell et al., 2016; Steinberg et al., 2011); and feeling civic and social responsibility or obligation. Meaningful peer-to-peer discussion embedded in community-based engagement experiences was also significantly related to more positive results on personal and social responsibility outcomes (Mitchell et al., 2016; Richard et al., 2016), as was participating in more than one service-learning course (Molely & Ilustre, 2016). Table 5 provides a list of publications related to specific personal and social responsibility outcomes.

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TABLE 5

Summary of Results Related to Personal and Social Responsibility

OUTCOME	PUBLICATIONS
Increases in civic attitudes and civic mindedness	**Service learning** Buch & Harden, 2011; Díaz et al., 2019; Molely & Ilustre, 2016, 2019; Richard et al., 2016 **Community-based engagement** Simeone & Shaw, 2017
Civic and community-based engagement (desire/goals, behaviors during and after college, perceived value)	**Service learning** Celio et al., 2011; Díaz et al., 2019; Hok-ka et al., 2016; Kilgo et al., 2014; Molely & Ilustre, 2019; Meyers et al., 2019; Painter & Howell, 2020; Richard et al., 2016; Sessa et al., 2013; Soria & Mitchell, 2018; Soria & Thomas-Card, 2014; Steinberg et al., 2011; Winston, 2015; Yorio & Ye, 2012 **Community-based engagement** Barnhardt et al., 2015; Benz et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2016; Soria & Mitchell, 2018; Steinberg et al., 2011; Winston, 2015 **Study abroad** Mitic, 2019a, 2019b, 2020; Myers, 2019
Civic learning	**Service learning** Hurtado et al., 2012; Molely & Ilustre, 2016 **Study abroad** Hurtado et al., 2012
Feeling civic and social responsibility	**Service learning** Hok-ka et al., 2016; Natadjaja & Yuwono, 2019; Simons et al., 2020; Valentine et al., 2021; Yorio & Ye, 2012 **Community-based engagement** Benz et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2016; Steinberg et al., 2011 **Study abroad** Valentine et al., 2021
Ethical and moral reasoning	**Service learning** Valentine et al., 2021; Yorio & Ye, 2012

Note: Many studies included multiple outcomes of focus and/or examined more than one community-based practice.

This analysis found existing research on the effects of global learning experiences (i.e., almost exclusively examined as study abroad experiences) and field studies and internships to be less prevalent than other forms of students' community-based engagement in higher education. Mitic (2019a, 2019b, 2020) and Myers (2019) used *Education Longitudinal Study* (2002–2012) data to investigate post-college behaviors following participation in study abroad, noting significant positive relationships with civic and community-based engagement activities such as volunteering, voting, and donating. Others have found an association between study abroad participation and civic learning (Hurtado et al., 2012) and perceived personal and social responsibility (Valentine et al., 2021). Using a national dataset, Valentine et al. (2021) found that community-based high-impact practices (HIPs) had a positive association with perceived personal and social responsibility, ethical and moral reasoning, and several other outcomes. However, study abroad showed the smallest effect sizes of the three community-based HIPs studied.

The authors located only three studies examining the impact of field work, internships, and/or work-study, each of which also considered other community-based practices. It is possible this is because much of the research surrounding internships and field experiences focuses on discipline-specific outcomes rather than field work as a community-based practice. These studies noted significant positive effects with outcomes associated with perceived personal and social responsibility, ethical and moral reasoning (Valentine et al., 2021 [internships]), and civic engagement (Myers et al., 2019 [internships]; Soria & Mitchell, 2018 [work-study]), including social justice activities specifically (Soria & Mitchell, 2018 [work-study]).

Only four studies addressing personal and social responsibility outcomes specifically explored outcomes for underserved and minoritized student groups (Mitic, 2019a, 2019b, 2020; Valentine et al., 2021). Mitic (2019b) found first-generation college students were less likely to participate in post-college community-based and civic engagement activities, particularly volunteering. However, participation in study abroad was found to increase first-generation students' voter participation after college (2019a), and community-based experiences in college— including study abroad experiences—mitigated the significant negative relationship between first-generation student status and volunteering behavior post-college (2020). Valentine et al. (2021) examined students' self-reported "practical learning gains" and "academic learning gains" and found significant positive "boosts" in these gains across underserved demographic groups. However, these gains varied to some degree by type of community-engaged experience and by demographic group. For example, both Black students and older students (over the age of 25) reported gains in relationship to their engagement in service-learning experiences and internships, whereas Hispanic students reported gains only in connection with their participation in service learning (p. 9).

Only four studies addressing personal and social responsibility outcomes specifically explored outcomes for underserved and minoritized student groups.

Effects Related to Mindsets and Dispositions

Outcomes related to students' personal dispositions and mindsets were a focus of many studies examining the effects of community-based and civic engagement. This category of outcomes ultimately included measures related to students' intrapersonal development, awareness of and attitudes toward diversity, motivation-related perceptions, empathy, and attitudes toward school and learning (e.g., enjoyment and engagement in academic contexts). Seventeen studies, nearly one-third of the sample (32 percent), included outcomes associated with mindsets and dispositions. The studies explored these outcomes in association with a variety of community-based practices. As such, the studies present the results across a range of community-based practices.

Most of the studies (*n* = 11) investigated the impact of community-based practices on awareness of and attitudes toward diversity. Broadly, this research suggests that service learning, study abroad, and internships positively affect students' openness to diversity and understanding of diversity (Díaz et al., 2019[1]; Engberg et al., 2016[2]; Hurtado et al., 2012[1, 2]; Kilgo et al., 2015[1, 2, 3]; Salisbury, 2011[2]; Salisbury et al., 2013[2]; Simons et al., 2013[1]; Valentine et al., 2021[1, 2, 3]; Yorio & Ye, 2012[1]), their awareness of social issues (e.g., racism, discrimination), and social justice (Conner & Erickson, 2017[1]; Díaz et al., 2019[1]; Hurtado et al., 2012[1, 2]; Simons et al., 2013[1, 3]; Yorio & Ye, 2012[1]).

The remaining six studies explored a range of other outcomes related to mindsets and dispositions (e.g., self-perceptions, adaptability in light of challenges and new information, managing emotions) and attitudes toward school and learning. For example, increased adaptability to new or challenging experiences or information was associated with service learning (Gonsalves et al., 2019) and study abroad (identified as "intercultural wonderment" by Engberg et al., 2016). Kilgo et al. (2015) found that study abroad, internship, and service learning led to more positive self-perceptions related to socially responsible leadership. Two studies examined attitudes toward school and learning. Celio et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis suggested a positive effect of service learning on attitudes toward school, such as "students' feelings about school or class" (p. 170; e.g., their engagement and enjoyment in those contexts). Similarly, Kilgo et al. (2015) found that participating in internships and service learning was associated with greater enjoyment of cognition and/or challenging tasks. Additionally, students' participation in service learning and community-based engagement was associated with increased self-efficacy (Gonsalves et al., 2019; Steinberg et al., 2011). Sessa et al. (2013) found that students who were more civically engaged following service learning perceived less personal cost (i.e., sacrifice required to engage in a task) associated with community-based engagement.

Few studies considered implications specifically for underserved students. Valentine et al. (2021) explored differential effects by race and student age on a list of practical learning gains that included "understanding people of other backgrounds"; significant positive benefits were only noted for some community-based practices by demographic group, as described earlier. Soria et al. (2019) reported positive effects on lower/working-class students' sense of belonging but no effects on middle/upper-class students' sense of belonging after participation in service learning.

The cited studies investigated various civic and community-based engagement activities, as follows:
1 Studied service learning
2 Studied study abroad
3 Studied internships

Effects Related to Graduation, Retention, and Other Institutional Outcomes

Eleven studies (21 percent of the sample) included graduation and/or retention as an outcome of community-based practices. Of those, six focused on service learning, three on community-based engagement more generally, and two on multiple high-impact practices (HIPs) in which several community-based practices were involved. Participation in service learning was positively associated with continuing studies, e.g., re-enrolling in courses, total credit hours completed (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013; Reed et al., 2015; Song et al., 2017, 2018) and graduation (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013; Mungo, 2017; Reed et al., 2015; Song et al., 2017, 2018; Yue & Hart, 2017). Yue and Hart (2017) found that upper-division service-learning courses had a more positive impact on graduation than lower-division courses.

Similarly, research suggests that engagement with the community is associated with increased retention and persistence (Maruyama et al., 2018; Schulzetenberg et al., 2020) and graduation (Maruyama et al., 2018; Metro College Student Success Program, 2021; Schulzetenberg et al., 2020). Using national-level data, McDaniel and Van Jura (2020) found that participation in multiple HIPs, primarily community-based (study abroad; internship, co-op, or field experience; community-based project; or research with a faculty member), was associated with increased six-year graduation rates for students regardless of demographic background (e.g., gender, racial background, first-generation student status). Alternatively, Johnson and Stage (2018) studied the effect of ten HIPs on institutional-level graduation rates and found limited direct association.

Multiple studies examined differential effects on underserved student groups. Findings were mixed. In some, the impacts of these community-based practices were either unaffected by student background (Locke & Pelco, 2013; McDaniel & Van Jura, 2020) or more beneficial to traditionally underserved students than majority students (Maruyama et al., 2018; Metro College Student Success Program, 2021; Schulzetenberg et al., 2020). In Reed et al. (2015) and Lockeman and Pelco (2013), participation in service learning more strongly predicted graduation and retention than common student-level correlates such as gender, racial background, first-generation student status, and GPA. At one institution, longitudinal studies of underrepresented students found inconsistent benefits that varied across colleges within a single university, which may be due to differences inherent to the courses specific to each college's service-learning program (Song et al., 2017; Song et al., 2018).

In addition to Johnson and Stage's (2018) study in which institutional graduation rates were not significantly affected by implementing multiple HIPs—which included several community-based practices—only one other study investigated institutional-level outcomes. Medved and Ursic (2021) described the benefits of university-community partnerships to communities. Their case study included eleven university-community collaborations in Europe, and they found several institutional advantages of local urban community projects, including institutional implementation of collaborative and participatory pedagogies and students practicing collaborative and mutual learning.

Effects Related to GPA and General Learning Gains

The effects of students' participation in community-based or civic experiences on their general learning, measured via self-report (i.e., self-reported gains in learning) and direct assessment (i.e., GPA), were the focus of ten publications (19 percent). Seven publications considered service learning alone; one focused on community-based engagement more generally; and one examined service learning, internship, and study abroad together as part of a larger list of high-impact practices (HIPs). Given that only three publications examined community-based practices beyond service learning, the authors discuss all of them together in this section.

Most of the studies linking community-based practices with increases in learning focused on direct assessment of an increase in students' grade point averages (GPAs) following service learning (Hurtado et al., 2012; Mungo, 2017; Song et al., 2017; Song et al., 2018) and community-based engagement (Maruyama & Song, 2018). Two meta-analyses similarly reported increases in learning measures across grades, test performance, and assignment scores following participation in service learning (Celio et al., 2011; Warren, 2012). Researchers have also studied students' self-reported perceptions of their own learning after engaging in several community-based practices, including students' self-reported general learning gains following service learning (Finley & McNair, 2013; Warren, 2012), internship, and study abroad (Finley & McNair, 2013) and increased course content knowledge associated with service-learning participation (Natadjaja & Yuwono, 2019).

Some of these results were inconsistent across student demographic groups. For example, GPA was significantly higher following service learning only for female students in one study (Mungo, 2017) and inconsistently across colleges/disciplines in another (Song et al., 2017). Two studies noted positive associations between underrepresented students' participation in community-based practices and learning outcomes (Song et al., 2017; Song et al., 2018). However, Maruyama and Song (2018) found a significant, positive association with GPA when all students were examined together but not when underrepresented students were investigated as individual groups. Similarly, Song et al. (2017, 2018) suggested that results were generally, although inconsistently, positive for historically underrepresented students.

In addition to examining the effects of community-based and civic experiences on learning as a global construct, nine publications (17 percent of the sample) also examined effects on specific intellectual and practical skills (AAC&U, 2021), including teamwork, communication, problem solving, and critical thinking. Among these publications, six focused on service learning, one considered service learning and community-based engagement together, and two investigated multiple high-impact practices (HIPs), including three community-based practices: service learning, internship, and study abroad.

Most often, participation in service learning was significantly associated with gains in interpersonal skills, e.g., communication, collaboration, teamwork (Bureau et al., 2014; Celio et al., 2011; Díaz et al., 2019; Hok-ka et al., 2016; Steinberg et al., 2011; Yorio & Ye, 2012), as well as engagement in community-based programs in general (Steinberg et al., 2011). Similarly, teamwork and collaboration were significantly and positively related to service learning (Bureau et al., 2014; Valentine et al., 2021).

Researchers have also explored gains in academic skills. Findings suggest that participating in service learning strengthens problem-solving skills (Díaz et al., 2019; Hok-ka et al., 2016; Valentine et al., 2021); content acquisition and skills such as research, writing, and mathematical analysis (Hok-ka et al., 2016; Valentine et al., 2021); and critical thinking (Valentine et al., 2021). Two studies, however, indicated that students' participation in service learning (Kilgo et al., 2014; Kilgo et al., 2015), study abroad, or internship experiences (Kilgo et al., 2015) did not increase critical thinking skills. In addition to service learning, Valentine et al. (2021) reported significant, positive relationships between participation in internships and study abroad and teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, and academic skills.

Valentine et al. (2021) also investigated trends surrounding underserved student groups, with inconsistent results by group and outcome. For academic learning outcomes—of which critical thinking was included—only specific community-based practices were associated with gains for each demographic group: Black students (service learning, internship), Hispanic students (service learning, study abroad), and older students (service learning).

Findings suggest that participating in service learning strengthens problem-solving skills; content acquisition and skills such as research, writing, and mathematical analysis; and critical thinking.

Effects Related to Career Outcomes

Four studies (8 percent of the sample) investigated career outcomes. Most of these studies focused on benefits related to students' career seeking or exploration, including better career exploration skills (Hokka et al., 2016) and increased career exploration in fields related to public service (Mitchell & Rost-Banik, 2019) following participation in service learning, and higher likelihood of seeking employment post-graduation following a study abroad or internship experience, but not service learning (Miller et al., 2018). Moreover, Valentine et al. (2021) found that participating in service learning, study abroad, and internships was associated with acquiring career-related knowledge and skills, although these differences varied for underserved student groups, as previously mentioned regarding practical learning gains.

Effects for Historically Underserved Students

Only eleven (21 percent) out of the total sample of fifty-three studies included in this analysis addressed findings related to students from historically underserved groups. Across these studies, racial differences among students were the most consistent focus, although most studies examined a range of demographic factors associated with underserved students, particularly first-generation status and Pell Grant eligibility (a proxy for a low socioeconomic status). A majority of studies found positive effects for underserved students' participation in community-engaged or civic experiences, specifically when compared with students from the same underserved group who did not participate in the experience. Although the authors found some exceptions across studies, community-based and civic practices generally tended to improve outcomes for all students regardless of whether they belonged to an underserved group.

Only eleven (21 percent) out of the total sample of fifty-three studies included in this analysis addressed findings related to students from historically underserved groups.

Community-based and civic engagement as forms of high-impact practices (HIPs) have proliferated across college and university campuses in the past decade. At the same time, research on the outcomes associated with these practices has also expanded. In general, however, research on the outcomes of community-based practices remains almost entirely based upon indirect or self-reported measures, and we need more evidence of students' demonstrated abilities related to these outcomes.

As noted earlier, community-based experiences such as service learning, study abroad, community-based research, and internships are generally viewed as separate practices and are studied individually. We encourage, simultaneously, research across community-based experiences and research that considers the outcomes of engagement in multiple community-based HIPs. We also encourage journals to prioritize empirical, multi-institutional studies and single-institution studies that are longitudinal or include data from multiple cohorts/academic years. We are indebted to journals such as the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* that emphasize rigorous empirical research on community-based experiences. Although single-institution studies of individual courses or programs at a point in time are important research, larger-scale studies offer wider generalization of results across higher education and a stronger impression of the impact of community-based practices.

The most robust findings related to the effects of community-based or civic experiences focus on personal and social responsibility outcomes. Although more than half of the studies that met the parameters for this synthesis focused on these outcomes, there was little continuity in the measures used to examine personal and social responsibility variables. For this reason, meta-analyses (e.g., Yorio & Ye, 2012; Celio et al., 2011) were particularly helpful in drawing important connections between various measures and findings.

Beyond personal and social responsibility outcomes, we see much more limited research on the other outcomes of community-based and civic experiences. Given limited but positive findings related to mindsets and dispositions, graduation and retention, general learning gains/improvement, intellectual and practical skills, and career outcomes, the authors urge more research on these outcomes. Additionally,

this synthesis identified publications that point to study abroad as a critical area for future empirical study. For example, studies on the awareness of and mindsets toward diversity are more often connected with study abroad experiences than with other types of community-engaged experiences. However, the authors located only six publications in the past ten years that studied this outcome in relationship to study abroad experiences.

Finally, higher education also needs greater and more thorough research on equity differentials in the outcomes connected with students' engagement in community-based and civic practices. Despite heightened focus on student success in higher education, studies examining the efficacy of civic and community-based practices continue to lack a focus on outcomes for underserved students. Additionally, the findings that do exist tend to focus on a very small range of outcomes measures, particularly GPA, credits earned, retention, and graduation. Thus, higher education stakeholders know almost nothing from large-scale studies about the effects of civic or community-based experiences on specific learning outcomes for underserved students, such as critical thinking or problem solving, or about the effects on mindsets or dispositions. While obtaining adequate sample sizes is a persistent challenge in conducting demographic analyses across subgroups, clearly there is a need

to increase these efforts specifically in large-scale or multi-institutional studies. The full story of the efficacy of community-based and civic engagement in higher education cannot be told without attention to equity and the persistent disadvantages that compromise student success across higher education, particularly among minoritized students.

Although the relatively small scope and scale of much of the research on the effects of community-based and civic experiences in higher education tends to constrain generalizability, this research synthesis points to a rich pool of generalizable evidence. Summarized in aggregate here, this synthesis makes a strong case for the broad efficacy of engaging students, including those historically underserved by higher education, in community-based and civic activities as part of their college experience. Nevertheless, the authors believe they would be remiss not to highlight that this evidence remains largely the product of students' own estimation of their civic skills or of general assessment of their learning (i.e., GPA). Higher education institutions know precious little about students' capacity to demonstrate their civic abilities in applied contexts, inside and outside the classroom. This is the next frontier for researchers to truly understand the ways in which community-based and civic practices contribute to students' attainment of essential skills.

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LIST OF REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

1. Barnhardt et al., 2015
2. Benz et al., 2020
3. Buch & Harden, 2011
4. Bureau et al., 2014
5. Celio et al., 2011
6. Choo et al., 2019
7. Conner & Erickson, 2017
8. Díaz et al., 2019
9. Engberg et al., 2016
10. Finley & McNair, 2013
11. Gonsalves et al., 2019
12. Hok-ka et al., 2016
13. Hurtado et al., 2012
14. Johnson & Stage, 2018
15. Kilgo et al., 2015
16. Kilgo et al., 2019
17. Kilgo et al., 2014
18. Lockeman & Pelco, 2013
19. Maruyama et al., 2018
20. McDaniel & Van Jura, 2020
21. Medved & Ursic, 2021
22. Metro College Student Success Program, 2021
23. Miller et al., 2018.
24. Mitchell et al., 2016
25. Mitchell & Rost-Banik, 2019
26. Mitic, 2019a
27. Mitic, 2019b
28. Mitic, 2020
29. Moley & Ilustre, 2019
30. Moley & Ilustre, 2016
31. Mungo, 2017
32. Myers et al., 2019
33. Natadjaja & Yuwono, 2019
34. Painter & Howell, 2020
35. Reed et al., 2015
36. Richard et al., 2016
37. Salisbury, 2011
38. Salisbury et al., 2013
39. Schulzetenberg et al., 2020
40. Sessa et al., 2013
41. Simeone et al., 2017
42. Simons et al., 2020
43. Song et al., 2017
44. Song et al., 2018
45. Soria & Mitchell, 2018
46. Soria & Thomas-Card, 2014
47. Soria et al., 2019
48. Steinberg et al., 2011
49. Valentine et al., 2021
50. Warren, 2012
51. Winston, 2015
52. Yorio & Ye, 2012
53. Yue & Hart, 2017