DEFINING COMMUNITY:
THE IMPACT OF OSU STUDENT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN
CORVALLIS, OREGON

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Roommates can make or break you. So can a committee. And I’ve got it made.

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE ESSAY OF

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Andrew Valls, representing Political Science

This study explores the context of and impacts resulting from a broad range of university student civic engagements on the city of Corvallis, Oregon. Through semi-structured interviews with local community partners who engage with the university in what I term student civic service-learning, feedback reveals impacts that are overwhelmingly positive, with community partners lauding students as contributors to organizational development, community capacity, and social justice. In contrast with existing literature, partners reveal the necessity for a diverse range of service levels and types, including one-time and short-term service. Further analysis reveals a fragile network of service professionals, at a stalemate in growth within this community that is immensely impacted by student service. Often bypassing the network’s largest service hub, many partners are limited in their connectivity within the network and thus find their contact with students and faculty inconsistent and inefficient. As university student populations are expected to continue growing, findings suggest that more of the same is not necessarily better, yet the service provided by students currently is vital to maintaining the quality of life for the local community. By assessing the impacts of service on the greater community and how they are situated in a service network, this research furthers our understanding of how this community comes to be defined and shaped by its relationship with its university.
Defining Community:
The Impact of OSU Student Civic Engagement in Corvallis, Oregon

The problem of education in its relation to the direction of social change is all one with the problem of finding out what democracy means in its total range of concrete applications: domestic, international, religious, cultural, economic, and political...The trouble...is that we have taken democracy for granted; we have thought and acted as if our forefathers had founded it once and for all. We have forgotten that it has to be enacted anew in every generation, in every year, in every day, in the living relations of person to person, in all social forms and institutions. Forgetting this...we have been negligent in creating a school that should be the constant nurse of democracy.

John Dewey
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Introduction

Civic engagement has emerged as a hot topic in higher education in response to dramatic transformations in society, including the way we understand learning and the purpose of public education. Scholars have framed their critiques and debates around the topic from a number of perspectives. Student-centered development has remained at the forefront of literature and research around student-community engagement (Levine, 2011). As a result, there exists a tremendous amount of scholarship addressing the impacts of engagement on, for example, learning outcomes, job-preparedness and placement, social responsibility, and the shaping of citizens within a democratic nation (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). While these demonstrated student outcomes are overwhelmingly favorable (Stoecker et al., 2009), they are insufficient for an inclusive policy-making that is informed by all parties impacted by student-community engagement. In particular, the community impact of these engagements has been largely overlooked.

At the center of the debate over education reform is the awareness that interventions must yield real-world outcomes, particularly during this time of economic turmoil and increasing social inequality. Civic engagement has been hailed in practice as an effective means of encouraging beneficial student outcomes, and in theory as promoting outcomes for public benefit (Stoecker, et al., 2009; Cruz & Giles, 2000). But less is known about the actual impact on the public and the characteristics of the structure that enables the community-university partnership. The bulk of recent empirical data on this topic comes from only a handful of sources, including a comprehensive 2009 publication from Stoecker and Tryon, and from survey data made available from Campus Compact, a national organization of campuses committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education, in which Oregon State University is a member.

Despite the presence of such committed universities, civic education and engagement have seen better days (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Today’s young adults are far less civically engaged than their grandparents were in their youth, a decline that has been steady since tracking it began (Galston, 2005, p. 23). Volunteer rates among 20- to 24-year olds are at their lowest in over ten years. Scholars and educators recognize this engagement climate as inadequate for fostering healthy communities, a healthy citizenry, and a healthy society (Galston, 2005). However, these criticisms of inadequacy have seldom been supported with empirical research demonstrating the actualities and scope of impact that civic engagement has on its community.
One such demonstration from Campus Compact (2013) shows that despite the declining levels of participation observed in today’s youth, those who do engage have a tremendous financial impact on their communities (See Figure 1), contributing an estimated 9.7 billion dollars in community work through their service. The financial impact of volunteer and service work is relatively simple to measure – it is a calculation based on hours served, times the calculated dollar value of that work – and it is a commonly used outcome measure in volunteering literature (United Nations Volunteers, 2011). Still, this information does little to describe community outcomes beyond the financial contributions of service, or as some critics assert, “free labor” (Haski-Leventhal, Hustinx, & Handy, 2011). It also frames student service as addressing a financial void, as opposed to building the social resilience, robustness, and welfare of a community, or understanding students as having more to provide for their communities than simply labor. Understanding community impacts as they relate to student service involves critically analyzing a complex relationship not only between student and community member, but also within a context of regional and university characteristics; between university and community.
This paucity in both participation and research is particularly relevant as the pressure for data-driven decision-making in higher education increases (Halpern, 2004). While community-based research is gaining momentum in academia (McNicoll, 1999), careful and critical examinations of outcomes that frame student civic engagement within the context of university-community partnerships are needed as a potentially powerful component to enriching town-gown relations; evidencing the impact of such a partnership is ultimately meant to give better representation to the parties involved and more information about this network’s configuration.

The research in this study addresses the gap in literature that exists concerning the impact of student civic engagement on the local community, and thus contributes preliminary data and analysis that will provide information pertinent to university and community policies and decision-making.

**Research Topic & Problem**

There is a growing movement in the U.S. and worldwide for public institutions such as universities to integrate broader and more accurate representation into policy-making and engage the public in civic life. This can take the form of voter drives, increased transparency measures, and often, on campuses, some form of a “We Heard Your Voice” campaign to indicate that program administrators are responsive to student preferences and needs. However, the student community is not the only community to which public universities are meant to be responsive. Unfortunately, thus far, external community benefits have largely been treated by researchers as a beneficial externality of student service-learning, as opposed to the purpose of it (Haski-Leventhal, et al., 2011).

Universities that do not have relevant information about the greater social impacts associated with their efforts are potentially less able to defend their funding and garner public support and recognition. “By their nature, colleges and universities are dynamic and constantly challenged by changes in political economy, funding, demographics, communities, and educational theory and practice” (Sungu-Eryilmaz, 2009, p. 5). The need at Oregon State University (OSU) for such information regarding student engagement in the community is great, as identified by several professional spheres in which the author participated. Perpetuating this lack of information is the difficult nature of tracking and defining student service, service-learning, volunteerism, and engagement, as well as narrowing down a solitary concept of community impact. These terms are further delineated in the Research Terminology section.
Research Question

The research question being asked through this project is, very simply, what is the state of student civic service and what are the impacts on the community? In this exploratory study, I take a broad approach toward defining the boundaries of service, impacts, and community, as is demonstrated in the open nature of the interview questions (see Appendix Interview Questions). We cast a wide net around service, including any voluntary participation in direct-service organizations by an OSU student, be it through the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE), through a course, individually, or with a campus-affiliated group. For this reason, no type of volunteer work was excluded, though only service to the public community through civic- or direct-service organizations was explicitly included. For example, service to or through a religious organization was not measured, though this activity may very well have impacts on the greater community.

This topic question was addressed by contacting local direct-service agencies and organizations that were identified as currently utilizing regular student service (unpaid student work, skills, talents, or knowledge), through a process discussed in detail in the Data Collection section. These included national and local organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, the Humane Society, the Boys and Girls Club, the local city’s Parks and Recreation agency, as well as local centers which combat issues like sexual assault and domestic violence, drug abuse, and homelessness or displacement. Community, in this case, will include a variety of stakeholders in a network, such as employees of service agencies and nonprofits, and the human and non-human populations they serve. This definition of community envelops the university and its students since, in serving their community, they are changing the conditions of the local world for themselves as well.

Both theoretical and empirical research suggest that community impacts are expected to be largely beneficial, and typically address youth education and development, including access; hunger, homelessness, and poverty; human, animal, and environmental health and welfare; and issues of diversity and multiculturalism (See Figure 2: Campus Compact, 2013). Campus Compact’s 2012 survey of 557 member institutions revealed these as the most prominent issues addressed by their student engagement programs. The results of these research studies will be further discussed in the literature review, as will the reasons for their scarcity.

Every university has its own distinct engagement culture, with nuanced issues, obstacles, and resources that all contribute to the outcomes of student-community engagement. With
cognizance of these dynamic relations, my research question (and interview format) was left as open as possible, making room for community voices to resound. Such an approach allowed for the revelation of findings that contrasted those in existing literature, and it brought about the discovery and subsequent discussion of a crucial network framework within which student service exists.

Research Significance

The practice of civic engagement rests at the heart of public education and democratic theory. Since the 1990’s, there has been growing concern from within and outside of the service-learning movement about whether the practice actually benefits communities, whether communities are being exploited as free sources of student education, how connected community issues actually are to classroom learning; and how useful a “charity” model of service is for
empowering communities and students to make transformational change (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

University-community partnerships and collaborations are a growing trend, supported by research demonstrating benefits to social capital, resilience, and additional beneficial outcomes for both parties (Levine, 2011; Cooper, Kotval, Kotval, & Mullin, 2014). Even if we assume that there are in fact beneficial impacts of service on disadvantaged populations and the larger community, Levine (2011) notes that the policies supporting service programs are still subject to opportunity costs (how our energy could be better spent) and negative externalities (third-party/community disadvantages). Without proper evidence of any program’s wide-reaching impacts, benefit to community is treated not as a target outcome but as a positive externality; that is, it imposes a positive effect on an external third party.

Gathering a community account of these impacts and how they come to be is essential for evaluation and planning efforts orbiting student-community engagement. Impacts are case-dependent, shaped by the myriad physical, social, political, economic and demographic factors that contribute to the particular relationship between the university and the community (or town-gown relations). The goal of this research is to provide the necessary current and context-specific knowledge required to further shared goals between Oregon State University and the City of Corvallis (and surrounding area) regarding the provision of service to the community. Expanding the local understanding of the relationship between town-and-gown stands to help officials and policy-makers on both ends to make better-informed (more democratic) decisions. This research project aims to serve this goal in a way that promotes a commitment to social justice and equity of voices represented in research literature.

Research Terminology

There is a rich discourse among scholars regarding the definitions of civic engagement, civic service, volunteerism, service-learning, and citizenship itself; a “definitional anarchy” which Sandmann (2008, p. 91) describes as dominating the service-learning and civic engagement literature. In our current discussion, while the author acknowledges the important distinctions between and characteristics of these terms, here we are not following a legal definition of citizenship in defining what is civic. Rather, the language used in this discussion aims to promote an inclusive citizenry that encompasses all those affected by public interaction – the entire community, as opposed to only citizens of legal status.
This research also describes student learning as occurring within and outside of curricular instruction and pedagogical programming, and the discussion that follows does so under the assertion that learning occurs even where it is not or cannot be assessed. Thus, this approach encompasses activities that have more or less connection to traditional curricular pedagogy (volunteering vs. service-learning), and a definition of civic that reflects that which yields direct public outcomes. Any delineations that are be made between volunteering, civic engagement, service-learning are made not to suggest a hierarchy of importance or potency to community impact, rather just a way to describe the many approaches to what we may broadly define as civic service-learning. Student civic service-learning, here, is defined as service by any OSU student to the public via a local direct-community-service organization or agency (including national/international organizations with a local chapter/office).

This inclusive manner of capturing student civic service-learning was a practical necessity and part of an exploratory research model. Some scholars have criticized simple volunteering (not associated with coursework, for example) as devoid of or lacking in the learning component in service-learning. However, this author takes the perspective that being a student is not an activity that only occurs within a classroom, and that instructors do not have sole claim to student learning, despite their propensity for encouraging it. The common thread between all the service types in which this research finds students engaged, is identified by our unit of analysis: local direct-public-service organization contact. More simply stated, the unit of analysis is “actor”, be that the organizational role of volunteer coordinator or the individual who fills that role. They are interrelated identities and a change in either can have an influence on the makeup of our social [service] network. This is further discussed in the Limitations of Theory Application section.

Civic service-learning in this context is understood within a collaborative network between Oregon State University and its larger community (with an emphasis on the local Corvallis and surrounding counties), intended for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. As will be seen to emerge from the data, student-community engagement occurs with more or less university involvement/affiliation, which has implications for the strength and configuration of these collaborations. Students and universities can take part in civic service-learning, for example through employment practices that enhance the quality of life in a community, or by promoting community-based and
community-relevant research and scholarship. While Ehrlich (2000) speaks about the individual level, the same principles can be applied at the university-level as well:

A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate. (p. xxvi)

Because of this important notion of the ecology of a community, the impacts of these various civic-service-learning activities are not viewed as compared to one another, but rather they will be discussed by their collective, complementary roles in an ecosystem, or network of community-university engagement. (See Figure 3).
Background & Literature Review

Civic Life & Education

A public education system charged with the development of an educated citizenry has a prime position and, as many have asserted, an obligation to represent the demos and address the needs of the community and its greater society. The structural and symbolic changes in civic life that have occurred in recent U.S. history suggest that our institutions are not encouraging civic participation, but that doing so is paramount (Carnegie Foundation & CIRCLE, 2006).

We find evidence of a diminished civic attachment in today’s young adults as compared to young adults of the past; “As far back as evidence can be found--and virtually without exception--young adults seem to have been less attached to civic life than their parents and grandparents” (Galston, 2005, p. 23). According to the 2013 Current Population Survey, volunteer rates are lowest among 20- to 24-year-olds (18.5 percent), and the volunteer rate in 2013 was the lowest it has been since the survey began in 2002 (US Department of Labor, 2013). Data from the Current Population Survey indicates that most of volunteering is going toward religious (33%) not social- or community-service organizations (14.7%) (US Department of Labor, 2013). While we have seen recent upward swings in volunteerism in today’s youth, evidence suggests most of them will not continue after they enter the workforce, and there is no evidence that this behavior will carry over into civic engagement, as it is typically seen by this demographic as an alternative to politics (Galston, 2005, p. 24).

Debate continues over the role of public education in serving important social values; scholars continue to “rediscover the important role of community in creating an environment for learning and the importance of values to educational outcomes and the development of character in students” (Bringle, Games, & Malloy, 1999, p. 4). Central to today’s debate is the significance that community service can assume, “not as a peripheral attachment to the educational agenda, but as a central component that benefits the most important educational goals and, in turn, improves society” (Bringle, et al. 1999, p. 4).

University Civic Missions

A major figure in progressive and democratic education, John Dewey promoted the mission of American higher education as inextricably intertwined with the civic mission of the United States. The purpose of higher education gained definition with the establishment of public
land-grant institutions under the Morrill Act of 1862. The foundation of land-grant colleges was tied to fulfilling community needs: “To some, the land-grant model once represented an ideal mission that gave importance to community service because the external orientation of the faculty demonstrated a commitment to an interactive campus that could respond effectively to societal conditions” (Holland, 1997, p. 52). Since the establishment of public land-grant institutions, the twentieth century has seen education transformed by a number of factors including the emergence of the large research university, unprecedented numbers of new and non-traditional students entering college (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), technological advancement that allows for some level of distance education and virtual communication, as well as a host of other factors contributing to a changing civic arena.

In response to a declining civic participation rate, nearly twenty years ago, Campus Compact (1996) asserted, "...higher education has a responsibility to develop the next generation of active citizens, and campuses must be good citizens in their own communities.” In those twenty years, “town–gown relationships have undergone a sea change that reflects a greater university interest in working actively with local governments, businesses, and community-based organizations” (Kemp, 2013, p. 24). New language used in university mission statements has indeed shown a shift toward a dedication to “engagement,” “partnership,” and “reciprocity” (Sungu-Eryilmaz, 2009, p. 5). But have actions kept up with language?

Engaging policy audiences more recently are the ways that universities are being held accountable to civic values. “For most colleges and universities, service is included with teaching and research as defining the tripartite mission of the institution. The nature of the mission statement and the degree to which it guides policy and decisions evolve over time” (Bringle, et al., 1999, p. 8). These authors go on to note the importance of seeing service holistically (see inset on p. 20). What’s more, critics have asserted that universities have nearly abandoned the function of teaching, imparting cultural ideas, transmission of culture, and preparing students for the work that is needed in the world, and that these ideals have been lost in favor of a mission central to the promotion of research (Holland, 1999). While the creation of scientific knowledge is central to higher education, engagement and democratic scholars contend that knowledge ought to be shaped by and reflect the world around us, particularly in the affairs of the community. “The academy also has much to gain by community engagement, including the intellectual challenges of applying scholarship to the pressing issues of the day and the
prospect of new interdisciplinary insights that the scholarship of engagement will bring.” (Hollander, 1999, p. vi).

In trying to make good on a professed commitment to service, Astin (1999) noted four major institutional trends that imply a great concern with fostering civic engagement: an increasing interest in ecology and environmental studies; an increasing focus on the development of community on college campuses, a heightened focus on diversity and multiculturalism, and the continuous movement toward student and institutional engagement in service-learning and volunteerism (p. 41). Many of these trends are demonstrated in the results of this study, a decade and a half later, and evidence the importance of understanding the ways that university and community can promote mutual benefit. Bringle, Games, & Malloy (1999, p. 38) iterated the balance needed to facilitate mutual collaboration: “We each have become so preoccupied with our individual welfare – raising as much money as possible, recruiting the best students and faculty, and promoting our institution’s reputation – that we tend to lose sight of the fact that we are part of a much larger community of institutions that is collectively trying to serve a very basic and critical public purpose: to educate our citizenry.” Hutchison (2001, p. 1) followed with strategies for achieving this collaborative aim: “Those who advocate for a renewed commitment to the civic mission of colleges and universities identify three main strategies for achieving this goal: a rigorous focus on education in democratic values and citizenship, formation of collaborative community-university partnerships, and promotion of service-learning”. Community-based data like that in this study will prove essential to the promotion of these collaborations.

**Community-University Partnerships**

Henry Cisneros, former U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Design secretary, “The long-term futures of both the city and the university in this country are so intertwined that one cannot—or perhaps will not—survive without the other” (Cisneros, 1995). Echoing this relationship nearly 15 years later, Sungu-Eryilmaz (2009), reaffirms, “Colleges and universities thus have a key role to play with state and local governments and nonprofits in areas as diverse as education and skills training, technology, industrial performance, public health, and social and cultural development” (p. 8). This theme of an integrative community-university relationship, as well as palliative vs. curative service will be illuminated by the findings in this research, particularly as it relates to student service toward youth development; “Rather than simply
blaming the precollegiate educational system for underprepared students, institutions of higher education need to share responsibility for underprepared students” (Bringle, Games, & Malloy, 1999, p. 7).

With respect to community-based research, we can see another way in which university-community engagement can benefit societal outcomes. One of the community partners in this study highlighted the discrepancy between university research and community inclusion, noting her organization’s abundance of data on the youth they serve, in which no apparent interest had been shown by university researchers. Furco (2001) and Gabelnick (1997) highlight this as an issue that may rest not within individual researchers, but as a consequence of a university research culture that does not value community-based practice. From separate community organization staff and faculty focus groups, Bacon (2002) identified a cultural divide in the relationship between the two, noting that organizational staff members were more likely to view themselves as learners, see learning as a collective activity, and more likely to link learning to action. Conversely, faculty were more inclined to think of themselves as experts and keepers of knowledge in the relationship.

There are other “serious barriers to collaborative endeavors because of the ways in which campuses are organized and a history of unequal relationships in which communities served the research interests of the academy but were not, themselves, served. The new conventional wisdom is that effective partnerships require communication, planning, and mutual decision making from the start” (Hollander, 1999, p. vii).

Not only does civic service expose students to a more diverse range of individuals, it exposes communities to the privileged skills and resources held within academia. The theme of university-community or student-community engagement as being a two-way street emerged consistently throughout this study, with several community partners noting the energy, enthusiasm, new knowledge, and innovations that students brought to their organization. This highlights the importance of viewing students not simply as passive receptacles of information, and viewing communities not simply as passive receptacles of service, but both as partners and contributors to knowledge and social development. This particular commitment to community inclusion and social justice in public education comes on the heels of criticism that universities are receiving public support but not attending to the needs and concerns of their host communities (Mayfield 2001). “Today mission statements of most colleges and universities
reveal a commitment to service and civic engagement, yet the reality does not always match the rhetoric” (Hutchison, 2001, p. 1). Knowing how to increase the impact of their volunteer staff, and in a way mutually beneficial for those volunteers, can translate to improving and even saving lives. Ineffective or weak democratic education programming may help to explain why so many “schools, nonprofits, and philanthropies fail to have the impact they dreamed of having” (Rubin, 2002, p. 5). The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) recommends that “colleges, universities, and communities collaborate to collect and disseminate similar data, whether in the same state, regionally, or nationally. Building the evidence base for the positive impact of service-learning—as well as understanding and learning from missteps and failures—is critical to long-term growth and sustainability of these partnerships” (Prentice, Robinson, & Patton, 2012, p. 14).

**Issues in Assessment**

In their article, “Where’s the Community in Service-Learning Research?”, Cruz and Giles (2000) note the tendency in research in the past two decades toward a focus on student learning outcomes and very little that addresses community outcomes. While this trend may reflect the reality that faculty, those who conduct much of this research, have relatively convenient research subjects in their students, the authors attribute this lack in the literature to “political, intellectual, and practical dimensions” (p. 28). Practically, community partners do not have access to the resources needed to comprehensively research the larger impacts of student service. Community impact in much of academic literature, Cruz and Giles note, is just one variable often secondary among many, often anecdotal and descriptive, and typically comes from a mix of research and program evaluation.

Understanding the complex history and context in which we find current community engagement outcomes literature gives us perspective on why there is not more research data in this realm. What remains is a scholarship heavily imbalanced and divided between academic and community impacts. In this light, much of the service-learning literature “perpetuates the split between campus and community” (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000, p. 770) by utilizing a perspective that focuses on what universities and students can do for the community rather than with it, reifying the division between the two parties and the idea that student learning is only of importance when in the context of the academic institution. The perspectives offered by the community partners in this study reveal a more balanced perspective on the role of students in
the community.

One community-centered insight that we can glean from student-centered literature is that particular forms of civic engagement, like service-learning, have a positive effect on students’ commitment to future community involvement (Knapp, Fisher, & Levesque-Bristol, 2010). This means that the potential for community impact is not limited to their contribution in college; rather, student civic service-learning influences future community involvement, or future civic engagement. This behavioral pattern reveals itself in our data as well.

Critics offer caution about the relevance of drawing upon existing literature to inform their own efforts, noting that “both the ‘service’ and the ‘learning’ embedded in these programs can vary dramatically from program to program” (Seider & Novick, 2012, p. 131). Without an aggregate way of describing the extensive and intricately unique service-learning partnerships between a university and its community, local community-specific research will provide the data from which the most relevant conclusions can be drawn and in turn, inclusive data-informed decisions can be made “Such information would be useful to policy makers considering strategies to enhance learning productivity and to institutional researchers for designing assessment efforts” (Kuh, 1991, p. 124). For without it, rational thought may lead us to believe that increased hours in service and community engagement will yield increased benefit in a linear-like fashion, which is shown later as very much not the case in this researcher’s community. This couples with Hollander’s (1999) insistence that, “we must ask if these community service activities are providing palliative relief for undesirable social conditions rather than working to eliminate the root causes of these conditions” (p. vi) and that more attention needs to be given to the quality of experience for not just students, but faculty, administrative personnel, and the communities they believe they are serving. Some critics question whether palliative service goes as far as to perpetuate its underlying cause (Žižek, 2008), underlining the importance of measuring outcomes for all parties involved. This research will introduce the theme that community service hours spent by students are not all of the same quality in terms of impact.

Community Outcomes Research

Although it is assumed that volunteers make an extremely important contribution to organizations and the community, studies that examine their direct impact are scarce (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2011). Whereas Ferrari & Wordall (2000) showed that community perceptions
of partnerships are frequently positive, such satisfaction measures are insufficient for gathering a clear picture of service outcomes. Several authors have been critical of this trend of relying on more simplistic performance indicators to gauge impact, including Eyler, Giles, Stenson, and Gray (2001), who in a review of service-learning literature published between 1993 and 2000, identified only ten studies out of one hundred thirty-six that addressed community outcomes. Within these ten, only three (Clarke, 2000 (dissertation); Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Gray, Ondaatje, Fricker, Geschwind, Goldman, Kaganoff, Robyn, Sundt, Vogelgesang, & Klein, 1998) addressed the impact on the community’s relations with the university, reporting enhanced positive outcomes for both parties.

Through focus groups with community organizations, Gray et al. (1998) revealed that 90% of community partners indicated that the benefits of working with student volunteers outweighed the costs. Driscoll, et al. (1996) found that community partners of Portland State University perceived an effect on their capacity to serve their clients, received economic and social benefits, and they were satisfied with student interactions. Through an unpublished dissertation case study, Clarke (2000) used multiple sources of information in a mixed methods analysis of the community impact of service initiatives from Vanderbilt University. Clarke found favorable impacts including a better understanding by community partners of the collaboration and its goals, increased participation in setting project goals, mutual accomplishment of community goals, a strengthened university-community bond, access to new resources, welcomed future partnerships, and that it helped community members become more active in and feel a sense of control over the community. Additionally, scholars have found also that the process and outcomes were not separate, but intertwined (Eyler, et al., 2001, pp. 28-29).

In a rare, in-depth look into rural community perceptions of service-learning, Vernon and Ward (1999) reported overwhelming satisfaction from community partners with student service, but also that they found challenges with student schedules, short-term commitment, and training needs compounded by lack of communication with supervising faculty, all themes that will reemerge from within the current research data. Another important insight from Ward et al. (2000) is the higher propensity for an equal partnership between community organization and institution among tribal, historically Black, and Hispanic-serving colleges and universities. This provides yet another insight into the importance of institutional mission and community culture and the impact of the dynamic relationship between the two on outcomes for both.
From a 2003, 18-item survey of almost 90 community service partners, as well as focus groups led by an external consultant, San Francisco State University’s Office of Community Service-learning (OCSL) aimed to assess the impact of the work SF State students had on community-based organizations. Over ninety percent of survey respondents and all of the focus group respondents reported micro-level benefits to having an intern, noting a significant improvement in the quantity and quality of services the organization offered and an increase in the number of clients they were able to serve. Sandy and Holland (2006) studied the relationship between 99 community organizations and 8 institutions of higher education in California, and found that the organizations valued the partnership itself over specific service-learning project outcomes, but that weak relations with faculty were a major obstacle to high-quality results. The authors went on to categorize community benefits into three categories: direct impact, enrichment including organizational development and community capacity enhancement, and social justice (transformational learning and change). Sandy (2008) later described community partners’ expressed needs for enhanced communication and collaboration with their university partners.

The most widely researched area of community impact is on the service-learning programming provided to primary and secondary students, demonstrating effectiveness in targeted issues, including gains in test scores, aspirations, development programs, as well as reduced inter-ethnic tension and violence (Gazley et al., 2006). Stoecker and Tryon (2009) note that most research on satisfaction of community partners has remained superficial, using Likert Scale questionnaires or focus groups, and neglecting to assess other important impacts. Additionally, the successes of one institution’s approach to their specific community will not necessarily serve the same needs in the same ways as another town-gown partnership and certainly, there is simply an inadequate amount of research from which to make even the crudest of generalizations.

A wealth of knowledge was made available when the AACC collaborated with California Campus Compact, with the help of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), to survey community partners about their service-learning outcomes (Prentice, Robinson, & Patton, 2012, p. 12). They asked about service-learners’ impact on the partner’s capacity to serve the community within the current economic downturn, and whether students provided valuable client services. Ninety-four (94) partner organizations were
administered the survey, primarily non-faith based nonprofits (61%), K-12 schools (14%), faith-based nonprofits (8%), and government agencies (7%) addressing hundreds of thousands of clients annually, and addressing issues across the spectrum. Results found that eighty-four percent (84%) of partners agreed that students increased the organization’s capacity to serve its clients (See Figure 4), ninety-seven percent (97%) indicated that students provided valuable services to constituents (See Figure 5), many expressed the importance of volunteers to the success of their organization.

Stoecker, et al.’s (2009) book, *The Unheard Voices: Community Organization and Service Learning*, is today seen as one of the most comprehensive sources of information about the topic at hand. Their interviews with 67 community partners throughout Wisconsin revealed findings mostly consistent within service-learning research, but explored in great depth and context. Raising concern with communication, relationship-building, training and management of service-learners, and cultural competency, the most consistent theme that emerged from their research was “the frequent reference to challenges associated with short-term service learning” (p. 16). They add, specify, and refine recommendations for establishing, executing, and assessing high-impact community service-learning practice that promotes mutually beneficial outcomes.
These recommendations are centered around commitment, communication, and compatibility, all themes that will be reflected in the discussion and recommendations from the results of the current research project.

Gazley, Littlepage, and Bennett (2012) have suggested a host of service-learning benefits to the community, including enhanced university-community relations, the provision of new knowledge and resources to the community, volunteer labor, improvement in an organization’s ability to serve clientele, and research opportunities that serve the community. While they find variation in outcomes based on the type of service-learner (ex. volunteer vs. intern), the community agency personnel indicated that each type of student involvement contributed to organizational capacity in different ways and that student engagement depends on adequate organizational capacity. Using an online anonymous survey of community organizations in Western Ireland, Healy, Rowan, and McIlrath (2014) found that student training was correlated with their impact on the organization, and that more training in organizational structure, communication skills, child protection, and fundraising was desirable. The average hourly contribution of students in this survey was 5.2 per week, and while respondents indicated a generally positive impact, they felt that time was inadequate for organizations to benefit from their expertise. Additionally, 60% of respondents indicated wanting the opportunity to address college students in lectures and 47% wanted to be involved in designing module content to reflect specific interests, which they felt would only be achieved through increased interaction between the organization and the educational institution. Through a quantitative survey of a private, urban, New England university where service-learning is mandatory for graduation, Maynard (2011) found benefits from one-time service initiatives in improved awareness of community issues and increased volunteer return. The efficacy of mandatory and short-term service is debated in the literature, and both were discussed by several community partners in the current research study.

The calls for a focus on community outcomes and university-community partnerships have been answered by several pieces of scholarship by civic engagement scholars and student affairs professionals; the gaps in what we know about purposeful institutional civic engagement are being carefully filled and are supplemented, including by this study. In a growing culture of data-driven decision-making and accountability, this knowledge is vital for university professionals in their delivery of educational activities and vocational opportunities, and for universities seeking
to fulfill a civic mission, promote social justice, and support diversity efforts.

**METHODS**

**Research Design & Strategy**

Determining the impact of student civic engagement in the Corvallis community is important for several reasons. While assessment of student impact is commonplace in engagement literature and Oregon State University actively monitors student outcomes of university programming and instruction, the impact of these civic engagement activities on the greater community is a topic that has not been explored for this particular community nor often in research. In 2013, the University Council for Student Engagement and Experience (UCSEE) identified the difficulty in accounting for all the ways in which OSU students are actively engaged outside of the University, and the lack of a centralized accounting structure for such assessment.

In turn, this exploratory project was designed with consultation and support from OSU’s Center for Civic Engagement (CCE), which since its founding has contributed greatly to the creation and growth of professional networks and collaborative capacity between the university and service organizations in the community and abroad. In addition to her service on the OSU UCSEE during the 2012-2013 academic year, this study is also informed by the researcher’s internship term at the OSU CCE, which included leading a service project with one of the community partners who would later become one of those interviewed for this project. The first of its kind for the area, this project serves to both give a voice to the community in regards to their needs for OSU-Corvallis engagement, as well as shed light on the engagement climate surrounding OSU students and affiliates. This study represents a contribution to an effort toward critical, thoughtful, and thorough examination of efforts in higher education to encourage meaningful, sustainable, and impactful practices toward civic and community engagement – “a wide yet interrelated set of practices and philosophies such as service-learning, civic engagement, experiential education, public scholarship, participatory action research, and community-based research” (Butin and Seider, 2012, preface).
Theoretical Framework

Applying a Network Lens

Complex ecological theories and research from the field of physical and biological sciences are increasingly being used to inform thinking about social systems, organizations, and networks (Booher, 2008). As groupings or clusters of people linked by association, the representatives of community organizations like the participants in this research are also connected through a complex network - formal and informal relationships that include overlapping memberships and other affiliations. Though here we examine the impact of student service on the greater community, we must remember that students exist within a larger context that enables or hinders the conditions of their progress, and that a significant part of understanding that context is recognizing the conditions and exploring the network that exists within it. “By better understanding these nodes and the structure and dynamics of these networks and nurturing norms of collaborative interaction, we can help create conditions and take steps to evolve a democracy with civic engagement that better reflects the historic central value of the ideal of democracy – that the people rule themselves.” (Booher, 2008, p. 143). Earlier in our discussion, we looked at components to the network of student-community service, including changes in civic life and educational climate, university-community linkages, and institutional policies and priorities that guide the direction of a network, all as a way of understanding how civic outcomes of service come to be.

In a complementary fashion, we also look at our findings through this network lens, noting the links and channels that connect actors across this service network. “Insights from complex adaptive systems can help inform our effort to evolve democracy so that it is more meaningful in the context of the network society”, however, “…the behavior of the system is determined by the interactions, not the components, and the behavior of the system cannot be predicted by examination of the components” (Booher, 2008, p. 126-127). Though a network analysis alone would not suffice for a comprehensive understanding of the civic service-learning climate and its outcomes, exploring the network within student-community engagement is important to understanding the whole of the system that supports student service efforts. Astin (1999, pp. 41-42) noted early the need for such systems-thinking: “Our growing concern about the lack of community on the campus is an acknowledgment that we are social beings, that we are members of a larger collective, that we necessarily depend on each other, that each of us
contributes to and receives from this collective, that our individual actions have important implications for that collective, and that our creative potential as individuals can be magnified or diminished by the actions of other members of the collective. A community, in other words, is also a system” (pp. 41-42)

The network present within this particular community was clearly emergent from the testimonials of our agency partners, all highly-involved and well-connected professionals within this community. Each emergent impact theme finds itself situated within this network. Exploring the configuration of these factors in our analysis gives us a greater depth of understanding of the mediation of actors and activities and their definition of community. In the following section, I summarize key features of network systems relevant to this discussion, which are helpful in making sense of the structure and dynamics of civic engagement in this setting.

Network Framework
The Basics

A network can be broadly described as a concrete pattern of relationships among entities in a social space. Social network theory addresses the ways that these patterns affect beliefs and behaviors (University of Twente, 2014). Within Sociology, this is understood more simply as a social structure; the format of the ties, relationships, and affiliations between actors that organize a community. Both the qualities of these associations (or links) between agents as well as their quantity are of importance to gauging the strength of any network. When this configuration is maximized for efficiency, efficacy, and stability in the face of threats to the delivery of whatever good or service the network provides, the network is considered robust (Barabási, 2003).

The responses of our interviewees revealed a glimpse at the kinetic structural situation within which they work and network with others. These actors include organizational personnel, community members, university professionals, and students (none of which are necessarily mutually exclusive). If we take these actors as our unit of analysis, they represent the nodes (agents, members) of the network. If one of these community members were professionally well-connected, the theory would label that person’s role in the network a hub. Hubs can therefore be labeled as that professional or as her organizations itself. There can exist any stringing of links connecting nodes to other nodes, though within social networks we would expect clustering – the tendency of any given node to form many direct links. Essentially, this is saying that people are networkers. Identifying the social structure of our particular network concerns the process and
the impacts of student-community engagement, and helps us identify key players and connections that can promote the success and growth of the network, collaborations, impacts, resilience, and of community.

**Random vs. Scale-free Networks**

Of increasing importance to political ecologists, network theory assumes an ecological setting in which actors exist in relation to one another, giving credence to the forces between them and the configuration of their links. Random networks have a distribution of links matching a normal bell curve and while they are called random, perhaps a more descriptive way to describe their configuration is non-strategic or non-intentional. Scale-free networks evolve toward *power laws*, which reveal asymmetric connections and asymptotic linkages, for example, the hubs on the flight map of an airline (see Figure 6). Power laws describe a certain type of probability distribution, which in the network looks like a tendency for extreme forms of clustering of nodes or actors. Under the conditions met by this research (lack of targeted threats to the network), Albert, Jeong, and Barabási (2000) conclude that scale-free networks are substantially more robust than randomly distributed networks. This means that decreasing the random or non-intentional nature of networks in favor of increased service flow including adaptability and diversity of links, all contribute to increased robustness and further network...
stability. The implications for each type of structure, random and scale-free, relates to the strength or robustness of the network. The robustness associated with the configuration of the network is relevant to the policy implications that emerge from this research in that they take into account if not highlight the importance of the structure of relationships within our identified civic service-learning community.

**Social Networks**

Travers and Milgram’s (1967) pioneering social networking research represents early efforts to identify the common characteristics and tendencies of social networks, such as clustering, the formation of hubs, and the concept of resilience (robustness) based on structure. Links between any actors are subject to constant change – friendships, working relationships, and other associations are unstable as people evolve and move within and outside of the network. Additionally, social actors are not limited to one link between them – a working relationship and a personal relationship can be held simultaneously, and one or both can be modified by any number of factors to affect the structure of the network. For example, recent acquaintances might initially share just one weak link between them, but as a friendship evolves this link strengthens and the two friends will come to share more common links as they are introduced to the other’s friends. Members in any network are non-statically connected together by diverse interactions, which Putnam (2000) and Woolcock (2001) delineate into bonding (strong) and bridging (weak) ties. In short, bonding ties are strong personal relations in closed, tightly connected networks. Bridging ties, conversely, span networks and give access to one network’s opportunities to another network. Despite being considered weak ties, bridging relationships can be just as influential in our lives as strong ties in gaining exposure and access to diverse opportunities (Granovetter, 1983). While it may be tempting to believe that strong ties are crucial to a strong network, Granovetter (1983) helped us appreciate the underlying strength and importance of weak ties, which end up being more useful in one’s finding a job or ‘spreading the word’.

“Connectors are an extremely important component of our social network. They create trends and fashions, make important deals, spread fads, or help launch a restaurant. They are the thread of society, smoothly bringing together different races, levels of education, and pedigrees” (Barabási, 2003, p. 56).

Strong and weak ties are not in competition with one another, rather they are complementary; weak ties are “our bridge to the outside world, since by frequenting different
places they obtain their information from different sources than our immediate friends” (Barabàsi, 2003, p. 43). A student’s tie to the community member she serves may be weak, but that may be a critical bond nonetheless. Granovetter (1983) argues that acquaintances (weak ties) are less likely to be socially engaged than people with strong (bonding) ties, but that “social systems lacking in weak ties will be fragmented and incoherent” (p. 202), that actors with “few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system compared with those with many weak ties” (Booher, 2008, p. 128). In other words, strong bonds encourage dense and highly engaged (close-knit) or stable networks, while weak ties help expand into diverse new territory and have a far-reaching effect. While social capital within a network may be high, only when the network encourages diversity and flexibility will a network increase its resilience and robustness (Adger, 2003). Thus, both bridging and bonding are important to a network’s strength, breadth, and robustness. According to Barabàsi (2003) he most robust networks are found in nature and strive to “achieve robustness through interconnectivity” (p. 111), resembling our notion of real life community-building.

### Fragile Networks

Network theory is applied to analyze energy structures to ensure effective and efficient power flow through the network in the face of surges, outages, or changes to one or more of the nodes that links to a major hub. Similarly, in a social network that facilitates the provision of service to the community, the configuration of connections between stakeholders has a significant impact on how that service is delivered, how far it reaches, and how resilient it is to changes in one or several nodes. We can imagine the impact that a haphazard collection of students and organizations for example, could have on the public good, as compared to an intentional networking of students and organizations linked strategically for maximum impact, efficiency, and resilience. It is essential to remember that network structures are not necessarily static, “instead, the roles of nodes (agents) in the network change over time, often on a frequent basis. (Consider a stakeholder who is a link to another related network who takes on new responsibility in his organization and thereby ceases to be such a link.)” (Booher, 2008, p. 128). This quality understood through network theory is vital to understanding the role that policy can play in establishing conditions that prevent shocks to the system when any given agent leaves the network (retires, for example), particularly a highly-linked one. As new students, faculty, and professionals enter and leave the area, new links are constantly formed and disbanded,
suggesting a randomness that must be balanced with intention in order to promote the robustness (and effectiveness) of service networks.

In some situations, moving toward a more intentionally robust network can be as simple as adding triangulating links between nodes, lest a crucially-linked node fails. Failure of a node for our purposes could mean: the retirement/resignation of a highly-associated community partner or particularly social university professional; the diminished associations that accompany the large position vacancy rate (turnover) for nonprofit organizations; or the simple attrition of student volunteers. Failure of a link in a social network could mean damage to or loss of a working relationship between stakeholders (say, a faculty member and a community partner).

**Building Robust Networks**

The needs of a network in order for it to succeed by design, or be robust, are based both on universal qualities, like interconnectivity and diversification (Barabàsi, 2003), as well as relativity to environmental conditions, such as limitations on linkage from geographic barriers or resource deficiencies – or distance between agencies in a community. Notice in Figure 8 below, there are the same number of nodes (circles) and hubs (squares); but with very different configurations, they yield unique qualities and results.

In this research, a non-strategic network emerges from the data to reveal a lacking in intentionality, as well as fragility and vulnerability to dissolution, but with vast potential to become a robust network whose impacts can strategically grow stronger. Robustness in a network is a quality that maximizes the heartiness of a network, encourages longevity and adaptability, promotes diversity (Barabàsi, 2003), and within the social sphere brings social capital and social resilience (Putnam, 2000). By applying the framework of robust networks, we, as a strategic network of educators and learners stand to development the impact that we are able to have across our community.
The most effective networks that persist over time tend to rely on and benefit from qualities like stability, interaction and engagement, diversity, resilience, and triangulation (Barabási, 2003). The addition of just a single node can increase the stability of a network’s connections, and conversely, the removal of a key node or hub can weaken or divide an entire network (such as the removal of Node 3 in Figure 7 above). Increased robustness plays a significant role in a network’s functioning and bolsters its performance “under extreme conditions and frequent internal errors” (Barabási, 2003, p. 111).

**Figure 8: From Random to Strategic Structure**

Source: [www.metropolitanmag.com/PoetsofView/March2013/](www.metropolitanmag.com/PoetsofView/March2013/)

Structural Diversity and Social Justice

Speaking about networks, Newman and Dale (2005) show how diversity is “critical to a community’s ability to move beyond adaptive management to proactively maintain and enhance resiliency” (2005, p. 1). Diversity in and across networks “exhibit a constant interplay of bottom-up and top-down processes” (Booher, 2008, p. 129), and can also expand the necessary perspective needed for inclusive decision-making, an invaluable quality in public higher education. Further, because “the world is characterized by profound uncertainty and the impossibility of knowing how many different things can change”, in order for a network to be adaptable, it “must have within itself more diversity than is necessary for its functioning at present” (p. 129). This “law of excessive diversity” (p. 129) comes into play later on in our discussion of our network as existing currently at capacity.

Developing our understanding of the networks within which we are a part and fostering robustness within them is a promising avenue for empowering communities to make choices that will limit the need for adaption in the future, for example, to an increasing student body or decreased resource access. In policy terms, this is useful, as social stability and resilience are viewed as desirable social goals and can reduce the need for policy adaptation as well.
In our earlier discussion of student engagement literature, we identified problems with viewing community impacts of student engagement as a product or externality of student service that is to be maximized. Following models of efficiency in the delivery of positive outcomes for students, universities, and communities, will not necessarily deliver the socially just outcomes public higher education aims to achieve, and fails to take into account the reciprocity of benefit in community service (non-unidimensional links) or the role of university policy in facilitating mutually positive outcomes. A particular program format or policy may deliver beneficial outcomes with a high return on investment, so to speak, but may fail to deliver those returns in a socially equitable or stable way, existing as a one-way link and not having the balance and strength of a reciprocal relationship or interdependency.

Walshok (1998) explains the issue as more complex than an “ivory tower” versus a “market driven” debate over campus culture:

The human implications are broader than simply workplace readiness and economic competitiveness. They connect to the fundamental and ethical and democratic challenges confronting post industrial societies everywhere. These issues include how to develop collaborative and “shared intellectual agendas”; how to engage more diverse sources of expertise in the work of the university; how to fill regional “knowledge gaps” simultaneous with discovering and developing new knowledge; and how to build new sources of political and financial support for the expanding knowledge work of the academy in an increasingly knowledge based society. (p. 66)

Astin (1999) noted that when an institution of higher education like a university “substantially expands its outreach, recruitment, and admission programs for disadvantaged and underprepared students and strengthens its remedial and developmental programs for such students after they enroll, it is, in effect, modeling the very civic values and beliefs that undergird the engagement of undergraduate students in tutoring and mentoring children of the inner city” (p. 40) as well as modeling the values that underlie all mainstream religions. Astin and Walshok here identify social network patterns that illuminate the need for diversification in programming – both to expand their reach to diverse others, to model the civic virtues we aim to achieve through engagement, and to support and balance the underlying framework of such intensive efforts.

Building diverse networks has been identified as critical in the development of a successful and robust network (Barabási, 2003), and we have discussed some of the many forms of diversity that a robust network can employ. Such a network can persist through the continued shifts that higher education and society are expected to undergo, and can create the conditions
that foster the development of a diverse campus as well.

**Limitations of Theory Application**

An empirical application of network theory would require considerably more data than gathered through these interviews, particularly for a multi-level network analysis. Measures of empirical validity in complex networks will require significantly more and increasingly nuanced data than is available here. Because of the complexities of institutional networks and the human networks within them, the preliminary investigation conducted for this research cannot be empirically validated without further research. It is examined in this study to situate the themes emergent from the data and to understand what these themes reveal about structural factors that limit or promote impact. Further and more extensive applications of network analysis to our community at hand is highly encouraged for a deeper understanding of the promotion of mutually desirable outcomes.

**Methodology**

**Approach**

Field studies employing a community-based research approach use a community as a site for study and community members as subjects for such study. By conducting a local, exploratory study of the Corvallis community regarding student and affiliated university civic engagement, the results of this research may inform multiple stakeholders in a way that promotes the inclusion of diverse public voices and organizations that serve traditionally marginalized populations – promoting a diverse and equitable representative democracy.

The goal of this research project is to determine the conditions of the current OSU-Corvallis civic engagement climate, the impact of this climate on the Corvallis community, and to analyze this relationship to inform future efforts in programming and policy for both OSU and the organizations that utilize OSU student service in its varying forms. Seider et al., (2012) suggest that while quantitative surveys have been the traditional focus of program evaluation, “for faculty and administrators interested in assessing the effectiveness of their particular program, qualitative assessment strategies such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation may be equally or even more valuable sources of data” (p. 145), showing how and why programming has the effects it does. A community-based research approach has been
described as contrasting a “public policy that is reserved as the purview of the few” (Hollander, 2012, p. 191), and one that regards large research universities as practitioners of policy, research, and advocacy in a way that reinstates value to individuals and communities who have been traditionally marginalized by market-based research dominance. Given that this research project looks in depth at the relationship between a particular institution and its surrounding community partners regarding civic engagement, and assesses the impact of that relationship as well as the needs of the community being impacted, a case study is the preferred method of analysis (Creswell, 2003).

**Research Site**

**Corvallis, OR/Benton County**

Corvallis is the county seat and population center of Benton County, located in central western Oregon. According to 2010 Census Bureau data (Oregon.gov, 2010), about two-thirds of the total county population resides in Corvallis, about 55,000 of the county’s 85,000 residents. The racial makeup of the county matches that of the state with noted exceptions where the county has a lower percentage of Black or African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, and Hispanic or Latino residents, and about double the percentage of the state’s Asian residents (see Figure 9 below), with 11% of the population speaking a language other than English at home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Corvallis</th>
<th>Oregon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American alone, percent</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian alone, percent, 2010 (a)</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent, 2010 (a)</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races, percent, 2010</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010 (b)</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2010 Census Data from: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/41/4115800.html*
As of the 2010 data, about 20% of the Benton County population is living in persistent poverty including 13.6% of children, and it is considered 2nd in rankings of “poverty hotspots” in the state (Oregon.gov, 2010), with 10.7% living in extreme poverty (<50% below the federal poverty line). In 2010, roughly 17% of the population under 65 years had no health insurance, 10% of people indicated a disability, and the county has an adult obesity rate above 22%. Since 2008, the county has seen a 60% increase in the number of clients receiving SNAP benefits, Oregon’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, with areas of Corvallis far exceeding county rates. Despite these troubling indicators, the median household income for the county nearly matches that of the state at $48,012; the unemployment rate of 6.3% is lower than the state average (8.7%). Despite a rate of high school completion lower than the state average (17%/25.6%), Benton County sees nearly double the rate of residents with at least a Bachelors degree than the rest of the state (47.9%/28.6%) (Oregon.gov, 2010).

**Oregon State University**

Corvallis is home to Oregon State University, the state’s only public Land-grant University and one of only two in the country to have the designation of a land, sea, space, and sun grant institution. The co-ed public research university receives more research funding
annually than all other public higher education institutions in the state. The university currently enrolls nearly 28,000 students (15% of whom are graduate students) from 50 states and almost 100 countries, with operations in all of Oregon’s 36 counties. Roughly 20% of OSU students are U.S. minorities, with the following demographics (see Figure 10). Other than age, the student body of OSU is highly similar to that of the city of Corvallis in terms of ethnicity. Demographic information on student household income and on faculty/staff ethnicity demographics are not available.

Data Collection

Participant Population

Key actors of non-profit agencies and organizations that work in direct service to the Corvallis community were contacted and invited to participate in the research via e-mail or phone. These primarily included volunteer coordinators and supervisors or other professionals who were identified by the organization to be the point person with the most relevant information regarding the research topic. Participants included professionals working in direct service agencies and organizations, who oversaw or otherwise possessed significant insights into the organization’s experience with OSU student volunteers, service-learners, or service-learning interns. Strategies to protect participants were included within an Institutional Review Board, which examined the proposal of this research project and concluded it exempt from further review.

Participant Recruitment

The researcher, having worked for the OSU Center for Civic Engagement and having served on the University Council for Student Engagement and Experience, had prior knowledge of local direct-service organizations that have worked with student volunteers. Key organizations were identified with this knowledge and through an Internet search of publicly available information, in order to generate a list of such organizations in and around the city of Corvallis, from which participants were drawn and contact information was obtained. The OSU CCE was consulted to identify those that actively served as recipients of student volunteers. Organizations were selected for participation based on the criteria of active utilization of OSU students as volunteers in some capacity, with the inclusion of one organization that is resuming its volunteer
program after a period of reformatting. The information provided from phone-interviewing this participant is included in the analysis where appropriate (not all interview questions were applicable). Organizations that were identified or self-identified as not actively utilizing student volunteers were excluded from this research. A list of the organizations affiliated with research participants is available in the Appendix (Organizational Participation).

In some cases, multiple professionals from within the same organization were interviewed in order to comprehensively assess the characteristics of the experience with student volunteers, including departmental contexts, limitations, and challenges faced by these professionals. At least one member of each organization identified was interviewed for this study.

**Interviews**

Invitations to participate were sent out via email and or by phone, and interviews were conducted in person. Of the 15 professionals invited to participate in in-person interviews, 15 accepted the interview request and participated in individual 60-minute or longer semi-structured interviews. Additionally, one professional provided information during a 20-minute phone interview, coupled with material provided in e-mail correspondence, and is included in the analysis where applicable.

Semi-structured, conversational-style interviews were selected as an appropriate method for gathering local knowledge concerning policy-oriented qualitative research, since “most fundamentally for good policy decision-making, case study provides us with a story and that helps us to envision policy that is beneficial rather than harmful.” (Erickson, 2008, p. 76). Additionally, qualitative interviews can help bring expert and local knowledge to light and capture and analyze these perspectives (Flick, Von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). This study utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary means of data collection. Interviews questions were grouped into five areas. These five areas were Position, Frequency, and Characteristics, Impact, and Improvements, developed to fit the exploratory nature of this research. The questions can be found in the Appendix (Interview Questions).

After providing each with a hardcopy, the researcher reviewed aloud the consent/confidentiality document with each interviewee, explaining aloud their minimal risk and ability to terminate participation at any time. In solicitation of interviews, all participants were given the option to meet at a location of their convenience and choosing to account for the possibility that providing truthful and comprehensive information at the employee’s workplace
may have posed a conflict of interest. The interval of time set aside for the interviews was buffered to be larger than anticipated need for answering questions to allow adequate time for the participant to explain and expound, and for follow-up questions.

Interview questions were developed through a comprehensive survey of the literature, and consultation with OSU’s CCE and Faculty Service-Learning Coordinator. Information relevant to the research question was noted, gathered, and reflected upon with each interview to inform the data collection in the next interview. This process was consistent with the recommended best practices in qualitative data analysis as described by Merriam (2009, Chapter 8). Interviews followed in a place chosen by the interviewee, typically occurring in their place of work, with some conducted in cafes local to the participant. From the interviews and correspondences with these partners, dozens of documents and materials pertaining to the research were collected. These were materials willingly provided from participants and collected during interviews, including spreadsheets of volunteer statistics, photos, brochures, as well as notes made about other relevant materials and technologies, such as an online volunteer registration kiosk on the site of one of the agencies. Field notes were generated and used in the analysis. Participants were asked permission to record and transcribe interviews, for which the procedures of confidentiality and voluntary participation were described in a consent document given to the participant before recording began. Each interview was recorded and each interview subsequently transcribed into Microsoft Word. The transcripts were subsequently analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

**Methods of Data Analysis**

All interviews were coded using Microsoft Excel. The coding process used a hybrid approach that drew on pre-determined (from the literature survey) and emergent (from the interviews) coding. The data was sorted into particular themes. A thematic analysis allowed themes to emerge from interview transcripts, while themes from the content of existing literature guided the search for pre-determined themes. The researcher analyzed interview transcripts and document texts, coding particular instances that spoke to the process, organizational network, or direct impacts occurring as a result of student civic service-learning in the community. These
instances were then grouped into three broad categories and three more specific themes within them, as follows:

**Identified Issues with University-Organization Partnership**

*Communication, Coordination, and Training Needs*

Segments of participant transcripts were included within this section where it was indicated that communication and coordination between an organizational contact and the student service body supervisor (or person instigating/requiring service) was insufficient due to preventable or changeable circumstances. That is, these themes were included in the issues section when they were specific to the community partner’s experience (rather than a broad complaint related to the nature of student civic engagement). Often, participants did not specify the particular changes they would like to see made, and when asked about ideal relationships, sentiments included general desires like “more communication” and “better coordination” as opposed to specific quantities, timelines, or structures. These themes were identified as pre-existing from the following literature: Hollander, 1999; Vernon et al., 2000; Bacon, 2002; Furco, 2001; Sandy et al., 2006; Sandy, 2008; Stoecker, et al., 2009; Healy et al., 2014.

Conversely, when speaking of training needs, partners unanimously described a specific need for either “professionalism/etiquette” or a “what to expect” training for students, with all indicating a desire for this training to come from university personnel such that students have received it before making contact with the organization or early on in the service relationship.

*Volunteer Commitment/Schedules*

Issues related to volunteer commitment and schedules was described as originating with the student, the university, or an intersection between the two, all of which were captured within this theme category. These themes were identified as pre-existing from the following literature: Hutchison, 2001; Stoecker, et al., 2009; Maynard, 2011; Healy et al., 2014. The University’s quarter system was targeted specifically as problematic in relation to both course-long service commitments as well as the interference of finals, midterms, and holiday/summer breaks with students’ service schedules. Whether a surge in student participation at the start of each term (Fall term in particular), an extreme lack of student participation during summer, or a drop-off in student participation/reliability during Finals Week, partners consistently highlighted the impact that this academic calendar has on their receipt of student commitment, and in some cases to some extent, student concentration on the job (interactional).
Additionally included within this theme were issues with individual commitments that were seen as preventable or changeable. Thus, excluded from this theme were general complaints about individual commitment level or what might be considered “bad apples”, as opposed to issues stemming from structural components related to the service partnership. While all partners were understanding of the needs of students and faculty and the pressures of higher education, partners felt that faculty and supervising personnel could adapt their course requirements to better serve the mutual interests between parties, where currently interests appear to be focused on university priorities. More often this was found to be an issue with faculty and not with other supervising bodies such as CCE Site Leaders or Greek System coordinating personnel.

**Saturation/Capacity**

As a theme not previously identified in the literature, issues of civic service-learner saturation or organization capacity in this respect emerged from interviews, particularly in response to questions about volunteer recruitment and ideal levels of involvement (see Appendix *Interview Questions* 8, 17, & 19). Follow-up questions that regarded taking on more students revealed surprising results about the organizations’ inability to expand their service-learning base as it is currently configured, and such sentiments regarding saturation and service scope were included within this theme.

**Network Considerations**

**Links, Hubs, and Clustering**

Because the unit of analysis in this study is complex, understood as an “actor” related to its role in the community organization but acknowledged as an individual linked by both professional and personal relationships, links to other actors within this category are diverse and broadly inclusive. We can see the same complication in identifying other nodes and actors to which they are connected – are they connected to a specific faculty member or to a specific service-learning course? This is an important dynamic to acknowledge because it affects the stability of these links. A service-learning course may not function with the community partner in the same way depending on the relationship between the particular faculty member and the particular organizational contact.

While further multi-dimensional analysis is recommended, in this analysis category I have included links between actors broadly – links between partners, organizations, students, faculty,
service-learning courses, etc. - to acknowledge all the channels that connect this network and by which service flows. Hubs are identified as nodes with a relatively high level of service flow in the form of links to students or other organizations; in the context of this network, this would include, for example, an organization with more than three links to separate bodies of student service-learners (for example, sustained partnership with one course, one sorority, and the CCE). Primarily, links were coded as currently active (or anticipated within the calendar year) or non-existent, though past links (currently non-existent) very well could innately promote their re-emergence; a faculty member who previously partnered with an organization may be more inclined to return to this relationship than faculty who are previously unlinked; or conversely a negative experience in the partnership could discourage future linking between the two. Link qualities were further described along categories of bridging and bonding in the following section.

**Bridging/Bonding**

Bridging and bonding links were identified by the interviewee's description of the relationship. If a link was considered one-time, short-term, or of low commitment, it was considered a bridging link. This type of link emerges as vital in the spreading of information and awareness about organizations and the community issues they address. Bonding links were categorized as such when a more personal or sustained relationship was established, for instance where partners described a long-term/sustained partnership with a faculty member, a student, or another organization. An example of this includes one organization’s sustained service partnership with key point-persons (given by name) within an academic department where the issues addressed by the organization are highly relevant to the academic outcomes desired by that department for students. The relevance of this type of bond is seen in community partners' ability to count on future partnership and mutual planning in this respect. Other bonding relationships identified include friendships that lead to students recruiting other students to the organization for service. Because of the diversity in the types of links connecting this network, this is an area that could benefit particularly from further analysis, and one in which network theory has rarely been previously applied in literature.

**Robustness & Fragility**
Research on network robustness and its converse, fragility, are more common than their application to a civic engagement network. Thus, categorizing the qualities of a robust network in this context is done so according to available literature on networks broadly, and has not been previously applied as done so here. As applied in this setting, information regarding diversity of link type, flexibility/adaptability of the network, and balance in the network’s structure are included in this section. As an example, diversity in link type includes organizations that partner with students in different capacities (long-term and short-term service, direct service and outreach or fundraising, or utilizing students of varying skills). This is also an area where link qualities are notable – the CCE’s ability to direct organizations toward different student volunteer bases, depending on relevance and need, speaks to that hub’s flexibility or adaptability, speaks to the constant flux of the network configuration, as well as the contribution of its nodes toward its stability.

**Impacts**

*Organizational Development*

A highly emergent theme, students’ impact on organizational development came in many forms. Interview questions about impacts were not differentiated between positive and negative, nor short- or long-term. However, partners almost exclusively spoke of the positive impacts (both short-impact and long-lasting) that students had on the organization, staff workload, the organization’s ability to serve the community, their recognition in the community, as well as financial relief. Some did communicate hardship concerning the time and cost it takes to screen, train, and oversee student volunteers, service-learners, and interns, however this would not be considered a negative impact due to its ultimate result. This thematic category (impacts on organizational development) was identified as pre-existing from the following literature: Driscoll, et al., 1996; Gray et al., 1998; Ferrari et al., (2000); Hutchinson, 2001; Rubin, 2002; OCSL, 2003; Stoecker, et al., 2009; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2011; Gazley et al., 2012.

*Community Capacity Enhancement*

Beyond impacts on the service organization itself, specifically positive impacts toward the community and its members (the effects of the service) were emergent from the data. Negative impacts on the community were not spoken of by partners, nor were any questions of specifically *negative* impacts asked (see Appendix *Interview Questions*). What constituted an impact was left for partners to describe, and they typically described enhancement to the quality
of living, community health, and community member empowerment (this could be considered *social capital*). This thematic category was identified as pre-existing from the following literature: Haski-Leventhal et al., 2011; Clarke, 2000; Gazley et al., 2006; Stoecker, et al., 2009; Prentice et al., 2012.

**Social Justice**

Social Justice is a grand term that encompasses many meanings. Here, I draw from only two components that are considered contributory toward social justice. The first are positive impacts toward historically marginalized and alienated populations, such as the homeless, survivors of domestic violence or child abuse, and those living in poverty. The second are positive impacts that change the course of the issue for the better, or are ameliorative; that is, they impact not just the symptoms but the root cause of the community issue. This thematic category was identified as pre-existing from the following literature: Clarke, 2000; Mayfield, 2001; Holland, 1999; Hollander, 1999; Bringle et al., 1999; Gazley et al., 2006; Sungu-Eryilmaz, 2009; Stoecker, et al., 2009; Gazley et al., 2012.

**Results & Discussion**

Direct excerpts of transcripts were copied, pasted, and coded into a spreadsheet. From this, quotes that best highlighted their categorical themes category were selected and were modified to maintain participant confidentiality and by the removal of excessive linguistic filler words (ex. *uh, um, ah, you know*), though many were retained. Otherwise, and except where indicated, quotes are direct.

**Identified Issues with University-Organization Partnership**

**Communication, Coordination, and Training Needs**

Healy et al.’s (2014) community partners indicated the desire to be more involved in student training and designing of service-learning modules, whereas our community partners indicated a desire for students to have prior training around the issues and populations their service would be addressing, and a more thorough understanding of the depth of commitment that would be required of them. Contrasting Healy’s findings, the partners in this study indicated wanting this training to come before the student begins working with the organization and that they were content with their current role in student learning. Partners who served particularly
vulnerable populations for which more extensive training and commitment was required, described student volunteer attrition due to underdeveloped or unrealistic student expectations. The sentiments described these students as “not knowing what they were getting into” and typically linked this to an issue in supervisory/faculty communication. This suggests that stronger partnerships between community partners and faculty may enhance the service that students provide. This concept will reemerge in the Links, Hubs, and Clustering section.

When asked about the possibility of increased volunteer requirements for OSU students, one responded summarized the sentiment given by the entirety of partners regarding the need for increased coordination:

My guess would be that the bridge that would be created more than likely by the professors and the contacting agency would be the more important connection. If the professors or the advisers [who is] making that connection has a very solid relationship with the community partners, and the students are going into a program where they are set up to be successful, that has a possibility of really being that ideal world. Let’s say every student at some point throughout their career is required to volunteer, I would think that the need for really good organization and communication is really what is going to make it successful project. The times that I’ve seen it not be very successful is when there is that huge disconnect and the students come in and say, ‘I need this, this and this from you...’ So, hopefully if the agency and the university could have a strong bond and a strong understanding, then the students will be set up to be successful.

When asked what they wanted students to learn from their experience, they overwhelmingly responded that they wanted students to be aware of community needs and the organizational and student role in serving them. From further discussion, this issue could also be framed as their desire for university administrators, faculty, and personnel to be aware of community needs and the university’s role in serving them, consistent with the scholarly and civic themes discussed earlier as a part of Community-University Partnerships and University Civic Missions sections (Cisneros, 1995; Astin, 1999; Hollander, 1999; Bringle et al., 1999; Campus Compact, 1996; Holland, 1999; Sungu-Eryilmaz, 2009); “It would be awesome to get in a front of a group of professors or even other faculty or administrative people, and explain this is who we are, this is what we do, and this is how we can utilize student volunteers and groups”. While this connection was made with some faculty and courses, it did not appear to be a consistent activity occurring across all service relationships. Further, while all indicated a preference for doing the on-site training of students, a significant proportion of partners indicated that students could benefit from a general “professionalism” training before beginning service, for developing favorable employee competencies like communication skills and workplace etiquette and to reduce volunteer attrition;
In terms of students [training] before they come...kind of reminding them of what that bigger picture looks like. It can be really easy for a student to be really busy, and just kind of rush through things. I can see a difference when there is time and thought and intention behind the decision to get involved.

Any of that would help, having them come in with that mind set... college kids that range from really mature to the freshman not so mature yet. I'm getting them to show up on time, making sure they know where to be.

I prefer to have a little bit of their training before they get there. Again, just kind of being prepared for what they are going to be getting involved in. So that way they are not shocked, ‘oh, it's a homeless shelter...oh, I'm working with a homeless population’.

...any information they would have beforehand going into something can help in regards to specific surface project and getting their eyes, ears, and thoughts into doing things differently. The other things is, we have to be safety-conscious - get an idea in terms of how to prepare a volunteer about what to wear and stuff. I'd be surprised over the years that how many folks would show up in flip-flops to a trail grubbing event.

I would say that those who end up not fulfilling their commitments possibly don’t know what they’re signing up for, maybe they don’t realize the time commitment that it’s going to take.

Most partners agreed with Healy et al’s (2014) that increased interaction and communication between the organization and the educational institution or supervising faculty was highly desired and necessary for such aims. Others were already well-connected with university professionals and expressed satisfaction with the level of communication. Partners frequently discussed a lack of a central contact point with the university, which is consistent with having a variety of types of student volunteers (interns, service-learners, etc.) and the many avenues from which they come to serve the organization (courses, CCE, student groups, etc.). Even the partners who were well-connected with the university reported connections with only particular faculty or staff members, indicating strong links but far removed from central hubs of service activity, as will be discussed in the Links, Hubs, and Clustering section.

**Volunteer Commitment/Schedules**

Several issues with students’ commitment and schedules were identified by community partners. They described much variation in types and levels of participation; every form of student engagement is more or less connected to a pedagogical framework, a course, or a supervising entity, and the service opportunity is more or less embedded in university engagement efforts (“less” also sometimes meaning not at all). Primarily, the university academic calendar and the course schedule tend to shape participation on the part of students. This was evidenced by the vast majority of community partners describing participation levels as flooding in toward the beginning of the school year, toward the ending of terms (as participation hours/projects become due), and with a marked lull in the summer, when most students have left
the area.

Since a lot of the volunteers are working towards obtaining hours as a requirement of a class, they only need to seek out about a month or two of volunteering and then move on…it can potentially become an issue when [our community members] desperately need consistency…It's frustrating to think that when the term ends we'll likely lose a handful of them.

Summer for volunteers, there is a big lull. And then the first couple weeks of each academic term there is a huge influx. There are a lot of students that need to do service hours for a class… We want to have a consistent, reliable volunteer schedule. So, we don't want a sporadic one person to work for three weeks and then their done. There is a lot to learn, so it takes some time to get familiar with the organization and if someone is only there for three weeks, they are not going to do a whole lot of good.

They described volunteer service dedication as coinciding with the University’s academic calendar, including disengagement during finals week and holiday breaks; some even described the pressure of finals as having a consistent impact on students’ engagement with their service work. Those who experienced students with blanket hourly course requirements stated that the service filled needed seats but little else in terms of transformative community impact, organizational development, or social justice.

Where these schedules (and service projects) were made concomitant to community needs (requiring a certain level of communication as previously discussed), the described impact on the community as well as on student development was perceived as higher or of higher quality by organizational professionals. Where projects were designed mutually with the organization, partners described decreased costs, time, and effort they needed to provide to see the project through:

Some of the most successful things are when there is an internship where we can sit down and both have a clear idea of what the expectations are on both sides, and we are able to work something that benefits both of us. That seems to work out the best.

While longer service commitments were preferable for all community partners, all also expressed the need for recurrent one-time or short-term service projects typically related to the maintenance of facilities or for fundraising events. Though most existent literature addressed students’ short-term commitment or one-time service as having a negative impact on the service process (Vernon et al., 1999; Stoecker et al., 2009), our data revealed a more nuanced insight into this situation, consistent with Gazley et al.'s findings (2012) where all our community partners (for whom it was relevant) indicated that each type of student involvement was helpful for overall operational capacity, with statements like,

For us, it's good to have both… One-time service groups can do more in a short period of time than individual volunteers.
The college kids will get in and work hard, but they're young, and they are there for a couple of hours, and they know that, so they come in and get the job done.

We would prefer to have volunteers who were more involved for a longer period of time and got something from the experience. But, we have also had great [one-time] volunteer things...a whole group of people that come over here and we have notice of it beforehand. To have a big group with a lot of notice, that is fantastic.

It was clear from the interviews that volunteers of all types, skill levels, and time-commitments are needed, and that a variety of engagements within a network of service to the organization and community are essential:

We like to have a diverse mix of volunteers...which brings skills diversity. Each group has a different impact. Even though it is chaotic, it works. The individual volunteers who come consistently probably do some of the best work, but groups will bring energy and manpower and speed.

The majority of partners did indicate that a longer service commitment (closer to a year), in any of their capacities or frequencies, would be beneficial; “It does take time to train people and if they only come once, it’s not very efficient if you’re having to train all the time, as opposed to if they come back and stay plugged in.”

A few spoke specifically of times when planned one-time volunteer groups canceled or no-showed at the last minute, “Right when you walked in the door, I just read an email that a group is not going to be able help me, and they committed back in October for an event that's going on February 8th and that is our biggest fundraiser event of the year”; but that this occurred only rarely. Partners relayed that large one-time groups of volunteers have a significant breadth of impact, whereas long-term volunteers and interns are generally able to have a deeper impact on the organization, particularly in the form of outreach and recruitment;

Because people get to know the organization better, they can better speak about what the organization does for the community... Volunteers are the biggest spokespeople. Volunteers can be a huge recruiter for an organization. Word of mouth is huge.

All partners expressed the desire to utilize volunteers in new types/levels of involvement that would benefit the organization in other ways (for example, as researchers, outreach agents, and fundraisers). All partners expressed interest in working with students who have higher-level skills who could bring benefits to the organization’s efforts without needing to significantly increase their supervisory roles.

**Saturation/Capacity**

From several interview questions including volunteer recruitment and saturation, the
researcher was surprised to hear almost unanimously that these organizational personnel were operating at capacity with student volunteers - that despite overwhelmingly positive views of and favorable impacts from student involvement, they felt unable to take on more students or more service projects:

*I would say we are just fine. I think we have a well-oiled machine for recruiting and attracting. We just need to get a lot more intentional... we just try to take everything we can get, but truth be told, it is time consuming. And we want to make the community feel like they are included in this, and I hate to turn anyone away, but again it gets to this, we need to cool this a little bit, because it is getting a little bit hard for us to manage.*

*I feel very grateful for the amount of volunteers that we do have, and I feel like if anything the one thing I am always very grateful for those volunteers who have been with us long enough and have been able to step up into different ways to help out, and so I guess if anything that if we are at a good level, if there is any improvement or expansion it would be in having more long-term dedicated volunteers that are able to do more things.*

When probed about diversifying the types of projects and the types of students (for example, to include more graduate-level work or students with particular skill development), they indicated that they would very much like to utilize expanded skills but did not necessarily have the capacity coordinate or afford it. Follow-up questions regarding the possibility of student groups and projects who were otherwise coordinated and supervised yielded favorable interest among all partners.

*We could use a few more volunteers but we’re too small to take on that many volunteers. There’s a limit to how big we can expand. If there were more highly skilled volunteers who could help with grant-writing and fundraising, volunteers helping to find and fund more projects, we’d love to do more.*

*(On not needing more volunteers of the same type): Theoretically at some point we could potentially train volunteers to lead groups as well.*

In discussing this issue of saturation, partners acknowledged the value in strategically diversifying the types of service they utilize. However, they expressed that ability to employ such intentionality in designing their volunteering programs depended on available information, resources, and consistency from students or their supervising faculty and coordinators. In other words, they would like to take on students and groups who required less oversight or who could potentially yield greater service with a lesser resource investment on the part of the organization.

**Network Considerations**

Examining the network structure of student-community engagement in this case, we shall see both bonding and bridging links, areas where the network is particularly weak or vulnerable, as well as links that could be reinforced and hubs that can be bolstered in anticipation of a
growing student body and a growing need for civic engagement. Such insights “may help inform the research on networks in planning and policy by many scholars in the United States, Canada, and Europe” (Booher, 2008, p. 126). As this network grows, strategic shaping and observation of the connections and partners potentiates a robust network that can thrive amidst its growth in an ever-changing world. As it were on a highway, as more cars and other forms of transport enter the road, we have the need for more roads, more types transport avenues, more detour possibilities, and if these needs are left unaddressed, then this growth congests traffic flow and impedes progression. What we can see in this network are some bumpy roads (issues in communication/coordination), some superhighways (strong, long-lasting links), and a few caverns that need bridges (distant nodes with few links).

**Links, Hubs, and Clustering**

Consistent with qualities that make a network robust, our network was shown to have a diverse collection of links - with students largely clustering around several hubs that connect them to organizations. These hubs included but are not limited to OSU’s CCE, a few academic departments that formally and informally sponsor service engagements, several faculty members, and a handful of Greek chapters (some were identified specifically by chapter and others known only as a part of the Greek system in general). Some organizations partnered together more often than others; “I think it's always good to have partnerships. We appreciate having a partnerships with different agencies. The campus of course is just a different agency than us”, suggesting inter-organizational links, or linked hubs (highly-linked actors/organizations). A lack of diversity in links is consistent with sentiments of volunteer saturation; partners generally feel that they have as many links as they can handle, but indicated the desire to work with students, faculty, university personnel, etc. in more strategic ways (diversifying links or types of connections with students); for example, class-led and project-based service where partners give input and direction but are not charged with supervising the group – this could be an example of the introduction of a “smart hub”, which is linked strategically with other actors (students and the organization) to make the flow of service more robust or more efficacious.

Partners also describe a network that is not highly interconnected; rather, strung out in areas linearly with more distant links in haphazard directions, resulting in a weaker or deficient flow of information and resources through the network, like low blood pressure in the heart of our community. One of the key characteristics of a robust and adaptive network system is non-
linearity: “The interactions are nonlinear, iterative, recursive, and self-referential. There are many direct and non-direct feedback loops” (Booher, 2008, p. 127). While such features can be identified in this network, more often we can see room for interactions to move toward this model with permanence via systemic intervention (policy interventions). Community-building seen this way would indicate not a growing body, but a body growing more dense, agents interconnecting with diverse and distant others, and policies/infrastructure that encourage such.

As students recruit other students to be volunteers, which according to our partners they often do, they bridge further links to an organization, and spread awareness and outreach along with their engagement. One community partner noted an increasing number of student volunteers - links being added to this organization. When asked, “How often does [your organization] work with OSU student volunteers?” she replied, “Pretty frequently, and it keeps increasing every year”, a resounding sentiment within the data, which signifies a growing network. However, a larger network requires a more strategic structure if it is to be resilient.

One of the primary concerns we heard from partners was poor communication between faculty members and the organization itself, particularly with respect to course requirements and student expectations - in other words, weak links that need to be strengthened - bridging links that would benefit from become bonding ones. Just as a patchy road slows the traffic network, a patchy communication between faculty and partner reportedly disrupts the flow of this service network.

The data collected in this investigation reveals a somewhat fragile network, resembling more of a random, kinetic structure than a purposeful one. That is, agents “interact dynamically, exchanging information and energy based on heuristics that organize the interactions locally” (Booher, 2008, p. 127). This makes sense, as the connections and links between and within networks and the emergence of hubs have developed organically over time. However, “in real networks linking is never random” (Barabàsi, 2003, p. 86), explaining why links appear between certain students, faculty, and organizations and not all of them equally - some organizations have more in common in terms of mission and resources, and it is not uncommon to see a professional from one service organization who has at one time worked for another. Social networks are subject to power laws such that it is likely some will cluster. There is strong evidence within graph theory that social networks are particularly subject to this phenomenon (Holland & Leinhardt, 1971; Watts & Strogatz, 1998). Though while not random, the connectivity between
those offices consulted in this research embodies many of the characteristics of a random network, including inconsistent patterns of connectivity and variations in the gravity of links, in constant flux.

One respondent’s vision of more organized reflects a move toward network robustness through more intentional and strategic linking via the creation of a hub, or as it was termed, a clearinghouse:

*It could be more streamlined - more organized. Right now, all these different groups singularly approaching me and trying to find opportunities. Whereas, if there was more of a clearinghouse like CCE to funnel that and get people going to the right places, I think that would lead to more meaningful work for people. If might lead to fewer volunteers but more focused and dedicated volunteers. Somewhat of a chaotic relationship with all the different groups and their needs.*

A clearinghouse is an example of the creation of a smart hub that could purposefully link the network of actors and eliminate failures in communication (links) between actors, for example, when one of them retires. More meaningful work, fewer volunteers but more focused and dedicated volunteers signifies a shift toward bonding ties and the desire to establish those early (rather than creating and breaking multiple bridging links) by matching students to organizations more purposefully (increased compatibility). Partners also spoke of specific needs for volunteers, such as longer-term commitments, an Assistant to the Outreach Educator role, point-persons for project work, graduate students doing related thesis research, and highly specific needs such as:

*Yeah, It would be like hey, for February 8th, I need 10 students in a short amount of time, I need outgoing personalities that can sell raffle tickets. I need 2 detail-oriented people that we can use for our silent auction. And I need people to help out with the registration, greeters. We need people who are mature, and who will be there, come hell or high water. This is huge, this fundraiser if going to hopefully bring in 80,000 dollars to the [organization].*

*...It would depend on the student, for example, the internships. Those are tailored pretty close to what the student can do. We've had kids that are really good with GIS, and so they went in, and they mapped all of our trails, and just did those things that we couldn't get done because of time. And even that, sometimes resources aren't that much. A hand-held GPS is not that expensive. We have the GIS program already, it's collecting the data and plugging it in, which is sometimes a lot more difficult than you would expect.*

Several community partners indicated either little communication with or little knowledge of OSU’s CCE:

*I didn’t realize the Center for Civic Engagement was kind of their volunteer center, my [colleague] just forwarded me an email from them where they were like “we have this center, if you guys are ever interested in reaching out to them...” - we didn’t even KNOW about it. If that center reached out to organizations in the area - give us a flyer, speak to our organization, we’ll take a brochure, whatever it may be that you want us to learn more about what you do... Awareness in general, we didn’t even know that they existed.*

This suggests a missing link and an untapped resource for both parties, including targeted
volunteer dissemination. Feedback about volunteer saturation also suggests that this network as it is configured is operating at capacity (partners have all the volunteers they can handle) and cannot afford to grow without structural changes (added smart hubs, a clearinghouse, or coordinator roles) and added diversification of service links (utilizing graduate students, students with particularly needed skills, connecting to new courses and faculty). Other factors of network theory emerged in a similar fashion from each respondent’s discussion, the results of which are summarized below.

**Bridging and Bonding**

Bridging ties were emergent from our data in several capacities. As discussed earlier, students who recruit other students, which according to many partners they often do, help bridge further links to an organization, and spread awareness and outreach along with their engagement:

*I have students who have volunteered with us and then they go and tell their friends or classmates, and then they come to me and tell me that they want to volunteer.*

*Even with the emails and with everything else I do to publicize it, I think word of mouth from the current coaches is the number one tool; Getting them to tell their friends, their fraternities or sororities.*

Quite popular among younger generations, social media was described as a significant contributor to this peer-to-peer transfer of information about the organization and to the propensity for students to recruit their friends.

*Using social media has made a big difference. I have a Facebook page and volunteers will go on there. We'll do pictures of the [work site], and they will share it with their friends, and that is another way that it will get out in the public.*

Partners attribute a large amount of spreading awareness of the organization and of community issues to word-of-mouth contact between students, their friends, and their affiliates:

*[On students’ awareness of the organization]…particularly student volunteers, they hear it through a friend… Any time we can make contact with people in the community, it is more possible that a survivor can make contact with us. Volunteers have expanded our ability to network throughout Linn and Benton counties.*

When students spread the word about their work in the organization, they may be helping to add new links to the organization, as described in the quote above. Through bonded friendships in which one student recruits a friend to volunteer, a new link between the friend and the organization is made; a bonded relationship sparks the development of a bridged link. Additionally, students are linked to many others outside of this network, actors who potentially could be a resource for the organization. Links with these actors represent further diversification of the network as well as its expansion. This student bridging capacity was illuminated in one
partner’s discussion of the networking assets that student volunteers bring to service organizations.

I think that’s a totally untapped resource with a dual benefit for us and the student. If they have connections in the community and they know so-and-so who owns a company and could talk to them about possible involvement financially with [our organization], I feel like that’s a major untapped resource because that’s giving them some kind of networking experience for whatever field they’re hoping to go into. If they’re marketing students, public policy, public health, whatever they may be, it all kind of ties into the same thing for us in development.

Bonding relationships were revealed in the manner by which partners spoke of other actors (students, faculty, etc.) - frequent contact vs. seldom, knowing the person well as opposed to knowing of the person, describing someone by name in detail rather than being unsure of their name. Several described enjoying getting to know the students as they persisted with the organization. Many of the partners have served over 10 years in their organizations, and a few had previously worked at other partner organizations and made long-lasting relationships with professionals across the community. Select partners had long-established partnerships with certain faculty members or department personnel, including their membership on organizational boards: “I would say, a majority of our board has been predominantly OSU professors or OSU affiliated… Historically we’ve had a lot of OSU board members and that has allowed for a really strong connection.” Bonding links give strength to a network in the way that they are less likely to break and they provide the stability for sustained collaboration within our network. According to partner feedback, the stronger the bond between a student and community members, the more likely they are to continue volunteering. Bridging and bonding ties were both prominent themes that emerged from the data, as many new volunteers were reported to be recruited through other volunteers, through friends.

**Robustness and Fragility**

While increased benefit would be expected from increased student-community engagement, the network as described by community partners is not fit to take on additional students without complementary network supports; more of this good thing isn’t necessarily better. This reveals the fragility or non-adaptive qualities of the network in the face of its own growth. One of the key features of a robust network is its “capacity to maintain its viability and the capacity to evolve. With sufficient diversity the heuristics will evolve, the agents will adapt to each other, and the system can reorganize its internal structure without the intervention of an outside agent” (Booher, 2008, p. 127). Diversification of links through an organization’s utilization of a larger
variety of students and their respective skill sets was highly desirable by all partners.

Stronger partnerships between actors were identified to the extent that it revealed that many of these nodes of the network are isolated from the rest; some nodes are only peripherally (not centrally) linked in the network. Certain organizations are connected into the network only through one type of link (for example, faculty from a single department), bypassing central hubs like the CCE, or highly-linked nodes like sororities and fraternities, and not utilizing students from other departments with other skills. Adding just one link from these nodes to any hub in the network could open access to resources and facilitate the flow of student service to the rest of the network.

**Impacts**

Consistent with anticipated and reported findings in theoretical literature on and empirical studies of student-community engagement, the partners saw specific and overall benefits to organizational development, community capacity enhancement, and social justice (Sandy and Holland, 2006). The service provided by students and other volunteers through these organizations provides, among others: food and shelter for some who would otherwise have none (including families and youth); mentorship, education, and skill-development for youth who would otherwise be without it; comfort, advocacy, and guidance for the victims of abuse (including children and animals); animal and environmental protection, waste reduction, and habitat restoration, including beautification efforts that can be linked to community livability measures; and multicultural awareness and diversity development.

**Organizational Development**

Though the benefits to organizational capacity and functioning are discussed in general terms throughout existing literature, community partners in this study were specific about the benefits that students in particular bring to their organization and their work. Partners described a reduction in staff burnout that student volunteers provided, both through alleviating workload and preventing burnout:

- *I think last fiscal year we had enough volunteer hours that equaled almost four full-time employees.*
- *It would make my job much, much harder if we didn't have the college kids to depend on for the volunteers.*
- *Again, I don't think we would make it if we didn't have the volunteers themselves… Without volunteers and interns we would fall apart. It can be mentally stressful, and so sometimes we need that break.*

Students were described as not only lessening staff workload, but also bringing positive qualities
and further contributions; another benefit was the energy and enthusiasm students bring to the workplace, a sentiment expressed by most partners, and explicitly addressed by those who worked in high-stress environments. Students were frequently said to bring “fresh energy” and “enthusiasm” to their roles, and that students who work with youth act as role models in this respect. Others noted the positivity that students enhanced this environment, for example:

Students, especially student groups, bring a lot of energy and enthusiasm. They tend to have a lot of fun and make things fun for a lot of people. I see that as maybe the primary thing that is specific to student volunteers. Some of [community members] have expressed appreciation for the enthusiasm and youthfulness of students - that they're not just showing up to get the job done and move on, but to have a good time and have fun and laugh. In their interaction with the [community members], their fun and enthusiasm is contagious and it helps.

Students were often set apart from other volunteers in this way, noted particularly for their passion, curiosity, and enthusiasm,

I think they bring a fresh energy, which is fabulous… They want to learn what we are doing and how they can apply that to their future, so that is kind of exciting…

The impact they have is huge because, in my experience, they are young and passionate and are really interested in learning about at-risk youth and youth in crisis.

I'd say the curiosity, generally speaking with the student groups is pretty well distributed… a curiosity level that does stand out beyond the other volunteer demographics that we are dealing with. I guess that is a natural given; it is a college experience.

Most of the students are in a degree where they want to pursue social services, and so it's a passion or interest that they have, and so they are generally more dedicated to the cause… I think it also brings some new knowledge into the organization as well.

While students certainly contribute a tremendous number of labor hours in the community, the perception of student volunteers as beneficial beyond their labor was predominant among interviewees. Five community partners in particular, whose organizations primarily served youth, had embraced the concept of the student as not just a passive receptacle of knowledge and experience, but as a skilled and networked asset to the organization. These organizations regularly utilized students’ diverse skill sets in a number of capacities including event organizing, development work, mentoring/tutoring and fundraising. This further shows the importance of understanding student-community engagement as a relationship of multi-dimensional benefit within the network of a community. While several of the organizations are the beneficiaries of Greek organization fundraisers, only a few partners spoke of co-ed student volunteers who directly worked on development within the organization. Such would represent an additional type of link between an organization and a student.
Among organizations, students made up a median of roughly one-third to one-half of the total volunteer force. In some cases, students made up the entire volunteer force. There was variation in this category due to significant differences in size, scope, and nature of the organizations’ services. However, all organizations expressed the sentiment that students made a tremendous impact on their organization’s ability to serve the community. Notably,

*If you look at the demographics, the OSU students are, hands-down, the largest contributor to our program.*

*It would be impossible to run my programs without them [students specifically]. I couldn't do it.*

*Again, I don't think we would make it if we didn't have the volunteers themselves… Without volunteers and interns we would fall apart. It can be mentally stressful, and so sometimes we need that break.*

They all indicated the devastating impact it would have on the organization if they were to lose their student volunteers. Losing volunteers would have the most devastating impact on the organizations that serve children and youth, as these rely most heavily on OSU student volunteers. While all organizations indicated a desire to further their level of student participation, most expressed not having the resources available to do so. All partners expressed interest in utilizing student service beyond the current scope, introducing a larger variety of service, and particularly utilizing self-coordinating graduate and highly-skilled students. However, they indicated the need for additional support and coordination of these efforts, much of which was seen as unavailable without further university personnel involvement (organizations indicated lacking the resources).

**Community Capacity Enhancement**

Perhaps the most important theme in this category is not the additional benefit that we can see student volunteers contribute to the community, but rather the devastation and accessibility losses that would be caused to the local community if students were not providing service:

*Without volunteers, it would be a weedy, ugly jungle. Things would not be as cohesive… Then, it would fall on my shoulders, and I would be out there for a month.*

*It is pretty devastating to think about what our agency would look like period without volunteers in general… I think about how our agency really tries to provide this wide range of services and I don't think it would be possible without volunteers and so in that sense without student volunteers.*

*It would look… kind of dead… what I would call, warehousing children… no programming… almost exclusively elementary school children. We [wouldn’t] have the richness of programs that we have been able to get over the years.*

One community partner in particular had calculated (using Independent Sectors’ Oregon Crew Value Rate) that volunteers in the year 2013 put in nearly $160,000 of work into the community,
with student volunteers representing “the significant chunk” of that time. On the whole, partners believed that student service was enhancing the relationship between OSU and the city of Corvallis, the impact of which they believed would be stronger if these efforts were more publically acknowledged. Of those who discussed it (nearly all), community partners acknowledged disappointment in how little is known about how much students contribute to the community through these organizations;

*I think making it public would be huge, I don't believe the public realizes what they have with the OSU students alone, just with how much they give back. They always look at the negative impacts, I don't think anybody recognizes the positive.*

*I kind of doubt the community realizes how much the student volunteers impact the work that we can do. And I think, as an organization we are getting better about talking about that, and figuring out how to utilize those student volunteers… But really taking the time to be able to explain how important it is that they are there. I think that helps with the retention.*

*There is definitely a subset of the community that grumbles and mumbles about the college, and how it grows and expands and takes over, and I get their perspective, but they don't hear the flip side of that story, and that is what the students do offer to the community. Which is cool, college kids aren't all just crazy partiers - they do good things.*

Accordingly, they spoke of the impact that the students have on other members of the community, bringing emotional and educational support, professional resources, exposure to diverse others, and general well-being. For example:

*The impact it has on most specifically our partner families who otherwise wouldn’t really have anything to do with the university, and seeing those students and meeting them and working with them and having identified with them, that’s where I see its most obvious connection. It also exposes non-student volunteers to student volunteers as they work alongside each other, particularly in the sustained volunteer positions.*

*They are providing a lot of services that we provide that would help someone work with that barrier, so for example, students have worked with the courthouse and have helped people with restraining orders… [students] will do a lot of the emotional support, or case management support work; maybe that means sitting with the person on the computer and looking at Craigslist jobs with them, or helping them fax out job applications. When the person is not in crisis and not in need of safety planning, the work can be done at that point with the volunteer to help the person get to the next step in their life.*

*Without a doubt [it seems like the programs run by these volunteers increase the well-being of the children in the community]. I think you can say that with no doubt. It's giving them exposure to a sport they might not have had. It's keeping them active. It’s giving them exposure to the college students. They love the OSU college students. Somebody different in their life to be a role model. The kids look forward to that; somebody for them to interact with.*

*Lastly, we often speak of communities of humans, and while this study addresses primarily the impact on the human community, we might evaluate animal, ecological and environmental impacts as well. While the Humane Society does its part to reduce the number of stray and suffering animal species, the city’s Parks Department partners with students to identify and*
remove invasive species, preserve and reintroduce native species, restore natural habitats like wetlands (aiding bird and mammal populations), and build trails to make natural spaces more accessible while keeping people from damaging delicate habitats. Other organizations work to reduce food waste in a variety of ways, with many organizations recycling goods from and back into the community. Student volunteers here contribute vastly to the alleviation of these issues.

Social Justice

The organizations through which OSU students civic service-learn are primarily serving marginalized and historically oppressed populations. While in some situations, volunteers are addressing the symptoms of systemic problems (palliative service), in many ways, OSU student civic service-learners are addressing the causes of systemic problems, providing ameliorative contributions to the community. On the whole, students are having a significant impact on our two identified veins of social justice. According to community partners, this work is propelled most by students of a higher skill-level and or students with a longer time commitment to the organization. Ameliorative impacts were identified particularly in organizations that work with youth development and wellness, but also identified in students’ tendency to bring awareness to other youths and to the community.

Consistent with findings from Knapp et al. (2010), partners noted students’ increased propensity for future engagement within the community, often extending past their college career:

*I would say, 75% of the kids that start volunteering with me earlier, they stick with it.*

*I think a lot of us were student volunteers, our executive director started as an intern here, and twelve years later, she is the executive director, so I think there is a lot of value in recognizing that there is so much we can offer the community by opportunities through our volunteer program.*

Coupled with testimony about students’ tendency to spread awareness and recruit their friends as volunteers, this could thus lead to a student’s ability and likelihood to contribute to the social capital of a student’s given community across their lifespan. While a student’s service to her college hometown is potentially large, to extend this propensity beyond those borders potentially exponentiates her impact on her communities at large.

A theme in constant emergence from interviews was that of exposure to community issues and diversity, both on the part of the student volunteers and on those they worked with, interacted with, and served as a part of their organizational engagement.

*We like the diversity of volunteers, I want you to notice the diversity of the kids in this building. We live*
diversity in this building every day and it is such a cool thing to see. There are all sorts mixing together, there is no status on economic, it doesn't matter, you are a club kid… That's the only chance that some kids get outside of the school environment to come and learn how to be with each other in a social environment and learn how to be in that social awkwardness with other people you don't know, and learn how you operate in that environment.

The way I think about direct service and the student volunteers that I’ve worked with, there are a lot of people who haven't worked with other people in crisis or don't have much experience in their own lives for all of the things that can happen in someone’s life and if they want to do direct service… they want to work with a pretty huge range of clients, but they have just never had the opportunity to interact with, [for example] a 45 year old woman who...that’s just never been their life experience, so it's the opportunity to have a very life enriching experience through this specific mindset.

Partners spoke of the favorable impacts this had on students, on the populations they served, and the implications for social justice, including exposure to disadvantaged and diverse others which encouraged the dissolution of boundaries between social classes and racial divides.

Several of these community organizations and their student volunteers work in partnership with law enforcement and the justice system, providing advocacy and support through the legal system to survivors of abuse, those who suffer with mental illness, and those whose lives are otherwise adversely impacted by social injustices or who otherwise aren’t afforded the advantages of being a part of the dominant social group. Most of the service in this network is directed toward marginalized and high-risk populations. In many cases, student service is providing increased opportunities for disadvantaged youth, with mentorship and tutoring programs that help students advance educationally and professionally. Additionally, the outreach and awareness component that students spread contributes to the dissolution of negative stigma and social incognizance that leads to an unhealthy and unsafe environment.

Summary of Key Findings

This analysis paints a unique service network picture for the city of Corvallis and OSU. In this picture, short-term service is lauded by community partners as integral in spreading awareness and outreach, and is significantly responsible for engaging new student civic service-learners. It is seen as a necessary component in the area’s service system, one that supplements longer-term and more-involved service, which partners find to have greater, longer-lasting, and more socially just outcomes. Longer-term service partnerships are preferable for a number of reasons, and generally yield a higher benefit for the cost of time and effort to the organization. Working with at-risk youth benefits particularly from long-term service commitments, as this increased exposure both helps the service-learner to develop their skills and helps foster the trust
essential to a mentorship relationship. Partners see larger benefit from particular forms of university engagement, including project-based service, utilizing higher-skill students, and local- and organization-based research. Contrary to community perspectives in the literature, these partners don’t necessarily desire more control over the service-learning curriculum, rather they desire increased communication from the university side, from faculty who integrate service into their courses in particular.

Perhaps because it is only a few years old, there exists a disparate level of familiarity with the university’s CCE, with some partners highly connected and others unaware of its existence, suggesting imbalanced areas of strong, weak, and missing links. Partners on the whole are linked with students in many different ways, however, with much inconsistency between organizations in terms of how often and from where they draw their student pool. While there seems to be consistency with the types of students each organization utilizes from year to year, without a dedicated service commitment from the university or from faculty members, some organizations scramble to ensure an adequate number of and appropriate pool of students for their specific needs. However, such is the nature of non-mandated volunteerism, which may reflect that a shift toward sustained university-sponsored service partnerships could alleviate some of the burden of reliance upon optional or charitable service. We can see this by differentiating between a faculty member who sponsors student service versus a course that sponsors service which remains relatively stable no matter which faculty member instructs it. For policy-making, these links are an important factor in any network structure whose configuration restricts and shapes the impact of any significant change made within it.

While recognizing the distinctive nature of the work of community- and population-based organizations, our varied points of data have produced clear themes regarding the common threads within the services provided by these agencies. Some of these themes have been previously addressed in existing literature:

- Issues in communication with faculty, service-learning personnel
- Organization needs are not mutually aligned with university needs
- Incongruent schedules between organization’s needs and course requirements
- Longer volunteer commitment is desired for larger projects/more impactful work
- More intentional, directed linking of students with organizations is desired
- Without student volunteers, all orgs would see significantly diminished operations, if not sunset
- Students provide palliative and ameliorative services
• Exposure to community diversity is prominent impact, priority

This analysis also revealing the following novel findings:

• Professionalism, volunteer “etiquette” training desired
• Organizations would have difficulty expanding volunteer base as it stands
• Diversity in types and levels of service is ideal
• Network is largely non-strategic, non-robust
• CCE is a central hub but often bypassed
• Student civic service-learning is responsible for a significant portion of community’s current state of livability

**Limitations**

There are two primary limitations to this study. The first is that the short time frame to collect data as well as limits in available research resources did not allow the researcher to interview members of the community served by these organizations. The impact assessed in this study is given from the perspective of organization professionals. Given that the researcher only spoke officially with employees of these agencies, the perspectives and feedback may be different than that of the community members who are directly served by these organizations. This is not to say that the community impacts cannot be judged from this perspective, but that the extent of impact cannot be fully determined, and that further study is recommended.

The second limitation comes in the form of generalizability, and is intentional on the part of the researcher, and expected within the community-based research framework that guides this project. The operational definition of community used here is broadly defined by those directly and indirectly impacted by the social services provided by the organizations that were a part of this study. As a community research study, it is methodologically impossible to control for all of the potential confounding variables, which limits generalizability and the application of this knowledge outside of the research site at hand. While this local, context-specific research project collected data from members of the target population, the results remain context-bound and may not be generalizable outside of this local community or those with highly similar demographic characteristics.

**Recommendations**
There is much yet to be gathered about the impacts of student civic service-learning and the way student engagement is situated within the university and the community. Gathering further information including the three points below is recommended in order to situate and refine the following recommendations within the particulars of each major party. This author recommends further research and analysis that could yield highly valuable information for informing practices and policy, including but not limited to the following:

**Further Research**

- Multidimensional Network Analysis including Spatial Mapping to explore potential accessibility/proximity factors
- Gather input from all key stakeholders including: student advocates/representatives, other organizational personnel, service-active academic & professional faculty members, community members, and community advocates/representatives
- Research best practices in network assessment to monitor inputs, changes, and outputs if recommendations are employed

Though further information is desirable, interviewees provided rich information about the current conditions of the civic service-learning relationship between OSU and Corvallis. They helped paint a picture of the civic engagement arena for students and the organizations they serve, and in this case, serve well. Through this data, we can conceptualize a virtual image of a network of actors (students and professionals) with many components in constant flux, and always adapting, more or less, to changing professional, educational, policy, and global climates around it. Within this context, the issues and impacts revealed by our community partners intertwine to reveal nuanced characteristics of this system’s configuration (its own structural ecosystem), and in turn illuminate potential changes and adaptations that can suit the network’s future and befit the efforts of those within it. From the feedback garnered from these organizational partners and from the analysis of the network within which they interact with students and university personnel, recommendations for OSU, for organizations, and for their working partnership are summarized below.

**OSU**

- Increase interaction and communication between the organization and the educational institution or supervising faculty
- Expand service-learning curriculum, target faculty and first-year students
- Create centralized civic service-learning clearinghouse
- Increase university sponsorship/promotion of student civic service-learning including integration into FYE and graduate courses
• Modify Mission Statement, Strategic Plan, Initiatives to reflect greater service commitment
• Include community impacts in assessments of student civic service-learning; promote acknowledgement of student contribution to community

Organizations

• Create/utilize “what-to-expect” volunteer education materials and make them available online
• Increase involvement with OSU’s Center for Civic Engagement (CCE)
• Increase partnership and collaboration efforts with other community service organizations (inter-institutional links), particularly for volunteer programming and event coordination
• Expand outreach efforts to target diverse, high-skilled, and graduate students for longer-term supervisory/coordination positions
• Invest in development positions – utilize high-skill students
• Inventory needs & assess anticipated needs for mutual planning

In Partnership

• Collect student participation data annually (including hours, contributions to impact);
• Develop measurable impact metrics
• Collaborate where possible; develop joint agendas
• Partner with Collaboration Corvallis
• Expand outreach efforts to university cultural centers and student groups/organizations, with particular regard to parallels with the groups served by the organization
• Leverage existing data: seek out opportunities for scholarship using organizational data
• Publicize student participation, impact information and appreciation widely, on website and in media

Such policy changes interact with changing conditions in the university and the city, including population increases, budgetary factors, and factors associated with social economic instability. For this reason, recommendations are written such that they could be applied in several different ways according to these fluctuating factors and other related conditions, including a potential change in divisional vision/direction associated with incoming new leadership in two administrative positions that oversee student-community engagement: Vice Provost of Student Affairs and Associate Provost for Academic Success and Engagement. Based on key findings identified within these university-community relations, the author provides the following examples of specific policy adaptations with brief descriptions of how they may serve to strengthen the robustness of the current network:
| Impact: Partners respect and appreciate student civic service-learners. |
| Issue: They cannot handle additional students without additional support. |
| Adaptation: Build official partnerships between key point-persons within university and organization. |
| Robust Qualities: Aligns goals, encourages resource-sharing, builds community. |

| Impact: Prepared students yield better service / Skilled students yield lasting service. |
| Issue: Needed: Volunteer “etiquette” workshops for students / Matching students to org/position. |
| Adaptation: Integrate via service component of First Year Experience (FYE) / student advising. |
| Robust Qualities: Permanence (younger volunteers persist), prevents attrition (prepped students persist), efficiency (less “wasted” and administrative downtime means longer service component/more service rendered). |

| Impact: Corvallis and surrounding areas are greatly improved by student civic service-learning. |
| Issue: System cannot support growth in current structure (strategic links, hubs needed) |
| Adaptation: Gear OSU Center for Civic Engagement toward “clearinghouse” (smart hub) positioning; introduction of coordinator (link-maker) positions to support aforementioned development and increasing enrollments. |
| Robust Qualities: All robust qualities will be supported through intentionality toward: diversity, interconnectivity, triangulation of links (student-OSU-community), and smarter hubs |

It is recommended that any policy or programming changes that stem from this research are made in conjunction with assessment of their impacts on key stakeholders, with significant input from community members or appropriate representatives, and with mutual agreement from OSU and from the community organizations potentially affected.

**Conclusion**

As student populations increase across the nation, cities and universities can benefit from being proactive in structuring programs and policies that will accommodate and support the influx of both students as well as additional faculty, staff, and support services with a community. This analysis showed how integral student engagement in the community can be in fostering the well-being of a community, but also how this stands in the face of continuous change and precarious relationships. The consensus from the majority of these organizations is that they have reached a stage of diminishing returns in terms of volunteer labor and capital (or skill and sheer number). It would do this community a disservice to thrust more of the same type of volunteers onto these organizations and onto the community. On the flipside of that coin, if these
organizations were to lose any significant portion of the student volunteer manpower that they currently have, their operational capacity and their ability to run the organization that provides for the needs of the greater Corvallis area would be severely diminished. If maintaining or increasing quality of life and livability for the public is a goal of public universities, strategically coordinating and aligning civic service-learning efforts is critical in accommodating a growing community and changing world.

According to this research analysis, successful growth in this domain necessitates strategic growth, mutual partnership, and further support for its coordination. Across the board, partners described the integral nature of a diversified service network, whether through different types of volunteers, different volunteering bodies, or diverse links throughout the service community. Though not weak, this non-robust network sees multiple unconnected and non-stable links between actors who are all trying to achieve similar broad goals. According to existing literature and our partner’s feedback, increasing intentionality, creating smarter hubs, triangulating links, and strengthening the links throughout the community are a variety of ways in which the robustness of this network would likely be increased, and how it can over-diversify to anticipate a growing number of student civic service-learners.

Under good conditions, students are making strides in the community, contributing to the welfare of underserved and at risk populations, to the development of today’s youth, and to the health of local natural habitats. Under great conditions, we can assume that these positive impacts would be magnified and better safeguarded against issues like turnover, schedule conflicts, or disengagement. With intention, policymakers have the opportunity to steer these effects in a direction that acknowledges the university as one of many knowledge centers whose shared agendas must now reach beyond the goal of outreach to focus on strategic collaboration and mutual partnership.
References


Ferrari, J. R. & Worrall, L. (2000). Assessments by community agencies; How “the other side”


APPENDIX

Interview Questions

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<th>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</th>
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<td><strong>Position</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. What is your title and what is your role in this organization?</td>
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<td>2. How long have you been working within this organization?</td>
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<td>3. Do you work directly with student volunteers? How often?</td>
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<td>4. What populations does your organization serve? Do you work directly serving community members?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
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<td>5. How often does [organization] work with OSU student volunteers?</td>
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<td>6. Roughly how many student volunteers have served with [organization] this year? In past years? Has there been a trend in how frequently you have student volunteers?</td>
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<td>7. Do you typically work with larger groups of students at once? Individual volunteers?</td>
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<td><strong>Characteristics</strong></td>
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<td>8. How does your organization recruit student volunteers? Do any come to you as a part of an OSU class, a student club or organization? [If a variety] Can you describe any trends or differences between the student groups?</td>
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<td>9. In what capacity do your students serve your organization and or the community?</td>
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<td>10. Describe the populations served by [organization]?</td>
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<td>11. What are some of the particular issues faced by the people your organization serves?</td>
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<td>12. What motivates your organization to utilize student volunteers?</td>
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<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
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<td>13. What impact, if any, have student volunteers made on the community members and populations you serve?</td>
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<td>14. Have students helped the organization, itself? Do student volunteers change your organization’s ability to impact the community?</td>
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<td>15. How do you think OSU can help improve the impact of student volunteering through your organization specifically?</td>
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<td>16. Do you see this type of student engagement as a viable way to improve town-gown relations (the relations between Corvallis and OSU)?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Improvements</strong></td>
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<td>17. Have you had trouble recruiting student volunteers? What have been barriers for you in accessing OSU students, staff, or faculty or the Center for Civic Engagement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Do you see OSU as a resource for your organization? Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. What is your ideal relationship and level of involvement with OSU student volunteers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. What would you like students to learn from working with your organization?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organizational Participation

1. ABC House
2. Boys & Girls Club of Corvallis (B&GC)
3. CARDV
4. Community Outreach, Inc. (COI)
5. Community Services Consortium (CSC)
6. Corvallis Multicultural Literacy Center (CMLC)
7. Corvallis Parks and Recreation (CP&R)
8. Habitat for Humanity Corvallis (HH)
9. Heartland Humane Society (HHS)
10. Jackson Street Youth Shelter (JSYS)
11. Trillium Children’s Farm Home (TCFH)