

DURATION AND INTENSITY: Evidence from the Research

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What Is Duration and Intensity?

Sufficient intensity and duration means that service-learning experiences include investigation, planning, action, reflection, demonstration, and celebration, and occur during concentrated blocks of time (intensity) and are long enough (duration) to meet community needs and learning goals.

Application to Service-Learning

- Eyler and Giles (1997) found that more intense service-learning programs provide more challenging and varied tasks, more opportunities to make important decisions, a greater sense of ownership, stronger collegial relations with professionals in the field, more opportunities to apply content from the classroom to the community, and greater contributions to the community than those service-learning experiences that are less intense.
- Researchers caution that hours alone are not sufficient to determine quality; rather, “the field should be very cautious in implementing service programs that require or mandate so many hours of service in the absence of teaching methods that allow students to interpret and learn from the experiences they encounter” (Blyth, Saito, & Berkas, 1997, p. 52).
- Melchior and Orr (1995), in their study of the national Learn and Serve program, found that program duration was associated with multiple positive outcomes for students.
- Billig, Root, and Jesse (2005) found that duration of at least one semester was significantly related to all civic outcomes and enjoyment of subject matters.
- Spring, Dietz, and Grimm (2006) constructed a quality index comprised of three elements: reflection, student participation in project planning, and duration of a semester or more. The study sample was comprised of 3,178 Americans between the ages of 12 and 18 who were surveyed by telephone about their civic engagement attitudes and behaviors, volunteering habits, and experiences with service-learning. The number and type of quality experiences were correlated to outcomes in the areas of civic engagement. Students who participated in programs that featured the most quality components were “three times as likely to believe they can make a great deal of difference in their community than youth who participated in school-based service without any of the quality elements of service-learning” (p. 3), were more likely to say they would volunteer in the coming year, were more interested in world events, and were more likely to talk with their friends and family about politics. In general, the more quality elements in a service-learning experience, the higher the outcomes, no matter what the socioeconomic background or grade level of the participant.
- In their study of the Generator School Project, Blyth and colleagues (1997) reported that the number of service hours provided by students had a positive effect on reducing risky behaviors, increasing social responsibility, and reducing disengagement from school.

- Conrad and Hedin (1980) showed that duration of high school service-learning programs was significantly related to multiple academic and civic outcomes, especially when the program was one semester or longer.
- Kraft and Krug (1994) found that 6 to 8 weeks of experience in service-learning with field work once a week was not long enough to produce desired outcomes for students.
- Eyler and Giles (1997) demonstrated that students who participated in longer and more intense service-learning were more likely to see value in the program and commit to further service activities.
- Moore (1981) found that students' understandings of tasks became increasingly complex and contextualized as they engaged in longer duration of service.
- In a CampFire USA study on a community preparedness initiative, those teams who participated in programs of longer duration had higher ratings of teamwork, leadership, and problem solving (RMC Research, 2007).
- The duration of service-learning activities was positively related to valuing school, civic engagement, social responsibility, and locus of control (Billig & Brodersen, 2007).
- A study that focused on the relations between students' community service and service-learning experiences, academic success, and socioeconomic status found that the duration or longer exposure to service-learning programs had a positive effect on students' on a scale of commitment to learning. In addition, there was a smaller achievement level gap between high and low socioeconomic status students who had longer exposure to service learning (Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kielsmeier, & Benson, 2006).