SERVICE-LEARNING IN NATIONAL PARKS: AN ANALYSIS OF
STUDENT REFLECTIONS

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in
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by
Jessica A. Walter
Fall 2015
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APPROVED BY THE INTERIM DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES:

______________________________
Sharon Barrios, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Laura J. McLachlin, Ph.D.
Graduate Coordinator

Emilyn Sheffield, Ph.D., Chair

Laura J. McLachlin, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

SERVICE-LEARNING IN NATIONAL PARKS: AN ANALYSIS OF
STUDENT REFLECTIONS

by

Jessica A. Walter

Master of Arts in Recreation Administration

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Service-learning has become an increasingly popular form of experiential education in higher education; the myriad of benefits to students and communities has been well documented in a variety of community settings and academic majors. In spite of this growing body of research, there has been a lack of research on service-learning projects that engage undergraduate students with the natural environment, specifically national parks. There is a paucity of research on the role of service-learning in encouraging students to become active stewards with a sense of ownership and responsibility towards parks.

The purpose of this qualitative pilot study was to analyze students’ prompt-based written reflection journals to determine if participation in an immersive service-learning experience in a unit of the National Park Service contributes to students’ feelings of responsibility and engagement with national parks and the environment. Twenty-five
undergraduate students from CSU, Chico enrolled in a five-day service-learning experience were given a prompt question daily to reflect upon and write about. Grounded Theory was used as a framework for data analysis, allowing categories to emerge during open coding.

In order to relate the categories to existing data on community based service-learning, Eyler and Giles’ dimensions of citizenship are used as a framework for a discussion. Findings revealed strong evidence for the values, knowledge and efficacy dimensions, supporting existing research that students involved in community based service-learning become more socially aware citizens in their communities.

The findings suggest that service-learning experiences in parks encourage undergraduate students to become active stewards with a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the parks. Students involved in service-learning immersed in the national parks became more aware of the complexities and challenges that park staff face balancing recreation with preservation.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of service-learning, a form of experiential education, can be seen in the large body of literature on the subject as well as the growth of two major national organizations that support, encourage and research service-learning. Learn and Serve America is a program of The Corporation for National and Community Service, an independent federal agency, and Campus Compact is a coalition of college and university presidents (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Research in higher education has shown that as an educational methodology service-learning has benefits to students’ academic learning, intellectual development, interpersonal and personal development, and that these benefits may lead them to become more engaged citizens in their communities (Eyler & Giles, 1999; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Rocha, 2000; Weglarz & Seybert, 2004). Service-learning projects place students in a variety of community settings including public and private schools, hospitals, government agencies, and nonprofit agencies (Maher, 2003; McClam, Diambra, Buron, Fuss, & Fudge, 2008; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002; Rocha, 2004; Schmidt, Marks & Derrico, 2004).

Despite the growing body of research on service-learning and student engagement in their communities, there has been a lack of research on service-learning projects that engage students with the environment, specifically National Parks. The
broad interest in service-learning and engaging citizens focuses on service to people and communities, not National Parks and natural environments. Curry, Heffner and Warners (2002) stated, “the scholarship of engagement may need to expand to include service to a place, not just a people” (p. 59).

In order for students to gain the full benefits of their experiences, service-learning programs must include active reflection activities. Reflection is a necessary component of service-learning, it enables students to make the connections between their service experiences and classroom learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Eyler, 2002; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Fiddler & Marienau, 2008; Maher, 2003; McClam et al., 2008). Eyler (2002) stated

reflection may contribute to a deeper understanding of social problems and to the cognitive development that makes it possible for students to identify, frame, and resolve the ill structured social problems that we must deal with as engaged citizens. (p. 519)

Field School

The Department of Recreation, Hospitality and Parks Management at California State University, Chico (CSU, Chico) developed the “Field School” program in the spring of 2008. Field School was initially developed to provide Recreation, Hospitality and Parks Management majors with the opportunity to learn directly from professionals in the field prior to their accreditation-mandated final-year capstone internships. As part of their coursework, students enrolled in RECR 190: Service Learning in Recreation Programming participated in a five-day alternative spring break immersive service-learning field experience in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA). Through service-learning projects, students gained hands-on experience in the
parks, interacted directly with park’s (and agency partner) staff members and park
visitors.

The Field School program began in spring 2008 with five enrolled students; by the Spring of 2010 enrollment had steadily increased to 30 students. Enrollment rosters also reflected many returning students and thus participation in multiple service-learning experiences. In the spring 2010, this successful program was looking to better understand students’ experiences in order to provide feedback to existing partners and to possibly expand the program with new partners. Other public lands agencies, including California State Parks, were looking to partner with the Field School program in order to replicate a similar model in their sites. In order to successfully replicate the Field School model in additional parks more data was needed on the students’ experiences with the program and some empirical “sense” of change in students’ awareness of and responsibility towards the parks. More in-depth assessment was needed to bolster anecdotal evidence that students and the parks were benefitting from the Field School program.

Statement of the Problem

If service-learning in communities can encourage a sense of responsibility and foster greater understanding of the issues in one’s community, can service-learning in National Parks and the environment encourage a sense of awareness and responsibility towards National Parks, the environment, and the unique issues facing public lands and public land managers? Research on service-learning in higher educations has a plethora of studies focusing on civic engagement as a benefit of service-learning and students
becoming active citizens in their communities (Eyler & Giles, 1999; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Rocha, 2000; Weglarz & Seybert, 2004). Few studies have looked at engaging students in becoming active citizens in their national parks and the environment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the relationship between immersive service-learning experiences in National Parks and undergraduate students’ feelings of responsibility and engagement with National Parks and the environment. This was achieved by analyzing the responses of students enrolled in a service-learning course during an alternative spring break service learning experience. Students were presented with daily reflection prompts for a reflection journal required as part of the course, Since this research was a pilot study, the prompts were exploratory in nature; two questions dealt directly with students’ interactions with people in the parks (staff and visitors) and three questions asked students to explore their feelings and reactions towards different aspects of the Field School experience.

In their 2004 research, Barcelona and Bocarro identified the need to research the collaborations (including service learning) between higher education institutions and park and recreation agencies and professionals. Their study focused on the perspective of university faculty and parks and recreation professionals. Though valuable findings were reported, the Barcelona and Bocarro research did not include any direct student perspectives.

Due to the lack of research on student perspectives and general need for research on service-learning in the field of parks and recreation, this study seeks to
broaden the knowledge base and contribute to the literature by examining service
learning in a national park setting in California.

Research Questions

This study posed three research questions:

1. When undergraduate students are involved in an innovative and immersive
service-learning experience based in the National Parks, what themes emerge from
students’ reflection journals that are structured with daily, reflective question prompts?

2. Does participation in a service-learning program in National Parks encourage
students to become more active stewards with a sense of ownership and responsibility
towards National Parks?

3. Finally, if support for research questions one and two is found, how can this
information be used to inform, improve and possibly expand the Field School Program?

Limitations of the Study

This is an exploratory pilot study focusing on a small convenience sample of
undergraduate students engaged in a five-day service-learning experience in the Golden
Gate National Recreation Area. All of the students were pursuing the same academic
degree, Recreation Administration, at CSU, Chico, although several of the department’s
five degree patterns were represented. The small sample size and the limited variability in
terms of academic interest limit the findings. It is not appropriate to generalize to a wider
population although future research may build on this pilot project.
Definition of Terms

Several broad terms and other, less common terms are used in this research effort. Terms are described in this section so readers have a clearer context for the research setting and findings.

Journals

This study focuses on written reflection journals kept by undergraduate students during their Field School experience. In this study, journal writing assignments were structured through a daily series of question prompts. Students were given a daily prompt each day time to reflect on the question prompt prior to preparing their journal entries.

The process of journaling is a form of active reflection, which research has shown to be a necessary part of service-learning. Reflection facilitates students thinking critically about their service-learning experiences and making connections between their experiences and classroom learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Eyler, 2002; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Fiddler & Marienau, 2008; Maher, 2003; McClam et al., 2008).

National Parks

The National Park Service (NPS) is administered through the United States Department of the Interior. NPS has 409 units throughout the U.S. Their mission is to preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world. (U. S. National Park Service, n.d., 2015)

This research focused on a service-learning experience at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in the San Francisco Bay Area.
Public Lands

This study focuses on students participating in service-learning in National Parks. However, the need for public engagement, awareness and stewardship is not isolated to just the National Parks. Opportunities and needs exist across the spectrum of state and federal land management agencies including but not limited to: US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, US Fish & Wildlife and California State Parks. These agencies also face similar challenges in their overarching mission to balance the conservation of resources with their government mandate to provide public access.

Service-Learning

Although service-learning takes many forms across academic disciplines and education levels, Eyler and Giles (1999) stated “we accept that any program that attempts to link academic study with service can be characterized as service-learning” (p. 5). This study focuses on a five-day immersive service-learning experience located in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, a unit of the National Park Service.

This chapter discussed the need to better understand the relationship between immersive service-learning experiences in National Parks and undergraduate students’ feelings of responsibility and engagement with National Parks and the environment. Chapter II discusses the literature on service-learning outcomes and benefits relating to students becoming more engaged and socially aware citizens of their communities.
Many researchers have discussed service-learning and its outcomes and benefits, however, a full discussion of service-learning is outside the scope of this paper. This literature review instead focuses on service-learning outcomes and benefits relating to students becoming more engaged and socially aware citizens of their communities. Emerging literature concerning service-learning on national public lands and other environmental settings is then reviewed to demonstrate the need for more research.

Service-Learning

The education methodology of service-learning has seen a rapid increase on college and university campuses since the phrase was originally introduced in 1966-1967 to describe a project funded by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in partnership with the Oak Ridge Associated Universities. The goal of the TVA project was to link students and faculty with development organizations affiliated in the TVA watershed (e.g., tributary area) (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2002). Since then many different definitions of service-learning have been developed, which reflects the diversity of programs that are labeled as service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Acknowledging this diversity and complexity in the structure of service-learning programs and the difficulty of a uniform definition Eyler and Giles (1999) stated, “we accept that any
program that attempts to link academic study with service can be characterized as "service-learning" (p. 5).

Service-learning pedagogy’s approach to learning theories and facts through service is a form of experiential education with roots in the progressive theories of John Dewey (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Rocheleau, 2004). Traditional education follows a pattern of reading and lecture, reinforcement through repetition, and memorization of material for testing. Students in traditional education apply theories from learned material to hypothetical situations discussed in the classroom; there is no hands-on experience in traditional education.

In contrast, Dewey believed in learning through a cycle of action and reflection where knowledge is internalized by applying it in concrete situations and through reflection on past situations to guide the present and future (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Rocheleau, 2004). Service-learning offers students the opportunity to apply theories and learning by involving them in hands-on problem solving of community issues and incorporating structured opportunities to reflect on what was learned during this process. As a methodology service-learning is being increasingly used in higher education (Gelman, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001).

Service-learning’s focus on practical application of theory and learning through service add a “unique value” to learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 58). Research has described several positive outcomes of service-learning on students’ academic learning and intellectual development: students learn more and are motivated to work harder in service-learning classes, students obtain a better understanding of subject matter and the ability to apply it to real problems, students learn specific skills, and students are
better able to demonstrate knowledge and analysis of complex issues (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Mertens, 2009; Rocha, 2000; Weglarz & Seybert, 2004). Eyler and Giles (1999) refer to some of these outcomes as “unique” because their research took a broad view of learning that included the ability to understand complex issues and a greater ability to analyze and apply information instead of a narrow view of assessing learning only by traditional means such as grade point average. Students acquire knowledge and a deeper understanding through the process of constructing knowledge by reflecting on their experience (Eyler, 2002).

In their landmark study, Eyler and Giles (1999) identified reflection as a key characteristic of the service-learning pedagogy, and despite the wide variety of definitions and locations for service-learning, there is consensus that reflection is necessary to “convert an event to an experience from which learning and meaning can emerge (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008, p.76). Reflection provides the opportunity for students to deepen their understanding, think critically, and cement ideas from service-learning experiences. Researchers also see reflection as a way to examine and assess learning outcomes in service-learning. Journaling is a common form of reflection and has “proved to be a rich source of information for both assessment of and insight into students’ service-learning experiences” (McClam et al., 2008, p. 245).

In addition to the ability of service-learning experiences to connect academic learning to real-world situations, research has found that it also has interpersonal and personal benefits to undergraduate students: greater self-knowledge, increased sense of self-efficacy and feelings of competence, the ability to work well with others, increased leadership skills, appreciation for other cultures and developing a more positive view of
others (Eyler & Giles, 1999; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Rocha, 2000; Weglarz & Seybert, 2004). Service-learning experiences allow students to interact in meaningful ways with a variety of people from diverse backgrounds including other students, academic faculty, community members and staff from non-profits and other groups where service-learning takes place. The learning process of interacting and communicating with a variety of people in order to solve community problems or provide a service to the community has an impact on the personal and interpersonal development of students (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Research has documented the academic, interpersonal and personal benefits of service-learning as a pedagogy to prepare students to become more engaged and socially aware citizens of their communities (Eyler & Giles, 1999; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Rocha, 2000; Watson, 2004; Weglarz & Seybert, 2004). In their research, Eyler and Giles (1999) identified five dimensions of citizenship that were central to linking the knowledge, values, attitudes and cognitive skills that compromise citizenship. The five elements of citizenship, according to Eyler and Giles are: values, “I ought to do”; knowledge, “I know what I ought to do and why”; skills, “I know how to do”; efficacy, “I can do, and it makes a difference”; commitment, “I must and will do” (p. 157).

Eyler and Giles’ (1999) values dimension, “I ought to,” describes service-learning students developing a sense of social responsibility by feeling connected to their community (p. 157). By having students work with agency staff and community members, service-learning breaks down barriers between schools and the wider community. In their comparison between students with involvement in a service-learning class and those who had not participated in a service-learning course, McCarthy and
Tucker (1999) found that service-learning students more strongly agreed that it was their duty as a citizen to help the community. Eyler and Giles (1999) take the values dimension a step further in the knowledge dimension, “I know what I ought to do and why”; in addition to feeling connected to their community, students also need the cognitive skills and expertise to make decisions and solve problems (p. 159). The knowledge dimension is supported in Weglarz and Seybert’s (2004) findings that service-learning increased students’ awareness of community needs, and experience in communities provided students with better insight into complex social problems. Service-learning also provides students with knowledge about where they can go for additional volunteer opportunities (McCarthy & Tucker, 1999).

In skills dimension, “I know how to do,” Eyler and Giles (1999) found that service-learning students “acquire practical experience for community action, as well as the interpersonal skills that make people effective” (p. 160). An increase in interpersonal skills was supported by Weglarz and Seybert’s (2004) research findings that service-learning students reported an increase in their appreciation of differences among people and their ability to relate to others. Service-learning has also been found to increase students’ efficacy, “I can do, and it makes a difference”; which depends on students’ feelings of self-confidence in their acquired skills (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 161). In her study of political participation between policy-related service-learning students and traditional classroom learning, Rocha (2000) found that service-learning students were significantly more likely to feel competent using the media to communicate ideas to the public, plan and implement a change effort, use the Internet to find policy-related information, and create computer-generated information literature.
The commitment dimension, “I must and will do,” is described by Eyler and Giles (1999) as “the ultimate test for the impact of service-learning on citizenship is behavior – what college graduates do in their community” (p. 162). Eyler and Giles were unable to study students’ actions after graduation in the timeframe of their study; intent was measured instead and service-learning students were more likely to indicate their intention to continue service. Rocha (2000) designed her study to compare two groups of recent graduates, those that had completed a policy practice course with an integrated service-learning component and students in a traditional classroom based policy practice course. Rocha found that students in the service-learning group differed significantly in four variables; students were more likely to have worked on a specific change effort, been active in a committee or coalition, become a member of a committee or coalition and been instrumental in organizing an activity in a committee or coalition.

Communities benefit from the work of students involved in service-learning and they also benefit from young people who are more engaged and socially aware. Experience in service-learning provides students the values, knowledge, skills, efficacy and commitment necessary for them to become effective citizens (Eyler & Giles, 1999). In his justification of the civic engagement model of service-learning, Watson (2004) stated that “The civic engagement of ordinary citizens with voluntary associations, social institutions, and government in local communities is a central feature of strong democracies” (p. 74).
Students in community based service-learning report a growing “awareness of community needs” (Weglarz & Seyber, 2004 p. 128). Is it possible to achieve similar outcomes if the intent is to increase awareness of park and environmental needs?

Researchers are beginning to study students’ service-learning experiences in environmental, rather than community, settings. In their 2014 study, Knackmuhs and Farmer conducted a pilot study of undergraduates involved in “eco-restoration” service-learning. In the study, biology students were involved in native plant restoration and invasive species eradication projects. Knackmuhs and Farmer’s study supported previous research findings on community based service-learning outcomes such as increased opportunity for knowledge retention and understanding, social benefits of working alongside other students, and a sense of accomplishment in their volunteer work.

Emerging research has shown a growing number of parks and recreation professionals and agencies are partnering with universities to collaborate in a variety of ways including, research, internships, and service learning experiences (Barcelona & Bocarro, 2004; Hendricks & Miranda, 2003; Reiter, Eagleman, & Luckenbaugh, 2000). Professionals and agencies are beginning to see the positive outcomes of these collaborations, and universities are calling for more research on the subject. Barcelona and Bocarro (2004) state “there is a greater need to understand what collaborations currently exist in the park and recreation field, as well as a further understanding of the nature and extent of these relationships.” (p. 4)

Park managers are eager to find new ways of addressing staffing shortages in light of changing budgets and aging workforces. Partnering with universities is viewed as
a synergistic relationship, where parks gain much needed “person-power” and the partnerships provide the opportunity to (1) sharpen the skills of baccalaureate and graduate students in resource management, (2) address a collection of interrelated resource management issues of real-life significance, and (3) develop the interdisciplinary resource managers required by “the state and nation in the new future. (Barcelona & Bocarro, 2004, pp. 48-49)

This view also recognizes the continuing role students will have after graduation as visitors, concerned citizens, voting public, and future parks professionals.

This literature review focused on service-learning outcomes and benefits relating to students becoming more engaged and socially aware citizens of their communities. Then, emerging literature concerning service-learning on national public lands and other environmental settings was reviewed to demonstrate the need for more research.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this pilot study was to analyze students’ prompt-based written reflection journals to determine if participation in an immersive service-learning experience in a unit of the National Park Service contributes to students’ feelings of responsibility and engagement with national parks and the environment. The research questions identified and explored themes that emerge from the journal reflections and how this information can be used to inform, improve and possibly expand the Field School program at CSU, Chico. Journals were structured with open-ended question prompts; students were given a single prompt question each day, and time to reflect prior to writing the journal entries.

Sample

A convenience sample of undergraduate students enrolled in RECR 190: Service Learning in Recreation Programming at California State University, Chico served as subjects for this study; the class included a five-day service-learning component. The class had 30 students enrolled and was an elective for the students. Of the 30 students enrolled in the course, 25 gave permission for their journals to be analyzed as part of this
study. No comparisons were made between students who allowed their journals to be used in the study and those who did not.

The majority of the 30 students were within the typical CSU, Chico undergraduate student age range of 19-25 years with only two students above that range. All of the students had selected advising patterns within the Recreation Administration degree offered by the Department of Recreation, Hospitality and Parks Management at CSU Chico. The students represented all five of the options within the Department: Parks and Natural Resource Management, Events Management, Recreation Therapy, Resort and Lodging Management, and Community and Commercial Recreation and Tourism.

The five-day service learning experience took place within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) and Muir Woods National Monument, a unit within the GGNRA. During their daily service learning activities, the students interacted directly with a variety of National Park staff members, as well as non-profit partner staff from the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. Due to the high visitation rates in the GGNRA and at Muir Woods National Monument, students were often seen and approached by visitors during their service learning activities.

The students spent their five-day experience living in park housing, a dorm-style building with double-occupancy single-gender rooms with shared kitchen, living space and bathrooms. To enhance group cohesiveness, students were encouraged to use their free time to explore the surrounding park with self-guided hikes. This service learning experience combined with in-park housing provided students with a fully immersive national park experience.
Reflection Journals (Research Design/Instrumentation)

The importance of active reflection activities as part of service-learning pedagogy is well established in the scholarly literature. Students’ written reflection journals were chosen as the data collection instrument in this study for several reasons. Reflection journals allowed the researcher to design question prompts to guide and focus the students’ writing and reflection process. This process of reflection and writing allows students to synthesize their experiences and make connections between service-learning experiences and their classroom learning. Written reflection journals also provide a detailed account of the service-learning experience in the students’ own words. The CSU, Chico Department of Recreation, Hospitality and Parks’ Field School program in its early, formative stages and the program’s instructors were seeking to student learning outcomes from program participation.

Open-ended question prompts were constructed based on previous literature and the broad goals of the service-learning program: increasing students’ awareness of Parks, creating a feeling of responsibility for Parks, advancing students’ knowledge of the career options in Parks. The question prompts were designed by the researcher to be non-leading, but explored student reactions to their volunteer service experiences, their interactions with visitors and staff while completing their service learning experiences, and any experiences that they found meaningful or surprising. A list of question prompts appears as Appendix A.
Data Collection Procedures

Students were required to keep written reflection journals as part of their RECR 190 coursework, but they received no benefit or extra credit for their voluntary participation in allowing their journals to be part of the study. Each day, during the course of the 5-day field experience, students were given one question prompt to reflect upon. Their thoughts were recorded in their journals. Journaling often took place immediately following or during a service-learning experience, usually on a lunch break or at the end of a day before returning their accommodations. Weather permitting, this allowed the students to reflect on their service and experience in the location that it had taken place.

Students agreeing to allow their journals to be analyzed for this research project were provided with a brief orientation to the research project and signed an Informed Consent Form approved by the campus Institutional Review Board. Journal question prompts and a list of demographic, categorical question were also submitted to and approved by the Institutional Review Board (Appendix B).

In order to reduce bias and maintain students’ anonymity, a graduate student collected the journals from the RECR190 instructor and made copies of the journal entries but omitted the students’ names. The hand-written journal responses were typed to assist in data analysis.

Data Analysis

Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was chosen as the data analysis framework for this study because it allows researchers to develop analytic categories and
theories as they emerge from the process of analyzing data. This study did not seek to build theory grounded in the students’ responses, rather the purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of students’ Field School experiences and relationships to national parks in order to better guide the growth and development of CSU, Chico’s Field School program. Grounded Theory was well-suited to enable this researcher to better understand what students were experiencing while enrolled in Field School and its service-projects in National Parks.

The researcher developed a coding system and identified emerging themes by reviewing the hand-written and transcribed journal entries. The original copies of the students’ journals, both hand-written and typed, were saved. Transcribed student journal responses were then compiled by question, which grouped all responses to each of the five reflection questions. Compiling the reflections by question, allowed the researcher to easily compare and contrast responses to each question. A copy of the typed reflection journals was then available for hand coding with adequate space for the researcher to make notes in the margins.

This study used open coding as the data interpretation method. Initially the raw journals were read thoroughly as the researcher identified themes and possible patterns of meaning that emerged for each question. Following the initial read through, the first cycle coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) used these patterns of meaning to develop 2-4 codes for each reflection question. A code sheet was developed to serve as an overview of the data and as an outline of the results.

This chapter provided a discussion on the methods used to collect data. The next chapter presents key findings from this analysis of data.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For this pilot study, 25 undergraduate students from CSU, Chico attended a five-day immersive service-learning Field School class in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Students were required to keep a written reflection journal as part of the class; journals were analyzed using Grounded Theory to allow themes to emerge from the data. In this chapter, results of the researcher’s analysis of journal entries are presented based on the chronological order in which the question prompts were presented during the service-learning experience. Selected student quotes are included in order to illustrate some of the themes the emerged in response to the question prompts.

As discussed in the literature review, Eyler and Giles (1999) theorized that service-learning increases the chances that students will become more socially aware citizens of their communities. In their research Eyler and Giles identified five dimensions of citizenship that service-learning experiences enhanced: values, “I ought to do”; knowledge, “I know what I ought to do and why”; skills, “I know how to do”; efficacy, “I can do, and it makes a difference”; commitment, “I must and will do” (p. 157). These dimensions will be used as a framework for relating the findings from this research to the existing research on community based service-learning. Each question prompt is restated, followed by a discussion of key findings and, if available, one or more student quotes to illustrate key concepts.
Has anything about your field school experience surprised you so far? Is so, describe what surprised you and why?

At the end of the first day of the Field School, students were instructed to get out their journals and to find a comfortable place to write. The researcher reminded students about the daily journaling assignment and emphasized that although the journaling was a class assignment, and hence mandatory, students did not have to participate in the study. This was part of a general orientation to the journaling assignment and the study. Each day had a different prompt for the journaling exercise.

As this was the first question prompt provided to students, it provided insight on their initial reactions to their service-learning experiences on the first day. Most of the responses fell into one of three categories: group dynamics, awareness of parks, and satisfaction with service.

The category of “group dynamics” had the most student responses, with 11 students providing responses that related to some aspect of the group’s dynamics. This category encompasses students’ comments on how they related to and interacted with other students involved in their service-learning field school experience.

In the group dynamics category, many students expressed surprise about how “friendly and fun” the other students were and how they had made friends so quickly and easily. Students noted they may have known one or two participants on the trip but that after the first day they were already friends with everyone on the trip. A representative student response summed it up as follows: “I made so many new friends that I probably would have never really gotten to know if I didn’t go to Field School.” Another student also made the connection that the atmosphere of the Field School played a role in
encouraging students to be open, friendly and accepting of each other. This atmosphere
allowed students to get to know each other on a deeper level and “build meaningful
relationships.” This was surprising to the student because the student disclosed that he or
she1 was new to the major and new to the University.

In describing the category of group dynamics some students thought a little broader
about how the group as a whole was interacting. Students were thinking not just about
their individual reactions to each other but also about how the whole group was working
well together on service projects and in a group living situation. One student stated that
he/she was surprised by “the sense of kinship and closeness that can be developed in
doing community service, its nice building bonds.” Students also realized that the group
living situation contributed to their bonding, as they had to “tackle tasks like meals, work
projects and beach adventures” together.

Also in the group dynamics category, it was interesting to note the language
students used to describe themselves and others as either a “veteran” or “newbie” to the
Field School program. Several students mentioned this when describing how they came
together as a group. They described how the veterans and newbies all came together for
service projects and for the tasks of group living. A student who was a self-described
veteran of two prior Field Schools also noted surprise at the level of student leadership
involvement compared to previous trips.

The second most common category of responses to the first day’s journal prompt
was the concept of “awareness of parks.” This category revealed a different level of

1 The information sheet that linked journal responses to the demographic information about participants
was destroyed in a fire so it is not possible to link responses to gender, student advising pattern or other
categorical data.
thinking in terms of the respondents’ depth of awareness about the parks. For some students their service-learning experience was a starting point to begin thinking about these parks. One student wrote about living “my whole life so close to this place and [I have] never been there.” For this student the service learning experience had sparked an awareness that the parks existed and were available for future recreation opportunities.

By participating in volunteer service projects in the parks, some students began to write about the ecology of the parks. They commented on their appreciation for the amazing variety of plant and animal life in the park. A few students took this a little deeper by writing about how visitation has an effect of park ecology. They commented on their surprise at learning from the park staff members how visitors walking off-trail had negative impacts on the health of the park’s natural environment. Another student was surprised to learn that some of the plants in the park were invasive species that actually had a detrimental effect on the park’s native plant and animal species. This student acknowledged that before completing the volunteer service project and interacting with the parks staff he or she would only have been aware of how pretty that particular invasive plant was and not realized it had a negative effect on the entire ecosystem.

Another student considered how parks staff have to deal with the constant need to balance visitor use and resource preservation. In addition to realizing that visitors can have a negative impact on the park, this student began to think about how the staff members have to come up with innovative and creative solutions to maintain this balance. The student acknowledged that she or he hoped to eventually work in a park and would one day face these same challenges in a desired future career.
The final category that emerged from the first day’s reflection question was the concept of “satisfaction with service.” This category reflects the students’ feelings towards the volunteer service projects that they completed. Students were surprised at their sense of accomplishment after completing service projects in the parks. One commented that “I felt like we were really doing something” after seeing the visual impact that the group’s service had on the aesthetic of the park. In addition to feeling a sense of accomplishment in being able to see the direct effect of their service, students expressed how the service personally made them feel good. Students commented on how the service affected them as individuals, how afterwards they had a “warm, calming feeling, it was extremely therapeutic.” By way of reminder, the question prompt asked students to reflect on something that surprised them about the first day of service-learning at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

☑ Describe an interaction you had today with a Park visitor. What was the visitor’s reaction to you? What did you talk about? Did it feel different to be a volunteer instead of a regular visitor to the Park?

The second day of the alternative spring break included service projects at Muir Woods National Monument, a park unit with extremely high visitation. At the conclusion of the second day, the students were again instructed to write in their journals. The journaling prompt for the second day was a multi-part question about interactions with other park visitors. Most students responded to the series of link question prompts with one integrative journal entry rather than a series of answers to the separate questions.

The journal reflections on the second day centered on the students explaining their presence in the parks and their service-learning to park visitors. The service-learning field
school took place in areas of the park with high visitation, which led to a variety of different visitor and student interactions. Some of these interactions were simple surface level interactions, yet several students also thought deeper about the differences between themselves and the visitors and the role their volunteer service played in this perceived difference. On a surface level, some students talked about how the visitors asked the student to take a picture for them. Other students wrote that visitors thanked them for the work they were doing in the park.

While a few students did not reflect on anything beyond these surface interactions, more than half took time to write about their deeper thoughts about these interactions. Several students wrote they developed a sense of pride for the service because visitors were thanking them and observing their service work. They felt that the service they were doing was “a valuable thing to the visitors, national parks and society.” In a similar manner, another student reflected how by volunteering he or she saw how much work went into running the parks and felt proud to be able to assist where needed and where the volunteer contributions were appreciated.

Students also frequently mentioned how visitors wanted an explanation about what the students were doing and why. Students had no difficulty explaining to visitors what they were doing, it was the “why” that gave them pause. Visitors often asked them why they were doing the volunteer service, in terms of how it made a difference to the park. Students expressed their relief that the parks staff had briefed them on how their service projects fit into the bigger picture of the park, and how it helped them respond to questions. They could then better explain to visitors how their work directly helped the parks. Through the process of putting the “why” it mattered into their own words, the
students may have further internalized this message. Numerous students wrote about how they took pride in helping the parks as well.

A student mentioned how much she or he enjoyed this process of interaction and explanation to park visitors because of the messages being shared with the visitors. This student stated that these interactions gave visitors evidence of how the students and CSU, Chico could make a positive impact on the parks and the community. The student thought it was important that visitors realized that “we care and want to make a difference and preserve and protect our parks.”

One student described an interaction they had with a tour bus driver at the park. They chatted about the volunteer service the student was doing, in a manner similar to interactions other students described. The bus driver made a comment that took the interaction in a different direction; he noted volunteer service would help the student in his/her future career. This led to a discussion about the student’s future career path and how volunteer service could help advance or support a future career.

_Describe an interaction you had with a NPS (or agency) staff member._

The third day of the service-learning experience was the halfway point of the week. Students continued with service-projects in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and were settled into their communal living routine. The group dynamics observed by the researcher at this point demonstrated a sense of group cohesiveness. In their free time, students self-organized exploration and hiking trips to the surrounding beach and trails. The alternative spring break participants had also settled into the routine of journaling at the end of the day. When asked, they settled down quickly to write in response to the day’s prompt.
When reflecting on this question, students conveyed answers that centered around two categories: career awareness and staff perspectives. It is important to note that students talked equally about interactions they had with NPS staff members from several different parks and non-profit partner staff members. The students did not seem to differentiate between the affiliations (e.g., government or non-governmental) of different types of staff with whom they talked and interacted. It is also worth noting that the majority of the students described one-on-one or small group interactions that they had with staff members.

Within the broad category of career awareness, students reflected on staff interactions about internships and career opportunities in the parks. Students frequently related how staff members took the time to give them the details about these opportunities. Staff members gave the students guidance on the variety of different opportunities and advice on how to go about applying for them. Students wrote that the staff was helpful in giving them specific information about how, when and where to apply for jobs and internships. One student stated, “It was really helpful to be able to come into contact with these people so I can get an idea of what ways to go about finding an internship or job down the line.”

The category of career awareness also contained students discussing how and why they had quizzed the staff members on their career backgrounds. Students were interested in experiences the staff members had and how this related to them getting their jobs or internships. Students relayed how staff members happily talked about their educational and professional experiences when asked.
Students also conveyed how they had discussions with staff members about their individual career goals, both within and outside park and natural resource positions. The majority of students talked to the staff members about internships and jobs within parks and natural resources, their focus area in the recreation major. A few students had discussions with staff members about other options in the recreation major, specifically special events and tourism. Based on written journal responses from the students, staff members seemed equally willing to assist these students with discussions about their career goals outside of the parks.

The category of staff perspective also emerged from the students reflecting on the interactions and discussions they had with staff members. Reflections in this category centered on what students had learned from and about the staff members, their jobs and the parks. Students were interested to learn more about the challenges and complexities that staff members faced in their jobs. Talking directly with the staff members gave students an insider view of how these professionals balanced providing access to parks with preservation. Students also learned more about how different agencies and non-profits worked together to preserve and protect the parks while still providing access. Finally, staff members shared their knowledge about the history and ecology of the parks with the students.

Through talking with staff members, students also glimpsed how passionate staff members were about working in the parks. Students related how they could see the staff members’ passion for their jobs shine through in all of their interactions, even when talking about their challenges. One student mentioned how “It’s always nice to see that although they face many challenges, it never diminishes their love or spirit.”
Describe how your field school experience compares to your previous experience in National Parks.

By day four, the researcher observed how the students needed little direction to take the lead on daily communal living tasks. The breakfast team moved quickly and confidently around the barracks kitchen, the students took the initiative to pack lunches and backpacks for the day and completed the routine of tidying and furniture repositioning of the common areas required before departure.

Student reflections on this prompt questions were organized into two categories: parks systems, park knowledge and park staff, and benefits of service to the parks. The majority of responses related to students reporting an increase in knowledge and depth of understanding from participating in service learning in parks, when compared to their previous recreational visits, gave them “an entirely different experience.” Being in the parks as a volunteer for several days provided students a “more intimate, closer view of the National Parks.”

Through repeatedly talking with a variety of different staff members, students reported learning more about what it takes to manage a park. Students talked about being able to see, first-hand, the knowledge, time, effort and staff required to manage a park. This first-hand experience also led to students writing about their growing realizations about the pressure that visitation puts on the parks’ natural environment. Students then conveyed how they came to understand more about the staff challenges of balancing preservation of the parks while still providing access.

Some students looked at how they could contribute to the balance of access versus preservation as volunteers. They wrote that volunteering in the parks gave them an
understanding of how they could be more conscientious visitors in the future. The importance of volunteers directly assisting time-strapped staff members was also discussed. Students commented on how important it was for parks to regularly make use of volunteer projects to assist with the day-to-day process of maintaining the parks. Despite students describing how the staff members had complex and challenging jobs, students also repeatedly mentioned how these staff members showed their dedication to and passion for their jobs. Staff members took the time to share their knowledge about the history, ecology, and challenges of the parks with the students.

When comparing their volunteer service to their previous experiences in parks, students reflected on the benefits they received as individuals. They wrote about how they “felt in touch with the park” after spending so much time volunteering and how this made them feel good. One student reflected how this experience had made her or him feel like they were a part of the parks, and how a new sense of ownership for the parks was an outgrowth of service. Another student shared how she or he had learned so much about the ecology of the parks, which in turn gave her or him a better overall feeling about the parks. Students also related how it was fulfilling and refreshing to be able to assist the parks, especially since she or he now knew how much it made a difference in the parks.

During field school have you had any “aha” moments? If yes, describe your favorite. What about it was meaningful to you? This was the final question prompt for the students; it provided insight on their cumulative feelings towards the entire service-learning experience. Within this question, data analysis revealed three different categories that student reactions centered around: stewardship, park ecology, park systems and partnerships and overall experience. Responses to this final question reflect the teamwork
and connections that students formed during the field experience, and added strong evidence that the educational objectives for the course had been achieved.

The category of stewardship contained a slight majority in the number of student reflections with six different responses. In this category one of the first areas students reflected on was how their volunteer service had made a difference in the parks. In reflecting on how they individually had made a difference, one student commented how he or she “had worked extremely hard and removed 300” invasive plants. This student was then struck by how one individual could make a noticeable difference in the park during just one day’s experience. Other students also related similar experiences on how all of the volunteer service provided a huge sense of accomplishment.

Relating to stewardship, students also reflected that their volunteer experiences caused them to realize that the parks belonged to them and to all citizens. A student summed this up when stating “when you volunteer you feel more responsible for it, therefore the parks give a sensation that it belongs to you.” Students commented how their time volunteering in the parks had given them a sense that the parks belonged to everyone, so everyone was responsible for taking part in their upkeep.

This feeling of the parks belonging to the citizens is also seen in students’ reflections on the need to educate the public about the parks. Students expressed a desire for the public to be more involved in the parks and to share similar volunteer service experiences. They saw these experiences as a way for the public to become more connected to the parks and therefore more knowledgeable about them. They speculated that this would cause the public to care more about the parks, build a sense of responsibility for the parks and encourage more volunteerism in the parks.
The second largest category was park ecology, with two main concepts. The first was that students expressed their sense of awe and wonder at the beauty of the natural settings that the parks protected. Students commented on the beautiful views they saw while hiking and volunteering, and how they were glad they could be part of helping to maintain this natural beauty by volunteering. One of the areas the students volunteered in was a fairly new park that was close to a densely populated area; a student made the connection that the beautiful view they were seeing would not be possible if the area had become a housing development instead of a park.

In the category of park ecology, students also reflected on what they had learned about the park’s natural environment and its delicate balance through their volunteer service. When working to remove invasive plants, the park staff explained to students how the invasive plants had a negative impact on the ecosystem. This explanation from the parks staff not only increased students’ knowledge but also made it clear how their volunteer service had a direct impact on helping the park. A connection was made by one student that if members of the public had similar volunteer service experiences it might increase their knowledge, and also make them understand how important it was to get involved in volunteering in the parks.

Park systems and partnerships was also a category that emerged in the student reflection on the “aha” question. Throughout the course of their 5-day service-learning experience, the students worked with staff from a variety of different parks and non-profit partner agencies. This variety of staff roles and responsibilities gave the students a new view into the complexity of managing a national park, and all the different agencies involved in park preservation efforts. Seeing all these different agencies and staff
members also gave students broader career awareness, in terms of the different agencies and professional positions they might pursue through careers in natural resources.

Within the “aha” question, the broadest category that emerged was students reflecting on their overall experience of participating in the five-day service-learning class. Students commenting on their overall experience had strictly positive reactions to their experiences. Students talked about the sense of teamwork and cohesiveness that had formed within the group through completing the volunteer service and the group living situation. They reflected on how happy they were to have made so many new friends, and how the entire experience had been positive. Students wrote that the experience had increased their overall knowledge of the parks, their history and their ecology.

Discussion

This pilot study was designed to determine themes and ideas that could be extracted from student reflection journals, structured with daily question prompts. These themes could then be used to improve and inform future service-learning programs. In this section Eyler and Giles’ five dimensions of citizenship are used to structure a discussion of the findings from the student reflections. The review of literature in Chapter II discussed Eyler and Giles’ (1999) five dimensions of citizenship as it relates to service-learning. The five elements of citizenship, according to Eyler and Giles are: values, “I ought to do”; knowledge, “I know what I ought to do and why”; skills, “I know how to do”; efficacy, “I can do, and it makes a difference”; commitment, “I must and will do” (p. 157).
In the values dimension “I ought to” Eyler and Giles (1999) state that students involved in service-learning can develop a sense of social responsibility by feeling connected to their community. This research took a slightly different perspective because it looked at students’ feelings of connection to parks and public places instead of community. An analysis of reflection responses revealed strong evidence that after completing their service-learning projects the students had developed a new sense of responsibility towards the parks and the natural environment they protect.

The category of stewardship best exemplifies this newfound sense of responsibility. They considered the realization that as citizens of the United States the national parks belong to them and therefore they had a role to play in preserving the parks. Taking this a step further, students recognized the need to educate the public about the parks. They speculated that if the public at large better understood the parks, and even completed volunteer service in the parks the public would develop a similar sense of responsibility.

These student reflections suggest that students also came to place value on the volunteer service for how it made them feel once it was completed. Students related how it not only felt good to be able to help the parks and know that they were making a difference, but that the volunteer service simply made them feel like they had accomplished something. They described how completing the volunteer service projects was almost therapeutic in that it gave them a “warm, calming” feeling directly after completing it.

The knowledge dimension of “I know what I ought to do and why” Eyler and Giles (1999) theorize that in addition to feeling connected to their community, students
also need cognitive skills and expertise to make decisions and solve problems. Students’ reflections on what they had learned about park systems, staff and partner agencies, provided strong support for the knowledge dimension. Consistently four of the five question prompts elicited students’ response on how they had learned a great deal about the “behind the scenes” work necessary to manage a large national park like the GGNRA.

Students had a variety of opportunities to talk with parks staff through large and small group discussion, as well as individual discussions. Students described how their service-learning experiences and talking with parks (and non-profit partner) staff gave them new insights into the complexities and challenges that staff face on a daily basis in their dual mission of providing public access while preserving the parks. They described how they had a better idea of the complex management problems that staff face in carrying out their dual and sometimes conflicting mission. Students also talked about their new understanding of the environmental challenges that parks dealt with because of invasive species and their impact on the ecology of a park. Cooperation between different agencies, different parks and non-profit partners in order to manage parks was also a topic about which students appeared to glean new insights.

The skills dimension of “I know how to do” (Eyler & Giles, 1999) showed that through service, students gained hands-on experience in community action and thus demonstrated increased interpersonal skills. This dimension was not strongly shown in the student reflections; it could only be seen in one reflection category of group dynamics. The category of group dynamics only emerged from the “surprised” prompt question. Students conveyed their feelings of group cohesiveness and their experiences in making new friends with other students on the trip.
“I can do it and it makes a difference” is Eyler and Giles’ (1999) dimension of efficacy in service-learning experiences. In their reflections, students discussed how they had come to realize that their volunteer service had a direct impact in the health of the environment and general upkeep of the park. When relating how they had to explain their presence and volunteer service to park visitors, students internalized how their service mattered to the parks. Park staff had briefed students on the importance of their volunteer service, but having to share this information in their own words with the public really seemed to drive the point home for the students. Students also talked about how good it felt at the end of a service project to be able to physically see the impact they had made, by removing invasive plants for example. Seeing the before and after differences from their service was an important part of the students’ experience.

Eyler and Giles’ (1999) final dimension of commitment, “I must and will do” was beyond the scope of this pilot study. Studying this dimension requires following up with students after their service-learning to see if they continued participating in volunteer service. This study only looked at students’ five-day service learning experience and reflections on that experience. The analysis revealed some evidence within the student reflections that relate to this dimension; students indicated that they plan to participate in more field school experiences before they graduate. Although not a formal part of this research effort, a review of subsequent enrollment rosters confirmed that many participants did indeed participate in subsequent field school experiences.

This chapter presented the results of the researcher’s analysis of student journal entries during their service-learning experience. Chapter V contains four sections,
a summary of the procedures and findings of the study, conclusions and limitations, a
discussion of implications, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter serves as a conclusion to the previous chapters including review of literature, research methods, and findings. This chapter contains four sections: 1) summary of the procedures and findings of the study, 2) conclusions and limitations, 3) discussion of implications, and 4) recommendations for future research.

Service-learning has become an increasingly popular form of experiential education in higher education; this rise in popularity is also echoed in the large body of research on service-learning. The myriad of benefits to students and communities has been well documented in a variety of community settings and academic majors. In spite of this growing body of research, there has been a lack of research on service-learning projects that engage undergraduate students with the natural environment, specifically national parks. There is a paucity of research on the role of service-learning in encouraging students to become active stewards with a sense of ownership and responsibility towards parks. This pilot study was designed to explore themes emerging from students’ journal reflections in response to a series of five questions.

Twenty-five undergraduate students from CSU, Chico Department of Recreation, Hospitality and Parks Management enrolled in a five-day service-learning experience embedded in an undergraduate course. As part of their service-learning
experience, students were given a prompt question daily to reflect upon and write about in their journals. The question prompts were designed to encourage students to think critically about their roles in parks as volunteers and their feelings about their service-learning experience in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Grounded Theory was used as a framework for data analysis of the reflection journals, allowing categories to emerge during open coding. Each prompt question was analyzed and coded individually to discover categories within the reflections on each question.

In order to relate the categories to existing data on community based service-learning, the dimensions of citizenship were used as a framework for a discussion. Eyler and Giles (1999) identified five dimensions of citizenship and demonstrated how participation in service-learning projects prepared students to become more engaged and socially aware citizens of their communities. The five elements of citizenship, according to Eyler and Giles are: values, “I ought to do”; knowledge, “I know what I ought to do and why”; skills, “I know how to do”; efficacy, “I can do, and it makes a difference”; commitment, “I must and will do” (p. 157).

In comparing the data to the dimensions of citizenship the researcher found strong evidence for the values, knowledge and efficacy dimensions. The skills dimension did not emerge strongly in the students’ responses, with only one data category reflecting a possible increase in interpersonal skills. The dimension of commitment related to students’ future actions, which is beyond the scope of this study. This study investigated students’ reflections and experiences during a five-day service-learning experience.
In the “I ought to do” values dimension students in this study reflected on their newfound sense of responsibility to the parks after completing their volunteer service. The data revealed strong evidence that after completing their service-learning projects the students had developed a new sense of responsibility towards the parks and the natural environments protect within the parks. Students also found value in completing the service because of the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction they felt from completing the service learning experiences.

Strong support was seen in the data for the knowledge dimension—“I know what I ought to do and why—with evidence found in all but one prompt question. In responses to four of the five question prompts students related on what they had learned about park systems, staff and partner agencies, essentially the “behind the scenes” work that goes into managing a national park like the GGNRA. This “insider” view gave students new insight into the complex management challenges facing staff as they implement their dual and sometimes conflicting mission on a day-to-day basis.

The skills dimension of “I know how to do” was seen in only one category within the data, the group dynamics category. After just one day of service, students expressed their surprise that the group had bonded so quickly. Students talked about how they had quickly made new friends and worked together as a group to complete service projects.

Efficacy (“I can do it and it makes a difference”) was demonstrated in the data when students reflected on the direct impact of their service on the park and its ecology and upkeep. The students internalized the importance of volunteer service to the parks when they had to explain their presence and service to curious park visitors. Students also
related their sense of accomplishment after completing a service project and being able to physically see the difference their work had made.

The final dimension of commitment, “I must and will do,” proved to be beyond the scope of this study. A follow-up study could determine if students continued to participate in volunteer projects in parks. Some preliminary evidence for this dimension can be found in the data because students indicated that they plan to participate in more field school experiences before they graduated.

Conclusions

The findings suggest that service-learning experiences in parks encourage undergraduate students to become active stewards with a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the parks. Students involved in service-learning immersed in the national parks became more aware of the complexities and challenges that park staff face balancing recreation with preservation. Findings that emerged from these data support existing research on community based service-learning, namely that students involved in service-learning become more socially aware citizens in their communities.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was the homogeneous sample; all of the students were declared majors in the Department of Recreation, Hospitality and Parks Management. When the data were collected, the Field School class was a small, experimental program implemented as a single service-learning trip for students as an “Alternative Spring Break.” Having student input from multiple majors across the CSU, Chico campus would have enhanced the study.
Another limitation of the study was the lack of demographic data relating to each student reflection. The researcher’s home suffered a house fire that destroyed the only copy of the key that matched the anonymous numbered reflections with the demographic data sheets submitted by students prior to the service learning excursion. Without the key, little analysis based on demographic variables could be undertaken. Though desirable, an analysis of responses informed by the demographic variables was not possible.

Discussion of Implications

This study was designed to explore themes that emerged from students’ semi-structured written reflection journals. Three themes that seem to have had the biggest overall influence on the Field School experience were: Parks and partner agency staff, service projects and food and housing. These themes will be used to broaden the knowledge base about service-learning in national parks, a topic that is particularly timely as the National Park Service approaches its second century of service. Themes will also be used to make recommendations on the implications for future service-learning and Field School programs.

The large and persuasive influence park agency and partner staff have on service-learning experiences is revealed by the students’ responses to every prompt question. These data suggest it is essential for students to have direct contact with a variety of staff members during service-learning projects. Staff members can provide students with a context for their service project, how the projects fit into the management of the park and why the service projects and the volunteers’ efforts are important.
Students also benefitted from staff members sharing their experiences dealing with the complex balance of providing access to the Parks while also preserving them. Students noted how their knowledge and appreciate for the Parks had increased due to staff member interactions. Students also appreciated that staff members provided students with career advice, internship opportunities, and insights.

The influence of park staff members has implications for campus staff interested in starting a program. University staff do not have to be content experts on parks in order to organize and implement a service-learning program, but they will have better outcomes if they work closely with experienced park staff members. The Field School program has benefitted greatly from park staff’s willingness to take the time to work with students: by leading service projects and engaging students in candid discussions.

The service-projects that the students worked on appear to have exerted a huge influence on their overall Field School experience. The types of service-projects and how they are introduced to students should be given careful consideration by organizers. Students enjoyed the fact that they could see the physical impact that completing a project had on the parks and situations where students can see a clear differences in the pre and post service learning conditions of the work site are likely to achieve better results. Park staff taking the time to explain how projects fit into the bigger management plan for the Parks was also important. Being able to see and understand the importance of the service projects gave the students a sense of pride and accomplishment for their service. Completing service projects also served as a teambuilding exercise that brought the students closer together as helped them work as a team.
Food and housing also had an influence on student satisfaction with the Field School experience. After a long day of completing service projects in the rain, coming back to a warm, dry, comfortable building for a hot meal influenced student morale. The barracks where students stayed were not fancy, but they provided a comfortable “home away from home” so students could relax, share meals and enjoy each other’s company. Students being responsible for group meal preparation and cleanup served a dual purpose of giving students a sense of responsibility and providing a group bonding experience. Having free time to socialize and explore the Parks together also served as another group bonding experience.

Recommendations for Future Research

This pilot study provided useful insight into the role of service learning in a national park setting and an important foundation for future research studies. This study could be replicated on a broader sample of student majors. Longitudinal research of Field School participants would help inform our understanding of an important dimension of citizenship, the commitment dimension “I must and will do” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 162).

Sample Broadly

As discussed, a small convenience sample was used from the newly developed Field School program. Future studies should sample broadly across different service-learning projects based in other parks and public lands. This study only included students studying in the Department of Recreation, Hospitality and Parks Management, future studies should include undergraduate students from a variety of majors and departments.
**Longitudinal Studies**

Time and funding constraints dictated that a single section of RECR 190 was studied once without any follow-up. Future longitudinal studies may enable researchers to better understand the changes that occur over time from service-learning experiences in national park settings and programs.
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
Reflection Journal Prompt Questions

Has anything about your field school experience surprised you so far? Is so, describe what surprised you and why?

Describe an interaction you had today with a Park visitor. What was the visitor’s reaction to you? What did you talk about? Did it feel different to be a volunteer instead of a regular visitor to the Park?

Describe an interaction you had with a NPS (or agency) staff member.

Describe how your field school experience compares to your previous experience in National Parks.

During field school have you had any “aha” moments? If yes, describe your favorite. What about it was meaningful to you?
APPENDIX B
Informed Consent

Explanation of Procedures
This research study is designed to explore undergraduate students’ level of engagement with National Parks. Jessica Jones, a graduate student at CSU, Chico is conducting this study to learn more about student’s service learning experience. Participation in the study involves the researcher conducting a content analysis on student reflection journals written for RECR 190 class, taught by Dr. Emilyn Sheffield.

Withdrawal without Prejudice
The use of your reflection journals in this study is voluntary, completion of reflection journals for RECR 190 is mandatory. Refusal to allow your journal to be included in the study will involve no penalty. Each participant is free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice. Furthermore, a decision to participate or not to participate, or to withdraw participation, will not influence in any way the grade students earn in RECR 190.

Risks and Discomforts
There are no risks, discomforts or adverse affects that are anticipated from your participation in the study.

Benefits and Incentives
The anticipated benefit of participation is the opportunity for educators and park staff to learn about student involvement in National Parks. Students will not receive payment or any other incentives for participation.

Confidentiality
The information gathered during this study will remain confidential in a locked drawer during this project. All information will remain anonymous to the researcher and data coders. There will not be any identifying names on the final paper and participants’ names will not be available to anyone.

Only the researcher, data coders, Dr. Emilyn Sheffield and CSU, Chico Institutional Review Board will have access to the study data and demographic information. The results of the research will be published in the form of a graduate thesis and may be used for class discussions or other educational purposes.
Questions
Any questions concerning the research project and/or in the case of injury due to the project, participants can call Dr. Emilyn Sheffield (faculty advisor for this project) at 530-898-4855. Questions regarding rights as a person in this research project should be directed to John Mahoney, Ph.D., Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee, at 530-898-4766.

Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate.

____________________________________
Print Name

____________________________________   __________________
Signature         Date
Demographic Questions

Age ___________

Gender (circle one response): M F

How do you best describe yourself? (Circle one or more responses)

- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Black/African American
- Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/Latino
- White/Caucasian

How many times in your life have you visited National Parks/Monuments/Seashores/Recreation Areas? (circle one response)

- 1–5 times
- 5-10 times
- 10-20 times
- more than 20 times