

Volunteerism: Why or Why Not

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Abstract

Volunteering during college years has been linked with overall lifetime effects of improved self-worth, social skills, and overall psychological well-being. This study delves into the dynamics of volunteering among college students within a Christian university setting, highlighting motivating factors and barriers influencing their engagement. Data collection involves a campus-wide convenience sample of 150-200 undergraduate students 18 years or older who completed an online survey. We used a combined research instrument featuring the Volunteer Inventory Functions (VIF) scale measuring motivators and Gage & Thapa's barriers to volunteering scale. The research results will provide cross-sectional data on current undergraduate students' perceptions of motivators and barriers to volunteering; a comparison will be highlighted between students enrolled in helping professions majors and all others. This research contributes valuable insights into the motivations and obstacles shaping the volunteering landscape among Christian university students, further informing service-learning program development and modifications to meet current student needs.

Volunteerism: Why or Why Not

Volunteerism during an individual's college years holds the potential of setting the stage for a lifetime of service and civic participation. Multiple studies explore the relationship between volunteerism and college students. However, in order to better understand this relationship it can also be beneficial to understand the motivators and barriers that influence this relationship and if those motivators and barriers differ between majors. Volunteerism simply refers to the act of freely giving one's time and efforts, especially in regard to community service activities and opportunities. Within the context of this study, motivators refer to the aspects of an individual's life that inherently motivate them to volunteer while barriers refer to the aspects of an individual's life that have the opposite effect. Helping professions include such majors as social work, education, nursing, religious studies, law enforcement, and a few others. On the other hand, non-helping professions include science majors, business majors, art majors, and various others.

Researching the significance of volunteerism among college students remains crucial due to the potential for setting the stage for long-term personal and professional success, and therefore understanding the motivators and barriers at play is equally as crucial. The importance of volunteerism is apparent in the literature, which highlights how engaging in volunteer activities during college positively affects students' well-being and self-esteem, reaffirming the enduring impact of volunteerism on young adults (Bird et al., 2016). While the literature explores motivators and barriers to volunteering among working adults or retirees, there is still much research to be done to see what the best ways for a(n) institution(s) to best implement volunteerism are, or otherwise referred to as service-learning (Anderson et al., 2019).

The current study explores the barriers and motivators of volunteerism among college students in the helping and non-helping professions at a private Christian university. The institutional context, which highlights preparation for a lifetime of service as presented in the University mission statement (Southern Adventist University, 2024), provides the most appropriate opportunity to explore the students' perceptions of their own volunteering experiences. Additionally, considering the limited opportunities for in person volunteer engagements during the COVID-19 pandemic and the social distancing requirements experienced during the students' formative high school years, current undergraduate college students perceive participating in volunteering activities from different perspectives that are worth exploring (Kulik, 2021).

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted seeking to understand the volunteering motivators and barriers among college students in the United States, as well as whether these differ among students enrolled in helping professions majors and non-helping professions majors. The literature is scarce on the topic specifically related to students' perceptions and engagements. Therefore, this review presents parallel research from studies that explored the volunteer motivators and barriers of students in other countries, or studies conducted with different populations such as emerging and older adults. Sources included quantitative, qualitative, mixed method studies, and systematic reviews.

Barriers to Volunteerism

With respect to their relative availability of free time and energy, college students are frequently considered the ideal demographic for volunteering, yet they, nonetheless, encounter a number of obstacles that prevent them from taking part in volunteer work. Studies show barriers

such as academic demands and time constraints and lack of awareness and access to volunteer opportunities.

Academic Demands and Time Constraints

College students' arduous academic schedules continue to be a barrier to their participation in voluntary activities. They may be reluctant to sign up for volunteer work because of the pressure to perform well in school and handle their homework, tests, and assignments (Eyler et al., 1999). It can be difficult to strike a balance between voluntary work and academic obligations, and students may see it as a compromise (Eyler et al., 1999).

Lack of Awareness and Access to Opportunities

Many college students may not be aware of the many volunteer opportunities that are available to them in their towns. Universities and organizations frequently have trouble telling students about and promoting the opportunities that are accessible to them (Astin et al., 1999). As well as awareness about neighborhood activities, events, and groups that depend on volunteers can be a significant obstacle to participation (Astin et al., 1999).

Motivators of Volunteerism

While barriers can often limit opportunities to volunteer, there are multiple factors that motivate students to engage in volunteer activities beyond professional development, seeking job opportunities, and resume building (Handy et al., 2009). Some of these factors are explored below.

Self-worth.

Research shows that people who volunteer have a greater sense of self-worth (Tierney et al., 2021). Research also found that volunteers are further increased by the gratitude and thanks from those helped (Tierney et al., 2021). Volunteers often look back on a completed project and

feel a sense of accomplishment at seeing the work that they have done and comparing it to what they saw when they arrived (Tierney et al., 2021). This highlights the importance that motivates individuals to volunteer when their self-worth is positive .

Improved Social Skills

Another motivating aspect of volunteering is that there are improved social skills (Gray & Stevenson, 2019). Research conducted with individuals from South England found that when individuals feel a sense of belonging, there is a substantial boost to social interaction and improved social skills. A study performed in Australia examined 278 volunteers of different ages, with various volunteer experiences and found that in addition to finding that aligned values are pertinent to a motivate individuals to volunteer, the research also found that these experiences with values aligned gave individuals a chance to socialize with others they may not have otherwise socialized with. (Nykiel et al., 2023).

Values

Another motivator for volunteering is faith. A study conducted with seniors from a Christian university found that one way individuals exemplify their faith is through volunteering (Burt et al., 2022). The fulfilling experience of helping others while volunteering then in turn strengthens their faith because it is being put into action.

Motivation of similar values is a key aspect in determining if one will volunteer (Chacon et al., 2017). A study by Chacon et al. (2017), examines volunteers in Spain that measured their motivations of values, understanding, social, career, protective, and enhancement using the VFI scale. The very same scale that is being used in this research. Chacon et al. found that the greatest motivation of the population of middle aged, mostly Christian adults, was

values. Although this population studied is not of typical college ages, the participants in this study did indicate that prior service in their lives much earlier have influenced them to volunteer.

Psychological Well-being

Psychological well-being is another positive growth area from volunteering. A study done in 2020 in China showed that results of regression analysis indicated that volunteering has positive effects on psychological well-being (Geng et al., 2022). The study showed that it is psychologically healthy for a person to practice selflessness because it gets the mind focused on caring for others rather than thinking of oneself. The study found that an individual's engagement in volunteerism limited the time they spent dwelling on their own problems and concerns. It showed that individuals were instead able to switch their focus outward on whatever they are doing to assist another person (Geng et al., 2022).

Previous Positive Experiences

A study by Haski-Leventhal et al., found that volunteers who have had positive first experiences, are more likely to volunteer again (2019). The study pointed out that if an individuals' initial experience was positive, they are more likely to participate in similar experiences and henceforth continue volunteering (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2019). As has been shown by previous studies, there are many positive motivators to volunteering. Because of these positive aspects, the inclination toward volunteering begun in college can lead to a lifetime of service.

Volunteerism in Helping Professions and Non-Helping Professions (*Geneva*)

Helping Professions Defined

The term "helping profession" is rather broad and includes various majors and careers (Graf et al., 2014). It refers to professions that aid individuals in dealing with the complexities

and issues that are a part of the human condition and these professions utilize special knowledge and intellectual techniques to provide that aid (Graf et al., 2014). With that being said, such professions can include health care, social work, psychology, education, law enforcement, etc. On the other hand, non-helping professions would inherently fall outside of this category. Some common non-helping professions include business, finance, art, journalism,

Volunteering and Choice of Majors

Cincalova and Cerna (2021) found that there is no correlation between a college student's major and their volunteer experience. The responses in that study also indicated that, from that specific sample of 282 Czech students, slightly more students from non-helping professions had engaged in volunteer experience than students from helping professions (Cincalova & Cerna, 2021). Another study conducted with 2,199 students from multiple European countries, found that students are more often motivated to engage in volunteer opportunities that relate to their field of study, regardless of whether it is in relation to a helping profession or not (Fenyés et al., 2021). On the other hand, Fenyés et al also found that students within helping professions are more likely to relate volunteerism to their course of study as compared to students in economics, business, engineering, and science. Their study additionally found that students in helping profession majors are more affected by career-building motivation to volunteer due to the fact that they relate volunteerism to their career path (Fenyés et al., 2021). Furthermore, a study conducted across twelve countries with 9,482 participants, found that although students are occasionally motivated by resume and career building aspects when it comes to volunteering, this is not one of the more prominent motivators and students are more motivated by altruistic aspects (Handy et al., 2010).

Overall, the examined studies did not find differences between the motivators and barriers of those in helping versus non-helping professions, and the main difference that does stand out is that students in helping professions are slightly more motivated to volunteer for career-building reasons. It is important to recognize that none of the studies found were conducted with students attending a private Christian university. Some of the studies were conducted over 20 years ago while the rest were either conducted utilizing samples that consisted of college students from other countries or samples that consisted of emerging and older adults with no college student representation at all. Therefore, the proposed study is important because it addresses a specific demographic and topic that previous studies and literature does not directly address. The proposed study will explore the barriers and motivators of volunteerism among college students in the helping and non-helping professions at a private christian university. It will also take into account the importance of volunteering during this time and the particular service learning requirements involved within the environment of the proposed demographic.

Methodology

Overview

Our study uses a mixed-methods strategy, integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, to answer the research subject. This method makes it possible to comprehend the intricate dynamics of barriers and motivations in volunteerism among college students in great detail. We have collected quantitative information on barriers and motivations as well as qualitative insights through surveys and in-depth interviews. Cross-sectional data collection is appropriate for capturing the current condition of barriers and motivations since it involves a single moment in time. To guarantee representation from various demographic groups, we will also use stratified random sampling. The data was evaluated using quantitative and qualitative

analysis. To protect our participants' rights and privacy, we have given great consideration to ethical issues such as informed consent and data privacy.

Quantitative Methods

Sampling and Recruitment

The researchers collected data from a sample. That sample was students from Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, TN. It is advantageous to look at the sample of college students since many have community service, volunteerism, or service-learning requirements to graduate from their given institution (Joseph et. al, 2022). The researchers used a non-random sample with a sub-group of convenience/ availability and quota.

The criteria to be a participant in the study one must be a registered student at Southern Adventist University as of Fall 2023 semester and be at least 18 years of age. The number of participants that is in the researchers tentative sample size is 150-200 participants. We will stop collecting data when we receive a total of 200 responses.

For recruitment we obtained participants for our sample by firstly, gaining clearance from Southern Adventist University to advertise our flier. Then subsequently posting flyers around the campus of Southern Adventist University that invite participants to take our questionnaire while having a QR code linked to the questionnaire (see Appendix A).

Measurement

Demographic Variables. The first portion of the survey questionnaire asked each participant demographic questions to determine their age, ethnicity, race, gender identity, class standing, and major. It also inquired if they were previously in any other majors prior to their current major and if so, how long were they in that major (see Appendix B).

Research Constructs. We measured the motivators and barriers that college students experience in regard to volunteering with survey questions that we have created for the study (see Appendix B). A total of six questions measured the participants' volunteer experience as well as their current volunteer engagement. These questions include “How many hours have you volunteered within the past month (1-3, 4-6, 7-9, or 10+)?”, “Was it required (Yes / No)?”, “Who do you usually volunteer with (Departments, Clubs, Churches, Civic Organizations, Work, Other-Specify)?”, “Did it align with your major (Yes / No)?”, “Do you tend to volunteer on the weekends or weekdays (Mon. – Fri. or Sat. and Sun.)?”, and lastly, “Do you receive credit (Yes / No)?”.

To measure the motivators for volunteering we used the Volunteer Inventory Functions (VIF) scale (Clary et al., 1998). There are 30 elements on the scale including statements such as “People I’m close to want me to volunteer”, “I feel compassion toward people in need”, and “Volunteering will help me to succeed in my chosen profession” (Clary et al., 1998). Each of these statements has a 7-point scale with 1 being equivalent to not at all important or accurate and 7 being equivalent to extremely important or accurate.

To measure the barriers of volunteering we utilized a questionnaire developed by Gage and Thapa. This questionnaire consisted of a five-point Likert scale with 1 being no influence and 5 being very strong influence. Within the questionnaire, there are three subscales: Structural, Interpersonal, and Intrapersonal. This scale includes statements such as “I have a limited budget”, “I have no one to volunteer with”, and “I think it will negatively affect my grades” (Gage and Thapa, 2011).

Data Collection

We collected data through a survey questionnaire on the Survey Monkey platform. The survey was accessed by QR codes which were posted on flyers around the Southern Adventist University's campus and the researcher's Instagram accounts. The surveys were self-administered and were estimated to take approximately 7-10 minutes (see Appendix D). The data was collected by the 3 primary researchers, Adam Bellis, Geneva Ferro, and Kyla Slaughter. Data will continue to be collected over 4 weeks until responses have been received from at least 150 participants. After all the data has been collected for both quantitative and qualitative sections, the researchers will conduct a drawing for three \$20 Amazon gift cards.

Protection of Human Subjects

Each study participant will be given a consent form to sign, outlining in straightforward language the goals of the study, its methods, and their rights as subjects of research. The information will include that they have been asked to participate, that it is completely voluntary and can be stopped at any time, the names of the researchers and the reason for the study, the steps involved, the anticipated length of the study, an explanation of the incentive and its requirements, a promise of confidentiality and anonymity, and the researchers' contact details. The electronic files containing the participant's data will be password-protected and kept private. Data and study-related materials in hard copy will be stored in secured cabinets. An IRB form will be submitted to attain approval for the research of this study. The identity of study participants will only be disclosed to the principal researchers and professors.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the survey was analyzed by the current version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS statistics version 29). We used descriptive statistics

to summarize each research and demographic variable (see Appendix ?). For our nominal and ordinal data, we reported the frequency in percentages. This includes the majority of our demographic variables (ethnicity, race, gender, class standing, and major) as well as the independent variables of volunteer experience and engagement. The mean and standard deviation will be calculated for our interval/ratio variables. These include one of our demographic variables (age), variables of motivators to volunteering, and variables of barriers to volunteering.

To answer our research question, “What are the barriers and motivators of volunteerism among undergraduate students in helping professions compared to other majors at a private Christian university?” We began by doing a descriptive analysis of the motivators and barriers (see Appendix A). The motivators of volunteering were measured using a Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) with a 7-point Likert scale: 1 – not at all important/accurate to 7 – extremely important/accurate (Clary et al., 1998). There are six subscales within the VFI: Protective Motives, Values, Career, Social, Understanding, and Enhancement. This scale provides us with a total score. The barriers to volunteering will be measured using a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale: 1 – no influence to 5 – very strong influence (Gage and Thapa, 2011). There are three subscales within the questionnaire: Structural, Interpersonal, and Intrapersonal. This scale provides us with an index. Next, we proposed nine t-tests for independent samples as a statistical analysis to analyze the comparison between the helping and non-helping professions on the 6 motivator subscale scores and the 3 barrier subscale scores. The significance levels were $p=0.05$ and the effect size will be Cohen’s D. If the assumptions of the t-test are not met, then we will append the data analysis with a non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test.

Discussion and Conclusion

Summary of Study

In order to see the motivations and barriers to volunteerism among current undergraduate college students in the helping and non-helping majors, we used a survey of a non-random and convenience sample of 150-200 participants at Southern Adventist University. We advertised this survey via flyers posted around campus, social media posts, texts, word of mouth, and physically passing out flyers. We collected data from the responses accumulated via survey.

Limitations

There are limitations to our study. First, our sample is limited to students at one university: Southern Adventist University. This limits generalizability to only the college population at a small, conservatively Christian university. The lack of random sampling further limits the generalizability to the larger number of college students. Additionally, responses are purely voluntary, which may result in a low number of responses which could greatly impact the quality of data that is received. It could jeopardize the validity because it is not completely representative.

Strengths

There are multiple strengths within the research being conducted. One strength would be the disclosures of researchers that include their own background and experience with volunteerism. Yet another strength is that because we have multiple individuals in our research group, we can have more than one person analyze/code the data. A last strength is that the measurement subscales for motivation to volunteer have a reliability of .8 which gives assurance of reliable results.

Implications of Findings and Recommendations

The research results will provide cross-sectional data on current undergraduate students' perceptions of motivators and barriers to volunteering; a comparison will be highlighted between

students enrolled in helping professions majors and all others. This research contributes valuable insights into the motivations and obstacles shaping the volunteering landscape among Christian university students, further informing service-learning program development and modifications to meet current student needs.

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