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# Helping the Me Generation Decenter: Service Learning with Refugees

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## INTRODUCTION

Recent research has empirically demonstrated that young adults today are different from prior generations in their decreased empathy, increased narcissism, and decreased civic engagement. The formative years of young adulthood are a critical period for the development of civic values and civil ideologies, a time when college-age adults need to acquire the experiences and skills to decenter and develop into civic-minded stewards of their communities. Engagement in service learning with individuals unlike themselves, i.e., outgroup members, is the approach we have taken at the University of North Florida to encourage this decentering through service learning engagement with refugees embedded in an honors colloquium during students' first term in college.

We took a three-pronged approach to the assessment of the impact of this service learning engagement. In the first approach, evaluations of student

responses to open-ended questions provided evidence of a reduction in their self-centeredness and increases in social empathy and multicultural competence. The second approach confirmed these changes in decentering by showing that honors students who were engaged in more interactive service projects with refugees scored higher on two measures of empathy—i.e., the Basic Empathy Scale Basic Empathy Scale (Jolliffe & Farrington) and the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Spreng et al.)—than did students engaged in less interactive service projects with refugees. In the final approach, evaluations of artifacts from the course suggested that levels of decentering, empathy, and civic action differed for students who had intensive versus superficial interactions with refugees.

Taken together, findings from the three assessment approaches converged to offer support for the value of intensive and interactive service learning experiences in which students interact closely with individuals unlike themselves. We discuss implications for the impact of service learning experiences like those in the honors colloquium described here on decreasing self-absorption and increasing civic engagement. We then outline limitations of the three approaches as well as the potential for future research.

## **BACKGROUND**

Every generation seems to complain about the following generation. Although we are always in danger of just showing our age, college students do seem to have changed over the years as American culture has increasingly promoted individualism (Bellah et al.; Twenge). Young adults also increasingly endorse materialistic values (Schor). According to the Pew Research Center in 2007, college-age adults overwhelmingly reported that becoming wealthy was one of their most important goals.

Another way that college students appear to have changed is increasing self-centeredness, which is measured through assessments of narcissism and empathy. Narcissism is characterized by self-aggrandizement, a sense of entitlement, and a lack of empathy (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides; Twenge, Konrath, et al.). The increase in narcissism in recent generations has been associated with declines in prosocial traits such as empathy, concern for others, civic orientation, and concern over social issues (e.g., Campbell, Bush, et al.; Smith et al.; Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman). Smith and colleagues reported that 96% of Americans age 18 to 29 were uninterested in civic affairs, community activism, or politics. This same generation reported that they would be less willing to donate to charities, less interested in social programs,

less willing to adjust their diets to help starving people, and less willing to change their behaviors to save energy or help with other environmental issues (Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman).

Similarly, a notable decrease in empathy has occurred among more recent generations (e.g., Campbell et al.; Konrath et al.). Several prosocial behaviors are associated with empathy: people high in empathy are more likely to engage in civic-minded activities, put in volunteer hours (Unger & Thumulari), donate money to charity, give money to a homeless person, help a stranger carry belongings, or care for a friend's plants or pets (Wilhelm & Bekkers).

Ehrlich defined civic engagement as “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference” (vi). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) maintained that civic engagement also requires civic behaviors in which people participate in activities that address concerns relevant to an individual as well as a community; by so doing, individuals involved in civic engagement feel personally enriched, and their communities benefit collectively.

Since the formative years of young adulthood are a critical period for the formation of civic values and civil ideologies, colleges and universities have a special obligation to encourage these values, and service learning accomplishes this goal. Researchers employing meta-analysis have identified a link between service learning and civic engagement (Celio, Durak, & Dymnicki.; Yorio & Ye). In addition to enhancing cognitive development and personal insight, service learning enables students to develop a deeper understanding of social issues (Yorio & Ye). Students engaged in service learning also tend to (a) develop more positive attitudes toward learning, (b) improve their social skills, (c) enhance their academic performance, and (d) increase gains in civic engagement (Celio, Durak, & Dymnicki). Furthermore, any enhancements in learning and engagement associated with service learning are above and beyond enhancements found in community service unassociated with courses (Astin et al.; Vogelgesang & Astin).

Evidence indicates, moreover, that certain kinds of college diversity experiences are related to civic engagement (Bowman). Dovidio and colleagues determined that interpersonal contact fosters intergroup empathy. Increased empathy and perspective mediate the relationship between intergroup contacts and prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, “How Does Intergroup Contact”). Integration of service learning and diversity experiences might, therefore,

promise to affect college students' social empathy more fully. Segal maintained that social empathy may be fostered through exposure, explanation, and experiences with individuals different from ourselves. In order to most effectively help college students decenter and become beneficent stewards of their communities, the ideals may be to (a) promote exposure to people different from students (in our case, refugees), (b) provide opportunities in which students observe firsthand the experiences of others, e.g., observing struggles to learn a new language, and (c) guide students in deriving explanations for other people's reactions to these experiences through service and reflection, e.g., reflective discussions and journal writing.

## **PURPOSE OF CURRENT INVESTIGATION**

In the studies reported here, we attempted to assess the impact of a first-term honors colloquium on incoming freshman honors students' degree of decentering. Honors students self-selected into one of ten service groups that provided services to refugees in the local community either in direct ways (i.e., events, soccer, mentoring, English tutoring) or indirectly (i.e., documentary film, fundraising, clothing drive, geographic information system (GIS), research, public relations). The majority of the 182 participants were 18 years old (86%), female (58%), and Caucasian (76%), and 90% were native citizens of the United States. These students also tended to have been high-achieving high school students, e.g., mean GPA = 4.35, mean SAT = 1231, mean ACT = 28, and mean AP/Dual Enrollment college credits = 18 hours. These students had typically been in special high school programs that offered significant college credit, had special admittance requirements, and likely segregated them into smaller and less diverse groups than a typical high school in terms of race and socio-economic class.

Immediately prior to beginning college, students admitted to the honors program completed an intensive 4-day retreat exclusively for honors students during which they engaged in community-building activities and exercises. One purpose of this retreat was to help these incoming students identify with the honors program and develop a sense of community, which made them an even more homogenous group. When these students who had typically been advantaged throughout high school came into contact with a group starkly unlike themselves, we hoped to see a significant increase in decentering. By selecting a colloquium subject (immigration and national identity) that is controversial and topical, we also hoped to provide an opportunity to decenter by thinking deeply and critically about their own assumptions and about

what they learn from the media. Finally, we hoped that the required contact with a group unlike themselves in terms of privilege and experience would be vivid enough to change the students' understanding of their place within the context of global privilege. We hoped that the sharp contrast in backgrounds between the students and the refugees as well as the intensely experiential nature of the class would cause a measurable change even in the short time of one semester.

During the honors colloquium, the entire group of honors students met weekly for ninety minutes of lectures, presentations, and class activities. Faculty members from different departments gave lectures: for instance, a historian talked about the history of immigration to America, an economist talked about the economic impact of immigration, and a biologist talked about what genetics tells us about human migration over the very long term. Some activities were specifically designed to foster empathy. For example, in a "refugee simulation" students went through a process similar to that of refugees arriving in the United States; they assumed roles as members of refugee families in different stages of acculturation and undertook a series of tasks in four fifteen-minute "weeks" trying to become economically self-sufficient. They then participated in a class discussion about the experience.

Following the large class meetings, small breakout groups of fifteen to twenty students met for ninety minutes to discuss the lectures and readings and to organize the service projects. Two upper-class honors student-facilitators, who had completed the colloquium and attended training sessions over the summer, led each breakout group. During breakout sessions, students engaged in reflective discussions about lectures, readings, and their specific service projects.

Other course assignments included more direct experiences designed to build empathy and reflect on connections with their service projects. For example, all students had to attend three "diversity activities" of their choice. These activities included eating at ethnic restaurants and attending events sponsored by groups to which they did not belong. The activities pushed students out of their comfort zone and put them in contact with people who had different experiences or worldviews. Students then wrote reflective papers on each of these diversity experiences. These reflective papers required students to conduct research to understand the cultural logic of the other groups and to understand their discomfort. Another assignment required students to research and write their family's immigration history. Students identified why their family came to the United States and compared their families' reasons to why people come to the United States today.

The service project was the activity designed to build empathy most directly. Service activities required contact with people who had arrived as refugees fleeing persecution and war in a range of countries that included Burma, Ethiopia, Iraq, Syria, Bhutan, Congo, and Colombia. Some of the adult refugees were highly educated whereas others could not read and write in their native language. Some came from wealthy backgrounds while others grew up in severe poverty. They arrived in the United States with very few belongings to start the arduous process of adapting to a new culture.

Each group of students had a different role in the project, and it offered them differing levels of engagement with the families who arrived as refugees. Students in the events group organized and hosted two events on campus for the refugee families: *Boo in the Q*—a Halloween party for refugees in Q building of the residence halls—and a Thanksgiving event that included a traditional dinner and a soccer clinic. Students in the soccer group coached refugee children and organized soccer games for the refugees. Students in the two mentoring groups worked directly with refugee children to help them adjust to relocating to the United States. The English tutors met with refugee adults and assisted them in learning English. These groups required weekly interaction with refugees and were termed "interactive." Another set of students had minimal interaction with the refugees and were termed "non-interactive." The documentary film group recorded various interactions between students and refugees and created a film that showed the impact on students and refugees. The fundraising group held activities like a dodgeball tournament and a talent show to raise money for the Halloween and Thanksgiving events. Students in the clothing drive collected coats and jackets as well as soccer balls and soccer cleats for the refugees. Students in the GIS group mapped the location of refugee resources, such as cultural food stores in the community, and then gave the maps to the community. The research group studied the histories and customs of the various ethnic and national groups among the refugees and made presentations to their fellow students during the colloquium to help them be more effective in their interactions with the refugees. The public relations group promoted the fundraisers and the Halloween and Thanksgiving events to the university community and beyond.

One goal of the course was to foster decentering and community stewardship among these young adults. In 1906, the influential social scientist William Graham Sumner, after assembling detailed anthropological observations, determined that people have a common tendency to differentiate themselves into "in-groups" and "out-groups." For more than fifty years, researchers have

studied intergroup dynamics and confirmed that people hold in-group/out-group biases (e.g., Allport; Pettigrew & Tropp, “How Does Intergroup Contact”; Quellar, Schell, & Mason; Tajfel et al.). In addition, researchers using neuroscientific approaches have determined that people feel less empathy for out-group members than for in-group members (e.g., Avenanti, Sirigu, & Aglioti).

The service projects were designed so that the in-group of honors student would interact with an out-group of refugees who differed from them in culture and socio-economic status. Although students shared some characteristics with some of the refugees, none of the students shared the salient experience of fleeing from their native country to avoid persecution or death, so asking them to decenter in relation to this group would increase our confidence in the results of our study. In order to gain an accurate picture of the impact of the honors colloquium and specifically the service project on honors students’ decentering, we took a three-pronged approach in which we examined (a) students’ responses to open-ended questions (qualitative evaluation), (b) students’ self-reported responses to measures of empathy (quantitative data), and (c) students’ course posters (artifactual examination).

## METHODS AND RESULTS

### Qualitative Examination

In this colloquium 171 participating students responded to questions about their perceptions of their service project and of immigration. Responses were predominantly positive (92.3%). The negative responses typically came from students in groups that had less direct contact with refugees and who were unhappy about their lack of involvement. One student wrote, “Personally, I didn’t get very much out of the service project since I was secluded from the refugees for the most part.”

In contrast, students in the interactive groups tended to respond with positive statements indicative of decentering. Many students were moved by the sacrifices immigrants made to gain skills they needed to prosper in a new country. Students were inspired by the refugees’ determination to take advantage of opportunities that would make them more successful. One student who served as an English tutor responded, “It was such a humbling experience to see grown men and women diligently coming to class at night despite having worked a full day already. They inspired me to take advantage of my education and to work to my fullest potential.” Interactions with the refugees



clearly had a significant impact on students' ability to process the refugees' experiences and to decenter more fully. Another student working directly with refugees noted, "Working with a Burmese family really broadened my worldview—watching the film on Burma was one thing, but I was able to empathize more with those on the screen because I've met four people who lived through it."

After contrasting their situations with those of the refugees, many of the students who were engaged in interactive service experiences expressed a sense of newfound gratitude for their circumstances. One student remarked, "It also helped me realize that not everyone has it as lucky as I do, and that I need to be more understanding with people and grateful for the things I have been blessed with." Another student who worked directly with refugees noted, "I am now more appreciative of the freedoms that our nation has provided me as well as the benefits of being in a first-world country that can assist others." Another student put it this way: "It blew my mind that people would have to wait in camps for years until they were found a place to go."

Other students expressed a sense of responsibility. One student described an epiphany: "My eyes have been opened to more current events across the world and to the people that need our help because they have no place to go." Another student simply and directly stated, "It made me want to get involved and help." Like many other students who interacted with the refugees, these students expressed a sense of empowerment in situations where they saw injustice, bigotry, or intolerance.

Students also noticed the connection between the interactive impact of their service experiences and other elements of the colloquium, e.g., lectures, readings, and assignments. One student noted,

This course allowed me to fall into the shoes of a refugee family, to see their struggles from their perspective. Prior to taking this course I had no idea that Jacksonville was home to so many refugees. From my experiences through mentoring, I can put an image to what was talked about in the lectures, specifically about the direct and indirect costs. Through the past 3 months I have learned how much the indirect costs affect a refugee family, how they struggled with our customs, and our language. I have gained a sense of appreciation for refugees, because I have seen how much they struggle and how much effort they have to put in to become adapted to our society.

This student acknowledged that serving as a mentor enabled him or her to put a face on the immigration issues discussed in lecture. Another student noted that assigned readings, panel discussions, and diversity assignments, in conjunction with the service element, “really opened my eyes to the different perspectives of people.” The influence of the other course elements on the service experience was a repeated theme in student responses.

Even those students who were themselves immigrants came to realize that their experiences and immigration stories were not necessarily typical of other immigrants. One immigrant student noted, “Learning about the struggles and pain of thousands who live here as refugees made it that much more real to me, and that empathy with their pain gave me a greater appreciation of their strength, happiness, and values.” For this student, decentering enabled her to empathize and engage in alternative perspectives.

The service learning experience and other course activities did not apparently promote decentering among a few students. One student wrote,

This course didn't help me at all in either area. I already view myself as a fairly aware person about what goes on in different things. While I may not have specifically acknowledged the specific aspects, none of them surprise me and I realize why things happen the way they do so I don't feel that my perspective has changed, only become more specific and less general in this area.

This student, while acknowledging a lack of knowledge about specifics, wanted to make it clear that he or she was already informed about service and immigration and had not benefited from the course in any way. Such comments tend to reflect some of the characteristics associated with narcissism, such as an inflated positive self-image, particularly agentic traits such as importance and power. Typically, however, students who claimed they had experienced no evidence of decentering nonetheless acknowledged the benefits to their classmates and the refugees.

Taken as a whole, the large majority of students' comments illustrated various forms of decentering, including increased empathy and appreciation of alternative perspectives. Relatively few students clearly remained resistant to decentering and stayed focused on themselves, inflating the value of their contributions or devaluing the impact of the refugee experiences. This preliminary, summative examination of emerging student observations of the course, specifically the service learning component, suggested that students decentered to varying degrees.

## Quantitative Examination

Of the original sample, 136 honors students volunteered to participate in a study of “Views of Yourself and Others.” In exchange for their participation, students were awarded course credit in the honors colloquium. Prior to beginning the survey, students indicated their willingness to participate after reading an online informed consent form. All responses were anonymous, and participants were able to discontinue the study at any time without penalty. All participants were treated in accordance with the 2010 ethical principles of the American Psychological Association.

As part of this survey, participants completed measures of empathy including the Basic Empathy Scale (BES) (Jolliffe & Farrington) and the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) (Spreng et al.). We chose these scales because of their psychometric properties concerning reliability and validity: for BES, see D’Ambrosio et al. and Mehrabian; for TEQ, see Baron-Cohen et al. and Spreng et al.

We employed two scales to establish convergent validity. For the BES, responses to items indicating a lack of empathy (e.g., “My friends’ emotions don’t affect me much”) were reverse-scored such that higher scores for all individual items indicated greater empathy. We then averaged scores on items, and higher average scores indicated greater empathy (for our sample,  $\alpha = .81$ ). For the TEQ, responses to items indicating a lack of empathy (e.g., “I remain unaffected when someone close to me is happy”) were reverse-scored such that higher scores for all individual items indicated greater empathy. We then averaged scores on items, and higher average scores indicated greater empathy (for our sample,  $\alpha = .72$ ). In our study, scores from these two measures were correlated,  $r = .72, p < .01$ .

Based on our review of the literature, we hypothesized that greater engagement in service learning with refugees would be related to decentering as exhibited by higher empathy. Specifically, we predicted that scores on the BES and TEQ would be higher for students in the interactive groups than for students in the non-interactive groups. There was a statistically significant difference in scores on the BES for students in the interactive and non-interactive groups,  $t(153) = 2.83, p = .005$ . Students in the interactive group ( $M = 3.83, SD = 0.38$ ) scored higher on the BES than did students in the non-interactive group ( $M = 3.66, SD = 0.35$ ). Not surprising given the correlations between the BES and TEQ, this pattern of scores was also true for the TEQ, with students in the interactive groups ( $M = 3.98, SD = 0.46$ ) scoring higher than students in the non-interactive groups ( $M = 3.84, SD = 0.37$ ),  $t(153) = 1.90$ ,

$p = .06$ . Although there were gender differences in scores on the measures of empathy, including gender as a factor in our analysis did not alter our other findings.

### **Artifactual Examination**

In addition to other assessments of student empathy, independent reviewers assessed 44 group posters produced by students while completing the honors colloquium. In their poster presentations, students discussed their service experiences and connections to course content (readings, lectures, guest speakers). Two independent evaluators who had not heard the oral presentations later used a rubric to assess an 8.5" x 11" printed replica of each poster. On a 4-point scale, posters were evaluated on three dimensions: Civic Action and Reflection, Connections to Experiences, and Intercultural Skills (AAC&U). Interrater reliability for scores on each of the scales—Civic Action and Reflection ( $r = .88$ ), Connections to Experiences ( $r = .87$ ), and Intercultural Skills ( $r = .51$ )—as well as on the combined scales ( $r = .86$ ) was statistically significant (all  $ps < .001$ ).

Civic Action and Reflection is conceptualized by the AAC&U as “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes” (Ehrlich vi). Civic Action and Reflection relates to decentering because, in order to attain these values, people must consider what is beneficial to members of the larger community and participate in actions that address community concerns rather than focusing on individual or personal concerns. To understand and appreciate the concerns of a community, an individual must be able to engage in alternative perspective-taking.

Connections to Experience demands that students broaden their points of view by linking what they learn in the classroom to experiences beyond it. The AAC&U suggests that to make these connections, individuals must at a minimum compare academic knowledge to “real world” experiences in order to ascertain associations and distinctions and recognize alternative perspectives. This focus on alternative perspectives is essential to decentering.

Intercultural Skills focuses on intercultural knowledge and competence. Intercultural knowledge and competence demand cognitive, affective, and behavioral capabilities that enable respectful, functional interaction in an array of cultural circumstances (Bennet). According to the AAC&U, development of intercultural skills necessitates an examination of one’s own cultural

imperatives and preconceptions, the ability to ask complex questions and seek answers that reflect multiple cultural perspectives, and an openness to alternative viewpoints.

These three dimensions were selected because they reflect the perspective-taking and openness that underlie decentering. Openness to new and unfamiliar experiences presumably enabled students to engage more fully in their interactions with the refugees as well as the information provided in the classroom. A capacity to assume alternative perspectives was crucial to understanding fully the plight of the refugees served by these students.

We found a similar pattern of assessment scores of the posters for the interactive versus non-interactive groups. There was a statistically significant difference in mean combined scores for the interactive groups ( $M = .91$ ,  $SD = .43$ ) compared to mean combined scores for the non-interactive groups ( $M=.42$ ,  $SD=0.30$ ),  $t(42) = 4.48$ ,  $p < .01$ . There was no statistically significant difference in scores between the service groups that were interactive. There was, however, a statistically significant difference in scores between service groups that were non-interactive such that the research group ( $M=0.00$ ,  $SD = .00$ ) scored significantly lower than all other non-interactive service groups: clothing drive ( $M=0.56$ ,  $SD=0.14$ ), public relations ( $M=0.67$ ,  $SD=0.58$ ), GIS ( $M=0.50$ ,  $SD=0.19$ ), fundraising ( $M=33$ ,  $SD=0.00$ ), and documentary ( $M=54$ ,  $SD=0.04$ ),  $F(9,34)=4.34$ ,  $p=.001$ .

Interactive groups also differed from non-interactive groups on each of the three dimensions. Interactive groups ( $M=1.28$ ,  $SD=0.43$ ) scored significantly higher than non-interactive groups ( $M=0.83$ ,  $SD=0.47$ ) on Civic Action and Reflection,  $t(42) = 3.25$ ,  $p=.002$ . Interactive groups ( $M=0.55$ ,  $SD=0.82$ ) scored significantly higher than non-interactive groups ( $M=0.12$ ,  $SD=0.29$ ) on Connections to Experiences,  $t(42) = 2.52$ ,  $p=.016$ . Finally, interactive groups ( $M=0.89$ ,  $SD=0.21$ ) scored significantly higher than non-interactive groups ( $M=0.31$ ,  $SD=0.35$ ) on Intercultural Skills,  $t(42) = 6.29$ ,  $p<.001$ .

Across all three indices, mean combined scores for all artifacts ( $M=.62$ ,  $SD=.43$ ) with average scores positively skewed ( $1.14$ ,  $SE=0.36$ ) indicated that there were many more artifacts rated below the median than above the median for the scale. These low scores may not be surprising given that these were first-semester college freshmen.

## DISCUSSION

Taken together, results from these three assessments provide support for the effectiveness of the honors colloquium and its related service learning

projects in helping students decenter. The same pattern of results emerged in each of the assessments, indicating that students engaged in service activities that provided greater interaction with refugees appeared to decenter more than students participating in service activities providing less interaction. Our findings are consistent with previous literature in which researchers have noted the value of sustained interaction with people of different backgrounds to increase diversity awareness (Marulla) and develop multicultural competence (Boyle-Baise). Students in the interactive groups received the exposure and experiences to arrive at explanations for the differences between themselves and the refugees that promote social empathy and discourage narcissism (Segal).

Our findings make sense in light of intergroup contact theory (see, e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, "When Groups Meet"). Intergroup contact theory assumes that interactions between members of different groups will improve attitudes toward the other group members. Researchers have demonstrated the benefit of direct contact in reducing prejudice and improving attitudes about members of another group (Pettigrew & Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test"). Other researchers have determined a benefit of indirect forms of intergroup contact as well, albeit to a lesser degree than direct contact (Crisp et al.; Miles & Crisp; Park; Wright & Aron). The difference in benefits between direct and indirect contact may explain the differences between interactive and non-interactive groups in decentering.

Researchers have also determined that the benefits of direct (Pettigrew, "Contact's") and indirect (Schmid et al.) intergroup contact are generalizable to the out-group as a whole as well as to outgroups not involved in the contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, "When Groups Meet"). Researchers have not assessed well the mechanism by which intergroup contact improves attitudes.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This preliminary research examining the impact of an honors colloquium and its related service component has two primary limitations. Students self-selected into service groups whereas random assignment would have allowed us to rule out the impact of third variables on decentering. Additionally, we conducted all assessments only after the students completed the course, so we could not determine whether differences in decentering resulted from differential levels of interactions with refugees or from students' preexisting levels of decentering. Because of these limitations, we cannot make any causal inferences about the impact on decentering of the colloquium or of the differential

interaction with refugees. We can, however, establish a relationship between the level of interaction with refugees and degree of decentering.

The results from this first assessment of the honors colloquium are encouraging. Although random assignment of students to service groups would be desirable in terms of research, students in the colloquium will continue to self-select into service groups because their interest in a subject enhances their perception that service is a learning experience and positively affects their understanding of academic course material (Astin et al.). Because students may be more or less interested in soccer, tutoring, technology, and other focuses of the service element, we intend to continue permitting students to select their service groups. We have also devised a method for matching pre-test and post-test scores on quantitative measures for future studies that will enable us to address in part the directionality problems identified in the current study.

Another issue is that assessments of posters were unusually low, possibly because posters were a visual aid and not meant to stand alone in communicating students' perceptions, attitudes, skills, or awareness. Reviewers had access only to posters and did not attend the poster presentations, and although students wrote reflective papers during the colloquium, they did not write a reflective paper related to the poster. Consequently, reviewers had nothing but the visual aid to review, putting them at a significant disadvantage. In future studies, students will also write a reflective paper to be included with posters and enable reviewers of artifacts to better assess the impact of the colloquium and service project on students.

Little if any previous research has been done on the impact that service learning has on students who work with refugees. Most of the research involving refugees or immigrants has focused on the implications of the service for refugees or immigrants rather than the students. Such research has also not focused on the outcome of decentering. As a result, we cannot compare our early findings to other student populations. Future research with other student populations would be beneficial in determining the degree to which service learning with refugees influences various indicators of decentering among college students more generally. Future studies could also focus on service learning with other out-groups, e.g., seniors, to determine if serving out-group members has a different impact on students than serving in-group members, e.g., tutoring college students.

These limitations notwithstanding, the results of the three investigations reported in this paper are a cause for optimism in helping students to decenter,

build empathy, and decrease egocentrism. Many of the service projects with refugees offered the colloquium students an intensive diversity experience, as described by Bowman, and promoted social responsibility (Kezar & Rhoads). As suggested by Dovidio and colleagues, the intergroup contact created by engaging in service learning with refugees apparently aided these students in developing empathy. The question remains whether the impact of these service learning projects will translate into a decentering that is sustained over time and generalizes to other contexts so that the students become stewards of their communities.

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