

Should I stay or should I go?

Exploring the impact of service learning on student retention through shared experience

Dr. Joan N. Shapiro Beigh, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee
Lubar College of Business Teaching Professor



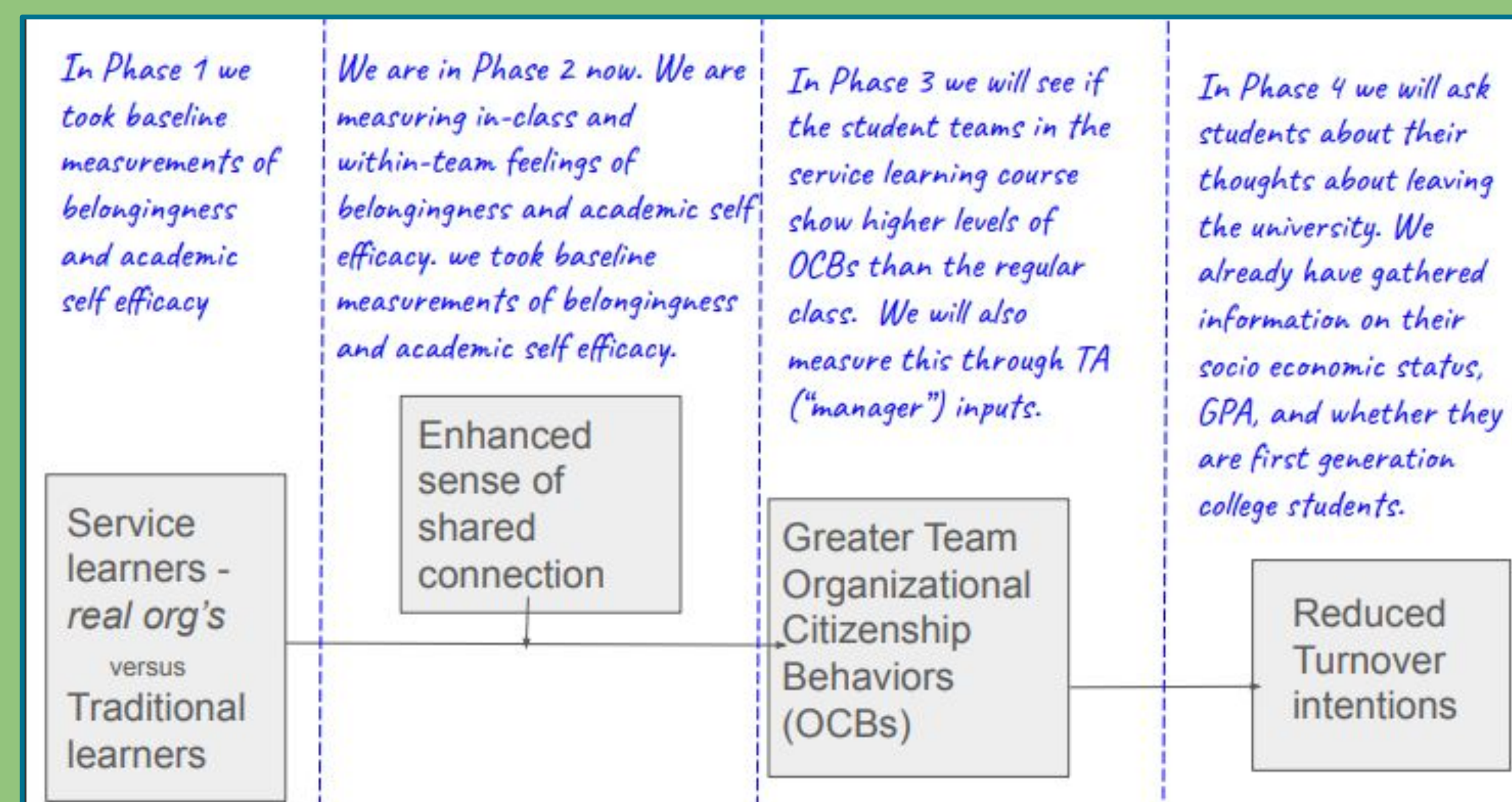
Contact Information

Dr. Joan N. Shapiro Beigh
The Lubar College of Business
ShapirJN@uwm.edu
414-251-6510

Key Research Questions

1. Does a shared experience around volunteering & relating the course content to create service learning lead to a greater sense of belonging in the classroom and in teams?
2. Does shared experience and belongingness lead to greater helping behaviors when students are on teams together?
3. In students with higher levels of "imposter syndrome," and lower levels of socioeconomic status, do their teammates' helping behaviors boost their academic self-efficacy and performance?
4. Might a great class and team experience around service learning reduce students' turnover intentions?

The Model



The Main Variables

Shared experience - is related to students sharing the experience of volunteering at the same organization and then discussing it in teams.

Belongingness - is related to fundamental development and wellbeing, feelings of acceptance, feeling valued, fitting in. (Rae et al., 2024)

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors - behavior that is outside of one's expected role, showing willingness to cooperate and be helpful to the organization or its members. (Organ, 1988)

Retention - is studied within the framework of turnover intentions, i.e., the conscious and deliberate intent to leave an organization. (Mobley et al., 1978) Turnover intentions are negatively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which may be translated into the university environment.

Lit Review -- What We Know / Don't Know

What we know

Much of the work on service learning (SL) and belongingness examines belonging and engagement in the local area community or in the college or university as a collective space. SL enhances general belongingness and retention. (He, 2019; Soria et al., 2019)

SL is particularly meaningful to students who support their home communities with volunteer work. (He, 2019)

Many large-scale samples have demonstrated a link between SL and retention.

Service learning has the greatest impact on lower socio-economic status ("SES") and minoritized students through their sense of feeling like they belong. (Beckett et al., 2022)

What we don't know

We don't know if service learning enhances classroom belongingness or the relationships in the classroom, e.g., Teamwork.

But, we don't know how meaningful it is for those who come from rural areas and support urban causes, which is the case at UW-Milwaukee, an access school that draws from all over Wisconsin and beyond.

If service learning's belongingness is strong enough to increase retention from the impact of one semester long class that students take.

If this impact translates into belongingness in student-run teams in classes, such as through a sense of shared experience from volunteering at the same location.

What we know

Among the types of organizational citizenship behaviors, "helping behaviors," i.e., to people in organizations or on teams is important to organizational culture and performance. (Graham, 1989)

Employees show more helping behaviors (rated by supervisors) when they have a stronger sense of belonging at work. (Kyei-Poku, 2014)

Lower SES students and first generation students have lower academic self-efficacy and perform at a lower level than other students. (Wiederkehr et al., 2015)

Academic self efficacy is predicted by mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal and social persuasion and physiological states

(Gebauer et al., 2020)

What we don't know

We don't know if student teams discussing their collective service learning experiences at the same organization leads to a sense of belonging for all team members due to a shared, visceral experience.

We don't know if the shared experience from bringing service learning observations into the classroom to analyze an organization using course concepts will create a sense of academic self efficacy and belonging in team members, particularly those with lower SES or first generation students.

What we know

As of 2015, only 60% of all students completed their 4-year degrees within six years. (Blumenstyk, 2015)

This is consistent with UWM's more recent data.

Career intervention programs influence retention and 4-year graduation rates. (Clayton et al., 2018)

Service learning positively influences student retention. (Yob, 2014)

What we don't know

The data we have at UWM is very general. For example, we may know that the lowest and highest achieving students are more likely to leave, but we don't know the factors that keeps the mid-level students engaged through graduation.

We don't know if students perceive the service learning in their classroom setting is relevant to their careers, beyond just volunteering and observing the organizational content.

We don't know if service learning in one class can influence turnover intentions, which is the inverse of retention.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's (1993) model of student attrition --
Integration & personal fit is key to retention.

+
Knowles's (1980, 1990) theory of adult learning --
Like business students, adult learners are practical, want their studies to be relevant and immediately useful. They like hands-on learning, not just informational content. They are highly goal-directed -- college offers a pedigree and a cohort of skills that they expect to be able to put to use immediately in the workforce.

=
Why these two theories fit well together --
"Together, these constructs suggest that academic and social integration, active participation and engagement in learning, and application and relevance of the subject-matter under study are key factors in student success." (Yob, 2014, p. 38)

References

- Beckett, L. K., Lu, F., & Sabali, S. (2022). Beyond inclusion: Cultivating a critical sense of belonging through community-engaged research. *Social Sciences*, 11(3), 132.
- Blumenstyk, G. (2015). *American higher education in crisis? What everyone needs to know*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Clayton, K., Wessel, R. D., McAtee, J., & Knight, W. E. (2019). KEY careers: Increasing retention and graduation rates with career interventions. *Journal of Career Development*, 46(4), 425-439.
- Gebauer, M. M., McElvany, N., Bos, W., Koller, O., & Schöber, C. (2020). Determinants of academic self-efficacy in different socialization contexts: Investigating the relationship between students' academic self-efficacy and its sources in different contexts. *Social Psychology of Education*, 23(2), 339-358.
- He, S. (2019). Finding home: Developing a sense of belonging through service-learning. *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*, 7(1), Article 4.
- Knowles, M. S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy* (Rev. and updated ed.). Chicago, IL: Follett.
- Kyei-Poku, I. (2014). The benefits of belongingness and interactional fairness to interpersonal citizenship behavior. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 35(8), 691-709.
- Organ, D. W. 1988. *Organizational citizenship behavior: The good soldier syndrome*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Rae, V. I., Smith, S. E., Hopkins, S. R., & Tallentire, V. R. (2024). From corners to community: exploring medical students' sense of belonging through co-creation in clinical learning. *BMC Medical Education*, 24(1), 474.
- Soria, K. M., Hufnagle, A. S., Lopez-Hurtado, I., & Do, T. (2019). Exploring the differential effects of service-learning on students' sense of belonging: Does social class matter? *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*, 7(1), Article 8.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Wiederkehr, V., Darnon, C., Chazal, S., Guimond, S., & Martinot, D. (2015). From social class to self-efficacy: Internalization of low social status pupils' school performance. *Social Psychology of Education*, 18, 769-784.
- Yob, I. (2014). Keeping students in by sending them out: Retention and service-learning. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, 4 (2).

Learnings so far ... Numbers are not in yet!

#1 Conduct the research *after* mastery is achieved

This is my first time teaching this course as a service learning - shared experience based course. Researching something I am just now introducing is premature.

#2 It's tough to measure courses that are "apples & oranges" - it's better to have two in-person courses

It is difficult to compare 2 courses where lectures are in-person versus lectures are pre-recorded. That said, both classes have in-person discussion sections, and surprisingly, the online lecture students are doing better in their quiz scores.

#3 Focusing on the practical connections - the service learning & the course material - helps the traditional class

I've learned that students in both courses appreciate when I de-emphasize the theoretical in favor of practical applications. I can see this better through the lens of teaching a service learning course.