

Sample Sociology SRP Proposal

Names of Applicants: Dr. Danielle M. Currier, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Sociology, Abigail Smith '15. Sociology Major

Title: Exploring the factors that encourage and/or motivate students at Randolph College to participate in volunteerism.

Abstract

This research project will explore the factors that encourage and/or motivate students at Randolph College to volunteer. A review of academic literature on the topic of volunteerism shows that there has been a decline in the amount of research being done about volunteering since the 1990s. In addition, there is a lack of literature about volunteering among college students, particularly among those at small private liberal arts colleges. Given this gap in the research, disseminated results of this study will contribute to the wider academic community. In addition, this research will be useful to the Randolph College's Office of Leadership and Engagement which is in the process of examining the current level of community service among RC students as they begin to strategize about how the College can promote and support more volunteerism among RC students in the future.

This research will include both qualitative and quantitative methods; I will conduct repeated and detailed observations and interviews in March, April and May of 2014. I will also administer a survey to all RC students in April 2014. Using two methods will allow me to get a full and in-depth understanding of what RC students are doing (or not doing) in terms of volunteerism as well as answer the questions "what do they think and feel about volunteering?", "why are they doing it or not doing it?", and "how can we increase the amount of volunteerism among Randolph students?" This data will be helpful in recommending approaches the various offices in the Dean of Students Office can take to effectively get RC students to volunteer.

Project Descriptions and Goals

Volunteering covers a broad scope of activities, so for the purpose of this study, I define volunteerism as nonobligatory helping (e.g., Penner, 2004). Even though the wider society may not encourage volunteering as much as it used compared to the First and Second World War periods (Putnam 2000), Taylor (2007) discovered that the act of volunteering is an important component of college that helps student's future development. However, colleges and universities need to be mindful of requiring too much of students, as research has shown that being forced to volunteer (extrinsic/external motivation) may reduce intrinsic/internal motivation to volunteer (Stukas et al. 1999). In fact, Beehr et al (2010) found that non-required volunteers report a stronger commitment to and satisfaction with their university as well as stronger internal and weaker external motivation to volunteer than do required volunteers. This suggests that it may be important to manage service learning programs to enhance students' experience of freedom in their choice to volunteer (Beehr et al., 2010), thus potentially increasing intrinsic motivation.

Research has shown that there are clear demographic trends in who volunteers and why (Manning,2010; Petrelka,2006). The clearest trend is gender differences. Although both women and men report valuing volunteerism (Fletcher 2004), women have a 15.8 times higher odds of volunteering than men (Manning 2010) .In fact, in 2012 the U.S. Bureau of Labor reported that women volunteer at higher rates than do men across all age groups, educational levels, and other major demographic characteristics. While both genders value the importance of volunteering for humanitarian reasons (Fletcher 2004), there exist differences in the motivation to volunteer between both genders. Petzelka (2006) found that in later life women are more likely to volunteer as it is a form of “women’s work” and men are more likely to engage in volunteer work that is reflective of their occupational history. I hope to explore if this may be an indicator of volunteer activities men and women at the college level choose to participate in.

Although there is not much literature about volunteering and its impact on academics, there was one study done in 2011 on Boston Colleges Pulse program (Seider 2011) which showed results pertinent to the proposed study. The Pulse Program is a yearlong optional course which serves as a community service learning program that seeks to help participants understand the barriers to economic mobility in their community at Boston College. The researchers found that this course had a significant impact on students’ belief about poverty and inequality, as the students left the program with a greater recognition of the structural factors that cause these problems. It is also noted that this kind of knowledge about structural factors derived from volunteering is beneficial in acquiring new skills, future class discussion along with information for writing course assignments (Seider, 2011; Fletcher, 2004).

Volunteering is without a doubt a part of college life in the United States(Seider,2011). I hope to use my research to expand on the literature about volunteering among college students in the 21st century which is currently lacking. Trends in volunteering are reflected in one’s social awareness (Knapp 2010 ;Fletcher 2004; Austin 1999), academic (Seider 2011) and sexes (Manning 2010 ;Fletcher 2004).

While students at Randolph College currently participate in civic engagement and volunteerism at different rates and in different capacities (such as with a class, sports team, independently, or with a club/organization as reported by Amanda Denny, Director of Leadership and Engagement) much of their motivation to do so is unexplored. The primary goals of this research are:

- 1) to make observations about the levels and type of volunteerism that are currently happening at Randolph College;
- 2) gathering information about the motivations and volunteering patterns at Randolph College;
- 3) analyzing the results to provide suggestions about what volunteerism should look like at Randolph;
- 4) proving practical recommendations to the Office of Engagement and Leadership as they move forward to increase volunteerism rates and interest in the future.

To gather this data I will use mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative research instruments. First, in April, I will administer a survey via Survey Monkey to all full-time Randolph students about their demographics, their experience with volunteering/civic engagement, and their attitudes toward participation in volunteering. I will analyze this data using SPSS, the statistical data analysis program. Second, I will utilize various qualitative methods to gain more in-depth information on attitudes about the meanings of volunteering among RC students. I am currently doing an internship with Amanda Denny as Community Service Intern, so I have the opportunity to interact with volunteers and other students doing internships. Thus, I will be able to carry out field research. My internship requires me to be a part of and facilitate the “alternative spring break” trip, which allows students to serve those in need in Lynchburg or the wider community. I will use this opportunity to conduct field research and observe differences and similarities of men and women along with other demographics intent and attitudes toward volunteering. In addition, I will also conduct one-on-one interviews with students; I will tape these interviews, have them transcribed, code them (as per sociological methodology), and (with help from Dr. Currier), do analysis to compare with the results of the surveys. (Please see attached appendix of draft of survey and interview questions.)

This research is related to both Abigail’s interest in volunteerism among college students and Dr. Currier’s commitment to advising internships and encouraging volunteerism among students. The main action items from Abigail’s internship can be found below:

1. Community Service Task Force: examine what community service should look like at Randolph College and work on building the structure of the program for future semesters.
2. Creating Community Partnerships: attend meetings with the Director of Leadership and Engagement with local non-profits organizations to determine how Randolph College can create a stronger partnership with their organization.
3. Volunteer Website: aid in building a webpage that allows students to see what volunteer opportunities are in the Lynchburg and surrounding communities. Contact non-profits for permission to list them on the website. Goal is to include: Organization name, Volunteer Services Coordinator Name, Contact Information, and List of ongoing project that they need help with.
4. Publicity of new Programs: help publicize the Office of Leadership and Engagement to students on campus as it has taken on a new structure. Promote events taking place this semester on campus and through social media.

Academically, this project will allow Abigail to apply the skills she learned in sociology and psychology courses. In addition, Abigail will be able to conduct a complete research project, pulling together all the skills and theory she has learned as Sociology major. This experience will be beneficial as she plans to pursue a master’s degree in Sociology with a concentration in Student Affairs.

The period of summer research is optimal for completing this study. Most of the data collection will be completed by the end of the spring semester. This is advantageous as Abigail is currently enrolled in SOC 396 (Social Research Analysis), with Dr. Currier and can get ongoing guidance on data collection.

The plan for the summer period is below:

- 1) Completing a literature review (begun in the spring semester) about volunteerism among college students; identify the demographics of volunteers and their level of commitment to activities; the motivations and lack of volunteerism among different groups along with any other previous research that speaks to civic enjoyment and college communities.
- 2) Identify aspects of attitudes and behavior gathered from the literature and from Abigail's spring observation about volunteerism.
- 3) Analyze the quantitative and qualitative data gathered in the spring (survey data and observation/field research/interviews).
- 4) Conclude a set of recommendations for the college and write

Dissemination Goals

The Sociology Department requires that all majors complete at least 3 internship credits before graduating. The department is strongly committed to civic and public engagement, but recognizes that earning college credit for community work is the most efficient and practical way to engage students in the community. Thus, the final paper for this project will be included in the annals of the Sociology department along with senior theses. In addition, this work will have the potential to be presented at National Conference on Undergraduate Research or a variety of regional sociological meetings. In addition the results will be available to the campus community and recommendations will be presented in a detailed report to the Office of Engagement and Leadership in the Dean of Students.

External Funding

We should not need any external funding to complete the project.

Budgetary Needs

We do not anticipate any special budgetary needs.

Past Outcomes

Statement about Student Researcher

There are two time periods for this project – during the Spring2014 semester, and during the 8-week summer research program.

In the Spring semester, with my guidance, Abigail will conduct an extensive literature review on volunteerism and civic engagement. This will include looking at the literature in Sociology, Social Psychology, Psychology, Social Movements, and any other fields we find pertinent to this topic.

After this review is complete, Abigail will assist in designing and administering the survey described in her portion of this application. The survey questions will reflect findings about salient topics related to volunteerism as well as ask questions designed to fill gaps in this literature. I will train her on Survey Monkey and she will be responsible for creating the template for the survey itself.

Concurrent with the design and administration of the survey, Abigail will conduct observation at various internship sites (accompanying Amanda Denny, using field-note-gathering techniques she is

learning in class) and conduct one-on-one interviews with interns if necessary to glean more information from individuals about motivation to participate in volunteering.

During the summer research period, Abigail will assist in the simultaneous analysis of the quantitative data gathered from the survey and the qualitative data gathered in the observation and interviews.

I will be working closely with Abigail on every aspect of this project. She took Soc295 (Methods) with me last year and is currently taking Soc396 (Advanced Analysis), so she will be structuring this project by the social science research guidelines learned in those classes (which coincide with the methods she learned in Psychology). During the Spring semester, we will meet at least once a week to discuss the construction and progress of the project. I will be available to her via email or phone during normal day hours. During the Summer Program, we will be in touch daily (either in person or by phone) to discuss the analysis portion of this project. I will also guide her closely in the writing of her analysis.

This project will allow Abigail to see how all aspects of a social science research project are designed and implemented. She will be partner to every stage of the process, from development of a concrete research question to the final write-up and presentation of final data analysis. She is deeply interested in volunteerism and civic engagement both as a professional (she has completed several internships and is currently a Head Resident) and as a person (she is deeply committed to service to others, as her life trajectory can show). Because of this combination of professional and personal interest in the project, I believe her participation will give her deep satisfaction at uncovering the answers to some interesting and perplexing questions (primarily, how to get people to volunteer more) as well as help her clarify her professional goals, or at least what she wants to pursue directly after graduating from Randolph.

Abigail is well-qualified for this project due to her work in both Sociology and Psychology and her strong academic record. She is a highly motivated student with the ability to multi-task well. In addition, she is highly reliable and I know if I give her a task, she will complete it. From her strong academic success in her methods courses, she is well-versed in data gathering methods and by the time we have gathered all the data, she will have completed her advanced analysis course (Soc396). She is a strong student and learns quickly, so I am sure that if she encounters any problems, she will not hesitate to ask me or another of her Sociology or Psychology professors for assistance.

There is nothing in Abigail's background that gives me pause regarding her ability to successfully complete this project. She has a lot of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as her track record both academically and personally clearly shows.

Statement from the Student

Volunteering has always been something that I have been passionate about since growing up in Jamaica, "To whom much is given much is expected" was a household quote that I adopted from early on and giving to those in need to alleviate some social issue became something I enjoyed doing. It therefore always puzzles me when other fortunate young adults show no interest in contributing their time or energy to alleviate social issues. In addition, I feel that my experience in a country where I am

readily exposed to see the difference between rich and poor encourages me to help those less fortunate than me. This is a reality that most of many middle-class American students take for granted as some of them are blinded by their privilege. I am therefore interested in this project as it will reveal the attitudes of my peers towards volunteering at Randolph, how to better motivate the students to volunteering, and provide recommendations for DOS as they move forward with their office of student affairs. I feel that the volunteering program at Randolph has the potential to bridge gaps between various student groups, encourage and strengthen the leadership skills of students, build local and regional partnerships with non-profit organizations, and increase student involvement at Randolph.

In addition, this project will allow me to gain valuable research experience and integrate academic knowledge learned from past courses. I have learned about research in SOC 295 (Research methods), SOC 366 (Social Theory), SOC 396 (Social Research Analysis), PSCY101 (Intro to Psych I), Psych 102(Intro to Psych II), PSYCH (Statistics for psychological research I) and I have learned about civic engagement and volunteerism in SOC 310 (Community). I am therefore confident that I will be able to use my skills gained to apply them to a research project. In addition, this research project will allow me to tie together my experience studying sociology and psychology.

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Survey

1. **Sex**
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other

2. **Year in school**
 - a. First-Year
 - b. Sophomore
 - d. Junior
 - e. Senior
 - f. Other _____

3. **Race**
 - a. White
 - b. Black or African American
 - c. Hispanic, non-white
 - d. Hispanic, white
 - e. Indian
 - f. Chinese
 - g. Other Asian
 - h. Native American
 - i. Other

4. **Major & Minor** (if not declared what are you thinking about)
5. **GPA**
 - a. 1.5 – 1.99

- b. 2.0-2.49
- c. 2.5-2.99
- d. 3.0- 3.49
- e. 3.5- 4.0

6. **How frequently do you volunteer?**

- a. Daily
- b. Weekly
- c. Monthly
- d. Yearly

Please use the definition of volunteering as “the act of serving or offering ones services without pay in return” to answer the following questions.

7. **How do you find out about volunteering opportunities?** (Please choose any that apply)

- a. ELC
- b. Professor
- c. Friends
- d. Club or organization
- e. Newspaper
- f. Social Media
- g. Parents
- h. Other _____

8. **Where do you volunteer?** (Please choose any that apply)

- a. At school
- b. Off campus
- c. Online
- d. Sports
- e. Human Rights
- f. Animals
- g. Racial Issues
- h. Other _____

9. **Why do you volunteer?** (Please choose any that apply)

- a. Class credit
- b. Enjoyment
- c. For a club or organization
- d. Something to put on my resume
- e. Sport requirement

- f. Career stimulated
- g. Other _____

10. **What topics do your volunteering** activities usually center on? (Please choose the top three answers) a. Childcare

- b. Poverty
- c. Business
- d. Children Rights
- e. Housing
- f. Environmental
- g. Other _____

Please use this alpha scale below to answer the statements in 11- 17

- a. Always
- b. Most of the time
- c. Often
- d. Sometimes
- e. Rarely
- f. Never
- g. Not Applicable

- 11. You enjoy volunteering.
- 12. You use information gathered from volunteering in the classroom.
- 13. You feel that you will use information gathered from volunteering for the rest of your life.
- 14. You feel that you will use information gathered from volunteering in future jobs.
- 15. You feel that you would use information gathered in relationships with other people.
- 16. You feel that volunteering strengths your awareness of your community.
- 17. You feel that volunteering increases your knowledge about the world.
- 18. Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things.
- 19. Volunteering makes me feel like a better person.
- 20. Volunteering helps me to understand concepts discussed in the classroom.
- 21. Volunteering in college is a new activity for me.
- 22. Volunteering is helpful in attaining my future goals.
- 23. Volunteering has helped me figure out more about what I want to do with my life
- 24. Volunteering has helped me clarify my values, morals and ethics.

To gather more information on this topic the researcher would like to conduct interviews. If you are willing to participate please provide your email address below so that the researcher may contact you.

Thank you. Email: _____

Interview

1. Are you currently volunteering?
2. Where are you volunteering? How long have you been volunteering?
3. What do you dislike/like about it so far?
4. What have you enjoyed the most about your present or past volunteering experiences?
5. Do you usually volunteer by yourself or with others? Why?
6. Have your volunteering experiences been school related or other?
7. What group of disadvantage people do you usually volunteer with the most?
8. Do you find yourself referencing volunteering experiences in class?
9. Does volunteering inform you about things regarding your community that otherwise you didn't know?
10. Does volunteering inform you about information regarding the world that otherwise you didn't know?
11. Do you find that volunteering offers you a new perspective on things? Explain?
12. Do you see yourself volunteering in the future?