Self-Determined Service-Learning Framework: Enhancing Graduate Students’ Perceptions of Competence

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Self-Determined Service-Learning Framework:
Enhancing Graduate Students’ Perceptions of Competence

By
Jamie J. Langlois

Banded Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctorate in Social Work

St. Catherine University - University of St. Thomas
School of Social Work

May 2019
Abstract

Decades of research have demonstrated that service-learning is an effective pedagogy. However, service-learning practices in higher education were primarily designed for undergraduate students. Leading scholars in community-engaged research have begun to acknowledge that distinct practices are needed for graduate-level service-learning. This banded dissertation begins to fill this gap by infusing Self-Determination Theory (SDT) with service-learning pedagogy to meet graduate students’ needs and enhance their self-efficacy. The first product is a conceptual manuscript that explores the potential relationship between SDT and curricular service-learning on the graduate level. Initial findings suggest that infusing SDT allows students the freedom to follow their interests which increases satisfaction. The analyses culminate in a new cross-disciplinary framework for graduate-level curriculum design and evaluation — the Self-Determined Service-Learning (SDSL) framework. The second product is a mixed methods study that explores graduate students’ mezzo and macro practice efficacy in an integrative capstone course. The SDSL framework was applied throughout the pedagogy (intervention) and research methods. Triangulated findings indicate that students had a statistically significantly change in their self-efficacy. Furthermore, mixed methods results provide insights into how and why self-efficacy was enhanced and offer a strong indication that graduate students will pursue macro practice in the future. The research supports the use of SDSL pedagogy in graduate capstone courses to enhance practice efficacy. The third product is a conference presentation that describes dissatisfaction in a capstone course and how the use of SDSL pedagogy changed student attitudes. The purpose of this presentation is to equip educators with promising service-learning practices for working with graduate students. The SDSL framework, corresponding research, and practice tools outlined in this dissertation further the scholarship of teaching and
learning by providing direction for community-engaged educators and researchers that want to meet the diverse needs of graduate students and enhance their self-efficacy.

Keywords: social work, capstone, cross-disciplinary, service-learning, framework, self-determination theory, self-efficacy, graduate, MSW, self-determined service-learning
Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by thanking the primary person that made this journey possible, my husband, Matthew Langlois. You made countless sacrifices while simultaneously cheering me along. Furthermore, beyond financial and emotional support, you edited my papers, brought groceries to my mother, and relieved my parenting guilt by maintaining a warm and happy home. Every day I am reminded how fortunate I am to have you in my life.

To my children, Johanna, Madeline, and Troy – thank you for your unconditional love throughout this taxing and rewarding endeavor. Your snuggles and laughter have kept me energized to stay the course during difficult times.

To the faculty, staff, and leadership of the St. Catherine University-University of St. Thomas Doctorate of Social Work (DSW) Program, thank you for seeing and fostering my potential as a social work educator. I thank you for your dedication to students, your hard work delivering a quality experience, and your constant support and guidance along the way. I have learned so much from each faculty member, but I would like to express special appreciation to Dr. Mari Ann Graham, Dr. Kingsley Chigbu, Dr. Barbra Shank, Dr. Laurel Bidwell, and Dr. Jessica Toft. You stand out to me because you stretched my thinking in new and different directions and helped me develop confidence beyond what I knew was possible.

To the members of the DSW Cohort 3, thank you for your support, honesty, and friendship. You have been there for me every step of the way, and for that, I am eternally grateful. Each of you has made an impact on my work and life. You have become my forever friends and colleagues.

Finally, to my fellow faculty, staff, and leadership at Grand Valley State University, my sincere appreciation for your support in this journey. I owe thanks to all the individuals who
paved the way and helped spark my love of higher education, but five people deserve special thanks: Dr. Dianne Green-Smith, Dr. George Grant, Dr. Scott Berlin, Dr. Elaine Schott, and Dr. Julie Guevara. Your extra efforts helped prepare my path for success and provided needed guidance. Thank you for your unwavering support.
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Self-Determined Service-Learning Pedagogy: Promising Practices to Enhance Graduate Students’ Perceptions of Competence

Social work education is well suited for service-learning because civic engagement aligns with core tenets of social work practice defined by the National Association of Social Work and the values and philosophy of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (Gerstenblatt & Gilbert, 2014; Phillips, 2007; Phillips, 2011). This banded dissertation furthers the scholarship of teaching and learning by investigating the role of self-determination theory (SDT) and service-learning pedagogy in graduate-level social work education.

Service-learning pedagogy was developed within higher education but primarily outside of social work education. University-level involvement in service-learning began in the mid-80s with grass root collaborations such as the Campus Compact which valued democracy and integration of community engagement in teaching (Campus Compact, n.d.). Presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton demonstrated national support for community engagement by passing the National and Community Service Acts (NCSA) of 1990 and 1993 (Lemieux & Allen, 2007; Lucas, 2000). These acts encouraged universities to offer student academic credit for participating and problem-solving in community-based issues.

A groundbreaking study of 22,236 college students conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA found promising results from service-learning in student growth in academic, personal, and civic involvement (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000). These results, along with the development of a peer-reviewed academic journal, *Michigan Journal of Community Service-learning*, laid the foundation to establish the academic effectiveness of service-learning (Zlotkowski & Duffy, 2010).
Social work education is a relative latecomer to service-learning methodology; nevertheless, the relationship is a natural fit given social work educators’ long acceptance of community-based learning (Phillips, 2007). In fact, social work educators like Mary Richmond and Edith Abbott shattered institutional norms at the beginning of the twentieth century by demanding community-based field practice in higher education (Austin, 1986). One hundred years later, community-based learning is reinforced by the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) which identifies field education as the signature pedagogy in social work (CSWE, 2008; CSWE, 2015). While social work has long embraced community-based learning through field education, the incorporation of service-learning remains limited in social work education (Petracchi, Weaver, Schelbe, & Song, 2016).

This banded dissertation builds on scholarly service-learning literature conducted inside and outside of social work education. The first product takes an appraisal of service-learning pedagogy across disciplines. A review of the literature found that studies primarily consist of case studies of a single course or program that are mostly descriptive in nature and are rarely based on relevant existing theories that provide a framework for understanding the outcomes of service-learning (Holsapple, 2012; Whitley, 2014). The review also found the need to distinguish graduate-level service-learning from its well-defined counterpart in undergraduate service-learning (Harris, 2017). Therefore, the first dissertation product examines the relationship between self-determination theory and service-learning pedagogy and introduces the Self-Determined Service-Learning (SDSL) framework for pursuing self-efficacy outcomes on the graduate level.

The second product is an original mixed methods study of the SDSL framework for service-learning conducted on the graduate level in social work. A review of social work service-
learning studies found that service-learning pedagogy has broad application at both the undergraduate and graduate level (Lemiex & Allen, 2007; Petracchi et al. 2016). However, social work scholars have only started to recognize that graduate service-learning needs to be distinct from undergraduate service-learning (Campbell, 2012; Deck, Conner, & Cambron, 2017). The research findings in product two begin to fill the void in social work and other disciplines regarding effective practices in service-learning at the graduate level.

The final banded dissertation product is a peer-reviewed presentation describing the application of the SDSL framework in a graduate capstone course. Research shows that service-learning enhances student engagement, prepares students to be contributing citizens, has a significant impact on social and emotional development, and enhances the achievement of curricular goals (Roldan, Strage, & David, 2004). However, these outcomes are primarily rooted in pedagogy and practices intended for undergraduates leading scholars to call for distinct service-learning practices at the graduate level (Howard & Harris, 2016). This final product provides distinct service-learning methods for graduate education that promotes social action and develops scholars. The presentation provides a concrete understanding of the course structure, instruments used, and how to embed self-determination principles in service-learning pedagogy to activate student ownership of learning.

**Conceptual Framework**

The dissertation products are bound together by the Self-Determined Service-Learning (SDSL) framework which infuses self-determination theory (SDT) with service-learning pedagogy. SDT is a meta-theory grounded in three basic psychological needs which are essential to healthy functioning and social development: autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2017). The theory posits that healthy growth and development are
fostered when an individual’s psychological needs are satisfied (Ryan & Deci, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2017). There is an assumption that people are growth-oriented organisms who naturally seek and engage challenges in their environment (Ryan & Deci, 2002). This framework conceptualizes people as actively working to actualize their potential, capacity, and sensibility. However, while the human tendency is toward actualization, the social environment can support or thwart actualization. The relationship between the person and the environment is dialectical. Moreover, an autonomy-supportive environment increases intrinsic motivation and promotes internalization (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2009). In this dissertation, an autonomy-supportive environment is coupled with service-learning pedagogy in the pursuit of healthy growth and development.

Service-learning pedagogy is the central method used in the SDSL framework to achieve student outcomes. Service-learning methods provide a structure to support students in developing projects that allow for meaningful choices (autonomy) and competency development. Service, reflection, and reciprocity are three widely recognized components of service-learning (Jacoby, 1996; Phillips, 2011). SDSL framework places equivalent emphasis on reflection, service to the community, and the development of collaborative and mutually respectful relationships between students and the community partners (Furco, 2011, Harkavy, 2004, Lemieux & Allen, 2007).

The banded dissertation provides potential application and implications for integrating SDT with service-learning pedagogy as a means to enhance graduate students’ self-efficacy. Studies indicate that an autonomy-supportive environment paired with service-learning promotes self-efficacy (Levesque-Bristol & Stanek, 2009; Richards & Levesque-Bristol, 2016). Aligning with SDT, the SDSL conceptual framework assumes that informed student choices (autonomy), opportunities to integrate and master knowledge (competence), and a sense of professional
belonging (relatedness) are integral to internalized student self-efficacy (outcomes). According to self-efficacy theory, actual competence and perceived efficacy are usually correlated (Bandura, 1986; Urdan & Turner, 2007).

**Summary of Banded Dissertation Products**

This banded dissertation consists of a conceptual manuscript, a mixed methods study, and an annotated analysis of the author’s peer-reviewed presentation at a national conference. The first product is a manuscript titled “A Conceptual Framework for Graduate-Level Self-Determined Service-Learning.” The manuscript introduces a new conceptual framework that infuses self-determination theory (SDT) with service-learning pedagogy. To meet graduate students’ diverse needs and experiences, a new SDSL conceptual framework and specific practice approaches are presented. This manuscript conceptualizes how to approach service-learning with graduate students to create meaningful experiences. However, the paper concludes that research is needed to understand whether SDSL pedagogy enhances graduate students’ perceptions of competence (self-efficacy).

The second product is titled “Graduate-Level Service-Learning: Building Confidence to Lead Organizational and Community Change.” Using a mixed methods approach (convergent parallel design), the study explored graduate students’ mezzo and macro practice efficacy in a social work capstone course (N=15). The SDSL framework informed the course and research design. Quantitative results indicated a statistically significant increase in self-efficacy (t(28) = -7.18; p < .001). Complimentary qualitative data reinforced instrument results. Mixing at interpretation also provided a deeper understanding of the elements that impacted students’ self-efficacy and broader knowledge regarding students’ future intentions. Product two supports the use of the new SDSL framework for teaching graduate students, which is a distinct model from
those used with undergraduate students. The SDSL framework begins to fill the void in social work regarding effective practices in service-learning at the graduate level.

The third product is titled “Graduate Level Curricular Service-Learning: Creating Social Action and Developing Scholars.” This product is an annotated summary of slides from a peer-reviewed interactive workshop conducted on Thursday, April 5th, 2018 at the Gulf-South Summit (GSS). A consortium of southern universities organizes GSS, which is considered the leading national conference on service-learning in higher education (Gulf-South Summit, 2017). The presentation focused on the application of SDT elements in a graduate-level social work capstone course to meet graduate students’ needs. Attendees received examples of service-learning scholarship and updated student satisfaction data. The presentation concludes that capstone changes enhanced graduate students’ satisfaction, challenge, and meaning in their work.

Discussion

This dissertation is bound by the SDSL conceptual framework, which grounds all three products. SDT flows throughout the SDSL framework influencing the primary components of service-learning pedagogy (intervention) and student outcomes. The first conceptual product combines elements of practice wisdom, theories, and service-learning literature to deeply explore and propose a new service-learning framework for graduate students—the SDSL framework. Furthermore, the SDSL framework was presented at the leading national service-learning conference. The conceptual product and national conference presentation feedback reinforced the SDSL framework; specifically, the importance of satisfying graduate students’ basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness to create a meaningful service-learning experience — information from these two products culminated in a mixed methods study conducted in a graduate-level capstone course. The study asked whether adhering to the SDSL model enhances graduate students’ self-efficacy as the framework suggests; how students
reflect on their intellectual and personal self-efficacy; and how mixing interpretations provides a deeper broader and more comprehensive understanding of student’s perceptions of competence.

Educators and researchers know that students’ developmental level must be considered when designing good service-learning curriculum (Doberneck, Bargerstock, McNall, Van Egeren, & Zientek, 2017; Howe, Coleman, Hamshaw, & Westdijk, 2014) or risk mixed results (Astin et al., 2000; Roldan et al., 2004; Rosing, Reed, Ferrari, Bothne, 2010). However, educators have limited knowledge and research about what works at the graduate level (Harris, 2017). The scholarly products from this banded dissertation begin to fill the void and guide graduate-level educators by supporting the use of the SDSL framework to enhance self-efficacy. Infused with SDT, SDSL is distinct from undergraduate curricular service-learning because it builds on graduate students’ diverse experiences and interests. SDSL is a promising framework for educators who want to use service-learning to meet the diverse needs of all graduate students, create an environment for meaningful learning, and enhance student self-efficacy.

The three products in this banded dissertation provide rich clarity regarding the application of the SDSL framework throughout the pedagogy (intervention) and student (research) outcomes. Decisions, reasons, practices, and assumptions were described in depth. Therefore, researchers have extensive information to replicate both the interventions and research methods in pursuit of more generalizability across social work capstone courses. Beyond replication, more research is needed in other graduate-level courses to determine whether the SDSL framework is effective. While the SDSL framework demonstrates promise in one graduate-level capstone course, the implications are constrained by the size and context of the study. The purpose of the capstone course is to integrate and synthesize knowledge and competencies gained throughout the program, lending itself easily to an autonomy-supportive
learning environment (SDT) where the educator takes a supportive role. However, using SDSL framework in other graduate courses for different purposes (i.e., clinical practice, diversity awareness, research methods) needs further exploration.

Social work education has historically blazed the trail for community-based learning. As national attention shifts toward graduate-level service-learning, relevant frameworks are needed for understanding the outcomes of service-learning (Holsapple, 2012; Whitley, 2014). This banded dissertation furthers the scholarship of teaching and learning in social work by introducing a new SDSL framework that assists educators in designing and understanding graduate-level service-learning outcomes.
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PRODUCT 1

A Conceptual Framework for Graduate-Level Self-Determined Service-Learning

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Abstract

Graduate students expect challenging and meaningful educational opportunities. Findings from previous studies indicate that the application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) with service-learning pedagogy meets student needs and promotes competence. However, scholarly literature is devoid of guidance on graduate-level service-learning methods and research. As universities begin to extend community engagement into graduate education, community engaged scholars acknowledge that new approaches are needed to meet the elevated and diverse needs of graduate students. This conceptual article introduces promising graduate-level teaching model and describes the largely unexplored relationship between SDT and curricular service-learning in the scholarly body of literature. These analyses culminate in a new cross-disciplinary conceptual framework for graduate-level curriculum design and evaluation that promotes self-efficacy.

*Keywords:* self-determination theory, service-learning, curricular, competence, self-efficacy, graduate-level, conceptual framework, pedagogy, cross-disciplinary
A Conceptual Framework for Graduate-Level Self-Determined Service-Learning

Teachers only need to teach on the graduate level for a brief period of time to recognize that teaching and learning practices that work for undergraduate students do not necessarily apply. Yet, scholarly literature is devoid of guidance on the distinctions of teaching graduate students. Ed Neal (2015), UNC-Chapel Hill teaching consultant and editor of *The Journal of Faculty Development*, explains that the majority of literature on higher education pedagogy is about teaching undergraduates, and the primary argument for teaching graduate students is that it is a mentoring relationship rather than a teaching relationship. However, scholars seem to agree that the banking model of education, or the knowledge transfer from *expert* to *apprentice*, is no longer sufficient in undergraduate or graduate education (Barnett & Coat, 2005; Fink, 2013; Grunert O’Brien, Millis, & Cohen, 2008).

Current graduate students are increasingly diverse and committed to making a difference through community engagement (Doberneck, Bargerstock, McNall, Van Egeren, & Zientek, 2017). Furthermore, as Millennials (individuals born between 1979 and 1994) firmly occupy graduate programs, scholars suggest that teachers need to create meaningful, challenging, and experiential teaching methods to meet their needs (Carlson, 2005; Harris & Cullen, 2007). While service–learning is inherently experiential, the existing research on graduate-level service-learning is limited and discipline-specific, limiting application for teachers and researchers (Harris, 2017). The problem with the diverse body of research is the inadequate amount of foundational knowledge for teachers to inform effective service-learning design (Holsapple, 2012). Teachers are further challenged by the enormous investment in logistics and time in developing service-learning only to achieve varying results (Richards & Levesque-Bristol, 2016; Rosing, Reed, Ferrari, & Bothne, 2010). *Graduate programs*—both masters and doctoral—need a
conceptual framework to guide service-learning teaching and research practices and meet the unique needs of graduate students.

The purpose of this article is to introduce a conceptual framework for graduate service-learning curriculum design and evaluation that meets student needs and promotes self-efficacy (perceptions of competence). This paper addresses a gap in service-learning pedagogy and research by providing a new graduate-level conceptual framework. While scholars recognize a student’s “year in school” is an important variable in service-learning (Roldan, Strage, & David, 2004; Whitley, 2014), there is minimal knowledge of what works on the graduate level (Harris, 2017). The concepts for the Self-Determined Service-Learning (SDSL) framework are grounded in the practice experience of the author and scholarly literature. The primary argument is that curricular service-learning informed by self-determination theory (SDT) meets graduate student needs and promotes competence. In this paper, the author describes personal teaching experiences and feedback in undergraduate and graduate education from 2010-2015 and the promising graduate-level teaching implications found by incorporating SDT principles into a revised approach to teaching on the graduate level. Practice experiences are followed by a critical review of the largely unexplored relationship between SDT and curricular service-learning in the research. The literature is synthesized to explain how the application of SDT can meet student needs and promote self-efficacy. These analyses culminate in the SDSL framework for graduate service-learning curriculum design and evaluation.

**Defining of Primary Concepts**

**Curricular Service-Learning**

Service-learning has three widely accepted and necessary components: (a) service, (b) reflection, and (c) reciprocity (Jacoby, 1996; Jacoby, 2015; Phillips, 2011). Service-learning is
different from other community-based work such as volunteerism, community service, field education, and internships because service-learning places equivalent emphasis on student learning (reflection), service to the community (service), and the development of collaborative and mutually respectful relationships (reciprocity) between students and the community partners (Furco, 2011; Harkavy, 2004; Lemieux & Allen, 2007). Service-learning can include civic engagement or democratic participation in civic processes, but it is not requisite (Jacoby, 2015). Moreover, the curricular service-learning described in this article is based on a method of teaching, often called service-learning pedagogy, which focuses on the integration of students’ skills and knowledge to solve problems, create change, and question the status quo (Butin, 2015; Furuto, 2007).

**Self-Determination Theory**

SDT is a meta-theory with an organismic viewpoint that humans innately want to grow, master ambivalent challenges, and integrate new experiences into a unified sense of self (Ryan & Deci, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2017). The theory posits that three basic psychological needs are universal to healthy functioning and social development: these needs are autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Dover, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT is centered on key assumptions. Some assumptions are: (a) that people are inherently motivated to grow; (b) that motivation includes both amount and orientation; (c) individuals naturally seek competence; (d) healthy development requires ongoing nurturing and support; (e) external motivation is inferior to internal motivation and thwarts potential; (f) freedom from control is optimal to well-being and development; and (g) supported interaction with the environment is desirable (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2017).
Activities and learning that are intrinsically motivated result in adaptive learning and competency. However, Ryan and Deci (2009) recognize that not all learning is intrinsically motivating. Therefore, teachers can nurture student well-being by providing meaningful choices, reasons for requirements, and an autonomy-supportive environment to foster student integration of external requirements (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). An autonomy-supportive environment is fostered by the teacher and begins with learning and connecting with students and encouraging students to take increased ownership of their own learning (Ryan & Deci, 2009). A common misconception of self-determined practices is that autonomous decisions are individualistic (selfish). Considerable evidence indicates that the need for autonomy and the need for relatedness are symbiotically connected where the satisfaction of each “need is intertwined with the fulfillment of the other” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 293). Essentially, individuals seek belonging (relatedness) with those they perceive to care, and those connections influence the individual’s perceptions to create integrated decisions. Therefore, students’ decisions are connected with their need for belonging to their field of practice and teacher and are not individualistic.

A Difficult Lesson to Learn

In fall 2009, I worked with several colleagues to develop a capstone course for undergraduate and graduate social work students to align with accreditation and assessment requirements. The curriculum was redesigned to support the student development of an electronic portfolio (ePortfolio) which was a broadly supported high-impact practice (Coleman, H., Rodgers, G., & King, J., 2002; Kuh, G. D. 2008; Rickards et al., 2008). The changes required all undergraduate and graduate students to collect artifacts-materials from their meaningful assignments, events, and activities-and upload them into an electronic portfolio system. Students collected artifacts throughout their tenure in the program, and during the final capstone course,
they integrated the artifacts into a compelling ePortfolio to demonstrate their mastery of prescribed competencies.

While the new capstone focus was not a significant change for the undergraduate students, who were accustomed to creating paper portfolios, the change was not well received by graduate students or faculty. In response to the changes in the graduate capstone course, most of the full-time faculty who had historically taught the course stopped teaching the graduate capstone course. Observations and conversations regarding this phenomenon revealed faculty’s agitation with the perceived external controls and threats to their academic freedom. Within one year, five out of six graduate capstone sections (approximately 120 students) were taught by part-time adjunct faculty.

Throughout the turmoil, I taught capstone courses in both the undergraduate and graduate programs. The capstone courses for both programs followed the same structure, although the graduate students wrote, reflected, and demonstrated the attainment of advanced competencies while undergraduate students focused on competencies. Personal course evaluations revealed that undergraduate students were appropriately challenged by the development of the ePortfolio and proud of their accomplishments; whereas, graduate students felt the ePortfolio was too simplistic, repetitive of prior reflections, and met institutional needs rather than their needs. In the summer of 2015, the graduate exit survey which measured implicit program objectives had several qualitative statements suggesting that capstone was a waste of time and money. To better understand the exit survey results, all graduate capstone course evaluation comments from the five proceeding years were compiled. There were more than 125 comments which overwhelmingly indicated graduate students’ frustration with the capstone course. Students felt
that the course was a poor use of time and that the ePortfolio was useless to their learning and development as a professional. Some comments that encapsulate student sentiments include:

- Capstone class is pointless & a waste of time. I will not use the competencies or portfolio after graduation.
- This class was something that could have been done completely outside of class time, writing assignments about competencies. The time spent in class was not worthwhile and I do not feel like I gained any knowledge or skills.
- This class is designed in a way that does not really benefit the students.
- I believe that there were more important issues that could have been discussed during capstone and not as much time spent on portfolio/core competencies. (Lopez-Arias, 2015, pp. 2-4)

The lessons from this experience showed that the methods that work in undergraduate teaching do not necessarily work in graduate teaching, that faculty who feel externally controlled will disassociate themselves from the work, and graduate students want challenging and meaningful experiences that are worth their time and meet their needs. While it is not surprising that undergraduate teaching methods do not necessarily work on the graduate level, it was confusing when evidence continues to suggest that the development of graduate ePortfolios is a “very powerful experience” (Janosik & Frank, 2013, p. 18). This raises the question of why ePortfolio development is viewed as a waste of time in one program and considered a powerful experience in another program. This distinction is particularly important as curricular service-learning begins to spread from undergraduate to graduate programs. It is important to harness the elements for powerful service-learning that meet students’ needs.
Meaning in Service-Learning

Once the reality of the discontent with the ePortfolio was absorbed, faculty unanimously decided to discontinue the curricular practice of developing an ePortfolio in the graduate capstone course. It was clear that the new capstone course needed to be worthy of students’ time, but there was no consensus regarding worthy endeavors. Some faculty advocated for an employment preparation course and others wanted an integrative advanced practice course. Ultimately, it was decided that students would be best served by allowing full-time faculty members to teach the capstone course in ways they preferred, and that students should be allowed to select the section that suits their needs. A tenured professor asserted that multiple approaches to instruction, by skilled and creative full-time faculty, can lead to similar student outcomes (J. Johnson, personal communication, March 16, 2016). Faculty agreed that while all sections of the capstone course would be taught differently, content related to ethics and development of the professional self would be consistent.

After reviewing the literature on capstone course design, a service-learning methodology was selected (community-based projects) to support students’ synthesis and integration of program learning. Jacoby (2015) describes the use of service-learning in capstone courses as enabling “students to integrate and apply their learning from throughout their college years through advanced intellectual and creative work that addresses a community issue or need” (p. 95). While a service-learning capstone was a high-impact practice and a good fit, there was one problem, the literature that supported the use of capstone projects or community-based projects was rooted primarily in undergraduate education (Finley & McNair, 2013; Jacoby, 1996; Jacoby, 2015). Multiple studies have found it necessary to give attention to service-learning design and application, including an orientation toward motivating students or risk creating negative student
perceptions regarding the experience and future civic engagement (Roldan et al., 2004; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000). I became concerned that this high-impact practice would also feel obligatory or meaningless to graduate students. To create meaning (worthy of time) for graduate students, I applied principles developed by Barry J. Fishman, Academic Innovation Fellow at the University of Michigan and co-creator of Gameful Learning, which are derived from SDT. Fishman identified three principles that support a learning environment that creates optimal challenges and meaningful experiences for students:

- feeling like you can make choices that matter,
- being part of something bigger than yourself, and
- being supported as you develop competence. (2016, para. 4)

Adult learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of choice and collaboration in the process of learning and knowing (Freire, 2005; Knowles, 1980), supports Fishman’s principles. Knowles, Swanson, and Holton (2005) argue that adult students want to learn on their own terms, in areas pertinent to their lives, and centered on their life experiences. Additionally, the mere fact that graduate students have enrolled in graduate education demonstrates that while they are much more self-directed and experienced, they seek support in reaching their goals. SDT posits that students are most engaged and motivated when they are autonomously supported in their quest for competence (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Therefore, it seemed that capstone community-based (service-learning) projects could be challenging and meaningful to graduate students if SDT informed the curriculum. However, more information was needed to understand the relationship between SDT and curricular service-learning better. The following section provides a critical review of the literature to understand the relationship and identify potential outcomes.
Self-Determined Service-Learning Literature

Decades of research have demonstrated that service-learning is a powerful pedagogy for student learning. Student outcomes from service-learning have been positively associated with identity development, personal growth, identity formation, efficacy, leadership, learning, self-confidence, skill development, critical consciousness, commitment to service, social justice, personal privilege awareness, responsibility to encourage social change, and cultural awareness, among many other outcomes (Whitely, 2014). However, as the capstone example illustrates, more is required to deliver a high-impact course that achieves meaningful outcomes for graduate students.

While there are hundreds of studies on service-learning pedagogy, there are few studies that investigate service-learning pedagogy with SDT, and none of these studies investigate student outcomes on the graduate level. Scholars have studied service-learning pedagogy with SDT: (a) to compare student outcomes in voluntary versus required service-learning (Kackar-Cam & Schmidt, 2014); (b) to understand how autonomy, competence, and relatedness are associated with a future commitment to service (Kackar-Cam & Schmidt, 2014); (c) to explore whether student motivations enhance a desire for continued service (Soria & Thomas-Card, 2014); (e) to understand if self-efficacy and self-regulated motivation impacts civic learning (Richards & Levesque-Bristol, 2016); and (f) to assess the relationship of an autonomy-supportive learning environment on motivation and outcomes (Levesque-Bristol & Stanek, 2009; Richards & Levesque-Bristol, 2016). Given that the focus of this article is on creating meaningful, challenging, and experiential learning opportunities to meet graduate students’ diverse needs, the following section considers student outcomes from the SDT and service-
learning studies that recognize the significance of the autonomy-supportive learning environments.

Deci, Schwartz, Scheinman, and Ryan’s (1981) landmark study demonstrated that autonomy-supportive classrooms promote intrinsic motivation, perceptions of competence, and better self-concepts in students. These findings are confirmed at every level of education, in the United States, and in several countries (Ryan & Deci, 2009). Levesque-Bristol and Stanek recognize that using a pedagogy such as service-learning is only as effective as the “learning climate established between the teacher and the student” (2009, p. 262). These scholars evaluated how the learning environment in a service-learning course impacted students’ motivation and students’ perception of their learning. In accordance with SDT, findings indicated that the autonomy-supported learning environment increased students’ motivation and their self-efficacy. Furthermore, findings from Richards and Levesque-Bristol’s (2016) recent service-learning study reinforces the need for learning environments that support self-efficacy and self-regulated motivation.

While there is limited research on curricular service-learning informed by SDT, initial findings support the vast body of SDT research on autonomy-supportive environments, which demonstrate students’ increased perceptions of competence. Knowles (1980) developed a list of required competencies for adult learners: (1) knowledge, (2) insight, (3) attitude, (4) skill, (5) interest, and (6) value (p. 228). Elliot and Dweck (2007) add that “competence can be seen as a basic psychological need that has a pervasive impact on daily affect, cognition, and behavior, across age and culture” (p. 8). Perception of competence is also labeled self-efficacy. Student self-efficacy is a desirable outcome for most teachers because it demonstrates the student’s confidence in the capacity to carry out skills to achieve successful outcomes in the future.
(Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy requires reflection on the skills one possesses; therefore, actual ability and perceived efficacy are usually correlated (Bandura, 1986; Urdan & Turner, 2007). While increased self-efficacy is likely in graduate-level service-learning informed by SDT, Aronson and colleagues (2005) found that students with more preparation are more likely to experience better outcomes from service-learning. Furthermore, Roldan, Strage, and David (2004) acknowledge that a student’s “year in school” and motivation are important variables in determining service-learning outcomes. Therefore, while service-learning research on undergraduate students shows increased self-efficacy, teachers should anticipate better and more advanced competency outcomes for graduate students.

The studies on service-learning research infused with SDT on the undergraduate level simultaneously meets students’ needs and increases self-efficacy. Therefore, graduate-level service-learning has significant potential. The following section integrates the previously described lessons learned from graduate student feedback and the research finding into a new conceptual framework for graduate service-learning curriculum design and evaluation.

**A Conceptual Framework for Self-Determined Service-Learning**

Graduate-level service-learning warrants a new conceptual framework to meet the needs of graduate students. The proposed framework is grounded in adult learning assumptions derived from the above-mentioned practice experience. The framework assumes that: (a) graduate students come into degree programs with diverse and rich lived experiences and capacities, (b) students seek learning to meet personal and career goals, (c) students want guidance to reach their goals, (d) students desire optimal challenges to actualize their goals, (e) program curricula prepare capstone students for challenges, and (f) one common service-learning project cannot meet all student needs. Given these assumptions, the following section describes a conceptual
framework for Self-Determined Service-Learning (SDSL) that meets graduate students’ elevated and diverse needs for competence (see Figure 1).

SDT flows throughout the SDSL framework to increase motivation and influences service-learning pedagogy and outcomes (see Figure 1). SDT is explicitly represented through the promotion of an autonomy-supportive learning environment which increases intrinsic motivation and promotes internalization through relatedness, ultimately satisfying students’ basic psychological needs for autonomy and competence (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2009). Guided by SDT, this framework assumes that informed student choices (autonomy), opportunity to integrate and master knowledge (competence), and sense of professional belonging (relatedness) are integral to internalized self-efficacy. Furthermore, the SDSL framework infuses clarifying SDT elements from Fishman’s principles to ensure meaning.

![Figure 1](image.png)

*Figure 1.* The self-determined service-learning framework shows the relationship between self-determination theory and service-learning components resulting in student self-efficacy.
and optimal challenge. Specifically, students need choices that matter, opportunities to influence something bigger than themselves, and support to develop optimal competence (Fishman, 2016).

Service-learning pedagogy is the central method used to achieve student outcomes. This pedagogy is demonstrated in Figure 1 by three concentric circles, with student self-efficacy in the center. Service-learning pedagogy is typically informed by postmodern paradigms, primarily critical or constructivist (Whitley, 2014). A constructivist teaching philosophy aligns well with service-learning pedagogy and SDT because the paradigm values authentic learning opportunities, placing the students at the center of instruction, and co-creation of knowledge (Karagiorgi & Symeou, 2005).

The SDSL framework incorporates three widely accepted and necessary components of service-learning: service, reflection, and reciprocity (Jacoby, 1996; Phillips, 2011). The service-learning methodology described in the SDSL framework places equivalent emphasis on reflection, service to the community, and the development of collaborative and mutually respectful relationships between students and the community partners (Furco, 2011, Harkavy, 2004, Lemieux & Allen, 2007). Moreover, the graduate-level service-learning addresses the criticisms of Butin (2015) and Furuto (2007) by focusing on problem-solving, creating change, questioning the status quo, and transformation.

Self-efficacy is the central outcome because service-learning research infused with SDT demonstrates increased student self-efficacy (Levesque-Bristol & Stanek, 2009; Richards & Levesque-Bristol, 2016). Student self-efficacy is a desired outcome for most teachers because it demonstrates the student’s confidence in the capacity to carry out skills to achieve successful outcomes in the future (Bandura, 1986). While the SDSL framework supports service-learning
pedagogy with predetermined competencies, to further align with SDT, teachers can create a more leading-edge learning experience by collaboratively developing efficacy outcomes with students and community partners (Gerstenblatt & Gilbert, 2014).

The SDSL framework was developed by the author to capture the perceived relationship between SDT, a constructivist teaching philosophy, service-learning pedagogy, and student self-efficacy to meet student needs. SDT flows through the course design, the service-learning project, and ultimately influences student outcomes. The SDSL framework provides the necessary construct to design graduate-level service-learning courses and evaluate student self-efficacy across disciplines. In fact, this framework was applied to one graduate capstone course and resulted in a significant change in students’ attitudes. The following section expounds upon this course and provides concrete examples of how to apply SDSL throughout curricular service-learning.

**Application of the Self-Determined Service-Learning Framework**

The capstone redesign used the SDSL framework to create meaningful and challenging experiences to meet graduate students’ needs and achieve efficacy outcomes. The subsequent section provides examples of how the three conditions of intrinsic motivation and Fishman’s principles were applied in a service-learning curriculum.

**Condition One: Autonomy**

The capstone redesign supports graduate students in completing an optimally challenging community-based project. To align the course with SDT, students are given options or *choices that matter* to foster intrinsic motivation (Fishman, 2016). Choices begin by giving students the
freedom to select one of three capstone options. If students choose the service-learning capstone, they select an issue they would like to address and choose a community partner from their existing relationships (see Table 1). Sometimes students are very passionate about an issue, but they do not have an existing relationship with a community organization. At other times, students have a community partner, but they are not interested in completing the project that the partner desires. These issues are discussed, and support is provided to assist the student in

### Table 1

**Self-Determination Theory Integration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDT</th>
<th>Fishman’s Principles</th>
<th>Application in the service-learning course to create an autonomy-supportive environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Autonomy          | Feeling like you can make choices that matter             | • Freedom to a select community partner—allowing for optimal challenge  
|                   |                                                            | • Choice to work in a group or independently  
|                   |                                                            | • Collaboratively identify a project with a community partner to impact a real local or national issue  
|                   |                                                            | • Negotiate content, class time, speakers, due dates, & grades  
| Relatedness/ Belonging | Being a part of something bigger than yourself | • Make a difference on a local or national issue-social action creates meaning outside the classroom  
|                   |                                                            | • Integrate previous coursework, scholarly literature, & best practices in project approaches  
|                   |                                                            | • Professional belonging with selected community partner as the student leads the initiative  
|                   |                                                            | • Teacher’s acceptance demonstrated through strengths-based feedback & natural consequences  
|                   |                                                            | • Empowered to identify & address ethical dilemmas that may result from projects  
|                   |                                                            | • Scholarship-dissemination of work & outcomes  
| Competence        | Being supported as you develop competence                 | • Teacher believes that each student has the capacity to achieve  
|                   |                                                            | • Concrete project development tools, timeline, & explanations of purpose  
|                   |                                                            | • Support through mistakes, setbacks, & project adjustments  
|                   |                                                            | • Critique of project proposal early in the semester by service-learning and community engagement professionals  
|                   |                                                            | • Handmade reflection notebook to assess learning  

students have a community partner, but they are not interested in completing the project that the partner desires. These issues are discussed, and support is provided to assist the student in
making the best decision. Students are given a choice to work in groups or independently. Furthermore, aside from some fixed course experiences (e.g., learning course expectations, the project defense, the project showcase, and the final project reflections), students decide how much time to spend developing the project and how to use class meeting time. Classroom content is determined collaboratively with the students to meet their needs.

When students are given these meaningful choices, they identify optimal project challenges that maximize their learning potential. Optimal challenges, or flow, occur when there are clear goals, a balance between the perceived challenge and perceived skills, and clear and immediate feedback (Csikeszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh, & Nakamura, 2007). Conversely, learning environments that are externally controlled (i.e., external goals, imposed values, and coercive rewards) thwart autonomy and make learning a chore (Ryan & Deci, 2009).

**Condition Two: Relatedness**

Fishman (2016) states that students want to be a *part of something bigger than themselves*. In graduate education, this translates into work that has meaning outside of the classroom. The capstone redesign provides students with a sense of professional belonging to the community, employing their professional skills, to address a real community need. Prior to identifying a project, students reflect on their learning throughout their tenure in the program and how that work has prepared them (see Table 1). This process assists students in making new connections to previous learning and reinforces a sense of preparedness. Then students review the scholarly literature about their identified issue and work collaboratively with their community partner to determine an appropriate project. The collaborative nature of the classroom and work with the partner elevates the student to the leader of the process engendering a sense of professional belonging.
Service-learning also promotes relatedness as the students feel that the teacher and the community partner genuinely like, value, and respect them (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). The capstone teacher promotes relatedness through strengths-based feedback, response to questions, collaborative decisions, and respect for students’ contributions. In Fink’s text on creating significant learning experiences, she states that “for a significant percentage of college teachers, learning how to improve their interactions with students would be a major advance” (2013, p. 26). These capstone changes acknowledge the need for relatedness, improved student-teacher interactions, and the promotion of student well-being, motivation, and competence.

**Condition Three: Competence**

While life experiences and program curriculum have prepared graduate students for meeting unknown obstacles, students begin the capstone course unsure of their ability to create change on an organizational or community level. Fishman (2016) suggests that students will choose to engage in challenging tasks if they are **supported as they develop competence**. In the first class, students are asked to take risks by daring to tackle a community-based issue. To foster the students’ willingness to engage in ambiguous situations, the classroom becomes an autonomy-supportive environment where students use guidance and freedom to overcome challenges. The teacher supports students by providing concrete project development tools, a guided reflection notebook, a project timeline template, a panel of community experts, and natural expectations (see Table 1). Students quickly learn to expect obstacles, mistakes, fears, changes, and hurdles, and these are integrated into the weekly class meetings as a part of the developmental growth process. Students’ intrinsic motivation is further supported by shifting the importance of grades to a secondary consideration. Students’ primary consideration should be on completing their best work. Grades are assigned collaboratively based on the students’
evaluation of their work through a reflection based on Boyer’s (1990) model of engaged scholarship and Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff’s (1997) standards for evaluating scholarship and propose their grade.

**A Radical Shift**

The changes to the service-learning section of the graduate capstone created seismic differences in students which I have never experienced in 14 years of teaching. Especially notable were the changes to student commitment, passion, and ownership of the work. Students created projects ranging from a self-care podcast series for survivors of sexual assault to an e-book of best practices for working with individuals that hoard. One student called her project a “labor of love,” and another said the work made her “heart smile” to think about the difference her group had made for citizens returning from prison. Students called the process empowering and expressed appreciation for the guidance in accomplishing their goals. Several students noted how they were being treated like respected professionals, rather than students, because of their leadership in their community-based project.

Students’ attitudes had markedly shifted from the previous years. Previously students viewed the completion of the ePortfolio as a meaningless and useless requirement; now students considered their service-learning work to be meaningful and self-actualizing. Surveys collected by the Graduate Program Director confirmed the change in student satisfaction. Fifty-nine graduate students completed the survey, from all sections of capstone, and only one student reported dissatisfaction with the curricula changes (Mulder, 2017). Furthermore, no students indicated that the course was a waste of time or that the work was useless to their learning and development as a professional (Mulder, 2017).
Increased satisfaction with the curricular changes among the graduate capstone students was just one positive outcome. I also noticed personal transformation in the students from the service-learning section of capstone. It was like magic: the students finally believed all the things their teachers told them about their potential. They no longer needed someone else to tell them they were capable. Bain (2004) describes this transformation as deep learning, where growth involves the investment of both the heart and mind.

**Discussion**

The conceptual framework proposed in this paper addresses a gap identified by the *Michigan Journal of Community Service-learning* in graduate-level service-learning. Harris (2017) describes this gap as the need to differentiate graduate-level service-learning from undergraduate service-learning. This paper describes personal teaching experiences and feedback in undergraduate and graduate education from 2010-2015 which provides insights to the different needs of graduate students using a high-impact practice; primarily, that graduate students want *meaningful* experiences that are worth their time and meet their needs. Adult learning literature reinforces graduate student feedback and clarifies that meaning is developed through choice, collaboration, optimal challenge, and the opportunity to build on life experience (Freire, 2005; Knowles, 1980; Knowles et al., 2005). This paper presents teachers and researchers with a detailed account of the author’s approach to infuse SDT throughout a graduate-level service-learning capstone course. Ultimately, this paper synthesizes the changes to the capstone course and changes in graduate student learning with a critical analysis of curricular service-learning informed by SDT which results in the SDSL framework (see Figure 1).
Implications for Teaching

The SDSL framework has significant implications for graduate-level service-learning methodology. As a method, SDSL promotes an autonomy-supportive service-learning environment which challenges the expert model of teaching where content and evaluation criteria are predetermined, and power resides with the teacher. The expert model presumes that teachers know what students need to learn; however, findings suggest that adult learners want to build upon their existing knowledge and skills (Rosing et al., 2010). Therefore, the conventional model with preselected service hours, direct or indirect activities, classroom structure, and community partners is inadequate for graduate students with a diverse and rich knowledge-base and skills. In fact, a study of student complaints indicates that external regulation (lack of choices) reduces student ownership in their learning, such as proactive engagement and creative thinking, and results in criticism of the service-learning sites and experiences (Rosing et al., 2010).

While changing teaching methods may be concerning to graduate teachers because they are often required to achieve course, discipline, university, and accreditation standards and competencies, SDSL and service-learning studies reinforce the central importance of student competency. SDSL teachers continue to identify core content, skills, and competencies, but SDSL allows the student to make meaningful choices to achieve these goals. These choices include the freedom to choose a community partner, a community project, and whether to work in a group. The key element is providing an optimal structure to support students in making connections between their project and course competencies and how they relate to their profession, the community, and to the broader historical and social justice narrative. Roldan, Strage and David (2004) found that when students cannot make the connection to the purpose of
the service-learning experience, they may find it useless, resulting in negative outcomes. In accordance with SDT, the desire for belonging and competence means that students will be driven to achieve predetermined competencies that have a meaningful rationale.

Caution is recommended for teachers and administrators seeking departmental or university buy-in for SDSL. Teachers should not be required to teach service-learning on the graduate-level, nor should all sections of a required course be taught with SDSL methods. Both SDT research and the aforementioned capstone example reinforce this point. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) summarize several studies that show that imposing universal teaching requirements creates less enthusiasm, reduces creativity, and crowds out inspiring teaching practices. Furthermore, personal experience with the previously described departmental changes which required graduate-level capstone courses to be taught the same, resulted in the exodus of most full-time faculty and significant dissatisfaction of students. Rather than seeking buy-in, SDSL should be presented as an option for administrators and teachers that seek to help students achieve competencies through experiential opportunities.

Implications for Research

The SDSL framework has additional implications for graduate-level service-learning research. The SDSL framework needs evaluation on the graduate level to better understand self-efficacy outcomes. While studies have been completed on the undergraduate level (Levesque-Bristol & Stanek, 2009; Richards & Levesque-Bristol, 2016), studies of perceptions of competence are needed on the graduate level. Investigation of competence is needed beyond knowledge and skills; it should also include elements identified by Knowles (1980) such as insight, attitude, interest, and value. These studies should explore the perceptions of competence experienced by graduate students and how it is similar and different from undergraduate
students. Reeve (2002) explains that autonomy-supportive learning environments have the potential to lead to greater levels of competence, as well as, improve conceptual learning, increase creativity, deepen engagement, increase flexible thinking, enhance self-esteem, and advance informed processing among other things. Studies are needed to understand graduate-level self-efficacy outcomes and how outcomes for graduate students differ from undergraduate students.

Moreover, the SDSL framework is a cross-disciplinary framework that promotes self-efficacy across disciplines. SDT posits that the basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence are *universal* (Dover, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Therefore, regardless of discipline, meeting students’ basic psychological needs should promote increased perceptions of competence. Understandably, definitions of competence will vary by discipline. Ryan and Deci (2017) have collaborated on many studies supporting the cross-cultural applicability of SDT. However, there are limitations. Ryan and Deci (2002) acknowledge that the means by which autonomy, relatedness, and competence are satisfied in diverse cultures needs more investigation. For example, the acts that support relatedness with engineering students may be different than the acts that constitute relatedness for business students. Studies are needed to evaluate the SDSL framework across graduate-level disciplines to understand relatedness and assess this claim of universality.

**Conclusion**

Graduate-level teachers and researchers have been using service-learning methods designed for undergraduate students for more than 20 years. However, graduate-level scholars are eager for guidance specific to graduate service-learning (Harris, 2017). This paper proposes graduate service-learning methods, purposes, and outcomes for teachers and researchers. The
elements of these recommendations and the new conceptual framework are grounded in the practice experience of the author and service-learning and SDT literature. The SDSL framework captures the relationship between SDT, a constructivist teaching philosophy, service-learning pedagogy, and student self-efficacy. SDT flows through the course design, the service-learning project, and ultimately influences student outcomes. There are early indications that service-learning infused with SDT results in meaningful experiences for graduate students. Teachers and researchers are encouraged to begin using and researching the SDSL framework on the graduate level to build the new foundation for graduate service-learning.
PRODUCT 2

Graduate-Level Service-Learning:

Building Confidence to Lead Organizational and Community Change

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Abstract

Service-learning pedagogy has been an effective teaching practice in social work. However, existing frameworks within service-learning are grounded in practices tailored for undergraduate students. These practices do not adequately meet the developmental learning needs of graduate students who have a myriad of diverse experiences and expectations. Service-learning research shows that graduate students want to build on their existing knowledge and experience, which is more complex at the graduate level. The purpose of this paper is to describe a mixed methods study that explores graduate students’ mezzo and macro practice efficacy in an integrative capstone course. A new Self-Determined Service-Learning (SDSL) method was used in the study to meet graduate students’ needs. Triangulated findings indicate that students experienced a statistically significant change in their self-efficacy. Furthermore, mixed method results provide insights into how and why self-efficacy was enhanced and offer a strong indication that graduate students will pursue macro practice in the future. The research supports the use of SDSL pedagogy in graduate capstone courses to enhance practice efficacy. The SDSL framework begins to fill the void in social work and other disciplines regarding effective practices in service-learning at the graduate level.

*Keywords:* graduate, self-efficacy, mixed methods, macro, self-determined service-learning framework
Graduate-Level Service-Learning:

Building Confidence to Lead Organizational and Community Change

The integration and application of social work competencies for the purpose of influencing organizations and communities is critical in social work education (Council on Social Work Education, 2015) because it embodies the profession’s commitment to social justice and social change (Reisch, 2017). Master of Social Work (MSW) students’ admission essays are often filled with dreams of making a meaningful difference in the community. However, by the time students are graduating, they are largely choosing employment in direct practice with individuals, families, and groups. Recent statistics show that less than 7% of MSW graduates work directly with communities or indirectly in public policy, advocacy, administration, management, planning, program evaluation, research, and environmental health combined (Salsberg, Quigley, Acquaviva, Wyche, & Sliwa, 2018). Why do so many graduates abandon their dreams in a time when socially just structural solutions are needed? I contend that MSW graduates do not feel competent to lead mezzo and macro interventions.

Service-learning pedagogy is one promising method that has the potential to increase students’ perceptions of competence on mezzo (organizational) and macro (community/society) levels. Decades of research have demonstrated that service-learning is a powerful pedagogy for student learning (Whitley, 2014). Scholars conclude that social work education is well suited for service-learning because civic engagement aligns with core tenets of social work practice defined by the National Association of Social Work (NASW) and the values and philosophy of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (Gerstenblatt & Gilbert, 2014; Phillips, 2007; Phillips, 2011). Service-learning pedagogy was developed within higher education, but primarily outside of social work education. While social work education is a relative latecomer to service-
learning methodology, the relationship is a natural fit given social work educators’ long acceptance of community-based learning (Petracchi, Weaver, Schelbe, & Song, 2016; Phillips, 2007). In fact, social work educators like Mary Richmond and Edith Abbott shattered institutional norms at the beginning of the 20th century by demanding community-based field practice in higher education (Austin, 1986). One hundred years later, the significance of community-based learning is reinforced by the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE), which identifies field education as social work education’s signature pedagogy (CSWE, 2008; CSWE, 2015). Community-based learning includes field practicums, internships, community service, volunteering, community-engaged learning, and service-learning; but service-learning is distinct because of the emphasis on the reciprocity (equal weight) of student learning and community participant goals (Furco, 2011).

Social work educators have been implementing service-learning at the graduate level (Campbell, 2012). This infusion has occurred in a variety of courses, across MSW programs (first semester through the final semester), for a plethora of reasons (Lemieux & Allen, 2007; Petracchi et al., 2016). However, studies do not differentiate how the educators address developmental differences of graduate students versus undergraduate students, and all of them refer to guidance for best practices based on undergraduate education. This lack of differentiation is an issue across disciplines leading associate editor of the foremost journal in service-learning, the Michigan Journal of Community Service-learning, to acknowledge that very little is known about effective service-learning on the graduate level (Harris, 2017). To address this gap, this paper describes a new Self-Determined Service-Learning (SDSL) framework for graduate students used in a capstone course (Langlois, 2018), and the findings of a mixed methods study
that explores the extent to which SDSL pedagogy enhances MSW students’ perceptions of competence.

**Service-Learning Literature Review**

Service-learning is accepted as a high impact pedagogy across disciplines (Kuh, 2008). A recent analysis of existing theories, theory-based models, and high-quality research, going as far back as 1956, found four principal outcomes from the use of service-learning: personal, academic and career, social and civic, and diversity, multicultural and intercultural (Whitley, 2014). In social work education, service-learning pedagogy has been widely used and determined to align with social work’s commitment to social justice and community-based learning (Lemieux & Allen, 2007; Phillips, 2007). Scholars conclude that when service-learning is applied appropriately, the method has the potential to achieve most desired learning outcomes (Phillips, 2011; Whitley, 2014).

**Social Work Service-learning**

Social work educators have been infusing service-learning pedagogy to achieve a variety of learning outcomes. Several outcomes are highlighted in Lemieux and Allen (2007) and Petracchi et al. (2016) reviews of scholarly social work literature. These scholars reviewed a combined total of 30 service-learning studies conducted in undergraduate and graduate social work programs. Fourteen studies were completed at the undergraduate level, 12 were done at the graduate level, and two were conducted across both programs. Learning outcomes from these studies demonstrated increased perceptions of cultural competence (Belliveau, 2011; Ericson, 2011; Sanders, McFarland, & Bartolli, 2003; Williams & Reeves, 2004), commitment to social action (Anderson, 2006; Butler & Coleman, 1997; Rocha, 2002), direct practice skills (Cohen, Hatchett, & Eastridge, 2006; Jones, 2011; McKay, 2010, McKay & Johnson, 2010; Petracchi,
Weaver, Engel, Koivoski & Das, 2010; Poulin, Silver, & Kauffman, 2006; Twill, et al., 2011), awareness of diversity and social justice (Belliveau, 2011; Blundo, 2010; Ericson, 2011), social work values and beliefs (Cohen, et al., 2006; Forte, 1997; Nino, et al., 2011; Williams & Reeves, 2004), macro practice skills (Bliss & Meehan, 2008; Campbell, 2012; Donaldson & Daughtery, 2011; McKay & Johnson, 2010; Poulin et al., 2006; Twill et al., 2011; Williams, King, & Koob, 2002), and perceptions of research competence (Knee, 2002; Knapp, 2006; Lowe & Clark, 2009).

The outcomes outlined by Lemieux and Allen (2007) and Petracchi et al. (2016) are derived from courses across undergraduate and graduate social work curricula. These courses include policy courses (Anderson, 2006; Petracchi et al., 2010; Rocha, 2002; Powell & Causby, 1994), diversity and human rights courses (Belliveau, 2011; Blundo, 2010; Ericson, 2011; Maccio, 2011; Maccio & Voorhies, 2012), foundational and theory courses (Cohen et al., 2006; Sanders et al., 2003; Twill et al., 2011), micro and macro practice courses (Bliss & Meehan, 2008; Butler & Coleman, 1997; Campbell, 2012; Cohen et al., 2006; Donaldson & Daughtery, 2011; McKay, 2010; McKay & Johnson, 2010; Nino et al., 2011), special populations (Forte, 1997; Jones, 2011; Williams et al., 2002; Williams & Reeves, 2004), field placement (Poulin et al., 2006), and research (Kapp, 2006; Lowe & Clark, 2009; Knee, 2002). Although Jacoby (2015) describes the use of service-learning in capstone courses as enabling “students to integrate and apply their learning from throughout their college years through advanced intellectual and creative work that addresses a community issue or need” (p. 95), none of these studies were conducted in a capstone course. A review of the literature on service-learning in graduate social work education since 2012 is also devoid of service-learning studies conducted in a capstone course (e.g. Bolea, 2012; Byers & Gray, 2012; Deck, Platt, & McCord, 2015; Fisther-
Borne, Hall, & Casstevens, 2014; Lim, Maccio, Bickham, & Dabney, 2016). Therefore, while service-learning pedagogy has demonstrated increased self-efficacy in macro practice (Bliss & Meehan, 2008; Campbell, 2012; Donaldson & Daughtery, 2011; McKay & Johnson, 2010; Poulin et al., 2006; Twill et al., 2011; Williams, King, & Koob, 2002), there is not yet guidance in the literature regarding the use of this method in a social work capstone course to achieve similar results.

**Determining Self-Efficacy**

The primary intent of social work education is to promote micro, mezzo, and macro competence in students. This prepares students to become competent social work professionals. A key element of Bandura’s (1977) social cognitive theory is that individuals who perceive themselves as competent (capable) are more motivated to continue pursuing their practice interests. In addition, perceptions of competence, or self-efficacy, are powerful predictors of future choices (Bandura, 1986, 1993).

When evaluating student-learning on the graduate level, it is important to recognize that MSW programs are centered on competency development (CSWE, 2015). One way to assess student competence is through self-report. Self-efficacy scales have been used by social work educators to assess students’ confidence in their competence (Holden, Barker, Kuppens, & Rosenberg, 2015; Holden, Meenagham, Anastas, & Metrey, 2002). Drisko (2014) criticizes the use of self-report but acknowledges the usefulness of self-efficacy in combination with demonstrated ability. He specifically recommends capstone projects as one approach to assessing complex learner performance. Bandura (1977) would agree with Drisko (2014) that a mastery experience, where individuals demonstrate skills similar to actual practice, is the optimal source of efficacy information (Bandura, 1977; Betz & Hackett, 2006). In other words, student self-
assessments of competence are more accurate following the completion of that task or practice. Furthermore, self-efficacy requires reflection on the skills one possesses; therefore, actual ability and perceived efficacy are usually correlated (Bandura, 1986; Urdan & Turner, 2007).

**Graduate-Level Service-Learning**

Unlike other graduate fields, which are at the beginning stages of integrating service-learning at the graduate level (Harris, 2017), the studies compiled by Lemieux and Allen (2007) and Petracchi et al. (2016) show that social work educators have a long history of integration at the graduate level. However, this integration is primarily grounded in practices formed at the undergraduate level by Jacoby (1996) and Bringle & Hatcher (1995). In fact, none of the social work graduate-level service-learning studies evaluated for this literature review clearly differentiated how educators planned to address the developmental differences of graduate students versus undergraduate students.

Social work service-learning studies have begun to recognize that graduate-level service-learning integration needs more attention. Campbell (2012) recognized the need for pedagogical clarification of service-learning in social work at the graduate level. Campbell (2012) not only provided excellent clarity regarding the integration of service-learning pedagogy but was very transparent about the criticisms from students. However, this descriptive study fell short of explaining how the implementation of the undergraduate-based service-learning components addressed the developmental differences and needs of graduate students.

Deck, Conner, and Cambron’s (2017) article comes the closest to providing a framework for service-learning integration at the graduate level. Deck et al. (2017) articulate the need for distinct practices for graduate-level students in social work education. In reference to graduate students, the scholars make an important assertion that recognizes that graduate students bring a
“myriad of life experiences and varied educational backgrounds” and that the “differences in the amount and quality of those experience increase the heterogeneity of adult learners” (Deck et al., 2017, p. 457). To address these differences, the scholars infuse five adult learning principles into the course design: (a) relevance, (b) a problem-focused process, (c) scaffolding, (d) hands-on learning, and (e) engineered failure (Deck et al., 2017, p. 457). While the scholars make a valid case that graduate students come with diverse experiences and expectations, they did not clearly describe how the service-learning project creates meaning (relevance) for all students from such varied backgrounds.

This literature review demonstrates that service-learning pedagogy has broad application across undergraduate and graduate programs. However, service-learning literature in social work education shows that service-learning pedagogy is not being used in graduate capstone courses and scholars are not clearly differentiating graduate service-learning methodology from undergraduate methodology. The review also demonstrates that self-efficacy is a valid measure to understand the changes in students’ perceptions of context-specific abilities as they relate to completing a service-learning project in a graduate-level capstone course. To address the void in the literature, this paper describes the graduate-level SDSL framework used in a capstone course and the findings of a mixed methods study that explores the extent to which SDSL pedagogy enhances graduate student self-efficacy in mezzo and macro practice.

Graduate-Level Self-Determined Service-Learning Intervention

The theoretical underpinning for service-learning pedagogy resides within experiential learning. Kolb’s (1984) model for experiential learning includes abstract conceptualization (i.e., using theories to guide thinking), active experimentation (i.e., opportunity to try something new that builds on knowledge), concrete experience (i.e., hands-on activity), and reflective
observation (i.e., thoughtful reflection on the learning that occurred). The concrete experience (service-learning activity) has the potential to be a mastery experience that involves overcoming obstacles (Bandura, 1977). For undergraduate educators, it is easier to make assumptions about obstacles and mastery experiences that might be common for inexperienced students. However, designing a mastery experience for graduate students is potentially much more challenging. A large-scale study of service-learning reviewed 2,200 end-of-term student evaluation responses and found that a conventional approach that serves undergraduate students was criticized for not drawing upon older adult students’ existing skills and knowledge (Rosing, Reed, Ferrari, & Bothne, 2010). For example, one student expressed her frustration with being treated like other inexperienced students, although she had substantial board and activism experience. Indeed, there is little room for meeting diverse needs in conventional service-learning frameworks because they often include preselected service hours, activities, classroom structure, and community partners. These practices diminish the opportunity for optimal challenges that build upon each graduate student’s unique life experience and educational background. Although positive outcomes related to undergraduate and graduate service-learning have been widely reported in social work education (Lemieux & Allen, 2007; Petracchi et al., 2016), these outcomes are not automatic (Levesque-Bristol, Knapp, and Fisher, 2010). The SDSL framework was designed to build upon each graduate student’s skills and knowledge with the goal of enhancing self-efficacy for all students.

**Self-Determined Service-Learning Framework**

The SDSL framework infuses self-determination theory (SDT) with service-learning pedagogy to meet the diverse needs of graduate students’ needs and achieve efficacy outcomes (Langlois, 2018). SDT flows throughout all curriculum decisions in SDSL. Fishman (2016)
provides guiding principles that help integrate SDT in the learning environment to create optimal challenges and meaningful experiences resulting in competency development. Fishman (2016) believes that students want to feel like they are making choices that matter (autonomy), to be a part of something bigger than themselves (relatedness), and to be supported as they develop competence (competence). The next paragraph will explain some explicit ways SDT is infused in the capstone course being studied.

Students’ first choice is whether to take a capstone course that uses service-learning or select a capstone section that does not use service-learning pedagogy. Once enrolled, I teach the students about the 12 Grand Challenges in Social Work (Sherraden et al., 2015) and they are asked to select one challenge that is important to them and identify an organization with whom they have an existing connection that might want to address their selected challenge. The discernment process connects students to something bigger than themselves by engaging in a national campaign and a local organization’s efforts. Students are simultaneously enrolled in the final semester of their internship and have already completed between 300 and 600 hours of field work. Students are free to choose any issue or organization; however, they should have an existing relationship with the organization because they are expected to make an organizational or community impact within fifteen weeks. This decision-making process is indicative of choices that matter. Unlike choices between predetermined partners or projects, students can tap into their intrinsic interests and make a difference in something that is important to them. These choices, along with their personal reflection notebook, transition responsibility of the community-based project (and ownership of learning) over to the student. Students work with their community partner to develop a project proposal, literature review, and timeline with project development tools they are provided in the course. As the professor, I provide students
with support, feedback, and guidance to accomplish their projects during class time. Each week students provide updates on their work and offer questions or concerns that they are encountering. I support students as they gain competence by helping them devise answers and bringing in resources that they need. This is a significant difference from most undergraduate service-learning where the relationship is between the professor/institution and the community partner. Ultimately, students present their community-based projects at a university showcase during the last weeks of the course to further educate the community regarding the issue and the work being done.

Methods

SDT is infused throughout the SDSL pedagogy and this mixed methods study. An assumption of SDT is that competence is enhanced through supportive feedback and optimally challenging tasks (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). However, service-learning pedagogy does not always succeed in achieving intended outcomes (Levesque-Bristol et al., 2010). This original mixed methods study asks:

1) Quantitative Strand: Whether SDSL pedagogy enhances graduate students’ perceptions of competence in mezzo and macro practice?

2) Quantitative Strand: How do students reflect on their intellectual and personal self-efficacy?

3) Mixed Methods: How does the mixing of interpretations from both strands provide a deeper, broader, and more comprehensive understanding of students’ perception of competence in mezzo and macro practice?
Mixed Methods

Convergent parallel design was used in this mixed methods study to address the research questions (Creswell, 2015). This design was selected for the purpose of expansion and complementarity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Haight & Bidwell, 2016). Both the qualitative and quantitative assessments evaluate student self-efficacy upon the completion of a service-learning course where students completed a community-based project. The qualitative strand consists of guided student reflections. Students reflected on their growth through written responses to questions related to the CSWE (2015) competency dimensions. The quantitative strand was a retrospective pre/post-self-efficacy scale completed by students following the completion of the community-based project (See Figure 1).

Graduate students completed both quantitative self-efficacy scales and qualitative project reflections to mitigate the limitations of one measurement. Self-efficacy scales are limited in their measurement of competence because they minimize competence to the *ability to do*, which is only abstractly associated with actual knowledge, values, skills, feelings, and cogitative processes. Therefore, this original study mixes interpretations from the quantitative self-efficacy scale with the qualitative project reflections to expand on the limitations of the scale. Furthermore, the triangulation of the quantitative analysis with the qualitative analysis assisted with the interpretation and expansion to provide a deeper and broader understanding of self-efficacy. Both the qualitative and quantitative data were collected separately (instrument and reflections) but in a parallel fashion (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2017). Neither strand takes priority (QUAL + QUAN), and data were analyzed separately then merged at interpretation for comparison (Creswell, 2015).
Figure 1. The self-efficacy mixed methods research design provides the schematic flow the separate but concurrent strand implementation and analysis. The figure shows that the qualitative and quantitative strands are integrated during the interpretation phase.
Sample and Population

A nonprobability purposive sample of 15 students was selected for both strands of the design. The same sample was used for both strands to best corroborate data in the mixed methods analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The study required participants who were: 1) social work graduate students, 2) in a capstone course, and 3) were learning with SDSL pedagogy. Internal review board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to the beginning of the course, requesting consent, and data collection. The sample is not representative of the population of all graduate social work students. There were three Latinas, one African American female, one transgender individual, one Caucasian male, and nine Caucasian females enrolled in the course. Their ages ranged from early twenties to mid-forties, and the majority of individuals were in their mid-twenties to early thirties.

Data Collection and Instruments

Quantitative.

The self-efficacy instrument developed for this original mixed methods study is a 28-item scale comprised of three subscales. Respondents indicated their level of confidence in their ability to perform specified tasks following the completion of a mastery experience. The scale ranges from 0 (cannot do at all) to 100 (highly certain can do). The scale follows design guidelines provided by Albert Bandura (2005) for constructing self-efficacy scales. The first subscale was derived from the practice subscale of the Social Work Self-Efficacy Scale (SWSE) (Holden et al., 2002). Items 1-13 represent the modified SWSE subscale (Table 1). This subscale was selected because it was developed for MSW students and has shown good psychometric properties (Holden et al., 2002). For this original mixed methods study, the scale was modified to specifically assess organizational (mezzo) and community (macro) practice skills which were relevant to the SDSL capstone course.
statements in the first subscale associate with behavioral performances related to engaging, assessing, intervening, or evaluating practice skills at the mezzo and macro level.

The second subscale consists of items adapted from the course objectives. Items 14-18 in Table 2 represent the course objectives. The objectives are common across all MSW capstone courses at Grand Valley State University (GVSU). They were collectively developed for the capstone course by the GVSU School of Social Work faculty and align with the 2015 CSWE EPAS criteria (CSWE, 2015). For the scale, course objectives were altered to specify the level of intervention (mezzo and macro). Finally, the third subscale consists of statements made by previous capstone students that were not captured in the two preceding scales. These items, 19-28, align with social work values and give voice to the student’s perspective of self-efficacy (Table 2).

The self-efficacy scale is a retrospective pre/post-scale which was administered on the final day of classes. This means that students completed the pre-scale and the post-scale, assessing their confidence in their ability at the same time. Students rated their confidence now, based on their current understanding of each task and then, based on how confident they would have been at the beginning of the course. The retrospective pre/post scale was used to reduce response shift bias (RSB). RSB can happen when respondents underestimate the complexity of a task and rate their confidence to complete the task very high.

**Qualitative.**

Students completed project reflections throughout the course, but this study only analyzed the final project reflections written immediately following the student’s completion of the community-based project. The questions were structured to elicit internal processes related to self-efficacy. These 12 questions were developed using Glassick and colleagues’ (1997) standards for evaluating Boyer’s model of engaged scholarship and the five dimensions of competence identified
by the 2015 CSWE EPAS. These dimensions are knowledge, values, skills, affective reactions, and cognitive processes (CSWE, 2015). The purpose of the reflection questions was to guide students through their internal process of developing the community-based project (i.e., goals, preparation, methods, results, and dissemination) and understand how students reflect on their intellectual and personal self-efficacy as they relate to the five dimensions of competence.

**Data Analysis**

The quantitative data and qualitative data were analyzed separately but in a parallel fashion. The quantitative retrospective pre/post-self-efficacy scale data were entered into SPSS 24. Cronbach’s alpha was evaluated for each subscale to determine the internal construct validity of each subscale. Quantitative data was examined to determine normality given the small sample size. Finally, paired t-tests were run to determine the change in perceptions of ability in the group’s scores on the overall scale, by sub-scale, and by statement.

Data from the qualitative project reflections were thoroughly reviewed for emergent themes using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Memos were taken with lists of possible codes. Then the literature described in this article (e.g., service-learning pedagogy, self-determination theory, self-efficacy, and CSWE EPAS) was revisited. Ultimately, five primary themes guided the interpretation of the reflections derived from the primary dimensions of competence: knowledge, values, skills, affective reactions, and cognitive processes. Sub-codes were listed on a coding guide that categorized how students described each dimension as they relate to their competence. Data were imported into MAXQDA 2018 and coded using the coding guide. Interpretations were derived by grouping codes for frequency and sub-themes emerged.
Results

Quantitative Results

The quantitative self-efficacy scale research sets out to determine if SDSL pedagogy enhances graduate students’ perceptions of competence in mezzo and macro practice. Cronbach’s alpha was run on each subscale and internal pre-scale ($\alpha = 77$, $\alpha = 65$, and $\alpha = 78$) and post-scale ($\alpha = 93$, $\alpha = 79$, and $\alpha = 88$) validity was acceptable. Paired-samples t-tests were run to determine pre-scale to post-scale differences in group scores. The pre-scale mean was 62.59 (SD = 10.11). The post-scale mean was 86.87 (SD = 8.32). The mean scores had a statistically significant increase from the pre-scale to the post-scale [$t(28) = -7.18; p <.001$], indicating a statistically significant change in the students’ perceptions of competence in mezzo and macro practice.

Students reported a statistically significant increase in self-efficacy on all 28 items, with pre-to post-scale differences ranging from 12.87 to 46.00 (see Table 1 & Table 2). The lowest mean score was on item 28 which indicated that students felt the least capable leading “mezzo or macro work that pushes you outside of your comfort zone” prior to completing the course (Table 2). However, this was also the item that students reported the greatest difference from pre to post (-46.00). In the cases where students indicated statistically significant changes, but less growth (items 11, 12, 18 & 24), pre-scale mean scores were above 65. These high pre-scale scores show that students already felt capable in these areas prior to engaging in the class and community-based project and therefore, there was less room for improvement during the capstone class. Each subscale measured slightly different items related to mezzo and macro competence; however, research inferences show similar levels of growth in all three areas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th><strong>Self-Efficacy Pre/Post Scale Differences Scale 1</strong></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Sig (2 tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Degree of confidence a scale from 0 to 100</td>
<td>pre</td>
<td>post</td>
<td>difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>initiate and sustain empathic, culturally sensitive, non-judgmental, disciplined relationships with a community partner.</td>
<td>63.33</td>
<td>88.00</td>
<td>-24.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>elicit and utilize knowledge (history, data, literature, ethics, and research) to plan an intervention with a community partner.</td>
<td>56.00</td>
<td>87.67</td>
<td>-31.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>apply social and organizational theories or frameworks in mezzo and macro practice.</td>
<td>52.67</td>
<td>78.00</td>
<td>-25.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>understand the interplay of organizational conflict and social forces influencing a particular issue.</td>
<td>68.67</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>-21.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>intervene effectively on behalf of and with individuals, families, and groups to influence organizational or community change.</td>
<td>66.00</td>
<td>86.00</td>
<td>-20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>work with various systems to improve services on behalf those who are vulnerable, oppressed, or disadvantaged.</td>
<td>69.00</td>
<td>88.67</td>
<td>-19.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>identify and work to realistically address gaps in service to clients or organizational systems.</td>
<td>59.33</td>
<td>87.67</td>
<td>-28.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>function effectively as a member of a team to achieve organizational or community change.</td>
<td>68.00</td>
<td>86.33</td>
<td>-18.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>maintain self-awareness in practice, recognizing your own personal values and biases, and preventing or resolving their intrusion into mezzo or macro practice.</td>
<td>76.33</td>
<td>90.33</td>
<td>-14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>critically evaluate your mezzo and macro practice, seeking guidance appropriately and pursuing ongoing professional development.</td>
<td>53.33</td>
<td>84.33</td>
<td>-31.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>practice in accordance with the ethics and values of the profession as they relate to mezzo and macro practice.</td>
<td>77.33</td>
<td>90.20</td>
<td>-12.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>critically review, understand, and use scholarly literature to inform practice.</td>
<td>76.00</td>
<td>92.33</td>
<td>-16.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>evaluate your mezzo and macro practice using regular self-reflection or a structured framework (e.g. Boyer).</td>
<td>63.33</td>
<td>88.00</td>
<td>-24.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale 1 Items 1-13 [Mezzo/Macro Practice]</td>
<td>65.33</td>
<td>87.50</td>
<td>-22.17</td>
<td>-6.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2

**Self-Efficacy Pre/Post Scale Differences Scales 2 & 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Mean pre</th>
<th>Mean post</th>
<th>Mean difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. interpret the NASW Social Work Code of Ethics in the context of a mezzo or macro case analyses.</td>
<td>67.00</td>
<td>87.00</td>
<td>-20.00</td>
<td>-5.86</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. lead a mezzo or macro level intervention using professional roles and boundaries.</td>
<td>47.33</td>
<td>77.33</td>
<td>-30.00</td>
<td>-7.25</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. analyze knowledge and values of diversity, law, policy, best practice methods and the NASW Code of Ethics related to ethical dilemmas.</td>
<td>64.00</td>
<td>86.33</td>
<td>-22.33</td>
<td>-6.55</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. develop mezzo or macro interventions to increase the choices and opportunities of all populations, especially those who are vulnerable, oppressed, or disadvantaged.</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>82.33</td>
<td>-32.33</td>
<td>-6.60</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. examine the consequences of systemic oppression and their impacts of implicit bias on populations served and their social environments.</td>
<td>67.33</td>
<td>82.33</td>
<td>-15.00</td>
<td>-5.20</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scale 2 Items 14-18 [CSWE Learning Objectives]</strong></td>
<td>59.13</td>
<td>83.07</td>
<td>-23.93</td>
<td>-5.25</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. challenge yourself to do more than is required in professional roles.</td>
<td>72.33</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>-17.67</td>
<td>-3.64</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. independently determine necessary information and resources to competently accomplish new tasks.</td>
<td>59.33</td>
<td>84.00</td>
<td>-24.67</td>
<td>-7.34</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. execute a mezzo or macro project from beginning to end.</td>
<td>44.00</td>
<td>87.33</td>
<td>-43.33</td>
<td>-5.61</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. grow from disappointment and obstacles and use them to inform future direction.</td>
<td>53.33</td>
<td>86.33</td>
<td>-33.00</td>
<td>-6.91</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. recognize and use personal vulnerabilities and privileges to serve the vulnerable, oppressed, or disadvantaged.</td>
<td>65.33</td>
<td>86.00</td>
<td>-20.67</td>
<td>-4.35</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. accept that asking for help is a strength that demonstrates vulnerability and personal awareness.</td>
<td>72.33</td>
<td>88.67</td>
<td>-16.33</td>
<td>-4.17</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. confidently identify as a social worker while also acknowledging that the identity requires humility and life-long learning.</td>
<td>72.00</td>
<td>93.33</td>
<td>-21.33</td>
<td>-5.03</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. accept that there are often no “right” answers and demonstrate a willingness to incorporate multiple points of view in grappling with ambiguity.</td>
<td>64.00</td>
<td>87.00</td>
<td>-23.00</td>
<td>-5.81</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. contribute in meaningful ways with other social work and non-social work professionals to achieve mezzo or macro change.</td>
<td>62.00</td>
<td>88.00</td>
<td>-26.00</td>
<td>-5.49</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. lead mezzo or macro work that pushes you outside of your comfort zone.</td>
<td>43.00</td>
<td>89.00</td>
<td>-46.00</td>
<td>-6.38</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scale 3 Items 19-28 [Student Identified Efficacy]</strong></td>
<td>60.77</td>
<td>87.97</td>
<td>-27.20</td>
<td>-6.93</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The mean difference on sub-scale one, that centered on engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation in mezzo and macro practice skills, was -22.17 \( t(28) = -6.34; p < .001 \). The mean difference sub-scale two, that centered on capstone specific objectives that align with CSWE EPAS criteria, was -23.93 \( t(28) = -5.25; p < .001 \). Finally, the mean difference on sub-scale three, that centered on previous students’ perspectives on self-efficacy, was -27.20 \( t(28) = -6.93; p < .001 \). Survey results clearly indicate that SDSL pedagogy enhances graduate students’ perceptions of competence in mezzo and macro practice.

**Qualitative Results**

Qualitative data were interpreted to understand how students describe their intellectual and personal efficacy. Five themes guided the interpretations of the reflections: knowledge, values, skills, affective reactions, and cognitive processes. Students reflected on several questions as they related to completing their final community-based project, but five questions explicitly pertained to the five dimensions of competence. The following findings describe how students spoke about their growth in each dimension.

**Knowledge.**

Each student worked on a community project and with a community partner that they individually identified. However, a group of five students chose to work together. This resulted in the completion of 11 separate community-based projects. Working on separate initiatives resulted in students reflecting on different kinds of knowledge. For example, individuals reported gaining knowledge that working in a group with passionate professionals can be a positive experience; approaching organizations with a well-researched pre-formed project is not a successful method; funding largely impacts an organization’s willingness to implement good ideas; being vulnerable about past indiscretions can help endear people to your cause; working
hard and taking advice does not mean a person will get the results they are hoping for; informing people about issues can help motivate them to act; and working collaboratively has the potential for meaningful outcomes.

While project experiences and knowledge varied, one sentiment persisted: students’ confidence in the ability to impact change on a mezzo or macro level. Every student commented on growth in specific skills or their overall work that made them feel more confident in impacting change. Here are two statements out of 31 that encapsulate this finding:

- *I was nervous about talking to people about the issue, but after the [showcase] I feel grateful for the opportunity and feel like I am able to advocate and speak openly about the topic.*

- *I feel, not hyperbolically, about a hundred times more prepared to carry on this kind of work in the future.*

**Values.**

Students were encouraged to complete the final reflection with honesty and were not required to refer to any sources. However, when students were asked about how their values had been enhanced or challenged, each student referenced a social work value as defined by the National Association of Social Workers (2017): *service, social justice, dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.* The values that were the most frequently identified were the *dignity and worth of a person* and *social justice*. Nine students clearly communicated how their mezzo and macro work with organizations and communities was grounded in the value of treating people with dignity and respect. The
following examples respectively reference the fair treatment of ex-offenders, parents in the child welfare system, and the elderly with dementia:

This project has the potential to reach hundreds of millions that have not re-offended and assist them with achieving the American dream.

We acknowledge the dignity and worth of an individual which includes treating individuals in a caring and purposeful way.

The end goal is for families to understand Dementia and what their loved one is experiencing.

The value for social justice was also reflected 27 times. Students described this value through their efforts to increase awareness, increase access to resources, counter social injustice, participate in activism, increase the voices of the marginalized, create systems change, and advocate for rights. Here are two comments out of 27 that highlight this value:

The main value that spoke to me while I was formulating the support group was social justice. I think the overall impact that teens who have undocumented parents is because of the social injustice of our country. Therefore, to help their parents find a voice, these teens must fight for social justice.

As someone said at the [showcase], all of the other issues presented would be impacted positively by systemic change around racism. So I think I will continue to value the need for systemic change, but to realize how difficult that is to sell.
Skills.

Students reflected on the skills that they enhanced through problem identification, community interactions, project completion, and dissemination. Their skills fell into three sub-themes: communication, macro skills, and problem-solving skills. Students articulated that they enhanced their communication skills through adjusting written communication to meet the audience’s needs; “forcing” themselves to engage in difficult dialogue and public speaking; applying advanced interviewing skills; and modifying verbal communication to meet the needs of interprofessional and cross-cultural groups. Students referenced enhanced communication skills for the purpose of advocacy more than 30 times in the final project reflections; these statements provide richer context:

*I was able to gain skills in wording it in a way that would fit the needs of psychologists, social workers, accountants, and business management professionals reviewing the proposal.*

*This project forced me to improve my communication skills. I am a naturally quiet individual who only speaks when she feels something needs to be said. With the board, I had to overcome more of my presentation jitters and learn how to condense the main points of what I needed to say in the short time allowed. I also improved my communication skills during the preparations and actual interviews. I worked on my active listening in order to confirm the information I was hearing and allow for a free flow of ideas from the interviewee.*

Students described macro skills as project planning, program development, project management, collaboration, leadership, networking, recruitment, and community organizing. Within macro
skills, students referenced project planning skills with the most frequency. These skills include feeling capable of mapping out a plan, breaking up a daunting process, keeping the main goals in focus, and being aware of options. Macro skills were referenced 33 times; here are two reflections that characterize macro growth:

*I feel that I have learned how to better manage a project on this scale, where barriers may be present, and what changes would be necessary to make in order to be successful in developing a community-based project. This has helped me to adapt and understand the reality of community-based projects and what approaches to project development would be the most effective.*

*I learned that I can complete a project at this level. While a big project might be daunting, it is able to be possible by setting deadlines and working as a team.*

Students described creativity, patience, and flexibility to address obstacles throughout the project execution. Once these skills were grouped they had demonstrated a combined frequency of 27 problem-solving references. The following three statements typify enhanced problem-solving:

*I also had to be creative in searching for participants after a few backed out.*

*I have grown in my flexibility and in making use of the resources I have. In the past with big projects, I would stress about perfecting the details and making everything meet all of the potential needs. I have learned that I cannot possibly know everything I need to know starting out and that some details will always be missed. I have also learned that the project can go in a completely different direction and still meet, and sometimes better meet, the needs of the clients or area that called for the project in the first place.*
Affective reactions.

Students reflected on both their negative and positive feelings associated with their work. The central negative feelings were disappointment, frustration, and an emotional toll. Disappointment and frustration were mentioned a combined total of 18 times. These emotions were primarily derived from barriers students experienced during the mezzo or macro change process. Barriers included time, funding, and societal readiness. One student wrote:

*There were times I felt frustrated as our group continued to hit barriers to securing a partner, but at the same time, I learned that these changes take time and resources to be completed.*

The feelings of disappointment and frustration often resulted in creative, patient, and flexible thinking (see problem-solving skills above). However, four students described affective reactions of a different tenor. These reactions reflect a concerning emotional toll. Students commented about becoming physically ill, emotionally exhausted, and “triggered” by their work. One student reflected that she:

*...struggled to stay positive about this project and give myself the time and care I needed to stay healthy. This resulted in my becoming physically sick and losing sleep.*

Interestingly, students that experienced an emotional toll successfully completed their projects and expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to do the work. Furthermore, these students felt passion, a sense of belonging, and motivation. These positive reactions were the predominant feelings that students expressed. Students expressed that they were passionate about their work 24 times. Students described their passion as helping push them outside their comfort zone; coming from their personal experience; related to the population or issue; bringing new ideas
into reach; confirming their commitment to macro work; and lighting a fire under them. Two students wrote:

*I have learned that once I find something I am [passionate] about, there is no stopping me.*

*This class gave me the opportunity to do the work that I love doing – advocacy. I plan to pursue this new passion of mine and see where it takes me.*

Students commented 24 times about feeling a sense of belonging. They communicated about feeling supported by their professor, classmates, community partner, the social work profession, and community members. Belonging evoked pride, validation, and glee. Two reflections characterize this sense of belonging:

*This project has influenced my worldview and I experience the feeling of glee to see that others care about those affected in this manner.*

*When I first started this class, I almost dreaded what this class was going to require of me. I thought it was an overwhelming and daunting task but now that it is done, I could not be more thankful to have had the opportunity to take this class. It has opened my eyes to new perspectives and motivated me to make a bigger impact in the world.*

Students felt inspired and motivated when reflecting on their work. Students described their work as solidifying the populations they wanted to serve; inspiring a desire to engage in mezzo and macro work; compelling them to continue their efforts; and allowing them to dream big about the work they might accomplish. New motivations were referenced 21 times; here are two reflections that provide examples:
This project has opened my eyes to things I was clueless about. I also wonder if there isn’t bigger things out there for me than what I originally thinking. I have a newly [kindled] passion for creating programs and trying to make things better in systems that are currently active.

This project also sparked an interest in social work at the macro level for me. I’ve always been very set on working on the micro level, but I’m beginning to realize how important macro work is to our practice.

Cognitive processes.

Students discussed cognitive processes as they related to critical decisions that they made while completing their projects. Three primary areas influenced their decision making: previous experience in the field or in coursework, new knowledge and encouragement attained during the course; and collaborative discourse. Eight students emphasized the important role of their personal or internship experience in helping to make decisions. Seven students described specific coursework that helped in their decision making. Specific coursework such as grant writing, program evaluation, research, integrated methods, social welfare policy, and community and social planning. Here is one student’s description of the role of experience and coursework:

I have done a ton of research on the subject of self-care. I feel I used the skills taught in Research I and in Integrated Methods. I am able to gather and utilize valid and reliable research because of those two classes. I also feel the best preparation for the project was my own life/professional experience and my experiences at my internship.
Students were given tools to manage their projects and a minimum of two opportunities to engage with community members to discuss their work. Eight students expressed appreciation for the time, tools, and guidance provided to make critical decisions. One student wrote:

*This was one of the first times I engaged in political outreach and planned the entire thing, start to finish, myself. While I’ve learned an awful lot of theory in class and on my own time, very little was taught about the practical realities of implementing such a thing, and how to structure it, and how to allocate resources, time, and how to assign tasks (and secure commitments for their completion).*

Most resoundingly, students commented about the influence of collaborative discourse in their decision-making processes. Students made more than 40 comments regarding the integration of input from their community partners, other community agency representatives, classmates, the professor, community members, and clients. This discourse resulted in changing directions, maintaining scope, or making modifications. While some students regretted choices that were made, most felt the collaboration improved their outcomes. Furthermore, all students felt there was merit in the work they completed. All 15 students commented on the influence of others in their decision-making processes. Here is an example from a student that collaborated with a community partner to created training program:

*I met a few times with [the community partner] via phone to discuss my research and her goals for the program proposal. In the beginning, her goals were vague and I felt confused about the intentions of the program. Instead of becoming stressed about the goals and pressuring myself to have known all of the outcomes I continued to research and check in with [the community partner]. After a few weeks of discussion and through*
my research, we were able to come to consensus about what type of program would work best.

Qualitative results show that students felt competent and inspired to carry out mezzo and macro practices. The results explain how students perceive each dimension of competence. The following section will triangulate the quantitative and qualitative results to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students’ perceptions of competence.

**Mixed Methods Results**

Results of the quantitative analysis were triangulated with the qualitative analysis to provide a deeper, broader, and more comprehensive understanding of students’ perception of competence in mezzo and macro practice. Complementarity, expansion, and extension findings were derived from mixing the results (see Table 3). Five themes were clarified in the qualitative findings: *knowledge, values, skills, affective reactions, and cognitive processes*. Through triangulation, complementarity was determined between the qualitative findings and the quantitative self-efficacy findings. Reflections reinforced self-efficacy scale results indicating that students felt more confident in their ability to impact change (*knowledge*) and use macro skills (*skills*). This triangulation increases the internal validity of the primary finding: students enhanced their capacity to carry out mezzo and macro practices.

Qualitative findings also expanded the understanding of how and why SDSL enhanced students’ perceptions of competence (see Table 3). Quantitative findings do not explain this connection. Students described how their self-efficacy was enhanced through decision-making (*cognitive processes*), problem-solving (*skills*), and their sense of belonging (*affective reactions*).
### Table 3
**Joint Display Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative Strand</th>
<th>Qualitative Strand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students reported a statistically significant change in their perceptions of</td>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>competence in mezzo and macro practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[t(28) = -7.18; p &lt; .001]</td>
<td>Confidence in the ability to impact change (f = 31)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dignity and worth of a person (f = 19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social justice (f = 27)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Skills</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication (f = 30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Macro skills (f = 33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem-solving (f = 27)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Affective Reactions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative &gt; disappointment &amp; frustration (f = 18),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&amp; an emotional toll (f = 8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive &gt; passionate about work (f = 24), a sense of belonging (f = 24), &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>motivated to pursue mezzo and macro interests (f = 21)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Cognitive Processes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influenced decision-making &gt; previous coursework &amp; experience (f = 21), course tools (f = 9),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&amp; collaborative discourse (f = 46)</td>
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#### Mixing Interpretations

- **Compliment**
- **Expand**
- **Extend**

Reflections reinforced instrument results indicating that students felt more confident in their ability to impact change (**knowledge**) and use macro skills (**skills**). **How** Self-efficacy was enhanced through decision-making (**cognitive processes**), problem-solving (**skills**), and their sense of belonging (**affective reactions**). **Why** Students were committed because of their passion for the work (**affective reactions**), and commitments to the dignity and worth of a person (**values**) and to social justice (**values**). Reflections extended the quantitative findings beyond a perception of increased competence toward credible future intentions or motivations (**affective processes**) to engage in mezzo or macro work.

*Note. f = frequency in student reflections*

Furthermore, qualitative data provides explanations to why students were so invested in their work. Students described a passion for the work (**affective reactions**), and commitments to the dignity and worth of a person (**values**), and to social justice (**values**). Triangulation for expansion provides the essential elements for a change in self-efficacy related to mezzo and macro
community-based projects from the student’s perspective. Furthermore, triangulation produced qualitative findings that extended the scope of the quantitative findings. Quantitative findings demonstrated that students felt more capable of engaging in mezzo and macro practices. The hope is that by enhancing perceptions of competence, graduates will choose more mezzo and macro work in the future. However, quantitative results do not communicate future intentions. By mixing the qualitative findings, future intentions become clearer. Ten students voluntarily shared that they were inspired or motivated (affective reactions) to engage in mezzo or macro work in the future. This triangulation extends the implications beyond enhanced capability toward more credible intentions.

Mixed interpretations reinforce the inference that students felt more capable of engaging in mezzo and macro practice; provide a deeper understanding of how and why self-efficacy was enhanced; and extend findings beyond capacity toward future intentions. The following section provides implications for this research.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this original mixed methods study was to determine whether graduate students enhance their self-efficacy in an SDSL capstone course. The quantitative strand of the research shows that students significantly enhanced their self-efficacy as it relates to carrying out mezzo and macro practices. This statistically significant change is noteworthy because students identified feeling more capable; and those that feel capable are more likely to pursue associated practice interests (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1993). Mixed method findings not only confirmed that students felt more capable, but findings also supported Bandura’s theory by providing evidence that enhanced self-efficacy increased students’ desire to engage in mezzo and macro work in the
future. Furthermore, these findings support the use of SDSL pedagogy with graduate students in a capstone courses.

The review of social work service-learning studies found that service-learning pedagogy has broad application (Lemiex & Allen, 2007; Petracchi et al. 2016) and social work scholars have begun to recognize that graduate-level service-learning integration needs more attention (Campbell, 2012; Deck et al., 2017), but there was no framework for using service-learning with graduate students that address students’ diverse experiences and expectations. Social work educators are not alone in the search for a graduate-level framework (Harris, 2017). This original mixed methods study provides a new SDSL framework for teaching graduate students that is distinct from service-learning with undergraduate students. The SDSL framework begins to fill the void in social work and other disciplines regarding effective practices in service-learning at the graduate level. The framework provides many clear distinctions from service-learning with undergraduate students. Three distinctions are the role of the professor, the relationship with the community partner, and the determination of the service project. With SDSL, the professor is a supportive consultant to the student, the community partner has the primary relationship with the student, and the project is proposed by the student and critiqued by a group of community members. These practices happen in a supportive learning environment and necessitate that students take ownership of their learning. These findings offer educators wanting to use service-learning at the graduate level guidance that addresses relevancy for more mature and experienced students and direction beyond the implementation of existing practices.

There are some chief limitations for this original mixed methods study: the sample size (n=15) was small, data were derived from self-report, and it was the first study of self-efficacy using SDSL pedagogy. To mitigate the limitation of the sample size, qualitative findings were
triangulated with the qualitative findings to increase validity by enhancing the breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). Self-report can also be a limitation because many believe that an individual cannot gauge their own competence (CSWE, 2015; Drisko, 2014). However, there is also support for self-efficacy measures in MSW programs (Holden, et al., 2017; Holden et al., 2002); particularly following a mastery experience (Bandura, 1977; Betz & Hackett, 2006). Another limitation is that this is the first study of self-efficacy in a course using SDSL pedagogy. While findings are promising, more studies of SDSL pedagogy are needed in capstone courses and in other graduate-level courses to determine whether the pedagogy is effective in other contexts.

Social work educators and scholars are committed to effective teaching practices and social justice. This study provides an early indication that SDSL pedagogy can address both commitments and enhance students’ confidence in their ability to lead organizational and community change. Educators wanting to build confidence have a promising method that meets students’ diverse experiences and expectations.
PRODUCT 3

Graduate-Level Curricular Service-Learning: Creating Social Action and Developing Scholars

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Author Note

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Presentation Abstract

Students have demonstrated many positive outcomes are from engaging in service-learning, such as enhanced social and emotional development and achievement of learning goals. However, positive results primarily stem from practices designed for undergraduate students. Educators have much less guidance on effective service-learning methods with graduate students. This presentation describes capstone course satisfaction data showing that graduate students wanted more meaningful opportunities that were worth their time. To address student needs, a new graduate capstone course was designed using principles of self-determination theory (SDT). This presentation provides concrete service-learning tools including course structure, rubrics, and Self-Determined Service-Learning (SDSL) implementation guidelines. These tools were infused with SDT to activate student ownership of learning and enhance satisfaction. The presentation offers examples of graduate student scholarship and updated student satisfaction data. The purpose of this presentation is to equip educators with promising service-learning practices for working with graduate students.

Keywords: self-determination theory, capstone, service-learning, graduate, scholarship, macro
Graduate-Level Curricular Service-Learning: Creating Social Action and Developing Scholars

A collaborative of southern universities representing 12 states hosts the Gulf-South Summit on Service-Learning and Civic Engagement Through Higher Education each year. The 16th annual Gulf-South Summit (GSS) titled “Changing the Narrative: Storytelling as Social Action” was held in Birmingham, Alabama from April 4 to April 6, 2018. Only 60% of submissions were selected. This author was selected to present an interactive workshop titled “Graduate-Level Curricular Service-Learning: Creating Social Action and Developing Scholars” from 10:45 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on April 5, 2018. The presentation is a product representing content from my conceptual paper promoting the infusion of self-determination theory (SDT) with service-learning pedagogy to meet the diverse and elevated needs of graduate students. The presentation extended the ideas from the conceptual paper by applying them to graduates students’ specific needs to engage in social action and engaged scholarship.

One of GSS objectives is to explore new frontiers in service-learning and civic engagement. Therefore, the new framework for graduate-level service-learning designed by this author piqued their interest. The following pages provide an overview of the objectives, proposal, and description of the slides used in the interactive workshop conducted at the GSS.

Overview of the Interactive Workshop

Workshop Objectives

At the end of the workshop, attendees will be able to (see Figure 3.2):

- Describe a concern with using undergraduate practices with graduate students
- Identify two ways to infuse self-determination theory to meet graduate student needs
- Use the tool provided to assess quality of expressions of scholarship based on Boyer’s model
Presentation Proposal

The presentation is designed to inform higher education professionals about integrated curricular service-learning, which integrates Boyer’s model of scholarship using self-determination theory at the graduate level. Information about the service-learning course is meaningful to educators for two reasons: 1) it was developed with self-determination theory and 2) relatively little has been published about service-learning on the graduate level. Self-determination principles were selected for the course design to addresses the need to connect with Millennials who require attention to relevance and rapport (Bart, 2011). The clear application of self-determination theory to a service-learning course, which attends to relevance and rapport, better prepares educators to make service-learning meaningful to Millennials. The shift to learner-centered education began taking traction in the beginning of the twenty-first century (Zlotkowski & Duffy, 2010) and was validated in service-learning pedagogy by a well-known study of 22,236 college students conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000). This study found that the “single most important factor” associated with student satisfaction with their service-learning experience was the degree the student was interested in the subject matter (p. 6).

In addition to integrating self-determination theory, this presentation provides a methodology for curricular service-learning on the graduate level. According to Howard and Harris (2016), editor and director of the Michigan Journal of Community Service-learning, service-learning impacts are widely documented across undergraduate disciplines; however, much less is known about service-learning on the graduate level. Educators are left with minimal information regarding appropriate paradigms, theories, curriculum integration, course design, and expected student outcomes when using service-learning pedagogy on the graduate level.
The information provided in the proposed presentation comes from the experience of designing and teaching a graduate level service-learning capstone course. The course design was reviewed and supported by the board president of the discipline’s national academic accrediting body. The course design was developed with service-learning pedagogy, a constructivist paradigm, and self-determination theory. Preliminary student feedback suggests an increase in student self-efficacy associated with completing community engaged social action projects. An empirical study is planned for spring 2018.

Individuals will be engaged in this presentation through exercises intended to highlight the differences in service-learning pedagogy between undergraduate and graduate students and the value of self-determination principles. Examples of student work and scholarship will be shared to stimulate interactive discussion. Additionally, course structure and tools will be shared with participants seeking curricular guidance.

The Interactive Workshop: Chalkboard Slides

Figure 3.1. Slide 1.
Slide 2 has a list of three learning objectives for the hour and fifteen-minute workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to understand the need for different approaches at the graduate level, learn how to apply the new self-determined service-learning (SDSL) framework, and how to assess students’ work. To meet the objectives, the workshop began by establishing the concerns with using undergraduate service-learning practices with graduate students. Participants then learned about a new framework infusing self-determination theory to meet graduate student needs. Finally, attendees learned how to apply the SDSL framework, the preliminary success using the framework, and were provided a tool to assess graduate students’ engaged scholarship.

Slide 3 established the need to differentiate graduate-level service-learning from undergraduate service-learning and community engagement (SLCE). This gap was initially elevated to an industry concern by the leading SLCE journal, the *Michigan Journal of Community Service-learning* (Howard & Harris, 2016).
Slide 4 provides an outline of a think/pair/square/share activity (Bain, 2004). The activity was designed to encourage deep thinking and engagement between workshop
participants. Rather than tell experienced professionals that high impact practices warrant different teaching approaches on the graduate level, this activity was designed to build on participants knowledge and experience. Participants independently answered the questions from the slide on a piece of paper (think). Then they paired up to compare thoughts — pairs grouped with another pair to create groups of four (square) and honed their responses. Finally, representatives from each square shared their views. Participants unanimously believed that teaching practices need to be different for graduate students. However, participants had a difficult time articulating what educators would do differently. One idea was that educators need to make the work student-driven. In response to the second question regarding how graduate students’ needs are different, participants felt that graduate students have more responsibilities making them less available and necessitating clarity about what they will get out of the experience (relevancy). Participants also felt that graduate students might have more to offer community partners because they generally have more experience. Moreover, participants thought that graduate students would want critical service-learning with more autonomy. These responses demonstrate that the individuals attending the workshop have a good sense of the differentiated needs of graduate students.

Slide 5 provides an overview of the author’s practice experience related to using a high-impact practice on both the undergraduate and graduate levels in a social work program. Beginning in fall 2009, this author worked with several colleagues to develop a capstone course for undergraduate and graduate social work students to align with the Council on Social Work Education’s (CSWE) accreditation and assessment requirements (CSWE, 2008). The curriculum was redesigned to support the student development of an electronic portfolio (ePortfolio) which was a broadly supported high-impact practice (Coleman, Rodgers, & King, 2002; Kuh, 2008;
Rickards et al., 2008). The changes required all undergraduate and graduate students to collect *artifacts*-materials from their meaningful assignments, events, and activities and upload them into an electronic portfolio system. Students collected artifacts throughout their tenure in the program, and during the final capstone course, they integrated the artifacts into a compelling ePortfolio to demonstrate their mastery of prescribed competencies.

In response to the changes in the graduate capstone course, most of the full-time faculty who had historically taught the course stopped teaching the graduate capstone course. Observations and conversations regarding this phenomenon revealed faculty’s agitation with the perceived external controls and threats to their academic freedom. Within one year, five out of six graduate capstone sections (approximately 120 students) were taught by part-time adjunct faculty.

![Practice Experience](image)

Figure 3.5. Slide 5.

Slides 6-8 provide the primary sentiments expressed in student evaluation outcomes. Undergraduate students reported being appropriately challenged. However, graduate students felt
the course was a *waste of time*. A compilation of 125 student comments overwhelming indicated that a change was needed in teaching practices at the graduate level.

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**Undergraduate Students**

- Evaluations revealed that undergraduate students were appropriately challenged by the development of the ePortfolio and proud of their accomplishments.

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**Graduate Students**

- All course evaluations from 2010-2015 were compiled: 125 comments from graduate students

- Findings: the ePortfolio was a *waste of time*:
  - too simplistic,
  - repetitive of prior reflections, and
  - met institutional needs rather than their needs.

---

Figure 3.6. Slide 6.

Figure 3.7. Slide 7.
Graduate Students

- Some specific comments (Lopez-Arias, 2015)

  This class was something that could have been done completely outside of class time, writing assignments about competencies. The time spent in class was not worthwhile and I do not feel like I gained any knowledge or skills.

  This class is designed in a way that does not really benefit the students.

  I believe that there were more important issues that could have been discussed during capstone and not as much time spent on portfolio/core competencies.

  Capstone class is pointless & a waste of time. I will not use the competencies or portfolio after graduation.

Figure 3.8. Slide 8.

Slide 9 makes assumptions about why the same practice was received differently.

Why the divide?

- Undergraduate students accepted the purpose of the ePortfolio

- Graduate students never accepted the reasons for completing the portfolio, it seemed too simplistic (not challenging) to them, it was “useless” (no meaning), and many felt like they were doing it because the accrediting body required it for assessment (external requirements).

Figure 3.9. Slide 9.
Undergraduate students appeared to accept the accreditation requirements and the need to demonstrate competence as valid reasons to develop a portfolio. Whereas, graduate students did not see the merit in completing the ePortfolio and felt externally controlled.

Figure 3.10. Slide 10.

Slide 10 establishes that graduate students want to build on their existing knowledge and skills (Rosing et al., 2010); desire learning opportunities that are meaningful, challenging, and experiential (Carlson, 2005; Harris & Cullen, 2007); and that student satisfaction with service-learning is related to the degree the student is interested in the subject (Astin et al., 2000, p. 6).

Building on student dissatisfaction and existing research about effective practices, slides 11-12 suggest that infusing self-determination theory (SDT) with service-learning pedagogy will reduce external controls increasing intrinsic motivation. This will result in student satisfaction, meaning, optimal challenge, and self-efficacy. SDT posits that three basic psychological needs are universal to healthy functioning and social development: these needs are autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Dover, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2017).
Slide 13 describes the new purpose for the graduate capstone course, which was a shift from one high-impact practice (ePortfolios) to another (service-learning). While infusing SDT into developing ePortfolios may produce positive results in other programs, the legacy of
ePortfolios in the author’s graduate program tainted students’ perceptions making it unfeasible. Therefore, service-learning pedagogy was selected to address the course purposes.

![Figure 3.13. Slide 13.](image1)

![Figure 3.14. Slide 14.](image2)
Slide 14 provides concrete ways that SDT was infused into a graduate-level capstone course to reduce external controls. Slide 15 shows the self-determined service-learning (SDSL) conceptual framework, which illustrates the flow of SDT throughout all components of the service-learning pedagogy impacting student self-efficacy.

Figure 3.15. Slide 15

The service-learning community-based projects completed in the newly designed capstone course fulfilled the requirements for engaged scholarship as defined by Boyer (1990). Slides 16-17 addresses how engaged scholarship creates meaning for graduate students to make the work *worthy of their time*. Primarily, that engaged scholarship helps to fulfill students’ basic psychological need for relatedness through being a part of something bigger than themselves by making a difference in the community. The engaged scholarship developed by graduate students had clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique (Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997). A handout defining criteria was provided to attendees.
Slides 18-19 offer examples of community projects completed in the SDSL capstone course. Each project was determined in collaboration with the student-identified community
partner. The educator played a supportive role to the student or student group as they encountered barriers and challenges.

Figure 3.18. Slide 18.

Figure 3.19. Slide 19.
Slide 20 identifies initial findings from the first year the capstone course designed with the SDSL framework. The educator noticed changes in students’ commitment, passion, and ownership that was markedly different from her experience teaching the ePortfolio capstone. For example, she offered to give the students a work day away from the classroom, and they unanimously chose to meet as a class. Student project reflections also expressed statements of passion about their work. One student stated that her work was a “labor of love.” Project reflections also gave appreciation for the support and time to accomplish their goals, demonstrating ownership. Moreover, no students indicated the course was a waste of time in the program survey administered by the Graduate Program Director (Mulder, 2017).

![Initial Findings](image)

Slide 21 revisits the hypothesis originally posed on slide 11 that reducing external controls will increase intrinsic motivation resulting in graduate student satisfaction, meaning, optimal challenge, and self-efficacy. Evidence presented in this workshop shows that SDSL is promising as it relates to satisfying graduate students needs and creating meaning. However, it is
unclear whether SDSL projects optimally challenge or enhance self-efficacy as SDT would suggest.

Figure 3.21. Slide 21.

Revisiting the Hypothesis

- If external controls are reduced, intrinsic motivation will be increased, resulting in graduate student satisfaction
- meaning
- optimal challenge
- self-efficacy

Figure 3.22. Slide 22.

Implications

- Self-Determined Service-Learning has great potential on the graduate level
- More time for SLCE-
  - More than one semester to expand the kinds of scholarship
  - Requested by students
- Research on self-efficacy
  - While current indications show graduate student satisfaction, more is needed to understand the change in graduate student self-efficacy
- Research across disciplines
  - This model is intended to work across disciplines
Slide 22 outlines the implications of the SDSL conceptual framework based on the information provided in the interactive workshop. SDSL pedagogy, or service-learning infused with SDT, shows great potential with graduate students. Those choosing to implement SDSL should know that students felt that fifteen weeks was limiting and expressed a desire for more time. Given that engaged scholarship requires the demonstration of advanced competencies, research is needed to assess whether students’ self-efficacy is enhanced through completing the projects. Furthermore, research is needed to determine whether SDSL achieves similar results across different graduate programs.