

Bridging Faith: The Effect of Evangelical Social Service

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Abstract

This article uses qualitative data gathered from a case study of a service program at an evangelical Christian university to examine the links between volunteering and the development of social capital and civic engagement in college students. The students were asked to describe their service experiences and to discuss the ways in which these experiences affected their connections with others and the influence that these experiences had on their perspectives on social action. Data gathered from these interviews provided new insights into the ways that volunteering promotes social capital formation in students and changes their perspectives on civic engagement. The data also revealed ways that the religious tradition of students shaped their ideas about forming relationships and social action. The results show that bridging social capital formation is far and away the most salient aspect of the volunteer experience for these students. The guiding social engagement framework for these evangelical students is relationships, which, for them, took precedence over meeting practical needs and working for structural change.

Keywords: social capital, civic engagement, social action, evangelicals, bridging capital, Christian college students

Volunteering for community service is an increasingly significant part of the college student experience (Edwards, Mooney, and Heald, 2001). A recent report by Campus Compact, a coalition of more than 1,100 college and universities in the United States, showed that a growing number (44%) of students in its member institutions participated in some form of community engagement during the 2011-12 academic year (Campus Compact, 2013). These acts of service have been linked to a number of important benefits for the students and for society as a whole. Eyler and her co-authors (2001) provide a summary of research that shows voluntary service by college students contributes to personal development, interpersonal development, improved cross-cultural understanding, and an increased sense of social responsibility.

In addition to the benefits cited above, volunteering is purported to enhance two other important aspects of society: social capital development (Wilson 2000) and increased civic

engagement among service participants (Yates and Youniss 1998). However, these connections are contested in the literature, with some scholars arguing that social capital and citizenship benefits can be attributed to the very nature of service, and others suggesting that only particular types of service nurture development in these areas (Perry and Katula 2001). For instance, Raskoff and Sundeen (1998) promote service among youth as an important means to providing the socialization necessary for civic participation, while Boyte and Kari (1996:8) contend that many community service programs do not “lead students to think broadly about the larger policy dimensions of the problems they confront.” With regard to social capital, Eyler, Giles and Braxton (1997) found that service learning encourages students to make cross-cultural connections and it makes them more open to the views of others, but Wuthnow (1998) demonstrates that different forms of volunteer service produce ties to other individuals and social institutions that vary in their type and strength.

These issues are further complicated when the element of religion is added to the mix. For instance, Putnam (2002) argues that religious communities are key repositories of social capital in the United States, and studies by Jackson et al. (1995) and Davie (2001) have shown that church participation increases helping and volunteering behaviors. However, these findings are qualified by studies conducted by Becker and Dhingra (2001) and Beyerlein and Hipp (2006) which suggest that different religious traditions produce different types of volunteers, who generate different types of social capital. Perspectives on citizen participation are also influenced by religion. In his book *Elusive Togetherness*, Paul Lichterman (2005) shows that faith traditions strongly influence styles of voluntary civic engagement. Some religious groups focus heavily on structural change and others show a strong preference for micro level change through relationships. For example, Emerson and Smith (2000) argue that white Evangelicals focus on micro level social engagement, relying on a cultural tool kit which consists of accountable freewill individualism, relationalism, and antistructuralism.

The complex state of the research on volunteerism and religion highlights Paul Lichterman’s (2005:141) claim that “[t]he actual connections between faith and civic engagement are not so well understood yet.” This case study seeks to shed more light on the dynamic interactions between the two. It also aims to extend the work of Emerson and Smith (2000) to determine whether volunteerism has an effect on the cultural tool kits of evangelical students. Qualitative data are used to examine the links between volunteering and the development of social capital and civic engagement in college students participating in a service program at a particular evangelical university. In-depth interviews were conducted with five students who are part of a volunteer program at an evangelical Christian university. In these interviews, the students were asked to describe their service experiences and to discuss the ways in which these experiences affected their connections with others and the influence that they had on their perspectives on social action. Data gathered from these interviews are used to answer the following questions. Does volunteering promote social capital formation? Does

volunteering change students' perspectives on civic engagement? How does the religious tradition of students shape their ideas about forming relationships and social action?

Evangelicals and Social Action

Evangelicals tend to be one of the most socially active Christian religious groups in America. Compared to fundamentalist, mainline Protestant, liberal Protestant, and Catholic Christians, evangelicals are overall the most engaged in civic activities such as voting in elections, giving money to help the poor, contacting elected officials, and volunteering (Smith 1998). This activity has attracted the attention of many social scientists such as Smith (2000), Noll (2001), Penning and Smidt (2002), and Cromartie (2003), who have tried to understand evangelical motives better and measure the social influence of evangelicals. Many who study the evangelical tradition have identified blind spots or areas of concern regarding their civic engagement tendencies. Two often cited concerns are their propensities to develop bonding rather than bridging capital and their failure to address structural issues in American society. These two issues will be a focus in this study.

Evangelical Christians are prolific volunteers. A survey by Christian Smith (1998) showed that in the past two years, one-third had volunteered "a lot" for a church program that serves the local community and nearly half had volunteered "some" for such programs. These numbers were higher than for any other major Christian group. Given these high percentages of volunteer participation, one would think that evangelicals would obtain significant levels of social capital. But those who research volunteers have called this assumption into question. A study of religious volunteer work by Wilson and Janoski (1995:149-50) found that "Conservative Protestant churches provide their members with a rich array of opportunities to 'volunteer,'...but what they volunteer for is church maintenance work." Beyerlein and Hipp's (2006) study on religion and social capital found evidence that evangelical social service activities tend to build strong ties between church members (bonding capital), but they do not promote linkages to members outside of the church (bridging capital). The authors also contend that "evangelical Protestant congregations are less likely to provide members with opportunities to develop the most relevant skills for promoting participation in civic organizations that serve and establish linkages with the broader community" (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006:101). For this reason, "the growing presence of evangelical Protestants [in America] is unlikely to translate into benefits for communities as a whole" (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006:115).

Others take a different view. Becker and Dhingra (2001:333) for instance, note that, "Although the rhetoric that evangelicals use to describe their volunteer activity is more privatized than that used by religious liberals, their behavior is just as public-oriented. The volunteer activities of evangelical congregations are "bridging" activities...involving outreach to others in the local community and not simply congregational maintenance." The concept of bridging is important from a civic engagement perspective. It greatly affects the extent to which

social activity “cultivates connections to people external to the group [which] has important implications for...the capacity of civic organizations to help generate and sustain robust and thriving communities” (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006:98). Thus, much of the analysis in the pages that follow will seek to determine whether the evangelical college students in this case study are creating significant links to “outside groups” and gaining skills to enhance these connections.

Religious scholars point to another characteristic of evangelicalism that has important ramifications for their patterns of civic engagement. This is their reliance on a personal influence strategy for social transformation. “American evangelicals are resolutely committed to a social-change strategy which maintains that the only truly effective way to change the world is one-individual-at-a-time through the influence of interpersonal relationships” (Smith 1998:187). Lichterman (2005) argues that this approach to social action is not just an intellectual framework for viewing the world, it is a style of group life. Derived partially from their religious commitment to a personal relationship with Christ, this relational approach is at the core of all their social interactions. Though it has many benefits and contributes greatly to the strength of their movement, this approach comes with a cost. Smith points out that,

It tends to render evangelicals rather blind to the supraindividual social structures, aggregate effects, power dynamics, and institutional systems which profoundly shape human consciousness, experience, and life-chances. Because evangelicals employ the personal influence strategy, it serves to obscure for them the effect of forces outside themselves and their interpersonal relationships, along with their capacity to comprehend adequately how the social world actually works and to formulate relevant and responsive solutions to complex social, economic, political and cultural problems. (Smith 1998:2002)

This evangelical blind spot toward broader social and structural issues (Emerson and Smith, 2000) raises interesting questions for volunteers in the community. As they are exposed to issues such as racism and inequality, will evangelical students drop the blinders of their religious tradition and become more attuned to cultural and structural concerns? Some researchers such as Raskoff and Sundeen (1998) and Yates and Youniss (1998) suggest that they might. This study will serve as a test for their claims.

Methods

This case study was conducted at an evangelical Christian university located in the Twin Cities metropolitan area of Minnesota. The university has a vibrant social service program that has been operating for nearly twenty years. More than 150 students volunteered weekly in the program, and in some cases monthly or bi-monthly, at 17 different service sites throughout the Twin Cities. The projects available to students included four different programs for homeless

men, women, families and/or children; two tutoring programs; three youth mentorship programs; two programs for senior citizens; two programs for children with disabilities; two nutritional programs; a construction group; and a program at a juvenile detention center.

I met initially with the university administrator who is in charge of the university's service program to describe the study and to conduct an informational interview. This interview included questions about the purpose of the program and the effects she hopes it will have on student participants, on the service sites, and on the university community. I also gathered basic information about the service projects that are made available for student participation, and about the process that the university used to arrange partnerships with these community organizations. Finally, I asked questions about the training program that she has designed to prepare student leaders for their work. (See Appendix I for an interview guide.)

The program administrator provided a list of eight student leaders as potential interview subjects. Most of these students were chosen as leaders because they have previous volunteer experience with the program. Each spring the program administrator asks a number of volunteers to serve as team leaders for the upcoming academic year. These students are matched to a particular service site. Each fall, the student leaders go through a weeklong training program before school starts. Then, during the first few weeks of school, they recruit a team to serve with them throughout the year. Starting in mid-September, they lead their teams in regular service at their respective sites. Thus the students in the sample have, on average, 18 months of service experience. They are highly committed to their service sites and they have received some training in issues related to service.

I made arrangements for the interviews using email contacts and follow up phone calls to all eight students on the list. I was not able to connect with one student. Two others missed my interview appointments with them (two times each). This left me with a sample of 5 student respondents in addition to the administrator.

Results

Table 1 below provides some basic information about each student (identified by pseudonym). The information in this table was gathered from a one-page survey that the students filled out before the interview. It asked about their religious and political identities along with questions about their civic participation.

Their responses to interview questions shows that, although they come from various denominational backgrounds, all of the students fit solidly within the evangelical tradition. Their evangelical affiliation was also affirmed in the language that they used to describe their faith and their volunteer work. It was important to confirm that all the students fit within the target group for this study because not all students at the school are evangelicals.

Table 1: Respondent Information

Pseudonym	Karen	Jason	Tara	Alli	Ron
Volunteer program	Monthly homeless feeding program	Teenagers with special needs	Affordable housing construction	Tutoring elementary students	English as a Second Language & Tutoring
Major	undecided	Business and Art	Nursing	Youth Ministries	Elementary Education
Religious and Political Affiliation					
Religious Denomination	non-denominational	non-denominational	Baptist	Lutheran	Vineyard
Political Affiliation	moderate Republican	self-proclaimed strong moderate	moderate Republican	unknown	strong Democrat
Civic Actions					
Gave money to poor and needy	x	x	x	x	x
Voted in political election		x	x	x	x
Contacted elected officials	x		x		x
Contacted/boycotted corporation			x	x	
Donated to political organization/candidate					
Attended political rally/protest			x		
I work hard to educate myself about social and political issues					
A lot	x				
Some		x	x	x	x
Not much					
How much did you volunteer (outside of your church) before you got involved in this program?					
A lot	x	x			
Some			x	x	x
Very little					
Not at all					

Given the small sample size and the right leaning tendency of the evangelical tradition, the political distribution of the respondents for this study are fairly representative. Of the five in the sample, two are moderate Republicans; two are in the middle--a strong moderate (as he insisted on calling himself) and an undecided; and one is a strong Democrat. This political diversity helps to assess whether students' views are informed by their faith perspectives or by their political commitments. For instance, Ron, the strong Democrat in the group, talked more

about broader social and structural issues than any of the other respondents, but he was also most firmly committed to the personal influence approach to civic engagement, which is characteristic of evangelicalism. On the other hand, Karen, a moderate Republican, was the only one who used religious language to talk about broader social issues like racism. Interestingly, she also complained that many conservatives do not even have people from different economic classes “on their radar screens.” Responses like these call for a more nuanced analysis of the influence that factors such as faith and political commitments have on social perspectives.

The last three questions of the survey were used to assess the students’ level of civic engagement. Though none of the participants in this study has given money to a political organization or candidate, and only one has participated in a protest, they have all engaged in a surprising variety of civic activities. All of the interviewees have given money to the poor or needy. All but one have voted in a major election. (The one who did not vote was only 19 years old, so she was most likely ineligible during the last major election.) Three have contacted elected officials, and two have voiced concerns to corporate officials. This indicates that most have been actively engaged in some social issues in the past. These students also indicate that they make at least some effort to stay informed about political and social issues. And finally, all of them have been involved in volunteering in the past. The survey data suggest that though these students are mainly driven by the “norm of personal assistance” (Serow 1991), as revealed below, they do have interests in and engagements with broader social and political issues.

The students work at a variety of different service sites. Karen’s team participates in a monthly feeding program at a local homeless shelter. The volunteers in this group purchase food, and prepare and serve a meal to the men and women who live in the shelter. They also have direct interactions with the shelter residents before, during and after the meal. Jason leads a group that meets bi-monthly with high school students who have special needs. Tara’s team works weekly with an organization that provides housing to low-income families in the Twin Cities. The organization buys run-down and abandoned houses and fixes them up to sell at an affordable rate. To keep their costs down, the organization uses volunteers for many of the low skill tasks such as demolition, painting, insulating, landscaping, and clean-up. Alli works with a group that provides tutoring and mentoring to elementary-aged students. The volunteers on her team go weekly to the site. They offer homework assistance and then participate in a number of games and a Bible lesson. Finally, Ron leads a team that provides two types of service at a church in Minneapolis. Half the group teaches English as a second language to adults. The other half tutors school-aged children. In addition to working with a core of regular volunteers, his group often incorporates students from the Modern World Languages Department, who are looking for service-learning credit, into their site.

All but one of the interviews, which was conducted at a local coffee shop, were held on campus in a back section of a dining area at the college. During our conversations, I asked the students to describe their service and to explain why it was meaningful to them. The students also provided an assessment of the needs of the people that they were serving and they

discussed the ways that they thought their service was making a difference in their lives. Because the literatures on volunteering and on faith-based civic engagement both make a distinction between broader public policy work and direct service, I also asked the students several questions comparing and contrasting these two types of social action. My goal was to obtain information about the type of work that students were doing, their reasons for doing it, and the impact that they hoped it was making on society.

As they talked about their volunteer work, the students interviewed discussed three different types of social concerns at their service sites. These are practical issues, social justice issues, and relational issues. These three topics will serve as an organizing theme for the analysis that follows. Each issue will be addressed in turn to show the perspectives of the students on these aspects of social engagement. These issues will be addressed again later, focusing then on the students' understandings through the lens of their faith.

Meeting Practical Needs

Early in the interview, each student spent a good bit of time talking about the practical needs of the people that they served. They mentioned the need for housing, jobs, tutoring, and English skills, to name a few. Meeting these needs was definitely an important and rewarding part of their work. For instance, both of the tutors that I interviewed were pleased to note that the children with whom they were working had made real academic progress during the past year. Tara, who volunteered at a construction site, was the most articulate about these rewards. She said:

[Knowing that] the organization that we're working for...is able to provide homes for these people that normally wouldn't be able to have a home makes everything worth it. And having a shelter and a place to call home is sometimes everything and so...just knowing that somebody was going to move into that house and be so thankful for that home and that place to stay and that warm roof over their head was just the most beautiful thing in the world, you know, it was just all the things we needed.

In their discussions of the practical aspects of their service, the students often discussed the new skills that they needed to obtain as volunteers. Karen's group had to pay for the meals that they prepared, so she was regularly talking to donors on campus and searching for new sources of funding. She also made references to the challenges associated with planning and preparing meals for so many people. Tara learned "how to swing a hammer." She also gained skills in flooring and sheet rocking. Alli talked about learning to assert her authority with a rambunctious kid in her tutoring group, and Ron was working through how to be respectfully stern, yet caring, with some of the kids who were "a bit crazy behavior-wise".

In general, the students talked about these practical issues in a matter of fact manner. Clearly this aspect of the work was part of their volunteer expectations. It was rewarding and important, but not necessarily the highlight. It was the bread and butter of their service.

Striving for Social Justice

Most of the students, though certainly not all, were also able to talk about wider social issues, such as racism, housing policies, and immigration, that impacted their service sites. It was interesting to note though, that most of the answers to questions about structural issues were prefaced with a long pause, several false starts or a great deal of stammering. Those who did mentioned these issues all acknowledged that they were very important to the people with whom they worked. Tara talked for some time about a government housing subsidy that has been discontinued and the negative effect that it had on the families and the organization that she was serving. Ron tended to speak more abstractly about social justice issues. He quoted a chapel speaker who provided an extension to the traditional “if you teach someone to fish” analogy,

Someone’s got to ask who owns the pond? And who polluted the pond? Who has the fence around the pond? And that sort of thing. And it makes you think about various things like, why is there homelessness and why is there injustice type of stuff? And not just meeting temporal needs that are met every day, but bigger needs, large structural needs.

Finally, Karen saw that “our public policy does affect [the homeless]...[In the upcoming election] it will be interesting to see how issues like these are or are not addressed by the promises of these politicians.”

Nevertheless, none of these students had much desire to get involved in this type of social justice work. Tara was quite plain about her feelings.

If somebody else took charge, I’d be a part of it 100%, but quite honestly I hate politics. I hate politicians. I hate going to the Capitol. I hate talking to these people that just kind of go around and around. I feel like that’s not my calling, but I’d definitely be in support of people who did and would aid them in whatever way that I could.

Karen said, “Lobbying is good, but it’s not my forte.” Ron was also adamant, “I don’t see myself as a public figure. I don’t want to be that.” Partially these students find social justice work frustrating and somewhat fruitless, but mostly they prefer direct service because it is more relational. Karen summarized it nicely, “I think what the distinct difference [between direct service and social policy work] is that what we’re doing is much more of a relational issue. We’re sitting with homeless men and hanging out with them and eating supper with them and trying to get into their lives.”

The two who were most articulate about social justice issues, and who were most able to make clear connections between particular needs at their service site and broader social and cultural concerns, were volunteers who had taken classes that specifically addressed these

issues. Ron, who works at an ESL and tutoring sight, mentioned job opportunities, immigration issues, divided families, remittances and cultural preservation as important concerns for the Latino people with whom he worked. Though some of these themes could have been drawn from direct experience at the service site, it was clear that he was drawing heavily from knowledge that he had obtained from classes he has taken on Latin American culture and society. Karen was taking a course on race and gender at the time of our interview. She noted that because of her class she was now starting to make connections and pick up on racial issues at her site. Asked if her group's work was making a difference in society, she said,

I'm not sure if I could honestly say that our group has changed any of those policies or affected them, but I would hope that by going out and by volunteering and by seeing, oh wow, why are most of the men in the homeless shelter not white? Why are most of them from a different country? I think what's been really good is...just getting the knowledge and just getting the radar screen on and saying okay there's problems out there. How can we fix these? How can we join with the effort and unify here and say what can we do with these issues and what can we do tangibly as college students?

One of the students, who worked at a tutoring site, was clearly unable to make this micro to macro link. Alli was bright and had a lot of experience in the city. She talked frequently about her passion for diversity. Yet, even when she was directly asked about it, she was unable to connect issues of race and class and educational opportunity to the struggles that the child she tutored was having in school. She just thought that teachers in public schools do not take enough time to help their students, and that they often do not notice when the children are falling behind.

Forming Relationships

Building relationships with people from different backgrounds was clearly the most powerful element of each of these students' service. This relationship dynamic between the students and the people that they served had various facets. First, many talked of having to overcome fears and misconceptions about the people that they served. Karen related this story from the homeless shelter:

I think there was a real fear of homeless people before my team went. The first night when we drove there...I just asked them, you know, "Have you ever had an experience with homeless people?" Some said, "Well I once served in a soup kitchen when I was like 10 with my church youth group." and like "Oh I lived in Chicago, so we don't talk to any of the homeless people because they might take your money." And then...after we were done, we all got back into the van and we were humbled real quick and we realized that they were just the same. They are just the same as us....I think that's why it's important

to hear their stories is that they have a family somewhere. They have a birthday. They are loved by people somewhere, you know, they have goals and aspirations in their life just like we do so. I think that's a big part of why it's important to hear those stories is to break those stereotypes and to break the image of what homelessness is.

Tara stated several times that it was important not to judge and to move past the outer appearances to a spirit of unconditional love. She talked about playing with kids in the neighborhood that she served. Her team tried to "give them a fun afternoon, ya know, free from whatever, out in the fresh air, something to do, and ya know, not judging the fact that they had mis-matched socks or that their clothes were completely stained from not being cleaned or whatever."

These volunteer relationships have broadened horizons and made students more aware of other people's situations. Ron commented that he has benefited from "just seeing the diversity, seeing how the people live and enjoying learning that, and being around them and that happened through a lot of volunteering." Karen suggested that, "Getting to know them is the most important part of us going there....The important part is hearing their stories and learning from them and so that's kind of how it's impacted me. It's just really opened my horizons and perspectives."

It is significant to note that these experiences have also had an impact on relationships outside the volunteer site. Every student talked about their efforts to influence their family members and friends. Tara shared about her parents' racial biases and about concerns that they and some of her friends had had about her serving in the inner city. Speaking of her team she said,

I believe we've all kinda had an aspect of that in our friends lives and in our families' lives and just saying, 'These people are not, you know, some leech to society...They are living. They are Christ's creation and we need to help them out of this hole that they can't dig themselves out of by themselves.' And so [we give] just that little push to try and make a flip in some ideas or some preconceptions about what poverty is in the people that we encounter.

Karen, whose parents were also initially opposed to her volunteer work with the homeless, shared that they now come along (with friends of theirs) to help at the site.

The volunteer experience also connected students to other communities and thus led them to create other bridging relationships. Ron spoke of a "roll-over effect" in which his initial volunteer experience has led him to work in other service settings, including a service stint in another country. Karen and Jason also started volunteering at new sites because of contacts they made in their main site.

Finally, it is clear that these students are wrestling with how these experiences and relationships will impact their lives outside the volunteer experience, or after they have

completed their time of service. Karen wondered aloud how her volunteering would affect her daily life. Ron said that he hoped that service would become “more of a lifestyle than something that you just get out and do for two hours.” Alli talked about ways in which tutoring might dovetail with her future career as a youth pastor. Each said that they wanted to continue their service after they left college, but most were unsure how it would specifically fit into their lives and work.

Religion and Social Service

From a religious perspective, it is evident that a number of factors are informing these volunteer experiences. First, students are motivated by a desire to serve as representatives of Christ. They talked about being the face of Christ, the light of Christ, and the hands and feet of Christ. They also feel a clear sense of obligation as Christians to serve. On a number of occasions they mentioned that this is something that Christians should be doing, that the Bible encourages people to serve the “least of these”, and that Christians need to bring change to society. The over-riding religious theme in the interviews, however, was a sense of love. Again and again the students mentioned the importance of loving the people they served. This love meets a need - “I think [the] women’s biggest need is to be loved.” Loving is also an imperative because it imitates Christ’s example - “The most important thing a Christian can do is love people unconditionally as Jesus did.” Tara summarized it this way, “God has always called his followers and believers to love each other and to love everyone else. In my mind the most important thing that Christians can do for everyone in the world is just love on them, love on them, love on them, love on them, in any way that you possibly can.” Christian love was far and away the most common theme in the interviews.

As mentioned above, the students focused on three different types of issues at their service sites: practical, relational, and broader social justice issues. It is interesting to note the way the students talked about each of these areas in religious terms. As the multiple references to Christian love suggest, all of the students were clearly most energized by the relational aspects of their service. This is reflected in the way they talked about these relationships from a faith perspective. Tara said,

What I have been called to do is serve and I can go into an environment and be a light for Jesus Christ. I can let people see Jesus Christ through me and through my deeds and go into an environment and give my all and love on people and let them know that they are not alone, that people love them, Jesus Christ loves them, and that he is willing to send people to help them.

Sara also commented on the fact that she did not often get to interact with people at her site, but when she did get time with families, it was extra rewarding from a spiritual point of view:

In the past several years I've been able to really see what God is doing through our work, because most of the time we just work and trust that He's using what we're doing, because we don't see the after effect. But those few times He gives us a glimpse of what He's truly doing through our service and that was so rewarding and so just thank you God, [for] these little glimpses of your kingdom.

When asked how his service has affected him personally, Ron stated that, "Just seeing the beauty of God's creation in different people and different types of people and different socioeconomic backgrounds and different places in the world. I think I've learned a lot from that...Jesus loves the little children of the world so we should too." These are just a few of the many references that the students made linking faith with relational ministry.

Though there were many references to the practical and social justice aspects of their service in the interviews, the students did not connect these types of service as closely to their faith. I was surprised that there was only one clear spiritual reference to practical service in all of the interviews. Karen, who works at the homeless shelter, said,

It's not really a choice for us to serve in this capacity as Christians. I think that we need to serve because I think in some respects that's what Jesus would have done. I think Jesus would have gotten his hands dirty and went in there and said, 'Hey, I'll help you find a job and hey, I'll help you learn English.'

Karen is also the only student to make a clear spiritual reference to social justice issues.

I think it's imperative that as Christians we, at least in one way or another, whether it be financial or whether it be giving your time, whether it's simply opening your mind up to the fact that there are issues that exist in the world, that are civic issues, maybe even political issues, that we need to be an active representative of who Jesus Christ would have been in this situation.

Interestingly, the student who talked the most about social issues made a distinction in his remarks between what Christ did and the social change that he personally wants. Ron noted that,

I like to just work with people and that's great. I feel like it's something that Christ did. But then there's part of me that just really wants large structural change and wants this as more of the liberal person who just wants things to happen, and I want, you know, the next type of civil rights movement to happen with restructuring society or something like that.

Even though he had a strong interest in structural change. He had no spiritual frame of reference to connect with it.

Discussion

This study set out to determine whether the volunteer experiences of students affected their perspectives on civic engagement in the areas of social capital formation and a commitment to seeking broader structural change. The analysis also sought to determine if the religious commitments of students influenced their outlook on these aspects of social action. While this case study is clearly limited by its small sample size and its focus on one specific institution, it does raise interesting issues that could be studied in future studies to determine if the current findings are generalizable across evangelical institutions or if different types of programs in different places produce different results. Comparisons between the service programs at evangelical, mainline Protestant, Catholic, and secular institutions could also produce interesting results.

The findings in this limited study show that bridging social capital formation is far and away the most salient aspect of the volunteer experience of these evangelical students. It helped them overcome misconceptions and it made them much more aware of the social situations of the communities in which they volunteered. Their service transformed them into advocates for these communities outside of their own, and it led them to find ways to get their friends and family members more involved at their sites. The experience fostered an ongoing commitment from the students to continue to serve in these communities in some capacity after graduation. It also connected them to other service sites in communities that were different from their own. All of the students in this study showed significant gains in their own development of bridging capital. It thus suggests that placing students in service sites that require them to interact with people who are different from them on a consistent basis does indeed engender social capital formation.

Some have argued that aspects of the evangelical religious tradition are detrimental to social capital development. This study provides no new insights into the propensity of evangelicals to volunteer more often in areas that promote bonding over bridging capital. It does suggest though, that there are aspects of the evangelical faith that encourage adherents to make connections with people outside its own community. The students interviewed used a great deal of religious language as support for their linking behaviors. They claimed that Christians were called to love everyone, especially “the least of these.” This admonition to love was supported by the fact that God has created the people from all these different backgrounds and He loves them. Evangelicalism is a religion that stress relationships with God and relationships with others. Thus it is easy for them to find spiritual justification for contact outside their own community of faith.

Though social capital formation was a dominant theme in these interviews, the effect that volunteering has on the willingness of students to engage in civic action directed toward broader social change is not as evident. All but one of the interviewees was able to identify cultural and structural issues that impact their service site, but these connections were sometimes hard for them to make. Answers to structural questions often drew on insights from the classroom or made references to issues that did not directly affect the respondent's service site. This suggests that the students' volunteer experiences were not helping them to see the structural needs at their sites or the broader impact of their work. These students need to look elsewhere to find resources for understanding macro level concerns. These findings lend support to the notion that insight into structural issues does not necessarily result from volunteer work unless it is intentionally addressed in the service program.

Furthermore, the students were on the whole disinclined to get involved personally with social justice campaigns. They all clearly stated that they did not want to do that kind of work. This finding could be a result of sampling bias. John Wilson (2000) cites the conventional wisdom which holds that social activists are attracted to social activism while most social service volunteers focus on addressing individual problems. Undoubtedly this personality issue was a factor in the students' responses. Yet it is clear that volunteering did little, if anything, to encourage them to find ways to see beyond the Evangelical cultural tool kit (Emerson and Smith 2000) and become more active for structural change.

Finally, analysis of the interviews supports the existing research on evangelicals and social action. As reported above, the students were able to draw amply on their faith tradition to support their relationship building activities. However, religious language for structural change was almost non-existent in the interviews. The students saw the importance of these issues, but they were unable to tap into resources from their faith to support social action on a broader scale. It is significant too that the students provided very little religious justification for their practical service as well. Clearly when evangelicals think of social engagement from a faith perspective, the guiding framework for action is relationships.

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APPENDIX I
Administrator Interview Protocol

Why does your institution have a program like this?

What impact do you hope this service will have on the students?

What impact do you hope it will have on the community or society at large?

How does your work impact your campus?

What types projects are your students involved in? Why these projects?

What projects are most popular with your students? Why? (Gather basic information about their programs, including numbers and history.)

What criteria do you use to decide which projects you will participate in?

Are there projects that your students would not be interested in or that they would not do?
Why?

What is civic engagement?

Why is it important?

How does civic engagement connect to matters of faith and spirituality?

What training do you do with your students? What are the goals of your training?

APPENDIX II
Student Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your current service. What are you doing and how long have you been doing it?
2. What is meaningful about this service?
3. How has the service that you have done affected the people that you are trying to serve? Why is this helpful for them?
4. Do the people you are working with have other needs? What are their biggest needs?
5. What have you learned about these people's needs and the best way to serve them through your volunteering?
6. Are there things that you had hoped to accomplish through your service, but you haven't been able to?
7. What overall is the best way to improve their circumstances?
8. Are there broader issues in society that affect these people? What are they? How do they affect them?
9. Do you know of any public policy debates out there that might affect them? Which ones?
10. Do you see yourself getting involved in these issues? Why or why not?
11. How would addressing these public policy issues affect them differently than your direct service?
12. Do you think what you are doing affects broader society in any way? How or why not?
13. How has your experience as a volunteer given you skills that will help you make a difference in the world? What skills have you gained?
14. Are there any skills that you think you still need to work on?
15. Do you see yourself getting involved with this or other issues after college? Which ones? How will you be involved?
16. I'm trying to figure out how volunteering affects people's views on how we should influence society. Do you have anything more to say about that?