



Program Evaluation Brief

Key Highlights:

Qualitative data analysis from Spring 2015 interviews with community partners revealed that students, agencies, and the community are benefiting in numerous ways from the service of Sam H. Jones Community Service Scholars.

Quick Guide

- p. 4 Difference from other volunteers
- p. 5 Changes in agency productivity and service
- p. 5 Community partners as co-educators
- p. 6 Satisfaction/future considerations for improvement

Perceptions of Community Partners regarding the Sam H. Jones Community Service Scholarship Program

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Overview

The purpose of this evaluation was to understand perceptions of community partners who have partnered with the Center for Service and Learning (CSL) to host Sam H. Jones (SHJ) Community Service Scholarship recipients. Community partners were asked to voluntarily participate in an interview at the end of the Spring 2015 semester to learn more about their experiences with the Scholars and suggestions for program improvement. Their responses were de-identified and analyzed. This report shares overall findings from these interviews and provides general recommendations to improve the experience for both the student and the community partners.

Sam H. Jones Community Service Scholarship

The SHJ Community Service Scholarship program is one of the nation's largest service-based scholarship programs. Created in 1994, this campus program has awarded over 2,700 scholarships, totaling over \$6 million. The program began with two Scholars in its first year and has grown to more than 200 Scholars annually in eight distinct programs. As an innovative practice in civic engagement (Bingle & Hatcher, 2009), service is valued as a form of merit for these campus designated scholarship funds, in a similar way as merit is often awarded for academic achievement or athletic ability. The purpose of this scholarship program is to recognize students' prior service contributions to the community and foster their leadership, professionalism, and community involvement (see Figure 1).

This report examines the SHJ Community Service Scholars (CSS) program, one of the eight distinct programs. Scholars' interests are matched with a community agency, and they contribute four hours per week at the agency during the academic year. The CSS program is designed to introduce IUPUI Scholars to social issues in the community. Throughout the year, Scholars participate in direct and/or indirect service that furthers the mission of the agency while addressing the social issue. Scholars also enroll in a service learning course, *Community Service Seminar*, during the fall semester that provides an academic framework for reflection on their service experience.

Method

CSL team members (3) interviewed community partners (10) involved in the CSS program. The evaluation research project was supervised by Tom Hahn and approved by the IU Institutional Research Board (IRB # 1502652264).

Recruitment Procedures

CSS community partners were contacted by CSL and invited to participate in an interview to learn more about their perspective on the CSS program. Prior to the start of interviews, potential participants (the community partners) were given an IRB approved Study Information Sheet. Only CSL team members and each individual community partner were present during the interviews. The interviews were approximately one hour long and were audio recorded.

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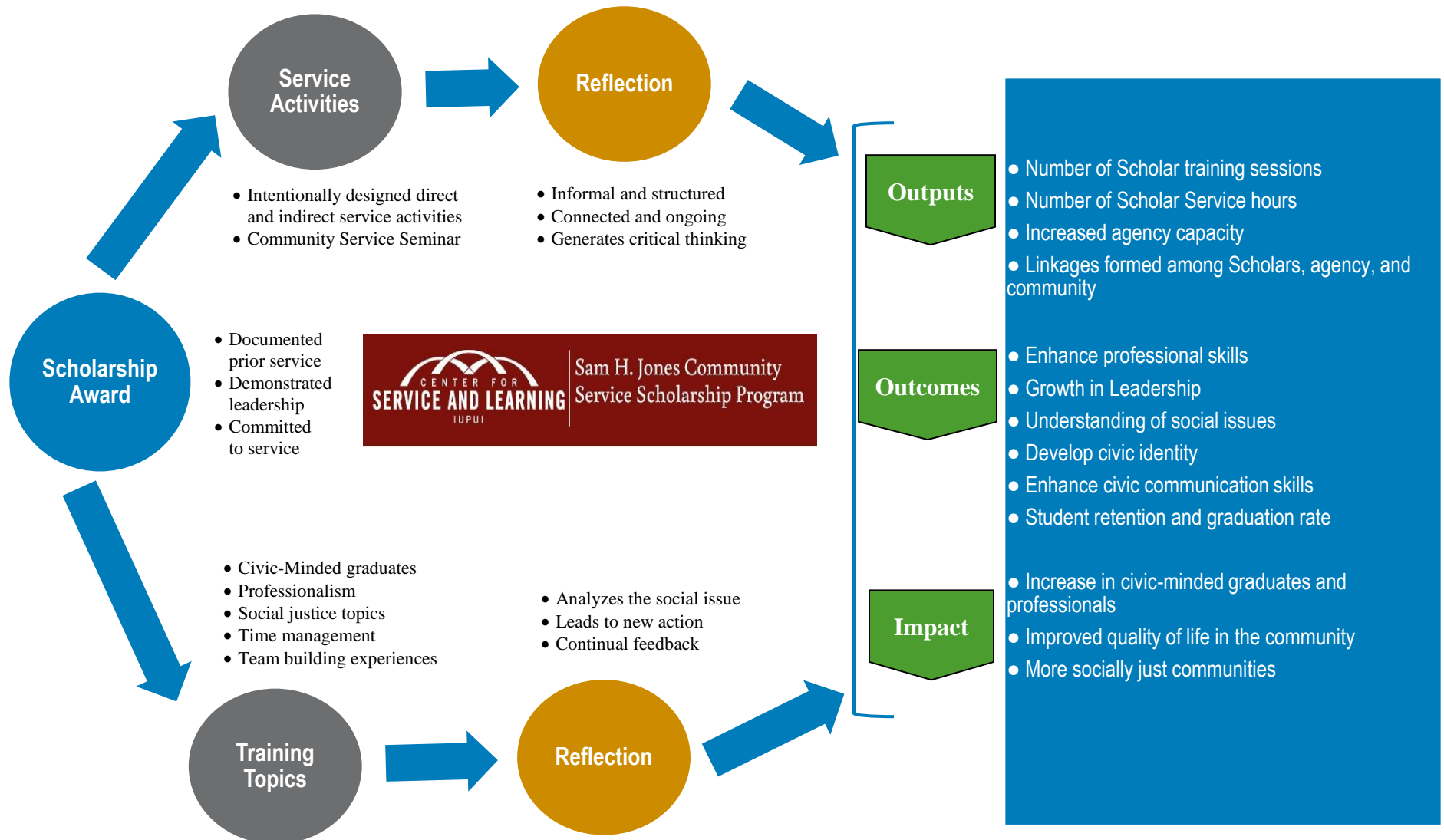


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Figure 1: SHJ Community Service Scholarship Program Logic Model





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Participants

A total of 10 community partners participated in individual interviews over the course of one month’s time in the spring of 2015. This sample was intentionally purposive in order to identify “information rich” participants (Patton, 2015). As shown in Table 1, these participants represented a variety of non-profit agencies. The participants included 8 women and 2 men; and 8 Whites and 2 African-Americans. The number of years the community partner had hosted a CSS ranged from 1 to 8 years.

Table 1: Community Partner Organizations

Name of Community Partners	Purpose	Yrs. w/CSS
AMPATH (Academic Model Providing Access to Healthcare)	Provides prevention and treatment programs to HIV-positive persons in Kenya; partners to feed HIV-affected persons, provides school fees, nutrition, etc. to children affected by HIV/AIDS.	2
Big Brothers-Big Sisters	Makes meaningful, monitored matches between adult volunteers and children, ages 8 through 18, developing positive relationships.	1
Exodus Refugee	Welcomes refugees to Indiana and arranges housing, food and clothing, case management, as well as education, employment and health services for individuals and families.	2
George Washington Community High School	Provides a wide variety of services designed to support students, families, and the surrounding community.	6
Indy Urban Acres	Maintains an 8 acre organic farm; donates 100% of its produce; provides education to elementary school children through free tours and workshops.	3
Mary Rigg Neighborhood Center	Provides emergency food pantry, housing and utility assistance, mental health counseling, health insurance information, employment and financial coaching, and before/after school programming.	4
Ronald McDonald House of Indiana	Provides a supportive home-away-from-home for parents and siblings of seriously ill or injured children receiving hospital care.	8
United Way of Central Indiana	Provides support to help individuals achieve and maintain self-sufficiency by focusing on four key areas of community impact – education, income, health and basic needs.	3
Volunteers of America of Indiana	Works primarily with individuals transitioning out of the prison system; assists homeless veterans, seniors, and adults with disabilities.	6

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the grounded theory method, which Patton (2002) defines as “theory that emerges from the researcher’s observations and in interviews out in the real world rather than in the laboratory or the academy” (p. 11). Grounded theory holds that the central tenants of experience and phenomenon are retained within the lives of the individuals under study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Qualitative analysis procedures were adopted to facilitate an exploratory content analysis of 10 interviews of CSS community partners. This comprehensive report considers an overall view of all CSS community partner interviews. Therefore, the main goal is to understand and describe notable themes and patterns of discussion found across all interviews.



Content Analysis of Interview Transcripts

Transcripts were constructed by using audio files created during the interview. Patton (2002) describes content analysis as “referring to any qualitative data reduction or sense making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). Due to the constructivist nature of this evaluation (Charmaz, 2000), the analysis progressed from more concrete codes to abstract themes that reflect the meaning that the community partners attached to their experiences with the Scholars.

Coding Process

A coding process was employed as the primary means of examination. Corbin and Strauss’s (1990) work explains, “data using the grounded theory method is frequently referred to as coding to depict the process by which data are collapsed into smaller pieces of data, categorized, considered, and reconceptualized in new ways” (p. 348).

Total Interviews	10
Total Codes Assigned	255
Average Number of Codes Assigned per topic	64

Results

Several notable themes emerged during analysis of the interview data. These themes are presented on the following pages and supported by actual examples of CSS community partners’ interview conversations. The names of the community partners have been omitted to promote confidentiality. However, these responses have not been edited in any other way, allowing for a trustworthy representation of the community partners’ experiences with the Scholars.

Results are organized by four main interview topics:

- 1) Difference from other volunteers
- 2) Changes in agency productivity and service
- 3) Community partners as co-educators
- 4) Satisfaction/future considerations for improvement

Difference from other volunteers

The intention of this topic area was to engage the community partners in articulating whether there were differences between CSS and other volunteers. Since prior service is one of the requirements to be awarded an SHJ scholarship, it was assumed the community partners would articulate some differences. However, the interviews indicated the differences were striking. The following themes were illuminated during the interviews:

Theme: More invested

- “Right off the bat they are more invested.”
- “They come with an openness to learn.”
- “They are always a step above. They understand the deeper meaning behind it.”
- “The individuals we have worked with have all been really positive individuals to work with and they seem to be very flexible, but also they seem to be very invested in the clients.”
- “I would say they are often eager to learn more about the populations that we serve and about how what they are doing fits into the bigger picture of service.”

Theme: Higher level skill set

- “This is a higher caliber of position. These students are amazing.”
- “I am overwhelmed by how smart they are as such young people and how much they seem to understand about the human element of giving and not expecting something in return. I am always amazed by that.”
- “Each year each Scholar has brought something special. Each person is different; I don’t always get the same thing. That is why I really enjoy working with them.”
- “I have found that they are really ready for complicated tasks.”
- “We also call them skills-based volunteers because they do bring an expertise.”



Changes in agency productivity and service

The intention of this topic was to explore if and to what extent having a CSS allowed an agency to provide additional resources and/or allowed agency staff to focus on other tasks. With many non-profits agencies facing budgetary pressures, providing a measure of assistance to them through their Scholar is central to the SHJ program. The interviews illuminated the following themes:

Theme: Increased agency capacity

- “The fact that you offer this service and provide us with additional help has been a huge help.”
- “Yes, especially with the computer lab, it definitely helps us with capacity for services and it’s consistent. If we don’t have a volunteer or Scholar, the lab is not open.”
- “They have definitely helped us to free up our staff.”
- “They are able to help us with things we don’t have time to do.”
- “I can focus on volunteer outreach.”

Theme: Enduring service

- “One of the best things to see is that there is another ally in the community to make the city more welcoming and they become advocates even making more connections for us in the community.”
- “XXX recruited her friends and brought them along to do stuff. That is pretty impressive.”
- “They are looking for ways to clue into that and be a part of that relationship even after they leave.”
- “And they give us undying devotion.”
- “I am really proud of each one of them and all have graduated and done fantastic things, they keep in touch with me and come back for events.”

Community partners as co-educators

The community partners displayed a deep level of understanding and commitment to their Scholars’ learning. They articulated a willingness to “be there” for the Scholars. Indeed, the community partners embraced their role of co-educators and recounted a variety of instances where they added to their Scholars’ learning. This commitment to prepare the Scholars to address the issues facing the community seemed to be embedded in their practice. In addition to integrating the experience with course content, other learning experiences detailed by the community partners included: deepened understand of social issue(s), diversity in the learning experience, and conflict management.

Theme: Integration with academic course content

- “Instead of having a syllabus where I sit and go through different topics, I address the situation at the time of the issue. For example, he might ask me a question, why do we do this with the payroll or what is the value of that? I can embellish upon that in the real world.”
- “I wanted him to redesign it to channel that water to a rain garden on the west side of the green house. We got the plans. We went to Lowes. We looked at materials. We now have no flooding issues. So, that was using his engineering background.”
- “I asked them to enhance their reporting and skills. I asked them to design the newsletter; that allows them to expand on their own creativity. I asked them to update the website.”
- “It is also really great that they are in a class the first semester because I think it ties in what they are doing here with the even bigger picture.”

Theme: Deepened understanding of social issue

- “We have conversations around issues involving incarceration a lot of times. It helps take that stigma away and starts to open up conversations about poverty and mental health and drug abuse and trauma. And so yeah I think primarily having those conversations, but I think they learn more from the ladies directly because when you are in a computer lab and someone doesn’t have an email address, it gives you a different view of the barriers it takes to get a job.”
- “He really just got a good understanding of all of the challenges that come with poverty.”
- “She has really gotten to see a whole other side.”
- “They understand how people live and what people are going through, and it’s amazing.”



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Theme: Diversity in the learning experience

- “Our clients are incredibly diverse with different ethnic backgrounds, religions, and languages. Our staff is incredibly diverse. We have a staff of close to 40 and over half of them are from the cultures where our clients are from and it is incredibly diverse. So I think just being exposed to that work atmosphere is a positive one.”
- “I think giving them that firsthand opportunity to actually engage with our clients and to actually get to know them and being exposed to a lot of diversity here.”
- “We talk a lot about civil rights.”

Theme: Conflict management

- “We took time to share what was your experience in school. So she shared how she did not have positive relations with her nursing supervisor. So we talked and we brainstormed some strategies and that made me happy because one week later she used the same strategies and it worked out. So it was a good experience.”
- “I think one of the challenges Scholars have had the most is when clients are in the computer lab they can’t be on Facebook or social media, so one of the hardest things that they have had to do is tell people who are often a lot older than them that they need to quit doing what they are doing. But it’s a good lesson in boundaries and in doing something scary.”

Satisfaction/Future considerations for improvement

The community partners were asked to rank their satisfaction with the CSS program on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being very satisfied. Eight of the community partners ranked their satisfaction as a 6, and the other two ranked it as a 5. These quantified responses led to a broader discussion of how the CSS program could be improved and enhanced in the future. The method used to track hours, the importance of the Scholar’s interests aligning with the activities of the agency, and desire to deepen the network among the agencies were themes that emerged.

Theme: Tracking hours document

- “It is very difficult for me to get in and do those reports.”
- “The one thing that I have trouble with is the Google docs spreadsheet. It would almost be easier if the Scholar had a binder for me to sign off on.”

Theme: Importance of fit with the organization

- “I kind of have to see what their strengths are and what they’re capable of doing. I mean, XXX, can do anything. He was fantastic.”
- “If they can work well with us and buy into the mission, it is a good fit.”
- “I think one of the more challenging parts, and this may be changing I think, but it is having to interview in the summer when folks are not necessarily here. Especially for this site, it is not for everyone to work here.”

Theme: Deepening network among agencies

- “I’ve only met with all of the other community partners once at orientation and I think that from a professional standpoint it might be nice to have a follow-up meeting at the end of the semester.”
- “We just had someone from XXX come in and there are two Scholars there and so I know XXX so I am able to make that connection, but it would be nice to be able to be like oh we are part of this program and we are all working together and we are not doing the exact same stuff but to have that support.”

Theme: Overall satisfaction

- “It has been a great relationship, I have gained great friends.”
- “I feel like I can trust them that they will do a good job and they will represent us well, and they have. I am really appreciative of being a partner for this program.”
- “The Scholars that we’ve had have been great to work with and just a benefit to us.”
- “One of the things I love and I do believe this is the case, SHJ Scholars are tomorrow’s leaders in some community.”
- “I always tell the students when they leave that Sam Jones would be very proud to have this person represent him and they say wow that is really important and means a lot and I would say well you are a very important person because you get to carry on his legacy.”



Summary of Findings

Overall, evidence indicates that the Scholars, the agencies, and the community are benefitting from the CSS program. Across all interviews, community partners conveyed that their Scholars were exemplars and described their service as very helpful to their various missions. For example, community partners described their Scholars as being more vested in the activities of the agency, having a higher skill-set than other volunteers, and increasing the capacity of the agency to provide service. These findings may be indicative of the rigorous process that all CSS Scholars go through before and after selection, e.g., documenting extensive prior service; demonstration of leadership skills; participating in an application and interview process; articulation of commitment to community service and addressing social issues; and ongoing feedback with the Scholars throughout the academic year.

The community partners also expressed a dedication to their role as co-educators to their Scholars. The undertaking of this role took many forms, often in concert: (1) formal integration of service with academic content, (2) in the moment “let this be a life lesson” learning experiences, and (3) face-to-face, sometimes uncomfortable, encounters with realities within the community. The community partners also indicated that many past CSS Scholars continue their service to the community after their scholarship award period is over; becoming advocates for the agency and in addressing the social issue(s).

Recommendations and Implications

The results of this CSS evaluation have a number of important implications for program practice. Overall, results suggest that the Scholars’ activities can have positive impacts on the agencies’ capacity for service delivery. Second, the results imply that there exist substantial learning moments during the Scholars’ service experiences; community partners appear to be quite attentive to explaining and enriching these experiences through discussion. Third, there are specific operational improvements that should be addressed:

- a) The system for tracking Scholars’ hours was seen by community partners as confusing and unnecessarily time-consuming. The CSL should revisit this method with a simpler “user friendly” process;
- b) While the community partners expressed high satisfaction with the overwhelming majority of their scholars, the instances when they were not greatly satisfied had to do with a lack of fit between the activities of the agency and the scholar’s interest. Though this was an infrequent occurrence, the CSL should ensure a match between the agency’s and the Scholar’s top choices. When possible, Scholars should visit and tour the agency before a match is made. As one community partner said “it is not for everyone to work here”;
- c) An end-of-the-semester follow-up meeting of the CSS community partners to reflect and share their experiences with the Scholars should be scheduled.

In terms of future research, it is important to continue to develop evaluation techniques and methods to investigate the impacts of the CSS and other SHJ scholarship programs. To that end, addressing the following questions is warranted:

- 1) Although the strong commitment by community partners to being co-educators for their Scholars is consistent with prior studies (Sandy & Holland, 2006), to what extent are these activities of the CSS program intentionally designed? Does the community partner participate in student reflection activities? Are the community partners given reflection products for review?
- 2) The community partners provided compelling examples of how the service of the Scholars increased agency capacity. Can this assertion be further quantified, measured, and shared with other stakeholders?
- 3) Community partners’ comments regarding the interactions between the Scholar and agency clients were intriguing. An additional line of inquiry to explore this interaction is warranted.
- 4) Community partners indicated that many of their Scholars continue to provide service to the community after they graduate. To what extent and in what ways (depth, breadth, leadership, career) do CSS alumni remain civically engaged post-graduation?



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