College Students, Diversity, and Community Service Learning

by Scott Seider, James P. Huguley & Sarah Novick — 2013

**Background/Context:** Over the past two decades, more than 200 studies have been published on the effects of community service learning on university students. However, the majority of these studies have focused on the effects of such programming on White and affluent college students, and few have considered whether there are differential effects for participants depending on their racial and ethnic backgrounds. This study considered these differential effects in both the academic and experiential components of such programming.

**Participants:** This study compared the experiences of 244 White students and 118 students of color participating in a community service learning program at Beacon University (a pseudonym) during the 2008–2009 academic year.

**Intervention:** The Social Action Program is a community service learning program sponsored by Beacon University’s philosophy department that seeks to educate participating students about social injustice. The academic component of the program is a year-long course that includes interdisciplinary readings from the humanities and social sciences as well as weekly lectures and a discussion section. Participating students also spend 10 hours each week for the entire academic year at one of approximately 50 different service placements focused on antipoverty efforts.

**Research Design:** Mixed-methods research design involving quantitative analyses (analysis of covariance) of pre-post surveys and qualitative analyses of hour-long semistructured interviews.

**Results:** Students of color participating in the community service learning program characterized the academic component of the program as offering a weaker sense of community than did their White classmates, and many expressed a reluctance to engage in race discussions with their classmates or to respond to perspectives they perceived as naïve, inaccurate, or offensive.

**Conclusions:** Even university courses and programming explicitly designed to disrupt White privilege can inadvertently be normed to serve the interests, experiences, and learning goals of White students. Such reification of White privilege comes with a significant cost; the learning of all students is diminished when diverse perspectives are not fully represented or heard.

Opportunities to participate in community service and community service learning (CSL) are
increasingly ubiquitous at American colleges and universities. A 2008 survey by the Higher Education Research Institute found that 65% of college freshmen characterized their respective universities as offering opportunities to participate in such programming (Liu, Ruiz, DeAngelo, & Pryor, 2009). Likewise, the Corporation for National & Community Service has reported that the number of college students participating in community service jumped from 2.7 million in 2002 to 3.3 million in 2005, a growth rate double that of adult volunteers during this same time period (Dote, Cramer, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006).

Community service learning has been defined as “a form of experiential learning where students and faculty collaborate with communities to address problems and issues, simultaneously gaining knowledge and skills and advancing personal development” (Higher Education Research Institute, 2009). Over the past two decades, more than 200 studies have been published on the effects of these community service and CSL experiences on university students, with the majority of these studies reporting on the positive effects associated with such experiences for participants (e.g., Butin, 2006; Saltmarsh, 2005; Zlotkowski, 1998). Scholars have found, for example, that college students participating in CSL experiences become less likely to have stereotypical perceptions of individuals contending with poverty (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000), less likely to blame social service clients for their struggles (Giles & Eyler, 1994), and more knowledgeable about complex social problems (Batchelder & Root, 1994). In relation to issues of race and racism, scholars have demonstrated that CSL can result in increases in racial understanding (Astin & Sax, 1998), decreases in racist beliefs (Myers-Lipton, 1996), and greater facility in working with individuals from diverse backgrounds (Osborne, Hammerich, & Hensley, 1998).

Despite all this scholarship, relatively few studies of university-based CSL programs have considered whether there are differential effects for student participants depending on their racial and ethnic backgrounds. In fact, the vast majority of the published studies have focused on the effects of the CSL experience on White and affluent college students (Butin, 2003). Yet with the student bodies of American colleges and universities becoming increasingly diverse (Carnevale & Fry, 2002), it is crucial to consider the experiences within CSL programs of students of color and other nondominant identity groups. Issues of race and racism can be particularly salient in CSL programs, and thus these programs may present unique challenges to students of color participating in them.

Moreover, if the existing scholarship on CSL is based primarily on studies of White college students, then many university-based CSL programs are likely structured to serve the particular interests and learning needs of these students (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2008). In such programs, the “Whiteness” of the college curriculum may unintentionally be reified because the program models themselves are designed to complement the White student experience. As a result, students from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds can be denied the opportunity to engage in a CSL experience that considers the issues, ideas and concepts embedded in the experience from multiple and diverse perspectives (Lechuga, Clerc, & Howell, 2009).

In this article, we first report on the extant scholarship regarding the disparate experiences of students of color in CSL programs and then draw on our study of the Social Action Program at Beacon University to increase understanding of why students of color may feel isolated within
these learning contexts. In so doing, we also seek to add to the scholarship on the experiences of students of color in higher education more broadly by focusing on an increasingly prevalent pedagogical strategy in university settings—community service learning. We conclude with recommendations for faculty and administrators who are engaged in CSL with an increasingly diverse student body.

BACKGROUND

One of the traditional objectives of community service learning on American college campuses has been to introduce privileged young adults to the challenges experienced by individuals from marginalized or oppressed communities (e.g., Astin, 2000; S. Jones & Abes, 2004; Seider, Rabinowicz, & Gillmor, 2010). Such motives, however, have led some researchers to characterize these efforts as “scholarly voyeurism” (Philipsen, 2003). As Butin (2006) has observed, an overarching premise of CSL is that the students participating in the experience are White, middle-class, between the ages of 18 and 24, and grew up in sheltered suburban communities. Yet increasingly, universities are populated by undergraduates who do not fit into one or more of these privileged demographic categories (Carnevale & Fry, 2002; L. Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Pewewardy & Frey, 2002; Vernez, Abrahamse, & Quigley, 1996).

In a report for the Educational Testing Service, Carnevale and Fry (2002) projected that the proportion of ethnic minority students in college will rise from 29.4% in 1995 to 37.2% in 2015. Also, these authors suggested that 80% of the growth in college attendance in this period will come from ethnic minority students. Given these trends, one increasingly important question is how students from nondominant groups experience CSL programs that seek to introduce them to issues facing groups of which they themselves are a part. A second, and related, question is whether CSL programs remain normed to the interests, understandings, and learning needs of White students. Or, as Butin (2006) has written, “Service-learning is premised on fostering ‘border crossing’ across categories of race, ethnicity, class, immigrant status, language, and disability. Yet what happens when the postsecondary population already occupies those identity categories?” (p. 482). Accordingly, recent scholarship has attempted to understand the experiential consequences of this pedagogical misfit in CSL programming at the college level.

Several key themes have emerged regarding racial differences in motivation and participation in CSL programs. Scholars have reported that students of color may be less likely to participate in courses involving CSL than their White classmates. Reporting on the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, for example, Miller and Scott (2000) have acknowledged that service learning at their institution has traditionally been the domain of White women and that the institution has been increasing efforts to recruit students of color to the programming. Similar disparities have been observed at other institutions, and Coles (1999) offered some helpful explanations for such disparities at Marquette University. Specifically, Coles found part of the explanation to be that students of color were more likely to hold part-time jobs than White students and, as a result, to characterize themselves as too busy to participate in CSL. Coles also found, however, that many students of color perceived themselves to not be in need of additional exposure to members of ethnic minority groups or to individuals contending with poverty. Most important, Coles reported,
To many minority students, Marquette’s service-learning program may look like another White establishment. . . . That the service-learning program is sponsored by a predominantly White university in the middle of a city with high proportions of people of color may establish it in the minds of many as a White charitable program. (p. 98)

Here, Coles suggested that students of color at Marquette may have been uncomfortable with the power imbalance that the service learning program established between members of the predominantly White university and the predominantly minority surrounding community. Given these imbalances in participation and the presuppositions that minority students hold for service learning programs, an important question becomes whether potential participants of color are accurate in their anticipation of biases in the social orientation of CSL programs.

Recent research supports these students’ suspicions of program misfit; scholars have reported that the learning outcomes from such programs seem to show some differentiation by race and ethnicity. According to Boyle-Baise and Langford (2004), the majority of White college students engaged in a CSL program that involved tutoring low-income urban youth described the experience as an “eye-opening” look at poverty and characterized the conditions in which their tutees were living as “upsetting” and “nightmarish” (p. 62). In contrast, many of the college students of color participating in the program characterized the experience as a “biased” or “stereotypical” portrayal of poverty. They expressed concern that their White classmates were only being exposed to problematic aspects of low-income communities and expressed particular discomfort with learning experiences embedded in the program, such as “drives through impoverished neighborhoods” and “community informants’ tales of adversity” (p. 62).

Similarly, in her research on a CSL program that brought college students into contact with southwestern farm workers, Enos (1999) reported that “the students who are most affected are not necessarily the minority students. . . [but rather] the students who have been somewhat isolated and have not been exposed to the conditions” (p. 58). The White and middle-class students in Enos’s study characterized their exposure to migrant farm workers as “eye opening” and “upsetting.” Yet for the working-class students and students of color in Enos’s study, the service learning experience represented far less of an awakening to previously unconsidered social issues. Indeed, these types of program activities illustrate clear—although perhaps unintentional—pedagogical biases toward the more privileged White participants in such programs.

Moreover, researchers have also found that students may be having racially disparate experiences in the academic components of their service learning programs as well. Green (2001) has reported that a number of the students of color in her service learning course “reported being more comfortable at their service site than on campus” (p. 25). She also found that students of color in service learning courses were leery of being perceived as “representing their race” in their contributions to class discussions (p. 25). Similarly, Coles (1999) has reported that “minority students often feel less free to talk in [community service learning] classes in which their numbers are low” (p. 101).

These deterrents to participation or full engagement have harmful effects on both the academic and service goals of CSL programs. In terms of academic outcomes, a number of researchers
have demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between college students’ interactions with racially diverse peers and increases in their cognitive development (Antonio et al., 2004; Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa, 2006; Nelson Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2005), moral development (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010), and openness to diversity (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001). Likewise, Hurtado’s (2003) study of college students at 10 different public universities revealed that the students able to engage in open and honest dialogue with racially diverse peers scored higher on a number of cognitive and analytical measures.

In terms of the capacity of the actual service provisions in these programs, Kean and Hall (2009) found that college students who themselves had experiences with marginality expressed a greater “desire to connect with community partners” than their more privileged classmates (p. 72). Green (2001) has reported that the African American college students in her classes demonstrated a greater degree of identification with their tutees than did the White students, as well as a greater willingness to push their tutees to succeed academically. Thus, students who are themselves from marginalized communities may make unique contributions to the service element of these programs. Given these findings, the ability of a university-based CSL program to meet both its learning and service goals may be hindered by pedagogical biases that deter many students of color from either participating or fully engaging in the program.

Still, CSL programs can and do hold benefits for students of color. Cohen (1995) has written that students of color participating in CSL experiences come away from such experiences with a heightened ability to identify and articulate the injustices that the service has sought to address. Likewise, Chesler and colleagues (2006) reported that although students of color participating in service learning at the University of Michigan characterized the experience as less eye-opening than did their White classmates, many of these students of color “nonetheless encountered challenges to their perceptions and assumptions” and were “challenged to expand their intellectual and emotional understandings” (Chesler, Ford, Galura, & Charbeneau, 2006, pp. 23, 29). It seems, then, that there are both practical and pedagogical reasons to bolster the participation of students of color in service learning programs, but to do so, we must continue to grow in our understanding of why such programs often fall short in terms of appeal to and appropriateness for these students.

In sum, despite the robust findings about the value of diverse participants within a CSL program, the extant scholarship suggests that students of color participating in CSL may possess discomforting concerns regarding both the social orientation of these programs and the power imbalance between university personnel and the community. There are also challenges for students of color in the academic courses that accompany the service experiences—namely, feeling uncomfortable sharing their experiences and insights as a result of the racial dynamics within these classrooms. Currently, these emerging research trends on racial differences in CSL experiences need further support to cement their validity as well as continued exploration of their mechanisms and nuances. Specifically, we have much more to learn about the actual experiences of students of color within these programs beyond the misfit in orientation in the service component and stifling racial dynamics in the academic portion. We also need to better understand the culture of these CSL programs, particularly as perceived by students of color who participate in them. To that end, the present study of the Social Action Program at Beacon
University sought to extend what is known in the field by (1) describing racial differences in students’ sense of community that undermine the aims of the academic component of service learning for students from diverse backgrounds and (2) interrogating this disparate sense of community by considering the discourse of both White students and students of color within the service learning classroom. In this article, we seek to offer new insight to university faculty and administrators engaged in CSL around why students of color may experience feelings of disconnection in the CSL context.

THE SOCIAL ACTION PROGRAM

Beacon University is a private American university in a large northeastern city, and the Social Action Program (SAP) is a yearlong CSL program sponsored by the university’s philosophy department. The mission of SAP is to educate students about “social injustice” by placing them in contact with “marginalized communities” and “social change organizations.” The academic component of SAP is a yearlong course that includes readings in philosophy, theology, sociology, and education. Students meet three times a week for lecture and participate in a weekly discussion section. The weekly discussion section allows students to meet with SAP faculty members in smaller groups of 12–15 students in order to ask questions about the weekly readings and lectures, to share successes and frustrations from their service placements, and to discuss connections between their academic learning and service experiences.

In addition to their academic requirements, all Beacon University students enrolled in SAP participate in a weekly service placement. Their work in these service placements ranges from tutoring urban elementary school students, to volunteering at a suicide hotline, to helping low-income families apply for affordable housing. During the 2008–2009 year, approximately half of the placements were in the field of education (e.g., GED tutoring, ESL classes, after-school tutoring), and the other half involved either homelessness (e.g., volunteering at a soup kitchen) or health care (e.g., hospital emergency room, rehabilitation center). Students spent approximately 10 hours a week at their respective service placements for the entire academic year.

Previous studies have shown Beacon University’s SAP to have a significant positive effect on participating students’ public service motivation, expected political involvement, and beliefs about the causes of poverty (Seider, Gillmor, & Rabinowicz, 2012; Seider, Rabinowicz, & Gillmor, 2010, 2011). Racial differences in these outcomes at Beacon University, however, had not been previously examined. This inquiry considered the question of how students of color participating in SAP perceived their experiences in the program as compared with their White classmates, with particular attention to racial differences in how participants perceived the climate of this program.

METHODS

SAMPLING

Approximately 400 Beacon University students participated in the Social Action Program during the 2008–2009 academic year. A total of 386 of these students completed our survey at the outset of the academic year in September 2008 (Time 1), and then 362 of those 386 (94%) students
completed our follow-up survey administered in May 2009 (Time 2). The responses of the 362 students who completed both the initial and follow-up surveys were considered in subsequent analyses. The group consisted of 222 female students and 140 male students; 321 participants were sophomores at Beacon University, 28 were freshmen, and 13 were juniors. Of these students, 358 (out of 362) were between the ages of 18 and 21 years old. The demographic characteristics of these students in terms of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Summary Statistics of SAP Participants by Race/Ethnicity (n = 362)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Asian American</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Biracial</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAP Participants</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>21 (6%)</td>
<td>40 (11%)</td>
<td>244 (67%)</td>
<td>30 (8%)</td>
<td>16 (4%)</td>
<td>11 (3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Summary Statistics of SAP Participants by Self-Reported Socioeconomic Status (n = 362)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socioeconomic Status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Working Class</th>
<th>Lower Middle Class</th>
<th>Middle Class</th>
<th>Upper Middle Class</th>
<th>Upper Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAP Participants</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>21 (6%)</td>
<td>22 (6%)</td>
<td>85 (23%)</td>
<td>190 (52%)</td>
<td>44 (12%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative interviews were also conducted in April 2009 by this study’s lead author with 30 Beacon University students enrolled in SAP. To select these 30 participants, we requested that the 12 Beacon University faculty members who taught in the Social Action Program nominate three or four students apiece who could offer diverse perspectives on SAP by virtue of their gender, race/ethnicity, and college major. These students were then contacted via electronic mail and invited to participate in an interview about their experiences in the program.

Of the 30 students who participated in qualitative interviews, 16 were female and 14 were male. Twenty-eight were sophomores at Beacon University, 1 was a junior, and 1 was a freshman. Eleven of the students were majoring in business or economics; 7 in a social science; 5 in the humanities; 3 in the natural sciences; 3 in communications; and 1 in education. The demographic characteristics of these students in terms of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status are presented in Tables 3 and 4. As can be seen in these tables, the diversity of the interview participants in terms of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status was roughly proportional to the diversity among both the survey respondents described earlier and in SAP overall.

Table 3. Summary Statistics of Interviewed SAP Participants by Race/Ethnicity (n = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Asian American</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Latino/a</th>
<th>Biracial</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAP Participants</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
<td>2 (7%)</td>
<td>23 (77%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Summary Statistics of Interviewed SAP Participants by Self-Reported Socioeconomic Status
Socioeconomic Status \((n = 30)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Working Class</th>
<th>Lower Middle Class</th>
<th>Middle Class</th>
<th>Upper Middle Class</th>
<th>Upper Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAP Participants</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(13%)</td>
<td>(7%)</td>
<td>(20%)</td>
<td>(50%)</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURE

As noted, 362 students participating in SAP during the 2008–2009 academic year completed quantitative surveys in September 2008 (Time 1) and then in May 2009 (Time 2). Embedded in these surveys were measures adapted from a number of scales, including the Public Service Motivation Scale (J. Perry, 1996; \(\alpha = .68\)), the Political Engagement Survey (Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich, & Torney-Purta, 2006; \(\alpha = .88\)), and the National Survey on Poverty in America (NPR-Kaiser-Harvard, 2001; \(\alpha = .77\)). The follow-up survey also included a series of items about students’ perceptions of their experiences in SAP. These items included students’ sense of safety traveling to the service placement, involvement in meaningful work at the service placement, quality of interactions with SAP professor, feeling of community in the SAP classroom, and perceived value of the assigned readings and subsequent discussions.

For all these items, participating students were presented with a statement to which they responded along a 5-point Likert scale; 1 represented strong disagreement with the given statement, and 5 represented strong agreement with the given statement. Feeling of community in the SAP classroom, for example, was assessed by participants’ agreement with the following statement: “I experienced a strong sense of community in the SAP classroom.”

Steps were taken throughout the survey administration to reduce social desirability biases in responses (Dillman, 2007). Both the pre- and postsurveys were administered by Beacon University’s Office of Institutional Research rather than by SAP faculty or this study’s authors. Students completed the surveys online at a time and location of their choosing and were assured prior to beginning the surveys that their responses would be confidential and not seen by their SAP professors. Specifically, the introduction to the survey explained that the survey questions were intended to help SAP gain a deeper understanding of students’ experiences and noted that students should answer “as honestly and candidly as possible.” Moreover, because the Office of Institutional Research conducts end-of-course evaluations for all Beacon University courses in an identical manner, the experience of offering confidential opinions about course material would not have been a unique or novel one for SAP participants. For these reasons, we believe that students’ responses represented valid representations of their beliefs, values, and worldviews.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURE

The interviews with 30 SAP participants all took place in April or May 2009 in a conveniently located coffee shop on the Beacon University campus. Each participant took part in an hour-long semistructured interview that was sufficiently structured to ensure that the questions posed to students were open-ended, clear, and not overly complex (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) but also allowed the interviewer to pose what Patton (1990) referred to as probes or follow-up questions.
All the interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of participating students.

Interview questions focused on a number of different aspects of students’ experiences within SAP. These included:

- Students’ motivation for participating in the Social Action Program (e.g., What led you to sign up for SAP? What did you hope to get out of your SAP experience?)
- Students’ experiences in the SAP class (e.g., What have you thought of class discussions? Tell me about a particular reading that caught your interest.)
- Students’ experiences at their respective service placements (e.g., What has been surprising or unexpected about this service experience? Tell me about something that has been challenging about your service project.)
- Students’ perceptions of SAP’s impact on their beliefs, values, and worldview (e.g., How do you think SAP has influenced your thinking about public service? How do you think SAP has influenced the way you think about citizens’ responsibilities for one another?)

The full protocol for these interviews is included as Appendix A. Steps were again taken to reduce social desirability biases in responses (Dillman, 2007). Specifically, prior to the start of each interview, students were assured that the interview was not a test with right or wrong answers, that this was a project to learn more about their honest experiences within the Social Action Program, and that their responses to the interview questions would not be shared with SAP faculty or administrators. Students were also assured that their responses would remain confidential and that pseudonyms would be used in any published account of the study. Each interviewed student received a $10 gift certificate to a local coffee shop.

DATA ANALYSIS

Step 1: Analysis of Survey Data

A two-by-two between-groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) strategy was employed to compare differences in the attitudes and experiences of White students (n = 244) and students of color (n = 118) participating in the Social Action Program. In these fitted models, experiential measures, including sense of community, represented the dependent variables; students’ dichotomous racial status (White or person of color) represented the independent variable; and a number of additional demographic variables (gender, religiosity, political orientation, and social class) were included in the model as control variables.

Step 2: Analysis of Interview Data

The qualitative interviews with 30 SAP students were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Our analysis of these interviews was an iterative process consistent with research methods focused on emic perspectives—descriptions of behaviors or beliefs by participants in a study in language...
that is culturally specific to those participants (Becker, 1996; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, our research team worked collaboratively to develop a codebook based on the different ways in which participants in SAP described (1) the academic component of the Social Action Program; (2) the service placement in which they had participated; and (3) what they perceived to be the program’s effect on their own beliefs and values. In so doing, we also worked to ensure that all members of the group shared a common understanding of our codes. The full codebook is available as Appendix B.

Next, each qualitative interview was coded independently by two members of the research team. For each member of the team, the coding process involved three separate readings of the transcribed interviews. The first reading focused on descriptions by participants of the academic components of SAP. Codes associated with this category included “Books” (a reference to a SAP assigned reading), “Philosophy” (a reference by SAP participants to philosophical concepts raised in SAP lectures or discussions), and “Discussion” (a reference by SAP participants to conversations that took place in the SAP discussion section). The second reading of each interview transcript focused on descriptions by participants of experiences at the SAP service placements. Codes associated with this category included “Interaction” (a reference by SAP participants to interactions with particular individuals at their service placements), “Commute” (a description by SAP participants of traveling to their service placements), and “Placement Choice” (a description by SAP participants of why they had selected a particular placement). The third reading focused on descriptions by participants of SAP’s effects on their beliefs and values. Codes associated with this category included “Worldview Poverty” (a description of SAP’s effect on their beliefs about the roots of poverty), “Responsibility” (a description of SAP’s effects on their beliefs about people’s responsibilities to each other), and “Career” (a description of SAP’s effects on participating students’ career aspirations). Examples of the transcription coding process are presented in Appendix C.

After coding each interview independently in the manner described in the preceding paragraph, two members of the research team then compared their analyses of each interview transcript, recoded, and then compared again until all coding discrepancies were resolved. To facilitate the identification of patterns and themes cutting across the qualitative interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1999), our research team then developed two- to three-page narrative profiles—a mechanism for facilitating reflection and analytic insight—for all 30 students who had participated in qualitative interviews (Maxwell, 1996).

The results presented in the next section focus on themes and patterns identified in these qualitative interviews about discussions of race and class within the SAP classroom. In considering these emergent themes, we also drew on findings from our quantitative survey data about the relationships between race, social class, and SAP participants’ sense of community within the SAP classroom. We believe that such triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data offers a robust (if preliminary) window into the experiences of students of color participating in Beacon University’s Social Action Program. We further believe that the experiences of these students hold important implications for faculty and administrators leading such programs within their own universities.

RESULTS
QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The ANCOVA results examining the relationship between race and sense of community in the Social Action Program showed a statistically significant difference, whereby White participants felt a greater sense of community in SAP than did the students of color. As Table 5 illustrates, on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, White SAP participants had an average agreement score of 4.28, whereas students of color averaged only 4.02. The effect size of this relationship was approximately one third of a standard deviation, and, as illustrated in Table 6, this difference was statistically significant even after controlling for gender, religiosity, political orientation, and self-reported social class, $F(1,344) = 5.42, p < .01$. Overall, then, on average, the students of color participating in SAP characterized the academic component of the program as providing a notably weaker sense of community than did their White classmates. There were no other statistically significant differences between White students and students of color on the other attitudinal measures of civic or social responsibility.

Table 5. Summary Statistics for SAP Participants’ Sense of Community ($n = 362$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAP Participants</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean sense of community (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White SAP participants</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>4.28 (.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAP participants of color</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>4.06 (.96)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 also reveals that gender, religiosity, and political orientation were not significant predictors of participants’ sense of community with the SAP classroom and that participants’ self-reported social class was a marginally significant predictor of participating students’ sense of community, $F(1,344) = 3.05, p < .04$.

Table 6. ANCOVA Describing the Relationship Between a Student’s Race and Sense of Community Within the SAP Classroom ($N$ Students = 362)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Type I SS</th>
<th>F Value</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
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<td>9.50</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White vs. SOC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>7.59</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Orientation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>242.15</td>
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$R^2 = .036$

Our findings about the disparate sense of community by race in SAP seem to coalesce with other studies on diversity and CSL. As noted in the literature review, Coles (1999) found that students of color often report a reluctance to be active participants in service learning courses in which only a handful of students of color are present, and Green (2001) reported that many of the students of color in her CSL program characterized themselves as more comfortable at their service placements than on the university campus. It is possible, then, that this quantitative
finding on sense of community captured some of the variation in the quality of experience that has been previously documented in qualitative inquiries. Indeed, the phenomena discussed in the research literature may be indicative of mechanisms by which students of color feel less connected to the greater community in their service learning programs, and we now turn to our own qualitative exploration to consider related disparities in students’ experiences in the Social Action Program.

THE SAP DISCUSSION SECTION AS A SUPPORTIVE CONTEXT

As for why White students and students of color experienced a discrepant sense of community, we turned to this study’s qualitative interviews with 30 SAP participants. In considering these interviews, we focused our attention particularly on these students’ descriptions of their experiences within SAP’s weekly discussion section, which was the central opportunity for SAP participants to engage with their classmates in wide-ranging discussions of SAP’s curricular materials and service placement experiences.

Five of the seven students of color who participated in qualitative interviews offered favorable but measured descriptions of the SAP’s discussion section. For example, Sabrina, an African American student majoring in economics, explained that in comparison with the lecture sessions associated with the SAP program curriculum, the discussion section offered “a smaller setting where you get to talk about what you have done at your [service] placement . . . [and] connect the readings to what we learn at the placement.” Likewise, Annie, a South American student majoring in history, noted that, in her discussion section, “We talked about our placements and how it made us feel and stuff, and those were good. Sometimes it was nice to be able to tell other people what I was doing.” On a similar note, Angela, an African American student majoring in English, observed that “everyone goes to different [service] placements most of the time, so it is kind of nice to hear from other people about what they are doing at their placements and you can as well give your own ideas about your placement.” Finally, among the students of color who participated in qualitative interviews, Abigail, a Cambodian American student majoring in business, gave perhaps the most positive endorsement of the discussion section in her explanation: “I think it’s much better than the real class because there you are actually getting into the real issues.”

Similar to the students of color, 21 of the 23 White students who participated in qualitative interviews offered favorable descriptions of the SAP discussion section as well. Yet 15 of the White students went on to offer especially high endorsements of their discussion section, with several being notably more enthusiastic about the discussion section than the students of color. For example, David, a White business major, explained, “Discussion section is incredible. I love it. It is a viewpoint into all of the other placements. I wish I could sit in discussion sections with all the other classes. That is where the real meat is, the real juice.” Justin, a Hispanic studies major who identifies as White, said of his discussion section,

I really enjoy that actually. That is where we get to talk about our placements, and so it is interesting to hear what other people are doing and how it interacts with what we are learning in class. I think it is a totally necessary part of the class. It is the only place where we can really connect the two.
And Felicia, a White international studies major, added, “It is cool to hear [classmates’] experiences because it is all so different. I am teaching little kids versus people who are doing health care for the homeless. The sharing of experience, I think, is the best part [of SAP].”

Other White students characterized the discussion section as an important source of support for processing the intellectual and emotional challenges that accompanied their service experiences. For example, Maxwell, a White communications major, explained, “It was very helpful to talk to my professor and the other kids and come to that realization that just because you are not changing the world, it is okay. . . . Without the discussion section, I would have been discouraged.” Sam, a White business major, explained, “Discussion section makes me feel like I am not alone . . . I struggle with that issue of ‘Wow, am I really making a difference?’ and I realized that eight other people in my discussion section are experiencing the exact same thing.”

A number of the White students went as far as to describe how classmates had burst into tears during discussions of their service experiences. For example, Rob, a White business major, said, “There was one day a girl like broke down crying in our discussion. . . . She just felt like she couldn’t help the situation [at her service placement] that much, just felt like totally helpless and hopeless.” Likewise, Corey, a White psychology major in a different discussion section, explained:

This one girl was having a real big issue with the girl she was tutoring, and we all just kind of sat down, we listened to her problem. She almost started crying, which was crazy, and we went around the circle, and we each gave her a piece of advice. It was really cool because we were working together to solve her problem.

In short, not only did the vast majority of the White students have positive experiences with the SAP discussion section, but two thirds gave particularly strong endorsements, with many explicitly characterizing the SAP discussion section as offering a crucial source of community and support. Their classmates of color, however, did not express such views regarding the discussion section experience, offering instead more measured acknowledgments of the merit of this aspect of the program. An explanation for this difference became evident in the specific ways in which White students and students of color experienced discussions of race and class that took place within their sections.

STUDENTS OF COLOR AND RACE-RELATED DISCUSSIONS

When asked about how certain racial discussions had played out in SAP, several important findings emerged. First, 4 of the 7 students of color who participated in qualitative interviews characterized themselves as deliberately not participating in their respective discussion sections when issues of race arose. A number of different reasons were offered for this decision, several of which align with the extant scholarship. For example, Namwali, a premedical African American student, explained,

In classes [at Beacon University] you are usually like one of or only one of two other Black people. When you talk about issues like race, you don’t want to be the Black voice. I don’t want to raise my hand [and say], “Oh, well, this is how Black people feel.”
In this explanation, Namwali revealed her concern that, as one of the few students of color in her SAP class, her opinions would be taken by White classmates as representative of *all* African Americans. Rather than risk becoming such a representative, Namwali often chose to remain silent during conversations about racial issues.

On a similar note, Marcus, an African American student majoring in sociology, explained that he took a “a vow of silence” during discussions of race in his SAP class out of a belief that “When a bunch of White people are talking race and a Black person says something, it kind of throws off the conversation.” As the only African American student in his discussion section (and one of only three students of color), Marcus felt that his opinions about racial matters would be given undue weight because White classmates “expect you to say something insightful.” He, too, responded to this dynamic by choosing not to enter into the discussion.

A third student, Angela, did not remain entirely silent during discussions of race in her SAP class, but explained, “I honestly sit back and listen to what people have to say before I say something.” Angela explained that, similar to Namwali and Marcus, she often waited to join discussions of race in her SAP class in order to confound what she perceived to be the expectations of the White students in the class. In Angela’s words, “When race or anything about the inner city came up, people would assume that I was going to speak, and [so instead] I kind of sit back and listen.” Such reluctance to be seen as representatives of *all* people of color has been documented in the extant scholarship on students of color in predominantly White institutions more generally (Anderson, 1991; Carroll, 1998; Saldana, 1994). Yet in the context of a service learning course, such dynamics may be particularly hazardous because the nature of much of the programming lends itself to frequent engagement with issues of race and social class. It is not surprising, then, that many students of color expressed discomfort with race discussions in the Social Action Program, and it is likely that such trepidation contributed to these students’ reduced sense of community in their respective SAP discussion sections.

Two of the students of color who participated in qualitative interviews also characterized themselves as holding back in discussions of race for another reason: to avoid appearing overly sensitive about racial issues. Sabrina explained that she sometimes became offended by her classmates’ comments about issues of race and racism: “When I am offended, maybe I tend to hold back and think like, am I really offended? Is this really offending me? When I respond, I don’t want to offend the person who made the comment, so sometimes I tend to hold back in the discussion.” Here, Sabrina reported that in a classroom in which she was one of only two students of color, her response to comments that were offensive to her was generally silence out of a fear that her response might be perceived as offensive by classmates who did not understand her motivation in responding.

Namwali characterized herself as offering a similar response during a discussion in her SAP section of Malcolm X. After reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Namwali characterized the majority of her classmates as indignant that Malcolm X saw no role for White people in the struggle for civil rights. In response to their indignation, Namwali explained, “I think I was actually angry a lot of the times when we were discussing Malcolm X.” However, she generally remained quiet during the class’s discussions of Malcolm X because, in her words, “I didn’t want
to be seen as the girl who thinks the world is racist . . . I had to find a way to make my point without doing that or without alienating people. Without sounding like I am being a backwards racist. ‘Oh, are you Malcolm X, too?’ No!” Namwali, too, feared that expressing her perspective would lead her to be perceived by her White classmates as overly sensitive about race issues. Such anxiety about being perceived as overly sensitive to these issues in a context—a CSL program—with such inherent racial implications may offer another partial explanation as to why many students of color found SAP to be a less communal experience than did their White classmates.

Finally, several students of color in SAP attributed their silence during race discussions to the difficulty of conveying their perspective on these issues to White classmates. For example, in regard to Malcolm X’s writings on racial discrimination, Namwali noted, “I didn’t know how to make people understand that this is a lot people’s experience.” Likewise, Abigail said of her White classmates, “I think it’s hard for them to understand what it’s like to have to conform to the White image. To conform to what people want you to be in order to be accepted by them. They just don’t understand.” Similarly, Marcus expressed shock at questions by his White classmates about whether racism was really still a dominant problem in American society. In response to these questions, Marcus noted, “I don’t think they understand how race is part of people of color’s lives.” He added that he had refrained from participating in the discussion sparked by those questions: “I was like, really? Is that a serious question? It’s not that I can’t participate. It’s just that I think the questions are ridiculous.” These explanations revealed students of color expressing frustration with the challenge of communicating effectively about issues of race and racism with their White classmates in SAP. It seems that the lack of understanding of racial issues exhibited by the White students in their program was at times overwhelming and perhaps isolating as well. Combined with students’ concerns about representing their race and appearing overly sensitive around racial issues, these communication challenges contributed to the weaker sense of community experienced by students of color in the Social Action Program.

WHITE STUDENTS AND “OTHERING” DISCUSSIONS

The descriptions by White students of conversations within their SAP discussion sections also offered insight into the divergent experiences of White students and students of color participating in SAP, which may have contributed to the program’s discrepant sense of community along racial lines. Specifically, unlike the students of color respondents, a number of the White interviewees characterized their respective discussion sections as an opportunity for conversation, reflection, and commiseration about interactions at their service placements with individuals or groups they perceived to be fundamentally different from themselves. For example, in describing the value of the discussion section, one SAP participant, Michael, explained,

I come from a decent background myself, you know there’s not a lot of direct interaction with that class of society, so I think that the discussion group has kind of like shown me the different aspects of it, like the educational problems, the structural problems of finding housing and what not.
In this explanation, Michael explicitly described the role of the discussion section in introducing him to the structural factors that contribute to poverty—an unequivocal objective of the Social Action Program (Seider et al., 2010). What also came across in this explanation, however, was the extent to which Michael perceived individuals contending with poverty to be different from the “decent” family in which he was raised. The students of color participating in qualitative interviews, conversely, did not articulate this degree of social distance from the SAP service recipients.

Another White student, Lori, drew a similar distinction between the families of the students within her SAP section and those of the low-income urban youth she encountered at her SAP service placement. According to Lori,

[In our discussion section,] we talk a lot about the [city’s] school system, and how when we were younger, everyone wanted us to do well in school. The teachers were like “Do this and get to college” and our parents were like “You need to do your homework and we will practice your flashcards with you.” And how like their parents don’t really see the importance of school. Well, they see the importance, but they never graduated from high school, and they work a lot, so they aren’t really pushing their kids.

Again, the conversation Lori described was explicitly focused on disparities in educational opportunity; however, embedded within this conversation was an assumption that the collective home and schooling experiences of Beacon University students were fundamentally different from those of the youth at the service placements. Lori did not seem to account for the possibility that one or more of her SAP classmates may have themselves grown up attending underserved urban public schools or been raised in households with parents who did not graduate from high school.

In addition to these presumptions of social distance, other White students who participated in qualitative interviews invoked language that revealed more emphatic assumptions about their classmates’ levels of privilege. For example, one student, Alice, prefaced a description of the discussion section with the observation, “We are obviously all serving people who have in some way kind of not been as fortunate as we have.” Alice’s use of the words obviously and all seemed to disallow for the possibility that there were differences in the types and levels of privilege that her SAP classmates had experienced. Everyone was posited to be uniformly privileged. On a similar note, Eddie, explained that the discussion section provided an outlet for SAP students to commiserate about their treatment by professional staff at the service placements. Specifically, Eddie explained,

If the discussion sections help people, the main thing is dealing with directors and supervisors and other staff there, because that’s kind of a universal thing . . . how [SAP] volunteers are stigmatized by staff there, especially White, assumed rich college students. . . . So I think that is something that we can relate to each other about. We have all had difficulties from that.

Here, Eddie explicitly characterized the discussion section as an opportunity to vent about what he perceived to be the assumptions of privilege made about Beacon University students by staff and supervisors at the various service placements. However, Eddie characterized this challenge
as “kind of a universal thing” and one with which “we have all had difficulties.” His explanation left little space for the possibility that students of color faced different types of assumptions at the service placements.

From these responses by White students in SAP, we can see that the starting point of many discussions in SAP featured the assumptions that (1) all SAP students were uniformly privileged, and (2) they perceived vast social distance between themselves and the community members at the service placements. However, we know from both previous research and the students of color themselves that these assumptions were often incongruous with the life experiences of students of color. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that SAP participants who themselves were members of nondominant groups experienced a sense of alienation in their SAP discussion sections.

Finally, although we have characterized the othering language invoked by White participants in SAP as one source of the disconnection experienced by students of color in the program, it is also important to note that two of the students of color actually described their classmates’ othering language as eye-opening in and of itself. For example, Marcus explained, “I think SAP imagines itself as kind of like an eye-opening experience where you get to see people experiencing poverty for the first time, and you kind of see your privilege and unpack your privilege or whatever.” Having arrived at Beacon University already acquainted with numerous people contending with poverty, Marcus characterized that aspect of SAP for him as “not that big a deal.” However, Marcus did describe as eye-opening the opportunity to hear some of the comments and beliefs offered by his White classmates. In his words,

Just what people say in discussion group, not that it’s necessarily bad, but I wouldn’t think that someone who is 19 or 20 years old would still hold ideas like that before SAP . . . I don’t know if that’s attributed to affluence or being White, but some of them just don’t get it.

As a result of his astonishment at many of his classmates’ perspectives, not only did Marcus characterize the community service placements, lectures, and readings associated with SAP as more eye-opening for his White classmates than for himself, but paradoxically, he also described as personally eye-opening the opportunity to hear his classmates’ reactions to the service placements and readings. This issue was not the focal point of this inquiry, but it should be considered explicitly in future studies.

DISCUSSION

A robust body of research has found that college students who engage in open, honest, and personal exchanges with diverse peers show significant gains in their analytical reasoning, cultural awareness, interest in social issues, and self-efficacy for social change (Gurin et al., 2002; Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, & Gurin, 2003; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Pascarella et al., 1996). A CSL program such as Beacon University’s Social Action Program would seem to offer the ideal venue for such open and honest exchanges; however, we found that such an opportunity was limited by the fact that many of the students of color in SAP did not feel sufficiently comfortable in their SAP classes to engage in race discussions with their White classmates. Specifically, a critical finding of this study was that, on average, the students of color participating in SAP described a weaker feeling of community in the SAP classroom than did
their White classmates and were often silent during the very discussions in which diverse perspectives would catalyze student learning and growth. As a result, students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds in SAP missed out on a valuable learning opportunity involving authentic discussions of these important issues across a diverse set of students.

Our qualitative interviews with 30 SAP participants revealed several factors that contributed to this disparate sense of community—factors that both confirm and extend the extant scholarship on CSL and issues of diversity. First, a number of the SAP participants of color expressed a reluctance to participate in conversations touching on issues of race in their respective discussion sections out of a fear of being perceived as “representing their race”—a concern that has been demonstrated both in CSL contexts (Coles, 1999; Green, 2001) and at predominantly White universities more generally (Carroll, 1998; Saldana, 1994). Additionally, several of the students of color who participated in the current study also characterized their reluctance as due to concerns about appearing overly sensitive about issues of racism, as well as frustration with conveying their perspectives on race and racism to their White classmates. Both of these explanations for silencing are currently underexplored in the research literature on CSL and students of color. However, regarding the cost of such silencing, Mayhew and Engberg (2010) found in their study of university-level diversity courses that “students who feel silenced or guarded because of the underlying tension that pervades a classroom may not benefit equally from group tasks and activities that are designed to enlarge their moral perspective, especially when they are asked to wrestle with sensitive issues” (p. 482). Indeed, CSL programs also lend themselves to the emergence of such “sensitive issues.” It is therefore presumably difficult for many of the students of color in programs such as SAP to fully engage in the program when issues of race—a factor they perceive to be critical to their own experience and to the community service work itself—are minimized or even dismissed in the classroom context. Given these findings and the unique context of CSL programs, it is imperative that we better understand how these challenges to race salience affect the experiences and participation of students of color.

Another key finding was that many of the White students participating in SAP invoked language in their discussion sections that erected sharp social boundaries between themselves and the individuals they encountered at their service placements. This language posited fundamental differences between individuals who were from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds and resulted in broad and pernicious generalizations about entire identity groups. Howard (2008, 2010) has sought to define privilege not simply as the advantages an individual possesses but rather as qualities that are intricately woven into an individual’s sense of self. The language with which many White students in SAP discussed the individuals they encountered at their service placements revealed the extent to which they—either consciously or unconsciously—perceived these individuals to be a different “type” of person from themselves and their peers. Many of these students’ comments about the clients at their respective service placements focused explicitly on social class rather than race; however, as Marcus noted in his qualitative interview, “Everywhere we go for SAP, it’s nothing but people of color, like there is no SAP thing for White kids.” In this observation—that the majority of individuals encountered at the service placements were people of color—Marcus revealed that comments by his White classmates explicitly focused on issues of social class were often simultaneously touching on issues of race as well. Consequently, it is not surprising that Beacon University students of color who were exposed to this othering language each week in their SAP discussion sections experienced a
relatively weaker sense of community than their White peers.

Ultimately, like many students of color in CSL programs across the country, students of color in SAP faced the unique challenge of serving marginalized people while being marginalized themselves. The discussions in the SAP sections lent themselves to silencing many of these students, and the language used by White classmates often served as a reminder to the students of color that the identity groups to which they belonged were not considered a natural part of the Beacon University community. In the end, these students felt less connected to their classmates, as exhibited by an attenuated sense of community in the program.

All these findings—the silencing of students of color, their attenuated sense of community, and the othering language of White students—suggest that the overarching lens through which SAP sought to educate participating students about issues of social justice had been normed against the interests, experiences, and learning goals of White students (Lechuga et al., 2009). Ironically, then, it is likely that a program committed to fostering “critical consciousness” among participating students in some ways reified White privilege rather than disrupting it (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). As noted in the introduction, such reification comes with a cost; the learning of all students is diminished when diverse perspectives are not fully heard (Gurin et al., 2002; Hurtado et al., 2003; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Pascarella et al., 1996). Furthermore, the anticipation of such discomforting and alienating experiences may be contributing to the low participation rates of students of color in university-based CSL programs. Particularly given the demographic tide of college enrollment, the issues discussed in this study are critical to understand and remedy so as to ensure that such programs are effective and meaningful components of the undergraduate experience for all students.

LIMITATIONS

Although we believe the findings presented in this article to be robust, there were also limitations to this study that should be addressed in future research efforts. First, our initial goal in conducting this mixed-methods study was for the students who participated in qualitative interviews to be representative of the demographics of students participating in the Social Action Program overall. As a result, 7 of the 30 students who participated in qualitative interviews identified as students of color, a proportion that was roughly equivalent to that of both SAP and Beacon University (which reports that 25% of its student body identifies as Asian, Latino, African American, Native American, or multiracial). The representative composition of our interview participants provided several advantages in carrying out our larger research project; however, in regard to this current inquiry, the study’s relatively small sample size required us to aggregate SAP participants from a number of different racial and ethnic backgrounds under the category of “students of color.” On a similar note, the relatively small sample size of this study made it difficult to disentangle the relationship between race/ethnicity and social class. Future research designs would do well to consider specifically the differential effects of CSL on students of color across race and class backgrounds, using oversampling methods as necessary.

Second, in this study, social class was assessed by means of self-report rather than soliciting specific information about parental income level, parental employment, prestige-based attributes, or a number of other potential measures. Although our data on self-reported social class provided
meaningful information on students’ perceptions of their own privilege, future studies may consider also including more specific social background measures—such as parental education levels or family income—to allow for analyses that consider more specific social and economic attributes.

IMPLICATIONS

Despite these limitations, the results of this study offer important implications for university faculty engaged in community service learning and who are committed to providing valuable learning opportunities involving authentic discussions of relevant social issues to a diverse set of students. One implication from this study’s findings is that university faculty teaching CSL courses might benefit from opportunities to reflect on how to foster a learning environment in which all students feel comfortable expressing their beliefs and perceptions of important social issues. A tool for engaging in such reflection might be recently published scholarship on pedagogical strategies central to antiracist teaching (e.g. Pollock, 2008). For example, M. Jones and Yonezawa (2002) have described the powerful effect of using a class session a few weeks into the semester to meet with students in small groups in order to provide a space for these students to share their perceptions “about the ways constructions of race, ability, class, culture and language impact students’ classroom experiences” (p. 247). On a similar note, from her work on students’ silences during race discussions, Schultz (2010) recommended both asking students privately and engaging in classwide discussions about the reasons underlying their silences.

Singleton and Hays (2008) recommended that, prior to beginning “courageous conversations” of race and racism, educators introduce students to a set of agreements that “help create the conditions of safe exploration and profound learning for all” (p. 19). Along similar lines, Ellsworth (1994) has written that authentic race discussions require faculty to work early in the semester to establish with their students high levels of trust in both the professor and one another. According to Ellsworth, such trust is developed by giving students opportunities “to know the motivations, histories, and stakes of individuals in the class” (p. 316).

Green (2001) has written about the importance of service learning faculty engaging students in dialogue about the ways in which students’ “subject position” influences their experiences at the service site. Specifically, Green explained that she and the undergraduates in her own service learning course “explored how and why service-learning is different according to the race and class that each person brings to the service-learning site” (p. 20). Likewise, P. Perry (2008) advocated incorporating into such discussions the effects of racism not only on people of color but on White people as well. Perry stated, “I have found that too much emphasis on the negative effects of racism on people of color can dangerously add to racial minority students’ sensation of being ‘singled out’ as a ‘problem’” (p. 228). Perry also recommended that during such discussions, teachers should explicitly “correct stereotypical assumptions students express in class about race, people of color, or even White people” (p. 228).

As a final example, Carter (2008) offered advice to instructors to counteract “spotlighting” students of color within a predominantly White classroom or, conversely, rendering them racially invisible. Carter defined spotlighting as the perception by a student of color that he or she is “racially hypervisible,” such as when an African American student is expected by an instructor
or classmates to serve as a representative for the opinions of all African Americans. In contrast, teachers fearful of engaging in spotlighting can sometimes shift too far in the other direction by ignoring Black students’ identities or experiences as Black students and in so doing create “an atmosphere where Black students (and other students of color) feel invisible” (p. 233). According to Carter, the key is for educators to consistently monitor this aspect of their own instruction and to stay attuned to the verbal and nonverbal interactions occurring between students during race discussions so as to be able to make adjustments as necessary.

Certainly the issues raised throughout this article about the experiences of students of color in the Social Action Program are complex ones, and none of the individual strategies offered in the preceding paragraphs can, in and of themselves, guarantee an antiracist classroom environment. That said, we do believe that providing the faculty members who teach in contexts like the Social Action Program with the opportunity to reflect together on such strategies could have a powerful influence on their effectiveness in fostering a learning environment in which all students feel comfortable expressing their beliefs and perceptions of important social issues. As Carter (2008) noted, although no single strategy can guarantee an optimal learning experience for all students, the educator who “consciously considers whether her moves are harmful or helpful to the students in the learning process will do better by her students” (p. 234). Offering faculty members engaged in CSL the opportunity to come together to learn, consider, share, and refine antiracist teaching practices seems like an important step in doing better by all students.

Notes

1. Beacon University, the Social Action Program, and all students in this article are referred to by pseudonyms.
References


Maykut, R., & Morehouse, R. (1994). Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and


APPENDIX A: SAP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

Tell me about how your SAP experience has gone so far.

What have you most enjoyed about SAP?

What have you least enjoyed about SAP?

What led you to sign up for SAP?

What (if anything) had you heard about SAP from other students?

What did you hope to get out of your SAP experience?

Which service site did you sign up for? Why?

The SAP Experience

How has SAP compared to what you were expecting?

Tell me about the classroom component of SAP.

What have you thought of class discussions?

What do you feel like you’ve gotten out of the experience?

What is something that has caught your interest in class?

What was a less interesting topic within the class?

Tell me about the readings you have been assigned for SAP

What do you think you’ve gotten out of the readings?

Tell me about a particular reading that caught your interest.

What was the hardest (least interesting) reading to get through?

How have you felt about the philosophy readings?
How has that compared to what you were expecting?

Tell me about your experience at your SAP service site.

How many hours a week do you spend doing this community service?

Has it been challenging to incorporate this service into your schedule?

What do you think you’ve learned from this experience?

What has been surprising or unexpected about this service experience?

How have your beliefs about __________ changed as a result of this experience?

Tell me about an interaction or conversation at your service site that has stuck in your head.

Tell me something that’s been challenging about this service project.

Tell me about getting to know the other students at your service site.

Tell me about the supervisor at your service site

What is SAP’s goal for you?

How do you feel like your experience in SAP has compared to your friends’ or classmates’ experience in SAP?

Are there topics or experiences from SAP you found yourself discussing with family or friends?

Are you glad you signed up for SAP? Why or why not?

What do you think would make SAP better?

**SAP and Influence**

What do you consider to be some of the biggest problems in the United States today?

Why would you say most poor people are poor?

Do you believe in the American Dream?

How do you think SAP has influenced your thinking about these questions?
How do you think SAP has influenced the way you see the world?

How do you think SAP has influenced your interest in politics or current events?

Has SAP impacted your everyday life?

What is your major or your expected major?

What type of career could you see yourself pursuing?

Do you think SAP has had any influence upon these impending decisions?

Describe someone for me you consider to be a successful adult.

What would your life have to look like 20 years from now for you to consider yourself successful?

When you think about possible careers, how important or unimportant to you is doing something that “makes the world a better place”?

When you think about possible careers, how important or unimportant to you is earning a large salary?

Do you think SAP has had any influence upon your ideas about success?

Should community service be required for Beacon University students?

Can community service play an important role in addressing social problems?

How do you think SAP has influenced your thinking about community service?

In the surveys you filled out at the beginning of SAP (and that you’ll fill out again at the end), we asked you about the likelihood of you participating in all sorts of activist activities. Joining a protest, writing a letter to a newspaper, donating money to charity, volunteering for a community service organization. What kind of influence do you think SAP has had on the likelihood of you participating in these types of activities in the future?

Do you think of community service as a responsibility or a good deed?

Do affluent people in America have a responsibility for the well-being of poor people in America?

How do you think SAP has influenced the way you think about citizens’ responsibilities for one another?
Biographical

What opportunities did you have growing up to participate in community service?

Is there a social issue that you feel particularly strongly about?

How do your parents feel about you participating in SAP?

How have your parents influenced the way you look at the world?

How has your religion influenced the way you look at the world?

Are there individuals outside of your family who have had a big impact on the way you look at the world?

Are there any particular intellectual experiences (books you’ve read, classes you’ve taken) that have had a big influence on the way you see the world?

Are there any single experiences or life events that have had a big influence on the way you see the world?

What made you want to participate in SAP when plenty of your classmates said, “That’s not for me?”

Do you think there’s any significant difference now between Beacon University students who participated in SAP and those who didn’t?

How do you think you’ll look back on SAP 10 years from now? (i.e., How important a role will it play in your life story?)

What would be your reaction if Beacon University decided to get rid of the Social Action Program? Why?
### APPENDIX B: SOCIAL ACTION PROGRAM STUDY QUALITATIVE CODEBOOK

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<tr>
<td>Book</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blaming</td>
<td>Description in which client at service site is blamed for his/her socioeconomic or health status</td>
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<td>Bubble</td>
<td>Description by participant of Beacon University as a “bubble” insulated from the “real world”</td>
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<td>Campus Rep</td>
<td>Description of what SAP participants had heard about SAP from other Beacon University students</td>
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<td>Description of impact of SAP on career aspirations</td>
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<td>Camaraderie</td>
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<td>Description of participants’ friends’ reactions to SAP or content from SAP</td>
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<td>Description by SAP participant of frustration as a result of an aspect of the SAP experience</td>
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<td>Description of participant feeling guilt over some aspect of the SAP experience</td>
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<td>Home Life</td>
<td>Description of participant’s home life or hometown</td>
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<td>Intellectual Experience</td>
<td>Description by participant of intellectual experience that occurred during SAP that impacted his/her worldview</td>
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<td>International Experience</td>
<td>Description by participant of international social</td>
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<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Description by participant of interaction at service placement that he/she characterized as impactful</td>
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<td>Jesuit High School</td>
<td>Description by participant of impact of attending Jesuit high school</td>
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<td>Description of interaction between SAP and college major</td>
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<td>Description by participant of opinion on whether community service should be required for college students</td>
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<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Description by participant of an individual whom they consider to be a mentor (within or outside of SAP)</td>
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<td>Description by participant of his/her SAP professor</td>
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<td>Race Talk</td>
<td>Description by participant of any conversations, interactions, or experiences involving the topic of race/ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Description by participant of his/her religion or beliefs about religion</td>
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<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Description by participant of his/her beliefs about people’s responsibilities to each other</td>
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<td>Service trips</td>
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<td>Description by participant of any conversation, interactions, or experiences involving the topic of social class (including self or individuals encountered at service placement)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structures</td>
<td>Description by participant of recognition of systemic or societal structures that contribute to poverty, inequity, etc.</td>
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<td>Description of students’ beliefs about success or of an individual he/she considers successful</td>
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<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Description by participant of supervisor at service placement</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Worldview American Dream</td>
<td>Description by participants of beliefs about American Dream and/or SAP’s impact upon beliefs about American Dream</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worldview Education</td>
<td>Description by SAP participants of American educational system or impact of SAP on his/her beliefs about the American educational system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worldview Impact</td>
<td>Description by SAP participant of impact of SAP upon his/her worldview, aspirations, beliefs, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worldview Poverty</td>
<td>Description by SAP participant of impact of SAP upon his/her beliefs about roots of poverty</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Male Respondent: Sam

INTERVIEWER: Are there topics or experiences from SAP you have found yourself discussing with family or friends?

To be honest I haven’t had . . . now that you ask me, it surprises me that I haven’t had more conversations with my family about it. It’s inspired some conversations I’ve had with friends here at school about social issues that sometimes stem out of political conversations (Friends). I’ve called my parents sometimes to bounce things off them that have troubled me in our discussions (Parents). Like a discussion of teenage pregnancy in impoverished communities (Discussion).

INTERVIEWER: What was the conversation in class?

It was a conversation in discussion in which we spent a great deal of time blaming both this girl and primarily her parents for allowing her to be put in this situation and essentially saying that she shouldn’t . . . some of us got down to saying she almost shouldn’t have the right to give birth to this child given her situation (Blaming). This was somebody that had been met in another person’s placement, or had been talked about at the placement (Placement). They just brought it up and, you know, that’s a very troubling scenario (Discussion). But what’s the appropriate response? My professor essentially said, “Who are you to say that they don’t have the right to bring a child into this world?” (Professor). So I was torn between . . . you get on a slippery slope when you start to talk about someone not having the right to bear a child, but at the same time how do you address the problem of stopping the cycle of suffering and poverty? (Cycle, Worldview Poverty). I talked to my dad about it and he agreed with me that it’s a struggle there, but he essentially backed my professor in saying that you are not in a position to prevent something like that (Parents).

INTERVIEWER: Where are you now on that issue?

It was kind of something that came and went over the period of a week and I haven’t revisited it in a while. It’s still something that I’m undecided about. I see where it puts you on a slippery slope and I don’t have the natural authority (Philosophy) to say that someone else . . . to control someone’s behavior of that nature, and at the same time I want to . . . so maybe how I’ve changed my view is looking at the structures (Structures) that allowed that situation to arise rather than attacking it on the surface there (Worldview Poverty).
Interviewer: Have there been times in discussion sections where you have been sitting back and thinking that this person has a totally different perspective from mine?

I think Malcolm X actually brought that out of me (Book). I think I was actually angry a lot of the times when we were talking about Malcolm X (Personal Impact). Just because, I guess not that I have been through the civil rights movement or anything like that by any measure. But I do know what happened, my professor was very very active civil right activist. He is always telling stories about his experience so I identify with that (Professor). It was hard for people when Malcolm X wrote like you are the White devil (RaceTalk). Those are hard pills to swallow but at the same time I was able to look at that and say when you are in that situation you are going to think that because there are no other ways to explain the oppression you are experiencing. I feel like it was easier for me to accept him for what he was than a lot of people (Compare Peer). It took people a few days . . . I remember one kid came into class and he was so angry because there was one point I think this might be in the movie as well (Discussion). Malcolm X is talking to a little girl, he had just given a speech and I think a girl about our age, a White girl came up to me and was like what can I do to help and he was like nothing. He was so angry he was like why wouldn’t he want her to help that is so separationist. He is using the same language the White people were doing, how does that helping? (RaceTalk). Well given that his father was killed by the KKK they are suspecting and that his mother was pretty much a victim of social injustices and in a mental institution for forever. You know all these things that he has been through of course he is gonna feel like that. How else would you feel? If that were the other way around you would feel like the other person was the devil because how else would you want to do that to me? I think a lot of time there it was harder. I think most people did come to a reconciliation especially when he started to get a little bit softer then they could come to reconciliation with the harder things before. I felt angry about their anger. (Personal Impact) I didn’t want to . . . the thing about I feel like being Black at Beacon University or in America for that matter especially at Beacon because there is such a very very low minority population. In classes you are usually like 1 or the only 1 or 1 of 2 other Black people (RaceTalk). When you talk about issues like race you don’t want to be the Black voice. I don’t want to raise my hand and oh well this is how Black people feel (RaceTalk). It was very very hard for me to try and find the line between ok let them be angry. That is part of the process, just let them be. And then just having like raising my hand, like I can handle that type of thing. I didn’t want to be seen as the girl who thinks the world is racist because I do not think that at all but at the same time I didn’t know how to make people understand that this is a lot of people’s experience (Discussion, Compare Peer). Just not having to represent everyone was a problem.
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<tr>
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<th>MALE RESPONDENT</th>
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Friends

I think I was actually angry a lot of the times when we were talking about Malcolm X.

Parents

I felt angry about their anger. I didn’t want to.

Personal Impact

It’s still something that I’m undecided about. I see where it puts you on a slippery slope and I don’t have the natural authority to say that someone else . . . to control someone’s behavior of that nature.

Philosophy

It was a conversation in discussion in which we spent a great deal of time blaming both this girl and primarily her parents for allowing her to be put in this situation and essentially saying that she shouldn’t . . . some of us got down to saying she almost shouldn’t have the right to give birth to this child given her situation. This was somebody that had been met in another person’s placement, or had been talked about at the placement. They just brought it up and, you know, that’s a very troubling scenario.

It’s inspired some conversations I’ve had with friends here at school about social issues that sometimes stem out of political conversations.

I talked to my dad about it and he agreed with me that it’s a struggle there, but he essentially backed my professor in saying that you are not in a position to prevent something like that.
My professor was a very active civil right activist. He is always telling stories about his experience so I identify with that.

It was hard for people when Malcolm X wrote like you are the White devil. Those are hard pills to swallow but at the same time I was able to look at that and say when you are in that situation you are going to think that because there are no other ways to explain the oppression you are experiencing.

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I don’t have the natural authority to say that someone else . . . to control someone’s behavior of that nature, and at the same time I want to . . . so maybe how I’ve changed my view is looking at the structures that allowed that situation to arise rather than attacking it on the surface there.

So I was torn between . . . you get on a slippery slope when you start to talk about someone not having the right to bear a child, but at the same time how do you address the problem of stopping the cycle of suffering and poverty?

Maybe how I’ve changed my view is looking at the structures that allowed that situation to arise rather than attacking it on the surface there.