ABSTRACT. The present paper describes a project that addresses the unique challenge service-learners face at dementia care programs. The project was conducted in conjunction with two courses on aging that offer students a service-learning (S-L) option at a university adult day service (ADS) program that accepts service-learners from these courses. The intervention consisted of two elements: (a) an orientation and follow-up sessions in which students learned about the causes of dementia, the behavioral characteristics exhibited by persons with dementia, and the best methods of interacting effectively with cognitively impaired persons; and (b) a structured scrapbook project for service-learners to
exercise their new knowledge and skills. The authors designed the project to increase students’ comfort in the dementia care setting and to facilitate students’ knowledge of the elderly. The following sections describe the project and its procedures, benefits, and challenges. Recommendations for continuing the project and for adapting the project to other dementia sites are provided. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Service-learning, adult day services, gerontology education

A growing number of educators and community service agencies embrace service-learning (S-L) as an opportunity to enhance students’ comprehension of course material (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Fisher & Finkelstein, 1999) while providing a valuable service to the community. Service-learning links service at a community site with academic curriculum by engaging students in active learning, structured reflection, and use of newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations, thereby extending student learning beyond the classroom (Waterman, 1997). Professional development (Adamany, 1994), enhanced self-esteem (Shumer & Belbas, 1996), and greater civic commitment (Gray et al., 1996) have been identified as valuable outcomes of S-L.

S-L research, however, reveals challenges as well as benefits. Some service-learners find that they become overly attached to the clients with whom they are working, which consequently makes it harder for them to end the S-L experience (Blieszner & Artale, 2001; Kretchmar, 2001). Others feel ill prepared for the situations and clients they encounter (Kretchmar, 2001; Whitbourne, Collins, & Skultety, 2001). Blieszner and Artale (2001) surveyed 214 students in an advanced gerontology course and reported that over one-quarter of the students had difficulties relating to and communicating with the older adults at their S-L sites. This challenge was compounded when the older adult suffered from a dementing illness, such as Alzheimer’s disease. Even though most of the students Blieszner and Artale (2001) surveyed had taken an introductory course in adult development which covered late life dementia, they did not receive specific guidelines on how to interact with persons with dementia. Students may have been uncomfortable interacting with this often marginalized group of adults, and they may have been unsure of what topics of conversation or which activities were appropriate for interactions with persons with dementia.
Such findings indicate that service-learners would benefit from greater preparation or training prior to starting S-L and/or greater supervision and feedback from the instructor and site supervisors.

Kendall and Associates (1990) propose that structure in the service setting provides the greatest opportunity for positive change. Effective programs that meet program goals include training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation (Honnet & Poulson, 1989). In S-L programs that unite service-learners with special needs populations, these elements are particularly salient. Although S-L research frequently addresses the impact of S-L on student learning (Adamany, 1994; Shumer & Belbas, 1996), little attention has been paid to the effects of students’ knowledge on their S-L experiences. Other professional disciplines have addressed similar situations with population-specific training programs.

Non-S-L research has identified benefits associated with training care personnel to communicate effectively with cognitively impaired older adults (Burgio et al., 2000). Burgio and colleagues found that certified nursing assistants (CNAs) communicated more frequently and more positively with nursing home residents following training in communication skills and use of memory books with residents, suggesting that communication skills training can positively enhance the interactions that take place between cognitively impaired older adults and those providing their care.

The present paper describes a program designed to enhance the experiences of service-learners placed at a dementia care program through training, provision of structured activities, supervision, and follow-up. The experiences of those service-learners who participated in this program were captured in a focus group session at the conclusion of the S-L project.

**METHOD**

**Service-Learning Program**

Various academic departments at Virginia Tech offer students the option to complete a S-L project for course credit. In 2001-2002, 1,350 students provided approximately 25,000 hours of service-learning at Virginia Tech. The S-L center coordinates student placement at sites, orients students to the S-L process, gathers student evaluations from site supervisors, and offers support and encouragement to students. Faculty provide students with reflection opportunities that require students to link their S-L experiences to course material. Individual sites are responsible for orienting S-L students to the facility and the client population. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the information
provided by the sites ranges from no orientation to an orientation that focuses on the physical environment. None of the sites served by human development majors offer participant-specific orientation.

The Adult Day Services (ADS) program involved in the current study is affiliated with Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. ADS provides meals, activity programming, medical administration, health monitoring, and supervision of clients. Clients at ADS vary across the continuum of independence and abilities, and most have some form of dementia such as Alzheimer’s disease or multi-infarct dementia. Attendance ranges from 10-17 persons each day. The number of staff, including graduate students fulfilling assistantship requirements, varies from 5-7 daily.

Participants

The eight service-learners placed at ADS included seven females and one male. All of the service-learners were undergraduates enrolled in an Issues in Aging or Sociology of Aging course and were performing S-L to fulfill course requirements. Seven of the service-learners were human development majors; one was a sociology major.

Procedures

To respond to the concerns addressed in the S-L literature, the research team implemented a program for service-learners at ADS to alleviate the discomfort service-learners frequently feel in dementia care settings (Blieszner & Artale, 2001). The program was developed and facilitated by the authors, who had experience with older adults at ADS. The doctoral student facilitators, the first two authors, were supervised by the third author, an assistant professor who teaches the Issues in Aging course.

The program included an orientation, a structured activity (i.e., a scrapbook project to perform with the ADS clients), a mid-semester meeting, and a student evaluation session. The ADS director also provided an orientation that was separate from the dementia orientation and training program. This orientation included issues such as orientation to the facility, safety procedures, confidentiality, and expectations of the service-learners.

Orientation. The program orientation was facilitated by the two doctoral students and included materials developed specifically to help the service-learners understand the population they would be working with at ADS. The facilitators provided an introduction to the scrapbook project, performed two role-plays that portrayed successful and unsuccessful ways to interact with a cognitively impaired person, and provided time to address service-learners’
questions and concerns. Service-learners received information on causes and stages of dementia as well as ways to facilitate communication with cognitively impaired older adults. Because the scrapbook project lent itself to reminiscence, students had to learn how to facilitate successful reminiscence with the ADS clients. Service-learners were also encouraged to seek out the facilitators and/or instructors with questions or concerns about their S-L experience.

During the first role-play, the facilitators portrayed an ineffective interaction between an older adult with dementia and a service-learner working on the scrapbook. To demonstrate poor communication skills, the person playing the part of the service-learner might infantilize the adult, speak too fast, and/or offer too many directions. After the role-play, the group discussed what went wrong during the role-play and how communication could have been better. The second role-play demonstrated more appropriate communication skills to use in working with older adults who have dementia. These included speaking slowly, using simple concrete words, simplifying a message by dividing it into one or two parts, and giving plenty of time for the individual to respond. After the role-play, the group discussed the effectiveness of these techniques and other ways to enhance communication with an older adult who has dementia.

The Scrapbook Project. The research team developed a structured project to provide service-learners with a sense of direction and purpose which previous service-learners have found lacking at dementia care programs (Blieszner & Artale, 2001). The project involved a social history scrapbook developed by Jarrott (2001) to facilitate knowledge of the participants and foster positive interactions between service-learners and the older adults.

The facilitators matched each service-learner with an ADS client and provided him/her with social history and scrapbook materials. These materials included photos, mementos, and information on the ADS clients’ family members, hometowns, family traditions, education, previous occupations, travels, hobbies, and favorite foods and music. The service-learners were instructed to involve the client in creating their scrapbook pages. This was done by having clients select, trim, and glue photos and decorations onto the page and by asking questions about the pictures to facilitate reminiscence for the older adults.

Mid-Semester Meeting. A mid-semester follow-up meeting was provided for the ADS service-learners. The students asked questions and addressed issues related to the site and their S-L experience, and the facilitators gave constructive feedback on the scrapbook project and the interaction with ADS clients.

One concern mentioned by service-learners at this time related to the clients’ behaviors. These behaviors included aggression, inappropriate remarks, and repetitive questioning. The facilitators normalized the students’ concerns, explaining that many of the behaviors displayed by the clients were part of the
dementia process and should not be taken personally. The group then brainstormed strategies for dealing with the clients’ behaviors.

This meeting provided an opportunity for the facilitators to check in with the service-learners on how they were progressing with their S-L hours and how the scrapbook project was being completed. Several students were having trouble completing the scrapbook project, and the facilitators addressed these concerns. Finally, the group discussed other activities in which to engage the ADS clients and ways of facilitating these activities.

Participant Evaluation. The current study included a focus group with the ADS service-learners. A focus group is a facilitated small-group interview on a predetermined topic. Focus groups typically consist of 6-10 participants discussing a specific topic in a session that usually lasts from 1-3 hours (Patton, 2002). Focus groups have been used in a variety of different settings to facilitate understanding of people’s experiences on a range of topics. Educators have used focus groups to understand the educational experiences of students (Pierce & Nickerson, 1996; Patton, 2002). Focus groups also give students a structured forum for airing grievances, acknowledging strengths, and recommending changes, thereby benefiting both students and the university or program involved.

The focus group explored how the S-L students experienced the program: whether the program fulfilled students’ needs at this S-L site; whether the training and feedback were helpful; and what could be done to improve the ADS S-L experience. Seven of the ADS service-learners attended the focus-group session. All were female undergraduate students enrolled in an Issues in Aging or Sociology of Aging course. A doctoral student not involved with the S-L project facilitated the focus group and transcribed the audiotaped session. Focus group participants were given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality and to encourage them to be open and honest about their experiences. The focus group session lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Data Analysis

Once transcription of the focus group was completed, the program facilitators and the focus group leader read the transcription to get an overall picture of the students’ experiences. Each of the three evaluators identified themes that cut across the data during a second reading of the transcription. As advised by Creswell (1994), these themes answered the question “What is this all about?” The evaluators next met to identify an initial list of themes that represented the service-learners’ experiences. At this point, the focus group leader discontinued involvement in the project.
The two project facilitators used constant comparison analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which allows the researcher to go back and forth between the data and initial themes to develop coding categories. This is done with two coding procedures: (a) making comparisons by determining if each theme is similar to or different from the others; and (b) asking the question, “To what class of phenomenon does [the theme] seem to pertain?” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). These two coding procedures create categories from the data to form the coding scheme. A category is a group of concepts, themes or subcategories that pertain to a similar phenomenon and are clustered together to form an advanced, more abstract concept.

After completing the analysis, the two project facilitators individually coded the transcripts using the coding scheme. They then met and compared their coded transcripts, revising the coding scheme as necessary and thus generating a final version used to code the transcripts (see Appendix A). When coding discrepancies occurred, the two facilitators discussed them until an agreement was reached. When the two could not agree, they met with the third author to discuss which category should be assigned. Thus, the authors reached 100% coding agreement.

FINDINGS

Four coding categories emerged from the data. The coding categories included structure of the S-L site, positive experiences at the S-L site, challenges at the S-L site, and comfort level of the service-learners.

Structure of the Service-Learning Site

Focus group participants commented on the main elements of the S-L experience, which included the orientation, the scrapbook project, and the facilitators of the program. As previously discussed, the literature on S-L has uncovered the need for increased guidance for students who will be working with marginalized populations during their S-L experience (Cone & Harris, 1996; Jarrott, 2001; Long, Larsen, Hussey, & Travis, 2001; Whitbourne et al., 2001). Further, preparation is specifically needed for students with no prior experience interacting with individuals with dementia (Nichols & Monard, 2001).

Orientation. Participants indicated that the orientation was helpful and provided a necessary framework for working with individuals with dementia. Specifically, they identified the role-plays, in which the facilitators modeled successful and unsuccessful communication skills, as valuable referents. Wood and
Bandura (1989) emphasize the importance of modeling to improve self-efficacy among students. Victoria illustrated the value of modeling when she stated:

What I found most helpful I think was the initial orientation that we had to the social history project when Jen and Christine did a role play of how to interact, and . . . the dos and don’ts of how to interact with somebody who is cognitively impaired . . . that gave me some cues, . . . and sometimes I would actually sit there and think about it . . . and be like, “Well, what is a more appropriate thing to say?”

The communication skills taught by the facilitators revolved around the service-learners’ observing a successful interaction between a student and an older adult who has dementia. Viewing and discussing appropriate behaviors guided the students in deciding how and what to say. The experience seemed to reduce the students’ nervousness in interacting with somebody who has dementia. Thus, the modeling of appropriate behaviors proved vital to training service-learners for specific populations and trying to facilitate comfort.

The orientation gave service-learners a valuable framework for working with cognitively impaired persons, which enhanced their experiences at ADS. This was displayed by participants who did not attend the orientation meeting. For instance, Beth stated, “I couldn’t go to orientation . . . so I was just kind of thrown into it with no training whatsoever and no orientation whatsoever. . . . I always felt like I was doing something wrong. . . . I just didn’t feel prepared.” The training service-learners received in the orientation increased their confidence. Service-learners who did not attend the orientation exemplify this finding, as they reported feeling unprepared and lost while at the S-L site.

Scrapbook. Another sub-category of the theme structure revealed the importance of the scrapbook project to the S-L experience. Jarrott (2001) found that students felt more comfortable with their S-L experience after completing a social history project that centered on a scrapbooking activity. However, several challenges with the scrapbook project emerged in the current study. For example, some students had a difficult time interrupting ongoing scheduled activities in order to continue with the scrapbook project. Maria believed “[the scrapbook] was hard to fit in because [the staff] already have things scheduled,” and Jill stated, “I was stepping on people’s toes . . . taking [the participant] away from what other people planned and [was concerned] that [the participant] might miss out on group interaction with the other participants. So, that was hard for me because I didn’t feel that there was ever an appropriate time to pull [the participant] aside and do it.” Some participants experienced difficulty completing the scrapbook project due to conflict with other
pre-planned activities and their uncertainty about their roles as service-learners; students who completed the project commented on its value.

Positive experiences emerged as participants commented on their time working with the ADS clients on the scrapbook project. Additionally, a unique learning opportunity materialized as a result of spontaneous student collaboration. Rebecca, one of the participants who worked with another service-learner on the scrapbook project, believed that it “didn’t feel as invasive if we were talking like in a group. . . . They kind of like interacted with each other and you kind of just sat back and observed it, which I thought was great. I thought it was great to have more than one person talking, more than one-on-one situation.” The collaboration between service-learners on the scrapbook project increased participants’ confidence when working with this unique population.

The facilitators provided an opportunity for students to meet and discuss their experiences (as suggested by Kretchmar, 2001). Aside from the orientation and scrapbook project, the participants commented on the facilitators’ support. According to Paige, “Jen and Christine . . . helped a lot [at] one of the meetings that we had downstairs. . . . [A] couple of us had concerns about how to deal with certain things that some of the participants said or did, and they . . . helped us decide what was best for us to do and what to do if we don’t feel comfortable in a situation.” The facilitators also provided accommodations for students who were having difficulties with the client they were working with at ADS. Rachel, for example, explained that she “was assigned to a [client] that was really impossible to communicate with. . . . [After the facilitators were informed of the problem,] they reassigned me.” The accommodations and support provided by the facilitators fostered successful experiences for the service-learners while offering them a chance to reflect on their experience; which have been noted as a critical part of the S-L process (Dunlap, 1998).

Although the students commented on the support and accommodations provided by the facilitators, they also discussed the facilitators’ inavailability. Citing “Jen and Christine’s busy schedules” as the cause of the problem, Rachel commented that “it took about three weeks for one of them to meet with me, because I missed the initial orientation.” Similarly, Beth reported, “they had an orientation; I couldn’t go, and when I tried to meet with them separately, they were really busy, so I was just kind of thrown in.” Rachel’s and Beth’s experiences highlight the importance of requiring everyone to attend the initial orientation meeting. In addition, the facilitators of S-L programs must make themselves available to the needs of the service-learners; otherwise students may find themselves lost in the shuffle.
Rewards of the S-L Experience

The coding sub-categories associated with rewards of the S-L experience are connection and enjoyment. The sub-category of connection includes the S-L experiences connecting to class, feelings for the ADS clients, responsibility of commitment, and connection to personal goals. These themes are consistent with previous investigations, which have attributed S-L to increasing social responsibility, personal development, and improved ability to connect with others (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Kendrick, 1996; Mabry, 1998; Sax & Austin, 1997).

One area that the service-learners in our study specifically commented on was that the S-L site improved their ability to understand class material. How students relate the S-L experience to class is exemplified by Jill: “For our class specifically, it was good . . . because you had the names and faces to think about when we were discussing things in class . . . [and because of the] different things that [the S-L site] did that you could think about, and try to contrast those to different programs we talked about in class or just to get the hands-on [expertise].” Maria said, “It was a good learning experience to be there.” Jill’s and Maria’s comments conveyed the importance of connecting classroom learning to the applied skills obtained through S-L experience. The combination of coursework and appropriate orientation and training will only enhance service-learners’ experiences.

A common attitude that students had as they approached the S-L experience was expressed by Victoria: simply “to serve my time, interact, and do what I was supposed to do, and get everything done and be done, with it.” However, Blieszner and Artale (2001) found that service-learners typically go beyond just serving their time and develop relationships with the clients at the S-L sites. The connection between students and clients can be seen as a reward and/or a challenge (Blieszner & Artale, 2001). In our study, the service-learners found that connecting with the clients enhanced their commitment and responsibility to the S-L site and the participants. Victoria further explained:

As time got more and more and [I] would spend more time and get to know the participants better, [I] . . . had a tie to these people. I started to feel a sense of responsibility to go, not for my grade sake. . . . [I]f I didn’t go one day and I had . . . planned to, I felt bad because I wanted to be there. . . . But I never expected to feel that tie towards what I was doing. I guess you know, I never expected to take it on as a true responsibility, I just kind of took in on as a more of a personal responsibility as opposed to an academic responsibility.
Victoria’s sense of personal responsibility is represented in other S-L literature (Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; McKenna & Rizzo, 1999; Miller, 1994). Although the connection may often make it a challenge to end a relationship we found that the connection between ADS clients and the service-learners was seen as a reward.

S-L also connects with personal and professional development. McKenna and Rizzo’s (1999) analysis revealed that service-learners who perceived their role at the S-L site as important reported greater personal growth. One service-learner in the current study specifically commented on the connection between her experiences at the S-L site and her career goals. Rachel believed, “Service-learning gave me a better understanding of my own life . . . and . . . what I wanted to do career-wise.” In addition to the rewards of making emotional connections, Rachel was able to recognize professional growth as an outcome of S-L.

Service-learners found their experiences to be not only rewarding but also enjoyable, as exemplified by Rachel’s statement, “I enjoyed Service-learning!” Focus group participants illustrated their enjoyment with accounts of working with the ADS clients, which has not always been the case (Blieszner & Artale, 2001). Supporting McKenna and Rizzo’s (1999) study, in which more than 90% of the study’s participants reported a positive impact of S-L, a service-learner in the present study described the experience in enthusiastic terms: “[Our group presentation to the class] was just positive . . . and we . . . shared our experience and everyone kind of looked at us like, ‘Wow, [you] actually enjoyed [your] Service-learning,’ and [non-ADS S-L students] kind of dreaded going to theirs and you could tell.” The orientation and training seemed to facilitate the increased self-worth and success of the service-learner in relating to members of this population of older adults thus, leading to enjoyment. With enjoyment, the possibility of positive experiences and the opportunity for positive change in attitudes towards older adults can be supported by the S-L experience.

**Challenges at the Service-Learning Site**

While there were many successful outcomes of the training program there were also challenges. These challenges, including lack of guidance from S-L site staff, along with site requirements, contribute to the challenges students experience at ADS. Jill illustrates how students may feel a lack of guidance from the site staff, particularly on the first visit to a site. She stated, “I know the first day I showed up, [ADS staff] were surprised . . . and didn’t know I was coming . . . [or] know my name . . . and it made me feel awkward like, ‘Am I really supposed to be here right now?’ ” The lack of staff awareness of service-learners can lead to feelings of uncertainty, as voiced by Jill: “I . . . felt like I was alone. I was standing, waiting, like ‘What do I do? Who do I interact...
with? How do I act?” Rachel further explained how the lack of direction affected her confidence in her role as service-learner: “I wasn’t given something to do. . . . I felt out of place because I didn’t really have a purpose.”

We found that lack of guidance not only eroded confidence, but it also led to a decrease in participants’ personal investment in S-L. Paige stated, “One of the challenges I had the rest of the days [after we finished up the scrapbook was what to do with the clients]. . . . I just sat there and talked with them and felt like I was. . . . taking up space. . . . If maybe we had some direction . . . [or] things that need to be accomplished, then that might be a little better.” The challenges students expressed reflect the importance of having structured guidance from staff with specific tasks and goals for service-learners to accomplish while at the S-L site.

**Comfort Level of the Service-Learning Students**

Service-learners’ greater comfort interacting with cognitively impaired older adults emerged as an important experience. Greater comfort, a product of time in partnership with training, is an essential component for manifesting positive change in service-learners. Beth believed, “I just felt uncomfortable at first, until I became accustomed to the routine.” Other students pointed out the importance of observing without having the pressure to interact with the clients before they felt ready. Rebecca recalled that on her first day, “I was really scared actually to go and do it because I just didn’t know. . . . I was in the observation room for about 15 to 30 minutes, just getting used to [ADS] and just seeing what was going on and how people were interacting. I think that increased my comfort level.” And Paige believed, “my comfort level definitely has changed. . . . [S-L gave] me a whole lot of confidence in dealing with people who [have dementia].” The change in comfort experienced by the service-learners in working with older adults with dementia enhances their professional and personal growth. Thus, S-L provides the opportunity not only to integrate classroom learning but also to influence life-long development.

The four themes identified in our analysis have implications for S-L courses in gerontology as well as other fields. S-L that provides population-specific training results in important benefits to service-learners. However, implementation of training is not without challenges, which instructors, S-L coordinators, and site supervisors have the responsibility to address.

**CONCLUSION**

Our findings indicate important benefits of providing specialized training to service-learners involved with cognitively impaired adults. Our goals of in-
creasing comfort and knowledge were met primarily by increasing students’ skills in communicating with this group of adults. Service-learners’ abilities were fostered by Honnet and Poulsen’s (1989) recommended elements of training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation. Kendall and colleagues’ (1990) recommendation for structure at the S-L site was also important to the students’ experience. The program may further be improved by enhancing the format or by increasing the magnitude of some of these elements.

Service-learners’ communication skills improved as a result of incorporating the items Honnet and Poulsen’s (1989) identified as key to effective S-L programming. Role-plays used during the training sessions allowed service-learners to see the positive results of exercising good communication skills and the negative outcomes of poor communication. Students found it helpful to replay the role-play scenarios in their heads when faced with challenging situations with the clients. Service-learners who paired up to work on the scrapbook project engaged in peer modeling and offered each other valuable support. We provided support as well as supervision to service-learners throughout the semester when we observed them successfully interacting with the ADS clients. Recognition was provided at these times as well as during the mid-semester meeting when the authors were able to provide positive feedback to the service-learners for their effective interactions with the ADS clients. Furthermore, the first two authors monitored service-learners’ work by tracking their hours and contacting them regarding their progress with the scrapbook project. Supervision from the first two authors was helpful but not convenient for all of the service-learners, some of whom found it difficult to coordinate schedules. One way to address this element would be for an activities director and/or other site staff member to provide supervision and regular feedback to the service-learners as a means to recognize and support their efforts to enhance communication with the ADS clients.

Focus group participants reported an enhanced ability to connect their experiences to course material as a result of the ADS training and their S-L experiences. This may be due to greater comfort interacting with cognitively impaired persons, which could be affected by knowledge and skills service-learners gained through the training, supervision, and feedback they received during the project. Time may also have been a factor as students’ exposure to the ADS program continued and they had the opportunity to practice the communication skills they learned. With increased knowledge of and exposure to the ADS clients, students’ anxiety about the S-L situation may have dropped, thus allowing them to focus on the links between their S-L experiences and course material.
Providing training, supervision, support, recognition, and evaluation was not without its challenges in this ambitious S-L project. Kendall and Associates (1990) propose that structure in the S-L site and activities provides the greatest opportunity for positive change. Our structured scrapbook activity, in conjunction with the training and supervision elements described above, affected positive change for some service-learners. However, some of the students lacked the confidence and/or initiative to engage a participant in the scrapbook activity if the adult was participating in another activity. Future S-L projects might minimize this challenge by more fully involving the S-L site staff.

Greater engagement of the ADS staff would have benefited the current project. The site director and activities director knew about the scrapbook activity and agreed that Service-learners would be free to perform this activity with ADS clients whenever they were at the program. However, a disconnect between ADS staff and service-learners evidenced itself, as illustrated by the student arriving at the ADS with no one expecting her. Some steps to integrate staff with S-L include posting the service-learners’ schedule at the site in a prominent place and designating a task for each student to complete, in this case working with the clients on the scrapbook. Also, staff could be included in evaluating the service-learners’ work; for this site, only the site director evaluated students’ performance.

We are encouraged by the success of our program. Service-learners benefited from the site-specific training they received, which improved their abilities to interact effectively with cognitively impaired persons. These skills, in turn, made them feel comfortable and competent serving at the ADS program. By engaging service-learners in a structured activity, students felt more committed to the program and its clients. Interesting questions about site-specific training for service learners remain to be answered by further research.

Providing similar S-L opportunities to two groups of students, one forming a treatment group that receives dementia-specific training and one forming a control group that does not receive such training, would allow researchers to consider the effects of training on service-learners’ experiences in dementia care settings. In addition to the focus group led with service-learners in the current study, we collected survey data from students serving at the ADS program as well as service-learners working at other sites, both with and without cognitively impaired clients. The survey data will permit such an intergroup comparison (Lambert-Shute, Jarrott, & Fruhauf, 2002) on measures of attitude towards older adults and comfort working with older adults.

Comfort working with older adults in a S-L setting could be an indicator of self-efficacy, or one’s sense of his/her abilities to successfully face varied situations (Bandura, 1997). Employing measures of self-efficacy in S-L research
would provide valuable indicators of the impact of the specialized training on the service-learners’ experiences. Wood and Bandura’s model (1989) for affecting self-efficacy includes mastery experiences, modeling, social persuasion, and physiological states. Future research should address the elements of Bandura’s model to better understand service-learners’ experiences.

Our program centered on mastery and modeling, which proved key to the program’s success. Still, the degree to which we provided mastery experiences and modeling could be increased with the expectation that greater benefits would result. Specifically, besides watching the first two authors role-play good and poor communication skills, the service-learners could role-play scenarios with each other or with the facilitators. Facilitators could offer service-learners feedback following these role-plays and could provide other forms of evaluation. Such activities could serve as social persuasion, which, if experienced as positive by the service-learner, would influence the student to exert greater effort in his/her interactions with the adults (Wood and Bandura, 1989). Finally, researchers with physiological training could assess whether program activities, including training, supervision, and support, serve to reduce physiological stress levels in service-learners compared to service-learners who did not participate in the training program.

Besides affecting comfort of service-learners in dementia care settings, a goal of S-L should be to increase students’ self-efficacy. Such outcomes have been linked to academic achievement (Bandura, 1997) and are important to professional success as well (Reinsch & Shelby, 1996; Tucker, McCarthy, Hoxmeier, & Lenk, 2001). We believe that instructors of S-L courses need to look at S-L with a new lens; in addition to considering how S-L affects students’ learning, instructors need to evaluate how learning (about the population they serve and the S-L site) affects the S-L experience.

REFERENCES


**APPENDIX**

Coding Scheme for ADS S-L

100 Positive experiences at the service-learning site
101 Connection (class, feelings for participants, responsibility, personal goals, classroom)
102 Enjoyment

200 Structure of the service-learning program at the site
201 Orientation
202 Scrapbook
203 Facilitators

300 Challenges and struggles at the service-learning site
301 Lack of guidance (staff, lack of purpose, and uncertainty)

500 Comfort level of the service-learning students
501 Change in comfort level associated with time at site