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# A Program Evaluation Of A University Volunteer Program

Stacey Patricia Jaksa

*Eastern Illinois University*

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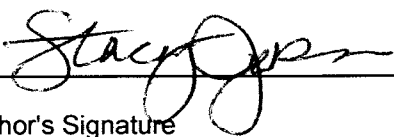
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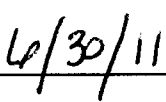
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A Program Evaluation of a University Volunteer Program

By

Stacey Patricia Jaksa

B.A.A., Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, 2009

**THESIS**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

In The Graduate School, Eastern Illinois University  
Charleston, Illinois

June 2011

I Hereby Recommend that this Thesis be Accepted as Fulfilling  
This Part of the Graduate Degree Cited Above

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I am incredibly fortunate to have two wonderful parents and three amazing siblings who believe in me and have shown me love and support my whole life.

This thesis is dedicated to them:

*My father, Stephen P. Jaksa*

*My mother, Patricia G. Jaksa*

*My sisters, Rachel A. Jaksa and Kelly N. Jaksa*

*My brother, Marc S. Jaksa*

*and*

*To all of the students who dedicate their time and effort to learning more while helping others.*

“Those who can, do. Those who can do more, volunteer.”

-Author Unknown

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## ABSTRACT

The present study was created to explore the phenomenon of volunteerism as it relates to integrated learning by showcasing a “best practice” in implementing a service-learning or volunteer program at an institute of higher education. Central Michigan University has been nationally recognized for its Volunteer Center program and through a mixed methods design the present study evaluated the program using qualitative and quantitative data collected by the researcher. The study was guided by four primary research questions:

1. What are student perceptions of the Volunteer Center and the programs it offers?
2. What is the value, if any, that students and/or alumni find in volunteering via out-of-classroom learning experiences offered by the Volunteer Center?
3. What is the relationship between student grade point average and student involvement with the Volunteer Center?
4. What specific programs offered by the Volunteer Center do students feel supports them in their overall development?

Results of the study showed that students find the Volunteer Center helpful and their involvement in the programs offered by the Volunteer Center have taught them more about societal issues, given them a connection to CMU as well as the communities they’ve served, and increased their likelihood of continuing to volunteer post-graduation; all of which contributed to their overall development while enrolled at the university.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **The Central Michigan University Volunteer Center**

The Central Michigan University (CMU) Volunteer Center was established in 1992 after a grant secured funding for its operation. Initially setup as a satellite office of the United Way of Isabella County Volunteer Center in 1994, the office grew to include the Alternative Breaks program. The online database, Volunteer CENTRAL was launched in 2002 and volunteer programming continued to grow. In addition to the Alternative Breaks program, the university's other well-known and popular Volunteer Center programs include the Safer Sex Patrol, the David Garcia Project, America Reads, Lunch Buddies, and Adopt-A-Grandparent. The Volunteer Center works in conjunction with seven regional partners that self-proclaim to be "dedicated to developing active citizenship among CMU students by providing unique and dynamic programs, coordinating civic engagement efforts and facilitating networking among service leaders across campus." Additionally, the CMU Volunteer Center is committed to upholding the university's 2010 vision statement, which lists "service for the public good" as a priority for the institution (Volunteer Center, 2009). Furthermore, the President's Higher Education Service Honor Roll has recognized the Volunteer Center every year since its official founding in 2006.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of the present study was to showcase a "best practice" in implementing a service-learning or volunteer program at an institute of higher education. A secondary purpose was to investigate if a positive correlation exists between students' involvement in the Volunteer Center's programs and their academic success. A third purpose,

but no less important, was to explore the relationship between participation in Volunteer Center programs and student satisfaction with their university experience as reflected in students' retention behavior. The Volunteer Center offers multiple volunteer opportunities, such as its popular Alternative Breaks program. Also offered through the Volunteer Center are opportunities for scholarships, internships, career development information and advisement, awards, and grants.

A review of the published literature revealed several quantitative and qualitative research studies that specifically examine an all-encompassing, established service-learning or volunteer program at an institution of higher education. The current study expands the existing research, albeit limited, in the area of service-learning as it relates to college campuses by exploring the efficiency of the CMU Volunteer Center as it accomplishes its intended purposes. It was hypothesized that the study would reveal a positive relationship between student success and student involvement in the Volunteer Center. The present research may help universities design comprehensive programs in the future that engage students in volunteerism and service-learning simultaneously which, theoretically, will facilitate increased student involvement and academic success at their chosen university.

The four research questions that guided the present study were designed to demonstrate and identify those components of the CMU Volunteer Center programmatic offerings that facilitate its efficiency in providing service-learning opportunities for students.

1. What are student perceptions of the Volunteer Center and the programs it offers?
2. What is the value, if any, that students and/or alumni find in volunteering via out-of-classroom learning experiences offered by the Volunteer Center?



3. What is the relationship between student grade point average and student involvement with the Volunteer Center?
4. What specific programs offered by the Volunteer Center do students feel supports them in their overall development?

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the present study is that it sought to expand upon the current research available on volunteerism and integrated learning. As an evolving area of research, the findings may provide a foundation for future research relating to volunteering and service-learning programs at all levels of higher education and potentially at lower levels of education as well. Further research of other successful programs could be generated based on the findings in the present study.

The present study also sought to contribute new knowledge to the national movement towards integrated learning and volunteerism taking place on college and university campuses across the country. Since there is a lack of research, which showcases the inner workings of a successful program and how it relates to the success of the students who utilize the program, the current study will be beneficial to institutions looking to develop a new program. Furthermore, the findings of the present study can be used as a resource to improve current programs offered by institutions of higher education. Having more effective programs may facilitate the creation of positive change in the communities where institutions of higher education are located, as well as on national and international levels.

### **Reflective Statement**

The researcher or principal investigator (PI) attended the institution reviewed as an undergraduate student. While having a prior knowledge and experience of Central Michigan

University was helpful in the PI's understanding of the campus culture, the PI could have made some assumptions or overlooked further exploration of the study's findings. While a student, the PI utilized the Volunteer Center services at CMU in much the same way as many of the present study's participants.

### **Limitations**

The data collection instrument was an online survey only made available via the Internet; therefore only participants with access to an Internet connection could complete the survey and this may have limited participation. The survey instrument was also distributed through online avenues only available to the Volunteer Center. Thus, it is possible that even though it was presented as an optional participation survey, some participants may have felt it was required to participate due to their involvement with one or more of the Volunteer Center programs. Additionally, the survey was developed by the PI and has not been used in other previous research so its content validity and reliability have not been established.

### **Definition of Terms**

- **Academic Success.** – Academic success is dependent on the campus culture and institutional guidelines. A student's success is usually measured against the all-campus grade point average, if the student meets or exceeds campus academic requirements, and if the student matriculates at the institution through graduation.
- **Integrated Learning.** – Also called experiential learning, integrated learning is a learning theory describing a movement, particularly in the education system, to help students make connections across curricula; it comes in many varieties: connecting skills and knowledge from multiple sources and experiences; applying skills and practices in

various settings; utilizing diverse and even contradictory points of view; and, understanding issues and positions contextually (Integrative Learning, 2007).

- **Experiential Learning.** – The term experiential learning is often used interchangeably with integrated learning and is described as a holistic perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior (Kolb, 1984).
- **Service-learning.** – Service-learning can be defined as a method under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community; is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program, and with the community; and helps foster civic responsibility; and that is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience (S. 1430, 1990).
- **Volunteerism.** – Volunteering is an altruistic movement in which people work for a particular cause or for others without payment for their time or services. Volunteering is intended to improve the quality of life for others and comes in many different forms such as international, community, political, or environmental volunteering (Boyer, 2007).
- **Alternative Break Program.** – Central Michigan University (CMU) defines Alternative Breaks as trips that occur over the academic spring, winter, summer, and weekend breaks. Sites pair with a non-profit organization working to combat specific social issues. Students sign up for a break based on a social issue they are interested in, as opposed to the trip's location. Students meet weekly with their group prior to departure

in order to assist with planning and to work on their social issue. Furthermore, students learn about the Eight Quality Components of an Alternative Break as well as the Active Citizen Continuum, according to the Break Away model (Volunteer Center, 2009).

- Millennial. – Also referred to as “Generation Y,” a millennial is a member of the generation of children who were born between the years of 1982 and 2004. On a whole, millennials are generally upbeat and engaged; they are held to a higher standard and they care about community, social discipline, and public purpose (Howe, & Strauss, 2007).
- President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. – Beginning in 2006, the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll recognizes institutions of higher education on a yearly basis for their commitment to and achievement in community service. The Honor Roll was put into place to increase public awareness of the service impact that institutions and their students have locally and nationally (Learn and Serve America, 2011).

### **Summary**

This chapter contains a history of the CMU Volunteer Center, along with an introduction to the concepts of volunteerism and integrated learning, the purpose of the present study, limitations of the study, and definitions of terms specific to the current study. Chapter II contains a review of previous literature and research as it relates to service-learning, volunteerism, and integrated learning. Chapter III contains a description of the methodologies used for data collection, a description of the study’s design, descriptions of participants, methods of data collection, and data analysis. Chapter IV contains the findings from the survey instrument in two parts. The quantitative data and tables, including the sample populations’ demographics, precedes the qualitative data, which includes descriptions of commonalities and

themes that emerged from analysis of the survey results collected from the participants. Chapter V contains a discussion of the study's findings and the conclusions drawn from the findings as they relate to the present study's research questions. Recommendations for the Volunteer Center, Student Affairs practitioners, and future research in the areas of volunteerism and integrated learning are also included. A comprehensive summary concludes the present study.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Volunteering in college, also known as service-learning, can significantly impact the students who choose to partake in things such as community service and philanthropic activities during their undergraduate years. Service-learning can develop a student's leadership skills while simultaneously helping them mature developmentally (Scharff, 2009). According to Rover (2007), there is a necessity to engage students outside of the classroom so that they can relate what they're learning in class to what is actually going on in society. This integrated learning technique is more meaningful and has a lasting impact on students because they are forced to think outside of the box and to critically analyze situations and make judgments that they may otherwise not have made if they were only engaging in classroom activities (Rover, 2007, p. 276). Taylor (2008) contended that current students are looking to control their own learning and want to make their own unique experiences and meanings from their learning to increase their understanding of their role in society and to develop a sense of self. Additionally, the total college experience can have a substantial effect on students' active learning, which is correlated with the desire of undergraduate students to find a greater sense of purpose by coming to college (Taylor, 2008; DiMaria, 2006). There is growing evidence that today's students want to not only graduate with a degree and get a proper education, but they also want to gain new life skills and help their communities (Jay, 2008; Seider, 2010; Simons, & Cleary, 2006).

Taking a more integrated approach to educating undergraduate students should include encouraging them to volunteer and giving them the tools to do so because volunteering creates the opportunities that today's students are seeking out. According to DiMaria (2006), 67.3 percent of high school seniors indicated that there is a good chance they will continue to

volunteer in college, which is an all-time high. Louis S. Albert, president of Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona, is given credit for having suggested that when students engage in volunteer work or service-learning they make a connection between occupational and civic skills (DiMaria, 2006).

Volunteering is also receiving national attention. An impressive list of university presidents and other noted experts was invited to a summit held to discuss national service. The outcome of the discussion was that it is important to note that today's students feel personally responsible for making a difference in the world; however, opportunities to volunteer are not easily accessible for all students (Jacoby, 2009). It was anticipated that The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, which was signed into law on April 21, 2009, would move the nation towards changing volunteer accessibility (H.R. 1388, 2009; Jacoby, 2009). The Serve America Act was first proposed by the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy, for which it is so named. The Act is intended to help provide opportunities to serve and learn to a wide variety of individuals, including college students. The Act specifically addresses higher education as it relates to service-learning and volunteerism. The main sections of interest are number 1202, titled "Higher Education Provisions," and number 1203, titled "Campuses of Service" (H.R. 1388, 2009).

### **History of Service-Learning**

Service-learning is rapidly becoming a buzz term among higher education professionals. The concept of service-learning originated as a branch of integrated learning and a form of community service (Rhoads, 1998). Community service is "out-of-class service-learning" while "classroom-related service-learning" or "academic service-learning" has concrete learning objectives. Rhoads (1998) conducted a qualitative study in which 108 students were interviewed, 66 completed surveys, and more than 200 were observed at their community service

sites over a six-year span. The collected data included important findings related to self-exploration, understanding other people, and helping for the “good of society.” John Dewey’s theory on democracy and education is the foundation behind Rhoads’ conclusions. Dewey (2002) argued that relational living governs our society, which means that an individual’s decisions and actions must be made with regard to how they will affect other people. This type of caring would encourage people to commit to making changes for the good of society. Lardner and Malnarich (2008) also noted that research has shown a difference between deep and surface learning. Surface learning requires meeting, but not exceeding course requirements, which would include things such as skimming the text and only studying what is needed to pass tests. On the other hand, deep learning occurs when the student tries to understand the course by seeking out knowledge, critically thinking, and applying the coursework to real life situations. Across the country, according to Lardner and Malnarich, universities and community colleges are placing an emphasis on deep learning. Thus, students learn a great deal from the non-curriculum components of their undergraduate experiences (Boyer, 2007; Astin, 1993).

Alexander Astin pioneered the creation of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). The CIRP took the first national survey of freshmen entering college in the fall of 1961. Data was gathered from 284 four-year colleges and the research inquiries included: family background, secondary school achievements, and educational aspirations (Astin, 1977). As the largest ongoing study of the American higher education system, Astin’s data now covers 200,000 students and 300-plus postsecondary institutions. While Astin covered a lot of ground in his study, he specifically referenced student involvement and volunteerism. In one section it was noted that, “In certain respects, activities offer an opportunity to develop skills that are more relevant to later life than the knowledge and cognitive skills acquired in the classroom” (Astin,



1977, p. 115). Based on Astin's research on the impact of college, it is evident that attending college makes a big difference in the development of individuals and it is noted that student involvement is strongly related to positive outcomes. Astin organizes involved students into three categories: maximum interpersonal involvement, academic involvement, and athletic involvement. Each area attracts a different type of student, but as Astin (1977) phrases it, "All three patterns lead to increased chances of completing college, implementing career objectives, and satisfaction with the undergraduate experience" (p. 241). Furthermore, increasing student involvement has shown to contribute to reducing dropouts (Astin, 1977; Brotherton, 2002).

### **Role of Federal Legislature**

Ashburn (2009) purported that the push for service-learning began in the 1990s and has not gone away. A study completed in the early 2000s assessed the nature of social commitments during college in relation to students' development (Lavelle, & O'Ryan, 2001). The Dakota Model of College Student Development was used, which encompasses four dimensions of student development to measure the sample. Student responses indicated that students were most concerned with issues related to human rights and the environment. Students also responded that they wanted to be more involved in improving the conditions of their concerns. With the election of President Barack Obama, Ashburn (2009) indicated that there was going to be a renewed focus on service as the President made this a goal of his for higher education. On April 21, 2009 the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act was signed into law (Jacoby, 2009). The Act reauthorized and expanded the AmeriCorps program that was first established in 1993. Among many other focus areas, the Serve America Act established "Campuses of Service" to support higher education institutions that host exemplary service-learning programs.

The support and implementation of service-learning that is happening across the country has been instrumental in the growth of the movement. For example, service-learning programs have gained significant support from Campus Compact (Brotherton, 2002). Per its mission statement, Campus Compact is a coalition of colleges and universities that “promote community service to develop students’ citizenship skills and values and to encourage partnerships between campuses and communities. Based on Ashburn’s work (2009), Campus Compact, the largest pro-service-learning organization in the country, had membership of over a quarter of all United States colleges in 2003. Young (2003) discussed the *Invisible College*, which is an association developed by the Campus Compact organization to give faculty a voice to explore issues related to service-learning. *Invisible College* partnered with the American Association of Higher Education to create a series of publications to encourage the connection between higher education and communities. Eighteen volumes of literature were created that were highly inclusive of multiple disciplines and also included quotes from students partaking in service-learning activities. The importance of integrating learning experiences into the service-learning is stressed and Young predicted that the number of service-learning programs would rapidly increase.

In another national study, the focus was on the goal of *Healthy Campus 2010*, which is an extension of *Healthy People 2010*, proposed by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (Healthy People, 2009; Ottenritter, 2004). In sponsoring this study, the government’s intention was to “reduce the health disparities that are based on gender, race, and ethnicity; income and education; disability; geographic location; and sexual orientation” (Ottenritter, 2004, p. 190). There is an identifiable relationship between this goal and service-learning. Ottenritter believed that service-learning would allow both advantaged and

disadvantaged students to literally view the health disparities in less fortunate communities with the intention of fostering social change and help to implement the *Healthy People 2010* objectives. It was encouraging to see such an objective as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services prepares to reveal the annual 10-year agenda for *Healthy People 2020*.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Kolb's experiential learning theory served as the basis for the present research study. The theory was born from a combination of Dewey's Model of Learning, Lewin's Model of Action Research and Laboratory Training, and Piaget's Model of Learning and Cognitive Development (Dewey, 1938; Lewin, 1935; Piaget, 1978). Experiential learning theory was fully developed after Kolb and Fry established the Experiential Learning Model (ELM), which is composed of the following four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection of that experience, formation of abstract concepts based upon the reflection, and testing the new concepts (Kolb, 1984). This model places an emphasis on the "learner" being willing to actively involve themselves in the four-part process. This coincides with the goals of service-learning to develop students through volunteerism and community service by incorporating an educational component (S. 1430, 1990). Kolb also mentions the importance of engaging individuals on a personal level, which service-learning attempts to do. Just as service-learning and civic engagement impact individuals in different ways, the ELM also takes individuals at their own pace as they learn (Evans, 2010).

Additionally, service-learning programs are now more common in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). These programs have been well received, as emphasis on community service in these institutions was rapidly put into place. Students at HBCU institutions tend to want to give back to their communities, especially to youth, because they

want to serve as mentors and be good examples (Brotherton, 2002). Furthermore, service-learning gives students on predominantly White campuses exposure to at-risk and minority communities. According to Allport's contact theory (1954) and Murphy and Rasch (2008), interracial contact will yield positive results if there is equal status, cooperation, common goals, and support from authorities. This same concept can be applied to adding service-learning curriculums to HBCUs as such programs would greatly benefit Black communities. By working with communities, students will have more meaningful experiences and be able to help bring about social change.

### **Student Motivation**

Students remain in college and matriculate when they feel the education they are receiving is meaningful, engaging, and relevant to their lives (Lardner, & Malnarich, 2008). In one study, University of Oklahoma students were asked to anonymously complete an online questionnaire to assess their attitudes on community service (Hellman, Hoppes, & Ellsion, 2006). The students were all enrolled in post-baccalaureate education degree programs and it was found that the desire to be connected to the community and personal responsibility were the biggest reasons for wanting to participate in community service.

Service-learning is an ever-popular avenue for students to engage in development (Boyer, 2007). In addition, service-learning allows students to gain insight on moral and civil issues, as well as practice skills learned in the classroom. In 2006, Ngai conducted a study of undergraduate students at the University of Hong Kong in which students were surveyed after completing a new course involving classroom time as well as a service-learning program. Ninety percent of the students indicated they believed that the program enhanced their development and social skills.

In another study, Jones and Hill (2003) sampled six institutions that had varying characteristics: three were urban, while the remaining three were rural. Three were large with over 15,000 students, while the other three were small with less than 3,000 students. Three of the institutions were public and the other three were private. Additionally, two were liberal arts colleges, one was Catholic, two were research institutions, and one was a state university. Four students were nominated by each school to participate in interviews related to community service. The interviews revealed that students were influenced more to participate based on external factors such as family, religion, peers, high school environment, and requirements to serve. They also noted that the biggest reason students continue their engagement with community service when they come to college is when they find it personally meaningful. These results can be correlated with another study conducted in Italy (Maran, Soro, Biancetti, & Zanotta, 2009). In this study, two rounds of interviews, with a total of 603, were conducted between 2006 and 2007 to obtain the data. Participants were split between the two rounds by students from other countries that did not host the Olympics and those who were students at Turin University. The interviews were videotaped and the questions were all volunteer work related. The researchers reported young adults were very willing to volunteer and in both rounds of interviews participants mentioned that they wanted to volunteer on global and local levels. It was additionally evident that young adults wished to have an outlet in universities in which to complete their volunteer work and think it should be provided to them because service was a mission of institutions of higher education in that country.

In a 2007 study conducted in the U.S., Brooks and Schramm (2007) experimented with a model they created that combined three components as follows: funding research into the University of Vermont's local economy, four semester-long courses to conduct the research, and

a partnership between the university and the community to help implement actions identified by the research. They discovered that such a combination was valuable to both participating parties. Students gained a very worthwhile real world experience and the University of Vermont's local community benefited from their volunteerism. In their evaluations, students reported they were highly motivated because the problems they were researching were real and they felt the work they were doing was important and valued.

While some studies are more involved than others and harbor various requirements and time commitments, the essential foundation of these studies is the same. Students apply skills such as problem solving, creativity, and empathy to civic engagement situations, which translates into real world experience and continued education. The outcomes of altruism make an impact on students, specifically millennials, because they are motivated to give back and make a difference in a tangible way.

### **Need for Service-learning**

According to O'Connor (2006), service-learning is the most popular way to encourage engagement because it combines academics with the current generation's interest in volunteerism. Kolb (1984) also indicated that integrated development is important for personal fulfillment and cultural development, which are things students are looking to attain. There is a need for integrated learning techniques in higher education, but service-learning, such as voluntary work or community service, is set apart by its unique intent to equally benefit the student and the recipient (Simons, & Cleary, 2006). Results of the study by Simons and Cleary (2006) suggested that a positive relationship exists between participation in service-learning and academics, and personal and social development. The researchers tested 142 college students in a psychology class at the beginning and end of the semester to gauge the effects of service-

learning. The authors found that 96 percent of the students found service-learning was beneficial to their academics and 97 percent indicated self-efficacy and self-knowledge as a benefit.

While the benefits of service-learning have been explored, there is limited research on implementing and setting up these types of programs in the mainstream on the university level. Some institutions continue to separate academics from student affairs, which keeps the university from actively engaging in the community in which it exists and only gives students information as a part of their education (Saltmarsh, 1997). Saltmarsh (1997) justified this with the paradigm of “connected knowing.” To put it simply, connected knowing combines learning information with reasoning and emotions and it treats education as a lifelong process. Based on this definition, community service is an influential type of connected knowing. Hernandez (2008) discussed one type of program at Concordia University-Chicago that satisfies the objectives listed above. The program works in conjunction with the curriculum at the university in a three-part process. The student selects a course that is supportive of service-learning and requires completing classroom work first, followed by partaking in volunteer work, and, finally, returning to class to reflect on the work they completed. Hernandez (2008) mentioned, “the first step is to believe in what service-learning is and can do for students” (p. 222). In a more focused and current study, St. Lawrence University students were invited to Los Angeles, California to participate in an anti-bullying service-learning project during their spring break (Scharff, 2009). Students were required to read literature on leadership and diversity before the program began and they received training on bullying prevention and cross-cultural communication. They were grouped in pairs and presented two-hour sessions on bullying to fourth and fifth grade students in different inner city Los Angeles schools. Each session consisted of approximately 800 students. A qualitative study was conducted and the undergraduate students, elementary students, and

principals of each school were questioned. The author noted that personal growth was evident from both the service-learning providers and recipients. Furthermore, the undergraduate students gained valuable leadership skills by conducting the sessions. It is necessary to provide opportunities for volunteering and service-learning such as these studies show because as Kolb (1984) describes, “continuous lifelong learning requires learning how to learn, and this involves appreciation of and competence in diverse approaches to creating, manipulating, and communicating knowledge” (p. 252).

### **Summary**

The above literature review notes research on the impacts of volunteering, service-learning activities and the efficacy of established volunteer programs. In addition, the literature revealed specific personal characteristics that volunteers feel were enhanced during their service-learning participation. Just as there is great diversity among institutions of higher education, there is great diversity among approaches taken to address community needs on local as well as national and international levels. Whether students were encouraged to enroll in a spring break volunteer trip, required to participate to maintain membership in the campus community, or simply provided with an opportunity to interact with individuals whose socioeconomic status might have been significantly different from their own, the research indicates that volunteerism and service-learning have essential efficacy and directly impact the knowledge, world views, and personal growth of students who participate in them.



### Chapter III

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

### Design of the Study

The current study was designed and participation extended to students as an online survey. A survey link was available on CMU's Volunteer Center website and in CMU's Volunteer Center newsletter. Additionally, the survey was distributed to the various listservs that the Volunteer Center maintains of its participants. The survey was administered once per participant and completion of the instrument required approximately ten to fifteen minutes. Upon completion of the survey, participants had an opportunity to enter their email address to win a \$15.00 Speedway gift card. Research material obtained from participants included demographic data, academic transcript information (specifically, cumulative grade point averages and class standing), as well as general and specific opinions related to volunteering and the Volunteer Center.

The survey instrument consisted of a quantitative survey, which also contained several open-ended qualitative questions. This method was utilized to reduce internal threats to the validity of the research design. "Use of both quantitative and qualitative methods is intended to ensure dependable feedback on a wide range of questions; depth of understanding of particular programs, (and) a holistic perspective..." (Stufflebeam, 2001). A program evaluation focus was chosen so that CMU staff could utilize the findings to gauge the success of the Volunteer Center as it relates to its intended purpose and so that other institutions could model their programming after reviewing the findings from the present study.

## Site Description

Central Michigan University is a mid-western, public university with a total population of 28,389 during the 2010-2011 academic year. On average, the student population is 42% male and 58% female. The university's main campus in Mount Pleasant, Michigan sits on 480 acres of land and has a park-type atmosphere. The campus can be divided into three main sections: south campus includes most of the athletic locations for the 16 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division 1-A athletic teams, the Indoor Athletic Complex (IAC), and the Student Activity Center (SAC), the central part of campus includes nearly all of the residence halls, residential restaurants, and many of the academic buildings, and finally, the northern part of campus includes a few residence halls, University Apartments, the Bovee University Center (UC), and several academic buildings.

The Volunteer Center is located on the lower level of the UC along with multiple other student services including: Academic Senate, the Box Office, the Copy Center, the UC Food Court, Minority Student Services, the Student Service Court and Receivable Accounting, the Multicultural Education Center, MEDIAGraphix, Native American Programs, the Office of International Education, the Office of Student Life, and the Student Organization Center. The mission of the UC is as follows: "The Bovee University Center serves as the 'hearthstone' of the University, providing a variety of social, cultural, and educational programs which work to support and enhance the mission of the University. We provide a safe, comfortable, attractive, and service oriented environment for students, faculty, staff, and community members" (Bovee University Center, 2011).

The Volunteer Center compiles information regarding participation numbers in an annual report at the conclusion of each academic year. Following the 2008-2009 academic year there

were 5,235 students currently enrolled on the Volunteer CENTRAL database. These students had an average grade point average of 3.1356 and logged over 9,633 service hours with the Volunteer Center. Specifically, the Alternative Breaks program included 396 students, 35 non-profit agency partnerships, and 10,488 service hours. The Independent Sector assigns a value to the volunteer work of \$20.25 per hour for a monetary impact of \$212,382 by CMU students. Grant funding in the amount of \$50,131.63 was also received during the 2008-2009 academic year. In addition to the being named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, there were 16 CMU students who received the Michigan Campus Compact Outstanding Student Service Award.

### **Instrument**

The survey instrument included questions on the participants' thoughts on volunteering before and after taking part in volunteer work, what CMU did to prepare and help them, how they first got involved, and their thoughts on how volunteering made them feel. There were four different sections of questions. The quantitative questions included: sample population demographics and a Likert-type scale for rating each inquiry item. The qualitative section included short answer, open-ended questions. The demographics section collected information regarding age, classification, ethnicity, graduation date, and grade point average. For example, one question from the demographics section read, "What was your classification when you began using Central Michigan University's Volunteer Center?" Through the utilization of questions requiring Likert-type responses, the PI gained information regarding the participants' level of agreement or disagreement with the provided questions or statements. One example of this question type from the survey is as follows: "How likely would you be to enroll in a class at Central Michigan University that involved a volunteer component?" This series of seven

questions involved three degrees of response that included: “very likely,” “somewhat likely,” and “not at all likely.” The Likert-type scale statements allowed participants to rate the statements on a scale of one to five in order to rate the intensity of their feelings. Descriptions for the number scale is as follows: one is equal to strongly disagree, two is equivalent to somewhat disagree, three is neutral, four is equal to somewhat agree and five is equivalent to a feeling of strongly agree. “My volunteer work helped me learn more about a social issue” is an example of one of these question types. The short answer section was designed to be the qualitative section of the survey. For example, one question from the short answer section read, “Describe a volunteer experience that changed your thoughts or values in some way, whether it was positive or negative.”

### **Research Questions**

Four research questions guided the present study and were chosen based on their ability to demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of the CMU Volunteer Center.

1. What are the student perceptions of the Volunteer Center and the programs it offers?
2. What is the value, if any, that students and/or alumni find in volunteering via out-of-classroom learning experiences offered by the Volunteer Center?
3. What is the relationship between student grade point average and student involvement with the Volunteer Center?
4. What specific programs offered by the Volunteer Center do students feel supports them in their overall development?

### **Participants**

The participants in the study were current undergraduate students and alumni connected to Central Michigan University’s Volunteer Center in some capacity at the time they took the

survey. A total of 137 participants completed the quantitative section of the survey with 94 (68.6 percent) identifying themselves as female and 43 (31.4 percent) identifying as male. A total of 108 participants completed the qualitative section of the survey with 77 (71 percent) reporting as female and 31 (29 percent) reporting as male. The participants were primarily Caucasian, undergraduate students; however, all ages, genders, and ethnicities were included.

### **Data Collection and Treatment**

Participants were recruited using the CMU Volunteer Center Listserv for undergraduates and alumni. They were also recruited through the CMU Volunteer Center newsletter and the CMU Volunteer Center website. Messages sent to participants (Appendix A) included a link to the online survey. A password-locked account was maintained on the online system, Survey Monkey and all data were collected through this medium (Appendix B).

To ensure confidentiality of each participant's information, the PI secured survey records in a locked file. Survey responses did not include participant names or other clear identifiers. Participants who chose to enter the \$15.00 Speedway gift card drawing submitted their email address separately from their survey so their answers were not linked in any way if they opted to discontinue participation in the research project or continue participation by entering the drawing. The PI was the only individual with access to the Survey Monkey account login and upon completion of data acquisition the researcher retained the records in a filing system that was kept only on one flash drive and available to only the PI.

### **Data Analysis**

The survey data yielded usable quantitative responses from 137 participants and usable qualitative responses from 112 participants. In total, five surveys were not used because they were not filled out beyond the demographic section of the survey. Surveys from 25 participants

were included in the quantitative data, but were not included in the qualitative data because those participants completely filled out the quantitative section, but chose not to answer the open-ended questions. Once data collection was complete, the results of the quantitative survey questions were manually entered and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calibrated for the Likert-type scale questions on the survey. The open-ended questions were charted by the PI's examination of common themes that emerged from the participants' answers. The PI and her advisor randomly selected a series of qualitative responses for each qualitative question and independently developed themes for those chosen responses. After developing themes independently, the PI and her advisor agreed upon a set of themes for each randomly selected response and assigned definitions to those themes (Appendix C). It was also possible for a response to yield more than one theme. The PI used the list of developed themes to chart the remaining qualitative responses for each qualitative question.

### **Summary**

Chapter III outlined the design and reasoning of the present study, as well as research questions, which guided the study. An explanation of the use of the quantitative survey instrument with the qualitative open-ended questions was provided. Chapter IV presents the findings of the research, while Chapter V contains a discussion of those findings, a list of recommendations, and concludes with a comprehensive summary.

## Chapter IV

### FINDINGS

This chapter addresses the findings gathered from the survey data collection. The quantitative data from the Likert-type scale questions were tabulated first, followed by the qualitative data from the five, open-ended questions.

#### Quantitative Survey Data

Responses to the items in the quantitative survey were scored on a Likert-type scale and are presented in two sections. The first section had three degrees of response and the second section had five degrees of response that are explained in the previous chapter. Participants also had the option of indicating a “not applicable” response. The frequency of responses and percentages for the Likert-type scale questions and statements are discussed below and listed in table form (Appendix D).

A series of demographic questions were asked of the participants and the listed data includes gender, race, and the participants' current classification at CMU (Table 1). Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were used to measure the relationships between variables because the involved variables are on continuous scales (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2001). McMillan and Schumacher (2001) also describe the interpretation of the generated statistics by stating: “The number representing the correlation can range from -1.00 to +1.00. “A high positive value represents a high positive relationship, a low positive value [represents] a low positive relationship, a moderate negative value [represents] a moderate negative relationship, a value of 0 [represents] no relationship, and so on” (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2001, p. 230). In other words, the relationship is more statistically significant the closer the number representing the correlation gets to -1.00 or +1.00.

Table 1

## Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 142)

Characteristic	<u>n</u>	%
Gender		
Male	43	31.4
Female	94	68.6
Transgender	0	0
Race		
White	123	89.7
Black or African American	9	6.5
Hispanic	2	1.4
Native American or Alaskan Native	0	0
Asian or Pacific Islander	3	2.1
Current Classification at Central Michigan University		
Post Baccalaureate	2	1.4
Freshman	16	11.6
Sophomore	23	16.7
Junior	24	17.5
Senior	51	37.2
Graduate	7	5.1
Alumni	14	10.2
Other	0	0



Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between the helpfulness of the Volunteer Center and the perceptions of the participants. In eight separate categories there was a positive correlation between the variables. The highest positive correlation was shown between the Volunteer Center helpfulness measure and the accessibility of volunteer opportunities at CMU measure (Table 2,  $r = 0.498$ ,  $p = 0$ ). In addition to accessibility, four strong statistical relationships can be seen between the Volunteer Center helpfulness measure and the following measures: the frequency volunteering was discussed during classes at CMU measure (Table 2,  $r = 0.230$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ), the likeliness of enrollment in a CMU class with a volunteer component measure (Table 2,  $r = 0.318$ ,  $p = 0$ ), the feeling that volunteering makes participants feel more connected to the communities they have worked in measure (Table 2,  $r = 0.256$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ), and the feeling that volunteering makes participants feel more connected to CMU measure (Table 2,  $r = 0.323$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). The remaining three categories demonstrated a significant positive correlation; however, they were not as statistically strong. In relation to the Volunteer Center helpfulness measure the additional significant correlations were viewed with the feeling that the participants' volunteering made a difference measure (Table 2,  $r = 0.182$ ,  $p = 0.036$ ), the feeling that participants are more engaged citizens due to volunteering measure (Table 2,  $r = 0.171$ ,  $p = 0.049$ ), and the likeliness of participants continuing to volunteer after graduation measure (Table 2,  $r = 0.206$ ,  $p = 0.017$ ).

Table 2

*Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient: Volunteer Center Helpfulness*

	How helpful is the Volunteer Center?
How accessible are volunteer opportunities at CMU?	.498**
How often is/was volunteer work discussed in your classes at CMU?	.230**
How likely would you be to enroll in a class at CMU that involved volunteering?	.318**
Volunteering makes me feel more connected to the communities I've worked in.	.256**
Volunteering through the Volunteer Center has given me more of a connection to CMU.	.323**
I feel like my volunteering has made a difference.	.182*
I am a more engaged citizen due to my volunteer work.	.171*
After graduation, I will continue to volunteer.	.206*

\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$

The relationship between four categories and the participant grade point average measure was also reviewed through a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The feeling that volunteering makes participants feel more connected to the communities they have worked in measure (Table 3,  $r = 0.222$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ), the likeliness of participants continuing to volunteer after graduation measure (Table 3,  $r = 0.215$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ), and the feeling that volunteering makes participants feel more connected to CMU measure (Table 3,  $r = 0.259$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ) all demonstrated a significant positive correlation. The likelihood that participants learned about a social issue due to their volunteer work measure (Table 3,  $r = 0.223$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ) had a slightly

more significant relationship with the participant grade point average measure than the other three categories.

Table 3

*Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient: Grade Point Average*

	Please list your GPA.
Volunteering makes me feel more connected to the communities I've worked in.	.222*
My volunteer work helped me learn more about a social issue.	.223**
After graduation, I will continue to volunteer.	.215*
Volunteering through the Volunteer Center has given me more of a connection to CMU.	.259*

\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient revealed a highly significant relationship regarding the likeliness of participants continuing to volunteer after graduation measure. The following categories were seen to have strong statistical correlations with the post-graduation measure: the likeliness of enrollment in a CMU class with a volunteer component measure (Table 4,  $r = 0.246$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ), the feeling that volunteering makes participants feel more connected to the communities they have worked in measure (Table 4,  $r = 0.871$ ,  $p = 0$ ), the feeling that the participants' volunteering made a difference measure (Table 4,  $r = 0.796$ ,  $p = 0$ ), the feeling that participants are more engaged citizens due to volunteering measure (Table 4,  $r = 0.781$ ,  $p = 0$ ), the likelihood that participants learned about a social issue due to their volunteer work measure (Table 4,  $r = 0.799$ ,  $p = 0$ ), the likelihood that participants learned about an environmental issue due to their volunteer work measure (Table 4,  $r = 0.639$ ,  $p = 0$ ), and the

feeling that volunteering makes participants feel more connected to CMU measure (Table 4,  $r = 0.763, p = 0$ ).

Table 4

*Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient: Post-Graduation Volunteering*

	After graduation, I will continue to volunteer.
How likely would you be to enroll in a class at CMU that involved volunteering?	.246**
Volunteering makes me feel more connected to the communities I've worked in.	.871**
I feel like my volunteering has made a difference.	.796**
I am a more engaged citizen due to my volunteer work.	.781**
My volunteer work helped me learn more about a social issue.	.799**
My volunteer work helped me learn more about an environmental issue.	.639**

\*\* $p < 0.01$

Lastly, there were strong statistical relationships between the feeling that volunteering makes participants feel more connected to CMU measure in addition to the previously mentioned correlations. The additional significant measures are as follows: the likeliness of enrollment in a CMU class with a volunteer component measure (Table 5,  $r = 0.353, p = 0$ ), the feeling that volunteering makes participants feel more connected to the communities they have worked in measure (Table 5,  $r = 0.768, p = 0$ ), the feeling that the participants' volunteering made a difference measure (Table 5,  $r = 0.700, p = 0$ ), the feeling that participants are more engaged citizens due to volunteering measure (Table 5,  $r = 0.721, p = 0$ ), the likelihood that participants learned about a social issue due to their volunteer work measure (Table 5,  $r = 0.707, p = 0$ ), the

likelihood that participants learned about an environmental issue due to their volunteer work measure (Table 5,  $r = 0.560$ ,  $p = 0$ ).

Table 5

*Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient: Connection to CMU*

	Volunteering through the Volunteer Center has given me more of a connection to CMU.
How likely would you be to enroll in a class at CMU that involved volunteering?	.353**
Volunteering makes me feel more connected to the communities I've worked in.	.768**
I feel like my volunteering has made a difference.	.700**
I am a more engaged citizen due to my volunteer work.	.721**
My volunteer work helped me learn more about a social issue.	.707**
My volunteer work helped me learn more about an environmental issue.	.560**
After graduation, I will continue to volunteer.	.763**

\*\* $p < 0.01$

### **Qualitative Data**

The final section of the survey included five open-ended questions relating to participants' reasons for choosing to utilize the Volunteer Center (Question 1), which volunteer experience they felt changed their thoughts or values positively or negatively (Question 2), what, if any, things they learned while volunteering that they did not feel they could have learned in a classroom (Question 3), the impact volunteerism has had on them (Question 4), and whether there is anything they think the Volunteer Center should change (Question 5). The open-ended

questions yielded many responses with similar content. “Qualitative data has been shown to clarify the results of a standardized test or a developmental rating scale” (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2001, p. 543). The qualitative data contributed to the complementary mixed approach design of the present study and was utilized to enhance the results of the quantitative section of the survey. Themes were developed for each qualitative question and are listed with each question below. Each listed theme is also defined (Appendix C).

Multiple themes were noted when participants discussed their reasoning for choosing to utilize the Volunteer Center (Table 6). These themes included: prior involvements or prior exposure to volunteering, personal belief or growth, mandatory or required, accessibility or variety, personal or university connection, love or interest of volunteering, professional development, making a difference or effecting change, and the feeling of giving back. Accessibility and variety were mentioned most frequently at 37 percent of the time.

A junior, female student indicated, “I wanted to grow as a person and give back to the community and others who needed extra help, love, or friendship. The Volunteer Center makes it easy to find a cause that I am interested in and allowed me to volunteer my time.”

“The opportunities provided by the VC [Volunteer Center] are conducive to growing as a person, improving my resume and interviewing skills, as well as increasing the probability of me getting a career post-graduation,” was the response of one junior, female student.

Another junior, female student said, “It is a great way to raise awareness about different social and environmental issues in our community and the world.”

Table 6

*Qualitative Question 1: Why did you choose to utilize the resources at the Volunteer Center?*

Theme	Totals	Percentage
(1) Prior Involvements or Prior Exposure to Volunteering	11	10.2
(2) Personal Belief or Growth	10	9.2
(3) Mandatory or Required	11	10.2
(4) Accessibility or Variety	40	37
(5) Personal or University Connection	10	9.2
(6) Love or Interest in Volunteering	26	24.1
(7) Professional Development	3	2.7
(8) Making Difference or Effecting Change	5	4.6
(9) Giving Back	7	6.5

In relation to participants' change in their thoughts or feelings, participants described positive or negative volunteer experiences (Table 7). Besides participants who opted not to answer the question, there were no negative experiences discussed. Many participants indicated specific programs when discussing their experience. Common themes seen were Alternative Breaks, tutoring or working with students or children, working with senior citizens, soup kitchen or shelters, indication of a mission trip or Habitat for Humanity, Safer Sex Patrol, and discussion of previous involvements.

A female alumna stated, "I participated in an Alternative Break that expanded my thinking about the world and caused me to further develop my understanding and acceptance of people."

A junior, female student responded, “Volunteering in an old person’s home made me change my views on health care for the elderly. I previously thought they should receive no government aid, but I now believe they should be given some help.”

A female, junior student said, “I took part in an Alternative Winter Break in which I was fortunate enough to rebuild a home devastated by [Hurricane] Katrina in New Orleans. It empowered me and showed me how much one person can make a difference. I also met amazing people from CMU and all over the country who have changed my life.”

Table 7

*Qualitative Question 2: Describe a volunteer experience, positive or negative, that changed your thoughts or values in some way.*

Theme	Totals	Percentage
(1) Alternative Breaks	30	27.7
(2) Tutoring or Working with Students/Children	13	12
(3) Working with Senior Citizens	3	2.7
(4) Soup Kitchen or Shelter	20	18.5
(5) Mission Trip or Habitat for Humanity	5	4.6
(6) Safer Sex Patrol	3	2.7
(7) Previous Involvement	10	9.2

In relationship to out-of-classroom learning (Question 3), the common themes that emerged were hands-on experience, the feeling of helping others, cross-cultural experiences, working on a team, and life skills or real world experiences.



A junior, male student said, “Yes, I could have never learned so much about how I interact with a different culture.”

A female alumna stated, “Volunteering provides practical application of theories learned in the classroom. By coupling service and learning in the classroom, I think I developed a deeper understanding of the material taught.”

In the words of a junior, male student, “It definitely helps you develop listening skills. I have found that the total stranger you are helping will tell you their story because they feel like you care. I have learned a lot about the hardships that people face and it has helped me appreciate everything I have even more.”

Table 8

*Qualitative Question 3: Are there things you learned while volunteering that you don't think you could have learned in a classroom? Please explain.*

Themes	Totals	Percentage
(1) Hands-On Experience	34	31.5
(2) Feeling of Helping Others	9	8.3
(3) Cross-Cultural Experiences	14	13
(4) Working on a Team	10	9.2
(5) Life Skills or Real World Experience	34	31.5

Participants were also asked to describe the impact, if any, that volunteerism has had on them (Table 9). Responses varied from general answers to narratives about specific experiences. Common themes were indication of a new awareness or learning experience, university or community connections, changing views or personal growth, sense of gratitude, and the feeling of compassion or empathy.

In the words of a female, sophomore student, “Volunteering has helped me feel more connected to the people that I am serving. It is sometimes difficult to learn about the diversity that surrounds us, but by volunteering it is much easier for us to realize that everybody has similar values and goals.”

A junior, female student said, “Volunteering has had a large impact on my life. So much, in fact, that it has led me to applying for the Master of Public Administration graduate programs for the non-profit sector.”

Another female, junior student responded, “I am not naturally an empathetic person, but volunteering has helped shape my emotional side and see things through the paradigm of others.”

Table 9

*Qualitative Question 4: Describe the impact, if any, that volunteerism has had on you.*

Themes	Totals	Percentages
(1) Awareness/Learning Experience	27	25
(2) University/Community Connection	14	13
(3) Changing Views/Personal Growth	30	27.7
(4) Sense of Gratitude	12	11.1
(5) Compassion/Empathy	19	17.6

In closing, the final responses from participants were suggestions for change within the Volunteer Center (Question 5). The common themes included: marketing strategies, visibility, no need for change, updating Volunteer CENTRAL or the Volunteer Center website, and difficulty in selecting an Alternative Breaks program.

“Yes, the database for Volunteer CENTRAL. It is really outdate[d], and there are a ton of errors that happen when trying to sign up for an Alternative Break.”

“I think they need to promote different opportunities more efficiently. I didn’t start volunteering un[till] my Junior year mostly because I wasn’t aware of different events I could have helped at.”

“I often found the Volunteer CENTRAL website very difficult to navigate and use. It was difficult to sign-up for events and log hours, and the overall layout was very overwhelming. I would make the website much more user friendly.”

Table 10

*Qualitative Question 5: In your opinion, is there anything the Volunteer Center should change?*

Themes	Totals	Percentages
(1) Marketing Strategies	15	13.8
(2) Visibility	12	11.1
(3) No Need for Change	50	46.3
(4) Updating Volunteer CENTRAL/Website	12	11.1
(5) Alternative Breaks Selection	6	5.5

### Summary

Chapter IV outlined the findings of the present study and was presented in two sections to identify the quantitative and qualitative data. Tables displaying the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were listed and explanations were provided to report the significant findings of the current study. Themes that emerged in the analysis of the qualitative data were listed and examples of participant statements were given for each theme. Tables were also

included to display the total number of responses and percentages for each theme. Discussion of the above findings of the present study continues in detail in Chapter V. The chapter also contains recommendations for the Volunteer Center, for Student Affairs practitioners, and for future research. A comprehensive summary identifying the main components of the present study concludes the chapter.

## Chapter V

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Discussion

The purpose of this project was four-fold: to explore the effectiveness of the Central Michigan University Volunteer Center; to highlight the Volunteer Center programs and qualities that support student development; to create recommendations for both the Volunteer Center staff, as well as Student Affairs practitioners wishing to implement a similar office; and, the completion of a Master's thesis in the College Student Affairs program at Eastern Illinois University. The study sought to answer four questions: What are the student perceptions of the Volunteer Center and the programs it offers?; What is the value, if any, that students and/or alumni find in volunteering via out-of-classroom learning experiences offered by the Volunteer Center?; What is the relationship between student grade point average and student involvement with the Volunteer Center?; and, What specific programs offered by the Volunteer Center do students feel supports them in their overall development?

The data that was collected for the purpose of this study yielded a plethora of interesting responses. There was a clear connection between the quantitative and qualitative data and from these responses several themes surfaced and were used to address the four research questions that guided the present study.

*Research Question 1: What are the student perceptions of the Volunteer Center and the programs it offers?*

The results of the present study revealed that students find the Volunteer Center very helpful and are satisfied with the offered programs. Of the quantitative correlations regarding the helpfulness of the Volunteer Center, the most significant positive relationship could be seen

with the accessibility of volunteer opportunities at CMU. Qualitative assessment confirmed this data, as the overwhelming theme of Question 1 was accessibility. One female, junior student stated, “The opportunities they [Volunteer Center] have provided to me in terms of breadth and depth of service have been amazing, and something that no other outlet has offered.” A female, sophomore echoed the same sentiment with, “...because the Volunteer Center provides a lot of diverse opportunities and makes the opportunities readily available.”

Another important set of quantitative data to consider are the correlations with the category that read, “Volunteering through the Volunteer Center has given me more of a connection to CMU.” Of the seven statistically significant relationships, five categories had a positive correlation of at least .700 and these categories are directly related to the overall goals of the Volunteer Center. Specifically, students that indicated using the Volunteer Center gave them more of a connection to CMU, also indicated that volunteering makes them feel more connected to the communities they’ve worked in, they feel that their volunteering has made a difference, their volunteering has helped them learn more about a social issue, they are more engaged citizens due to their volunteering, and they believe they will continue to volunteer post-graduation. Within the qualitative data, in response to Question 4, a male, graduate student said, “My alternative break to Texas showed me how large the world is and how small acts of helping others can change that larger world.” In response to the same question, a female alumni said, “Volunteering has helped to determine what I will do in the future, has made me feel connected to my community and the people in my community.” It should also be noted that 59.8 percent of respondents indicated they were upperclassmen at the time of the data collection and 69 percent of respondents began using the Volunteer Center when they were freshmen. In other words, students perceive that using the Volunteer Center has given them personal and University

connections, has contributed to their maturity and personal development, and will lead them to continue volunteering after they graduate.

There were seven other significant relationships that were seen within the Volunteer Center helpfulness category of the quantitative data; however they were not as statistically significant. Additionally, two emerging themes from Question 5 of the qualitative data were updating Volunteer CENTRAL and visibility. A female junior student indicated, "Volunteer CENTRAL is great, but sometimes unreliable when a lot of people try to access it at one time." In regards to visibility, one male junior said, "They need to get into more classrooms and get more signs posted. Many people have no clue they even exist, which is sad, since in my opinion they are a huge campus organization." These two sets of data may be relatable, because while feedback indicates satisfaction with the Volunteer Center and shows that the office is meeting its overall goals, there is room for improvement and streamlining based on the present study.

*Research Question 2: What is the value, if any, that students and/or alumni find in volunteering via out-of-classroom learning experiences offered by the Volunteer Center?*

Participants indicated a substantial amount of value could be found in volunteering and out-of-classroom learning. In response to Question 3, a female sophomore indicated, "Yes, volunteering opens up people's eyes to so many more things. In class the world can only be talked about, but when you are volunteering, you are actually experiencing the world." A female graduate student said, "Yes, I definitely feel that working as a volunteer enables you to learn from people and not from a textbook. When you experience things for yourself you develop a real sense of the issue because you have been involved in it." Quantitative data also showed a significant positive relationship between respondents' likelihood of enrolling in a class at CMU that involved volunteering and the feeling that volunteering through the Volunteer Center has

given them more of a connection to CMU with a correlation of .353. When asked how likely they would be to enroll in a class at CMU with a volunteer component, 89.1 percent of participants responded they would be at least “somewhat likely” to enroll with 50.4 percent indicating they would be “very likely to enroll.” It is also worthy to note that 45.3 percent of participants responded that volunteer work was discussed in their classes at CMU “somewhat often,” and an additional 40.9 percent responded that it was “not at all often” discussed. The data indicates that students find volunteering meaningful, beneficial, and are gaining important skills from the work they are participating in. However, based on the data it seems volunteering and service learning is not discussed across university paradigms.

*Research Question 3: What is the relationship between student grade point average and student involvement with the Volunteer Center?*

A statistically significant relationship was established between grade point average and involvement in the Volunteer Center, and the highest correlation was only listed at .259. Respondents discussed their course work in generalities in their qualitative answers, but did not specifically indicate their grades in relation to their volunteer work. In the demographic section of the quantitative data, students listed their most recent cumulative grade point average. These responses ranged from 2.0 to 4.0 on a 4.0 scale with 82.4 percent of respondents indicating at least a 3.0 grade point average and 47.2 percent of respondents indicating at least a 3.5 grade point average. In order to graduate from CMU, students must achieve a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.0 and there was no respondent that indicated being below that mark. Indication that it was “very likely” they would graduate from CMU was reported by 89.1 percent of respondents. From this data it can be inferred that the present study’s participants are academically successful. Of these academically successful students, 87.6 percent of them



responded that they were registered on the Volunteer CENTRAL database. Additionally, when looking at the qualitative data gathered from Question 2, respondents mentioned the Alternative Breaks program 27.7 percent of the time. In its entirety, this data shows that there is a positive relationship between involvement in the Volunteer Center and academic success.

*Research Question 4: What specific programs offered by the Volunteer Center do students feel supports them in their overall development?*

This research question was primarily answered through qualitative responses. The Alternative Breaks program was mentioned the most frequently within Question 2 at 27.7 percent. The Alternative Breaks program was also specifically noted throughout the qualitative section and was not restricted to only Question 2. In response to Question 2, one female alumnus said, “Alternative Breaks were life-changing experiences. They opened my eyes to social issues that I never fully grasped until I witnessed them firsthand.” A female junior student noted, “I have so many positive volunteer experiences, it is amazing. One of my favorite ones was volunteering internationally in San Ignacio, Belize, for an Alternative Break. We were building a road so a foster home could be built. Never have I worked so hard or learned such valuable life lessons.” Another female junior mentioned Alternative Breaks as her favorite program and stated, “The Alternative Breaks program was the most positive volunteering experience I have ever had, and because of the great time I had on my first Break, I continued to participate and Site Lead in two others [Alternative Breaks]. It was great to see that college students were selfless enough to take a week of their lives to spend serving others, and often in communities where they would not see the [long-term] effects of their impact.”

The quantitative data was very positively significant in regards to participants’ feelings about expanding their knowledge on social and environmental issues, which is one of the

primary goals of the Alternative Breaks program. The responses for social issues was consistently higher than those for environmental. A correlation was noted at .560 for knowledge of environmental issues and at .707 for knowledge of social issues in relation to volunteering through the Volunteer Center giving the respondents a feeling of connection to CMU. Furthermore, highly positive correlations were demonstrated for knowledge of an environmental issue at a .639 and knowledge of a social issue at .799 in relation to the belief that the respondent will continue to volunteer after graduation. Other significant statements regarding the Alternative Breaks program were seen in different sections of the qualitative data. When asked for Question 3 if there were things learned during volunteering that could not have been learned in the classroom, a male junior responded, "ABSOLUTELY! My Criminal Justice Social Reform [Alternative] Break taught me to look at people in the criminal justice system from a completely new perspective and that education and resources are what the U.S. justice system lacks today to help these people. Additionally, local organizations like Community Compassion Network and the Soup Kitchen show me that there is a need even in this small community [Mount Pleasant] for help." Giving a description of the impact volunteerism has had for Question 4, yielded one female alumni to respond, "I am more willing to take time for the person with me and explore other cultures than I would have before the experience. I would never have thought about going to any other country without that [Alternative] Break." Based on the present study, the Alternative Breaks program is the most holistically beneficial and impactful program offered by the Volunteer Center.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations that existed during this study. First, the participants in the study were undergraduates or alumni of Central Michigan University with some connection to

the Volunteer Center. In theory, these participants were current or previous students who had chosen to become actively involved in the activities offered by the office, which could have given them a bias opinion in comparison to another student at the institution. While the survey instrument was available to any undergraduate or alumni, it was distributed primarily through Volunteer Center avenues. This may have limited the likelihood of receiving responses from undergraduates or alumni without a clear connection to the Volunteer Center. Additionally, Question 2 within the qualitative section presented as a poorly worded question. Based on the responses from the participants it was clear that participants seemed confused and therefore did not fully answer the question in the way it was designed. This made it more difficult to develop concise themes. There was also a clear difference in the number of respondents for the quantitative and qualitative sections of the survey instrument. The quantitative came first, followed by the qualitative and it is possible that this design may have discouraged some students from fully completing the survey.

### **Recommendations**

While the Volunteer Center had run data collection to gather demographic information of its users, this program evaluation was the first for the office. It was the hope of the researcher that the present study would serve as a source of information for Central Michigan University's Volunteer Center to further develop the quality of the Volunteer Center's functioning and effectiveness at achieving its intended goals. Recommendations for the Volunteer Center, Student Affairs practitioners, and future research follow.

#### *Recommendations for the Volunteer Center*

1. Students need to be aware of the existence of the Volunteer Center in order to utilize the programs and resources offered. Participants revealed that while they are aware of the

opportunities to get involved, some did not hear about the Volunteer Center until they had been at the university for a while and others mentioned rarely seeing marketing for the office. Concentrating efforts on more marketing and visibility on the campus would be expected to increase student involvement with the Volunteer Center.

2. The Volunteer Center should invest in “cleaning up” the Volunteer CENTRAL database or overhauling it completely and creating something new. Student feedback indicated experiencing errors with the database and having difficulty navigating it, especially at busy times of the year such as Alternative Breaks registration. In addition, students noted that the Volunteer Center website could be updated to look more modern and include more resources. Making these relatively small changes, could greatly impact student satisfaction with the Volunteer Center and increase involvement.
3. The Volunteer Center should continue to staff their office with caring and informed individuals. Students overwhelmingly indicated they were pleased with the staff and found the Volunteer Center to be extremely helpful. This customer service approach has been beneficial.
4. The Volunteer Center should reach out to other departments on-campus. This will increase visibility as recommended above and making sure other professionals are informed will also educate the Volunteer Center staff. Possible collaboration across departments could occur and potentially evolve into service learning for college credit, which would be ideal. This change may take place gradually, but the conversations and education should begin. For example, in response to Question 5 one participant recommended, “Work with the English department to encourage Freshman Composition instructors to require (or encourage) students to write about a volunteer experience...”

5. In addition to their annual report of demographics, the Volunteer Center should establish an annual review in order to gauge student satisfaction and ensure that they are meeting the stated goals of their office. One small way to get started may be to implement an exit survey so when students affiliated with the Volunteer Center graduate they automatically get sent a survey.
6. The Volunteer Center should establish contact with alumni of their programs to track their career success and future volunteering. This would allow the Volunteer Center to establish data over time to show the longevity of their programs and contribution to the overall success of CMU students, which is one of their stated goals.

*Recommendations for Student Affairs Practitioners*

1. Develop a Volunteer Center-type office on all campuses. Previous research and the present study indicate having a central location is very beneficial and gives students a resource point to get started. There are also opportunities for campus recognition based on the success of the programs, such as the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll.
2. Find ways to incorporate service-learning and volunteering in the college curriculum. This will require collaboration across Student Affairs departments and increased communication will strengthen student service on-campus beyond just volunteering. Integrated learning techniques such as the addition of service-learning to a campus will allow professionals to develop their students more fully.
3. Volunteering should be a focal point of the university and the Student Affairs department. Adding service-learning and volunteerism to the institution's goals for example, will help

reinforce the importance of volunteering and will show students that campus professionals are committed to their development as students.

4. Once a Volunteer Center-type office is established, or if a similar program is already in place, professionals should create a plan to annually review the output of the office and the student perceptions of the offered resources. This will allow professionals to make necessary changes and to stay updated on current trends.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

1. Present the mixed approach design in a more integrated way. Some respondents did not fully complete the survey instrument so changing the design to include an open-ended question at the end of each quantitative question page may increase responses. Additionally, the development of focus groups or student interviews would also allow for a wider range of students to be sampled and give the data more depth.
2. Gather more data regarding student grade point average. While the data did point to academic success in the present study, more significant relationships could have been established if additional questions were asked. Questions regarding academic success should also be included in the qualitative section of future studies.
3. Examine the success of alumni after graduation and compare it to their collegiate volunteering and continued volunteer involvement.
4. Reevaluate the wording of the survey instrument questions. The survey instrument for the present study was developed specifically with CMU and the needs of the Volunteer Center in mind. Using the same instrument or a similar one to the present study will require the researcher to tailor the survey to the campus being evaluated.

5. Examine the relationship between the campus Volunteer Center-type office and the Academic Affairs department to see if collaboration has ever occurred so proper recommendations can be made.

### **Comprehensive Summary**

The primary purpose of the present study was to understand the perceptions of the Volunteer Center at CMU from current and former students who utilized the Volunteer Center's resources in order to properly evaluate the overall program. The focus of the present study was to assess the effectiveness of the Volunteer Center in meeting its stated goals and the stated goals of the institution based on the student responses and to generate recommendations to the office so that they may improve and fine tune their approach and programs.

Student responses revealed that students find the Volunteer Center to be very helpful and are satisfied with the programs the office offers. Based on the results, involvement in the Volunteer Center contributes to student academic success, helps students learn about critical issues, develops skills and a greater knowledge base for students, and creates a strong connection between students and CMU. Thus, the effectiveness of the Volunteer Center in its program offerings and services delivered to both students and surrounding communities has been determined to be prominent. The current study showed that the Volunteer Center is an integral part of the campus community, and more importantly, the Volunteer Center helps set students up to be successful all the way through graduation and beyond.

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APPENDICES

**Appendix A**  
**Message to Participants**

**Message to Participants**

Greetings,

My name is Stacey Jaksa. I am a Master's student at Eastern Illinois University and an alumnus of Central Michigan University. As my thesis project, I'm gathering data to showcase the CMU Volunteer Center and am requesting your help. Your participation would help the Volunteer Center in its evaluation and expansion of its services to others like you. Participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, your name will be kept confidential.

Please follow the link below and complete the 10-15 minute survey. Upon completion you will have the opportunity to enter your email address to win a free 15-dollar gift card to Speedway! Thank you for your commitment to CMU.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/centralvolunteers>

**Appendix B**  
**Survey Instrument**

**Survey Instrument**

Volunteerism

*1. Demographics- Part 1*

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender

2. What is your age?

Write-in age

3. What is your race? Mark one or more.

- White
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- Native American or Alaskan Native
- Asian or Pacific Islander

4. What is your current classification at Central Michigan University?

- Post Baccalaureate
- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate
- Alumni
- Other (write-in)

5. What was your classification when you first began using the Volunteer Center?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate
- Alumni
- Other (write-in)

6. Please list your most recent cumulative grade point average.

Write-in grade point average

7. In what year did you graduate from Central Michigan University? (Continue to next question if not applicable)

Write-in year



2. *Part 2*

1. How likely do you think it is that you will graduate from Central Michigan University?  
Very likely  
Somewhat likely  
Not at all likely  
Already graduated
2. How often did you volunteer prior to attending Central Michigan University?  
All of the time  
Some of the time  
None of the time
3. Are you registered on the Volunteer CENTRAL online database?  
Yes  
No
4. How helpful is the Volunteer Center?  
Very helpful  
Somewhat helpful  
Not at all helpful
5. How accessible are volunteer opportunities at Central Michigan University?  
Very accessible  
Somewhat accessible  
Not at all accessible
6. How often is/was volunteer work discussed in your classes at Central Michigan University?  
Very often  
Somewhat often  
Not at all often
7. How likely would you be to enroll in a class at Central Michigan University that involved a volunteer component?  
Very likely  
Somewhat likely  
Not at all likely

3. *Ranking- Part 3*

1. Rate the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being strongly disagree, 2 being somewhat disagree, 3 being neutral, 4 being somewhat agree, and 5 being strongly agree:

Volunteering makes me feel more connected to the communities I have worked in.

I feel like my volunteering has made a difference.

I am a more engaged citizen due to my volunteer work.

My volunteer work helped me learn more about a social issue.

My volunteer work helped me learn more about an environmental issue.

After graduation, I will continue to volunteer.

Volunteering through the Volunteer Center has given me more of a connection to Central Michigan University.

*4. Short Answer- Part 4*

1. Why did you choose to utilize the resources at the Volunteer Center?

Write-in with not applicable option

2. Describe a volunteer experience, positive or negative, that changed your thoughts or values in some way.

Write-in with not applicable option

3. Are there things you learned while volunteering that you don't think you could have learned in a classroom? Please explain.

Write-in with not applicable option

4. Describe the impact, if any, that volunteerism has had on you.

Write-in with not applicable option

5. In your opinion is there anything the Volunteer Center should change?

Write-in with not applicable option

**Appendix C**  
**Definition of Qualitative Themes**

## Breakdown of Qualitative Themes

### *Qualitative Question 1*

1. Prior Involvements/Prior Exposure to Volunteering
  - a. Involvement in organization or with volunteering prior to beginning at institution
2. Personal Belief and Growth
  - a. Affirmed personal belief or improved self-knowledge and identity
  - b. Specifically noted feelings of change directly related to volunteering
3. Mandatory/Required
  - a. Expressed requirement for class, organization membership, and so on
4. Accessibility/Variety
  - a. Ease of access and multiple choices of volunteer sites and volunteer information
5. Personal/University Connection
  - a. Creation of connection to institution, population being served, or other volunteers
6. Love/Interest in Volunteering
  - a. General answers indicating volunteering as important/fun
7. Professional Development
  - a. Use of volunteering as resume builder or for future job
8. Making a Difference/Effecting Change
  - a. Volunteering creates positive change, respondents felt able to make a difference
9. Giving Back
  - a. Respondents noted “giving back” to community specifically

### *Qualitative Question 2*

1. Alternative Breaks
  - a. Specifically mentioned Alternative Breaks program
2. Tutoring/Working with Students and/or Children
  - a. Volunteerism included working in a school or with students/children
    - i. Examples include: Circle K, David Garcia Project, Lunch Buddies
3. Senior Citizens
  - a. Volunteerism included working with/for senior citizens
4. Soup Kitchen/Shelter
  - a. Volunteerism included helping at Soup Kitchen, Mobile Food Pantry, or a shelter of some kind
    - i. Examples include: animal shelter, food pantry, clothing distribution
5. Mission Trip/Habitat for Humanity
  - a. Volunteering occurred as part of a mission trip, through Habitat for Humanity, or in another country (outside of Alternative Breaks)
6. Safer Sex Patrol
  - a. Specifically mentioned volunteering through Safer Sex Patrol
7. Organization, Club, or Previous Involvement
  - a. Volunteered through a previous involvement not specified in another theme

*Qualitative Question 3*

1. Hands-on Experience
  - a. Specifically indicated “hands-on experience”
2. Feeling of Helping Others
  - a. Discussed positive feelings/emotions of the after effects of volunteering due to the sense of accomplishment from helping others
3. Cross-cultural Experiences
  - a. Mentioned that direct interaction with people from different cultures, socioeconomic status, or race through volunteering was impactful
4. Working on a Team
  - a. Discussed collaborating with other students/volunteers and/or working on a team
5. Life Skills/Real World Experience
  - a. Specifically indicated gaining new life skills and/or real world experience through volunteering
    - i. Examples include: communication skills, ability to problem solve

*Qualitative Question 4*

1. Awareness/Learning Experience
  - a. New knowledge of subject area that respondent did not have prior to volunteering
2. University/Community Connection
  - a. Creation of connection to institution, population being served, or community
3. Changing Views/Personal Growth
  - a. Specifically indicated experiencing a change in opinion related to a societal or world view
  - b. Noted that volunteering caused for enhancement of skills or knowledge
4. Sense of Gratitude
  - a. Respondents reflected on their own life and/or discussed feeling thankful due to what they’ve witnessed other people going through at volunteer site
5. Compassion/Empathy
  - a. Discussed feelings of sympathy after recognizing the hardships of others
  - b. Noted wanting to put themselves in the place of those who required help

*Qualitative Question 5*

1. Marketing Strategies
  - a. Necessity of updating/using more marketing for the Volunteer Center
2. Visibility
  - a. Discussed needing more outreach to make sure students are aware of resources
  - b. Indicated need for more communication or more staff
3. No Need for Change
  - a. Respondents noted satisfaction with Volunteer Center, gave no recommendations
4. Updating Volunteer CENTRAL/website
  - a. Discussed desire for more user-friendly online technology
5. Alternative Breaks Selection
  - a. Specifically indicated frustration with sign-up process because of website errors

**Appendix D**  
**Likert-type Scale Tables**

**Likert-type Scale Tables**

*Question 1: How likely do you think it is that you will graduate from Central Michigan University?*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
Very Likely	122	89.1
Somewhat Likely	2	1.5
Not at all Likely	0	0
Already Graduated	13	9.5

*Question 2: How often did you volunteer prior to attending Central Michigan University?*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
All of the Time	45	32.8
Some of the Time	84	61.3
None of the Time	8	5.8

*Question 3: How helpful is the Volunteer Center?*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
Very Helpful	94	68.6
Somewhat Helpful	41	29.9
Not at all Helpful	2	1.5

*Question 4: How accessible are volunteer opportunities at Central Michigan University?*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
Very Accessible	105	76.6
Somewhat Accessible	31	22.6
Not at all Accessible	1	0.7

*Question 5: How often is/was volunteer work discussed in your classes at Central Michigan University?*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
Very Often	19	13.9
Somewhat Often	62	45.3
Not at all Often	56	40.9

*Question 6: How likely would you be to enroll in a class at Central Michigan University that involved a volunteer component?*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
Very Likely	69	50.4
Somewhat Likely	53	38.7
Not at all Likely	15	10.9



*Statement 1: Volunteering makes me feel more connected to the communities I've worked in.*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
(1) Strongly Disagree	8	5.8
(2) Somewhat Disagree	3	2.2
(3) Neutral	5	3.6
(4) Somewhat Agree	28	16.8
(5) Strongly Agree	93	67.9

*Statement 2: I feel like my volunteering has made a difference.*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
(1) Strongly Disagree	8	5.8
(2) Somewhat Disagree	1	0.7
(3) Neutral	9	6.6
(4) Somewhat Agree	39	28.5
(5) Strongly Agree	80	58.4

*Statement 3: I am a more engaged citizen due to my volunteer work.*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
(1) Strongly Disagree	9	6.6
(2) Somewhat Disagree	4	2.9
(3) Neutral	8	5.8
(4) Somewhat Agree	41	29.9
(5) Strongly Agree	75	54.7

*Statement 4: My volunteer work helped me learn more about a social issue.*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
(1) Strongly Disagree	7	5.1
(2) Somewhat Disagree	4	2.9
(3) Neutral	6	4.4
(4) Somewhat Agree	42	30.6
(5) Strongly Agree	78	56.9

*Statement 5: My volunteer work helped me learn more about an environmental issue.*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
(1) Strongly Disagree	7	5.1
(2) Somewhat Disagree	14	10.2
(3) Neutral	25	18.2
(4) Somewhat Agree	37	27
(5) Strongly Agree	54	39.4

*Statement 6: After graduation, I will continue to volunteer.*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
(1) Strongly Disagree	9	6.6
(2) Somewhat Disagree	3	2.2
(3) Neutral	7	5.1
(4) Somewhat Agree	29	21.2
(5) Strongly Agree	90	65.7

*Statement 7: Volunteering through the Volunteer Center has given me more of a connection to Central Michigan University.*

Rating Scale	Totals	Percentage
(1) Strongly Disagree	10	7.3
(2) Somewhat Disagree	7	5.1
(3) Neutral	18	13.1
(4) Somewhat Agree	33	24.1
(5) Strongly Agree	69	50.3

VITA

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