

Assessment of SIA Project Impacts on Students at Four CSU Campuses

Introduction

This report is the second part of a year-long research study undertaken by the CSU Community Service Learning office to assess the impact of SIA projects on four CSU campuses: Humboldt, Monterey Bay, San Luis Obispo, and San Jose. The start-up phase of SIA projects was described in an earlier report based on group interviews conducted between April, 2004 and November, 2004 with student leadership teams formed at the four campuses.

In April, 2005 follow-up, personal interviews were conducted with 22 students who participated as core members of SIA leadership teams at the four campuses. Of the 22 students, there were seven from Humboldt, four from Monterey May, eight from San Jose, and three from San Luis Obispo. The group consisted of six juniors, 14 seniors, and 2 graduate level students. All students were very cooperative and eager to talk about their SIA experiences during the interview.

The interview was designed to gather information about: (1) the student leadership team, (2) the goals and activities of the campus project, and (3) impacts of the project on the participants. Interviews were recorded on audio tape with student consent. They were then transcribed for analysis and reporting. At the end of the interview each student was asked to complete a brief questionnaire about their campus SIA project. The interview and post-interview questionnaire can be found in **Appendix A: SIA Project Instruments**.

The purpose of this report is to describe the impact of SIA projects on members of the four campus project teams. The report is primarily a qualitative assessment of self-reported changes that students experienced as a result of their projects. It is important to emphasize that this report is not about the work students performed on these projects but about the impacts of their experiences in four categories of student learning and development: knowledge, skills, interests, and attitudes. Based primarily on information gathered from personal interviews, the report is highly qualitative in nature. However, it is also supported with relevant quantitative data from the post-interview questionnaire.

The balance of this report is divided into four parts. The first part gives a brief sketch of each of the four campus projects. The second part provides a detailed analysis of project impacts in each of the four content areas of student learning and development mentioned above. The third part analyses project impacts from a process perspective. The report concludes with some general comments about the value of these projects.

Campus SIA Projects

Before launching into the assessment of SIA project impacts, it is important to understand what these projects were all about: what purposes they served, who

participated in them, and what they did. Each campus formed a student leadership team that identified an important social issue to address on their campus and/or in the local community. The teams set goals and planned and organized many activities and events that impacted the community. This section of the report gives a brief description of the goals and primary activities of the SIA projects at each of the four CSU campuses.

Humboldt (HUM)

The SIA leadership team at HUM was composed of students enrolled in a service learning course entitled “Justice and Sustainable Food Systems.” In this class the students identified projects they wanted to pursue, presented their ideas, solicited feedback, and met informally outside of class with students who were interested to participate. The class divided into small groups of students according to their particular area of interest. Each group took on the responsibility to form a community partnership to address issues of food security, food access, and/or food quality within the community. Three initiatives were undertaken:

Manilla Community Center. Manilla is a small, low-income community located on a peninsula west of Humboldt. The lack of personal transportation is a significant barrier for many residents to shop at the large, commercial grocery store in the community. Their only choice to buy food is at a very small, gas-station-like convenience store where food quality is inferior and food choices are limited. Located in Manilla is the Manilla Community Center which provides social and recreational services to the community and conducts studies of the needs of community residents. SIA students worked with the director of the Center to re-draft a community needs survey about food access and food preferences. The students distributed the survey to approximately 80 people who attended a public Thanksgiving event offered by the Center.

Arcata Night Shelter. The Arcata Night Shelter a transitional housing unit for the homeless. It had a non-working garden until SIA students showed up. Their goal was to revamp and rejuvenate the garden and thereby provide a secondary food source to meet the needs and preferences of shelter residents. Students surveyed the residents to find out what vegetables and fruits they liked, tilled the ground, built garden beds, planted seeds, and maintained the garden with help from the residents.

Arcata Educational Farm. Another small group of SIA students made their partnership connection with the Arcata Educational Farm to help them re-establish its Farm to School Program. This program invites local area elementary schools to bring children to the farm to learn basic concepts of agriculture. SIA students developed and presented a slideshow presentation to children in grades 3-5 at approximately 20 elementary schools in the local area. They also served as tour guides for children who visited the farm and developed California state-approved, supplementary instructional materials for classroom use on agriculture-related topics.

Monterey Bay (MB)

The SIA project at MB emerged in a service learning course on Social Justice. Students noted that there were strong anti-gay sentiments both within the culture of the campus and the local area community. The class decided to make Gay-Lesbianism the social justice issue to address for their SIA project. The goal of the project was to make different areas on the campus and in the community a “safe haven” for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual (LGBT) students and at the same time raise awareness in the larger community about LGBT issues.

The SIA leadership team planned and organized a number of activities and events to accomplish their goals. They established a connection with the campus “coming out” club to gain its support of the project. The team introduced the project to the campus through an “open-mic night” event, an occasional campus event that gives students and/or faculty an opportunity to express themselves on various issues or topics through art, poetry and music.

MB project also published the “Zine,” a roughly 30-page magazine that contained articles and works of art contributed by gay and straight members of the campus community, information about gay resources (e.g., books, websites, national organizations,) and names of gay people on campus.

SIA students put on two workshops designed to raise awareness of the difficult challenges that members of the LGBT community face in their daily lives. The workshops were attended by students, faculty members, and people from the local community. Teams of two or three students went out to businesses in the local community to distribute information, invite business owners to workshops, and pass out stickers to communicate to patrons that their place of business is a safe (free from discrimination and homophobic speech), tolerant, and welcoming place for members of the gay community.

San Jose State (SJS)

After researching a number of low-achieving schools in San Jose for a SIA project, the SIA project team at SJS selected a middle school that operates an after-school academic and enrichment support program, called the “After School All Stars Program.” The 100 or so students enrolled in the program spend three hours each day during the school week in both structured academic learning activities and unstructured, free-time activities doing whatever the students enjoy most. The school is populated primarily by Hispanic and African-American students living in low-income neighborhoods troubled by gangs and drugs. The goal of the program is to increase students’ interest in school, improve their academic achievement, and raise their educational aspirations – in short, to make education a priority in their lives.

Approximately 20-25 trained volunteer students from SJS and members of the SIA student leadership team travel from the campus to the school each week to tutor and

mentor the students. For most of the school week the program is structured into three parts. The first hour is devoted to doing homework assignments. The student volunteers provide help to individual students as needed or hold small-group tutoring sessions on homework assignments primarily in the areas of math and English. The second hour is time for students to play sports and games (i.e., basketball, soccer, etc.). The third part of the program is free-time for students to do whatever they like. The second and third hours provide opportunities for SJS volunteers to build trusting relationships with the students and serve as positive role models for them.

San Luis Obispo (SLO)

SLO has a long history of implementing projects for the homeless in the local area community. The goal of the SIA project was to raise awareness about hunger and homelessness and inspire students to get involved in addressing this issue in the community.

The SIA student leadership team planned, organized, and carried out many on-campus and community activities. The team implemented a campus “Hunger Awareness Week” that included speakers and a number of activities and exercises designed to heighten awareness of hunger and homelessness problems. The team also implemented a campus “Homelessness Awareness Week that began with a 2.5 mile walk along one of the main streets of SLO as a means of bringing this issue to light within the community. During the same week students organized a large food drive with another campus organization, Campus Crusade for Christ, to support the local food bank.

In collaboration with a local community organization that works with homeless people living at a night and day shelter, the SIA students set up a campus program called “Shelter Helpers.” In this program student volunteers play games with the children in the shelter and, in general, try to serve as positive role models.

The SIA project organized other activities and events aimed at reducing hunger and homelessness in the community. SIA students worked with a Senior Nutrition Program in the community by helping it deliver meals on wheels. The project team held a sit-in for hunger awareness in the University Union and collected money for the local food bank. The team also put up a booth at the Farmer’s Market to distribute information about homelessness and sold bracelets at Pepperdine University to raise money for tsunami victims. They sponsored an on-campus event called “Change the Status Quo” that featured presentations about homelessness and organized a one-night, campus “sleep-out” in front of the University Union to demonstrate what it feels like to live as a homeless person. Other activities supported by the SIA project included “Free Speech Hour” and “Soup and Substance” at which students and faculty give brief talks about hunger and homelessness issues.

SIA Project Impacts: Content Perspective

Our assessment of SIA project impacts begins by presenting the results of analyzing the interviews that were conducted with members of each campus student leadership team. The purpose of this analysis was to find out how students were different at the end of their projects than they were at the beginning, if indeed they were. Understanding what students reported in the interviews about how their experiences affected them was a challenge on two fronts. Students sometimes had difficulty articulating their thoughts and feelings, and the audio tape recorder did not always pick up every word clearly which hampered the transcription of interviews in various places. Despite these problems, this report was prepared on the faith that interview records were essentially complete and accurate. Without doubt they provided very rich, useful, and usable information about the impacts of SIA projects which are discussed next under four separate categories: knowledge, skills/abilities, interests, and attitudes/feelings.

Impacts on Knowledge

Interviews provided ample evidence that students learned a great deal about the culture of their campuses and local area communities. For example, students gained greater familiarity and awareness of campus attitudes toward and interest in the issues SIA projects were attempting to address. Project outreach activities heightened students' knowledge of relevant needs, services and resources, events, and socio-economic and other demographic characteristics of their communities. Post-interview questionnaire results indicated that all but two or three of the 22 students in this study felt they had increased their understanding of both the causes and solutions of the community problems on which they were working.

More striking than the mere accumulation of factual information about the community were unanticipated insights that students gained into the nature of the problems they were addressing.. Here are the actual voices of several students conveying how they came to appreciate the difficulty, complexity, and enormity of the community issues they were facing:

- “So just kind of I feel like I got more understanding of the complexity of the issue.”
- “That [the problem] is more complex than [I] can ever understand I guess that is kind of what I've learned; its expansive almost intimidating issue to get involved with.”

Further on in the interview the same student says:

- “I guess what I learned the more I worked with the homeless community is ... there are so many reasons that put people into this very similar situation and I guess what has become more apparent is that there needs to be more work on these other issues as well.”

- "There are so many different ways that people become homeless or become in so much need that they can only put a roof over their families head verses being able to supply full meals every day. So I see the more important issue being in, how we can help people through those times, because there are so many different ways that people get there, that it would be hard to combat that."
- I think the best parts of [the project] [were] ... coming together as a group and really figuring out what the problem was. That was something that we wanted to define the first day but it was still being defined the last day of class.
- I think we did a lot of that in the Food Systems class and that there is so much to do, and that I am ...more dedicated to do what I can It's hard because there is so much out there to do ..."

Elsewhere in the interview this same students says:

"We have been ... looking [at] other structural, economic, political, cultural and all of these forces that come together to produce what is happening at that moment in time; and understanding that all these things are happening at once and trying to understand that and wrap my brain around that ..."

Interviews revealed that the knowledge and understanding of community issues that students initially brought to their endeavors was broadened and deepened by the SIA experience. Moreover, the perception that SIA students had of the complexity and magnitude of the issues facing their communities seemed to motivate and energize them to learn even more about these issues. These conclusions are further supported by quantitative results obtained from the post-interview questionnaire. All 22 students indicated they increased their "desire to learn more about the problem addressed by [their campus] project and "desire to learn more about community problems in general." both increased.

Impacts on Skills/Abilities

Students identified a number of skills/abilities they developed on SIA projects. The most salient ones fall into two major categories: Organization/management and communication.

Organization/management. Students reported that SIA projects gave them opportunities to demonstrate and gain leadership skills. The following example is a student who attributed the development of his leadership skills directly to the SIA project:

- "...[the project] made me more capable as a leader.... I gained leadership skills directly from this project."

Other examples point to acquiring more specific kinds of leadership and management skills:

- "... from an organizing standpoint I felt I did gain a lot of experience in being able to coordinate a project.... Being able to effectively set up committees and keep track of committees so that everyone stays on task."
- "I learned a lot of organization. Like how to organize things very well. Definitely splitting up into committees was a good thing and learning how to brainstorm. Brainstorm everything, brainstorm and get the activities that you want to do ..."
- "I think this is the first time that I've had any experience supervising people and delegating tasks. First time I've created a program from scratch. So, I've learned personally, how I work people, how to address people, how to get people to do things, motivating [them] ... Like the way I look at it is ... I have a lot of the responsibilities that a manager would have and so, just looking at everyone as an employee, so complimenting people, praising them for the work they've done, keeping them motivated so that they can continue to do all the tasks that I ask them to do."

Many SIA students already had substantial prior community service experience but not necessarily as leaders with responsibilities to manage or coordinate projects, supervise people, or plan activities. SIA projects apparently provided additional opportunities for these students to develop leadership skills at a higher level. Responses to the post-interview questionnaire indicate that a large majority of students (approximately 60%-70%) felt that SIA projects did, in fact, offer them opportunities to "organize people to bring about change/improvement" and "plan and organize programs/activities." The questionnaire also revealed that all but two students "increased their ability to plan and organize community activities/events." Both interview and questionnaire results indicate that SIA projects helped students hone and develop various kinds of organizational and leadership skills

Another area of important learning closely related to leadership skills that SIA students emphasized as project impacts was "group process" skills. Students referred to experiences they had in leading group meetings, facilitating groups, and delegating work. One of the students shared how she learned to work more effectively as a member of the project team:

- "I guess [the project] helped me be part of a team, I guess I developed that skill, being a member of a team.....Well we definitely worked together as one group, and also split into smaller groups. We had to move along and spend a lot of time checking in with each other. I am like more of an independent worker.... I am just going ahead and doing what I am doing instead of needing the team to help me do it. So this helped me work as a team. So I personally learned a lot about working with a team."

Communication. In the following excerpts, several students speak of developing more effective communication skills as an outcome of their SIA experience:

- “I’ve learned, I’ve improved my communication skills so much. A lot of times ... I’d be more careful with my word choice, the way I speak about clients, my interaction.... I think I’ve improved on my communication skills and just reevaluating what I am going to say before I say it when speaking stuff.”
- “... I guess what I learned is how to really talk to kids or how to really reach kids. I mean if you want them to do something you really don’t out and say it, you sort of like hint at it a little bit or you sort of lead them to that conclusion for them to make it up on their own.”
- “My ability to talk to strangers, also my ability to convey my interests and solicit other people’s interest. So, I think that I have gotten better at just communication skills in general is what I would say.”
- “Giving actual presentations ... A week ago we had to give a presentation and I think that is one of my weak points that I have is being able to stand up in front crowds and giving a presentation. So it was good to get me out there and feel a little more secure about doing [it]....
- “... just communication skills, like talking to people and being educated about the topic because it could be scary to go out and say come to my event and they’re like ‘well why should I come?’ Also being tactful in dealing with people ...”

SIA projects provided opportunities for students to communicate and interact with a number of different campus and client groups with whom they may or may not have had prior contact. All 22 students indicated in their responses to the post-interview questionnaire that SIA projects provided opportunities “to do campus and/or community outreach,” “to build relationships with campus staff/administration,” and “to build relationships with people in the community.” In these contexts students would likely have been called upon to use persuasive communication. The examples cited above suggest that students did indeed find themselves working under these conditions and needed to become more strategic, careful, and sensitive in their communication. In short, they became more effective communicators through their SIA experience.

Impacts on Interests



All of the students who participated in this study are upper-division or graduate level students who are thinking about their goals and plans after college. Interviews provided many examples of shifting and expanded interests related to immediate and/or future academic work and career plans. The clearest examples of project impacts in this area are illustrated below by students who speak about their career pursuits:

- “I think [the project] affirmed my decision to become a teacher or at least work in the public school system as a coordinator for after school programs. My major right now, I’m on the track to becoming a high school teacher, so just to stay in education.”
- “[The project] ... helped me make a decision of where I wanted to go with my career as I was playing with a few ideas; it helped me finally settle on what I wanted to do.... become like environmental analyst.”
- “... now I’ve just like come up with my latest dream for what I want to do with my life; its incorporating community gardens with an organized and activist space together to house a little restaurant ... I think the idea of food ...as organizing a way to bring people together to organize.”
- “I wanted to go into teaching music and then I wanted to go into teaching the elementary school level. And then after being more involved in service learning projects, it’s really wanted me to go into teaching special education.”

The next five statements from students are particularly interesting in showing the idealism, altruism and heightened interest in social advocacy work they would bring to their future endeavors:

- “ ...I don’t know if it was a direct result of the project but I definitely want to go into social activism work once I graduate. I think I’ve gained more interest in working for free rights, probably.”
- “I’m a psychology major and I wanted to do child development for a while and then I changed it during the course of the school year. And after I started working with SIA and “After School All Stars,” I decided that I’m more interested in doing advocacy work and nonprofit organization work than I am in being a psychologist. I found that out a bit too late, but I’m working on it. So, I mean it helped me a lot because I really found something that I’m really interested in doing and that I’m interested in pursuing.”
- “I’m actually going to be pursuing historical studies. One of the areas how this project has really impacted for me is that I’m interested in history as a platform for social activism. I’m very interested in the history of LGBT communities in combination with other historical movements as well.”
- “I did a lot of mentoring and working with kids that in high school and I got away from that after college started, and this [project] just brought me back to why I really ... like working with kids.... I wasn’t really having any sort of direction, but right now I’m still looking into maybe working for ... the Peace Corps.... I’m looking for something to make more of a difference than just thinking about making money for myself.”

- “I have now become a lot more interested in advocacy.... It’s not just about doing your part for yourself, but it’s about doing your part for your community....about facilitating other people. Your community isn’t just about self-interest.”

There were also a number of students who had not clearly decided what they wanted to do after they finished college. They appeared either to be in limbo, transition or thinking about different possible futures. The three examples below reflect the status of these students at the end of their SIA projects:

- “So, in terms of that, [the project] made me re-think what I want to do after college. Cuz when I came into Associated Students I was like, yeah, I could see myself being a politician. Now I can’t. I can’t do that; it’s not for me. Maybe sometime down the road I could do it and serve in some type of position, but I can’t make a career out of it. It’s not for me. So, now it’s more like, what I’m thinking is once I graduate, I want to take off a year and go to a foreign country and teach over there ...”
- “I’m a business major just really trying to get out to the industry, do my thing, get a house, whatever.... But, I mean, I could see myself doing something in education or, you know, counselor head Counselor head is not about teaching a subject; I don’t know about teaching a subject, maybe being a counselor. That was something that was like, oh yeah, I could do that, but now it’s like, oh yeah, I can do that. It’s different. ... it seems like more of a possibility or more of something that I could do. We’ll see. I have a feeling that the more I work with [kids], the more that I’m going to like it ... “
- The following exchange took place between the interviewer and a student:

Interviewer: “Ok, so you think you might, as a result of working on the project, you might be shifting your career or immediate plans after college?”

Respondent: “Maybe for post grad.”

Interviewer: “Did you consider that before?”

Respondent: “No, I was thinking MBA straight. I’m going to do this, then work for a year or two and then go straight into masters of business. But, I don’t know. Now that the possibilities started opening, sort of like, post grad is like a second lease on life, I guess.”

It is clear from the above reflections that many students either made or were contemplating important changes in their lives with respect to their career plans and choices as a result of their SIA experience. In at least one case the SIA project helped to affirm a student’s career decision. It is important to point out this outcome should be regarded as an important project impact in its own right, just as important as in the cases

where students either decided to switch from one career path to another or became undecided.

Impacts on Attitudes/Feelings

The richest source of information in this study of SIA project impacts comes from reflections by students on their attitudes and feelings. It is the richest because students tended to reveal a deeper side of themselves. Arguably, SIA projects had their greatest and most widespread impact in this area. Interviews revealed that students felt differently about themselves as a result of their SIA experience. They developed greater self-awareness, showed greater compassion and empathy for people in need, and exhibited more openness to change and tolerance of diversity. Students also developed greater self-confidence and showed more optimism about the future. Students express their feelings on these matters next.

Self-awareness. The following examples taken from selected interviews show students who became more aware of personal weaknesses and the need to improve:

- “I’ve learned that I really like to be organized but I am not that good at it. That is something that I am obviously going to work on. I see how people who are organized get so much done, and they know exactly where everything is, so that they, they’ll keep notes on exactly what happened when they call so they don’t have to be like oh what happened during that phone call, things like that.”
- “Well I definitely I think that I am definitely much more comfortable speaking with members of the community especially people that I don’t know. I also think that especially with the transition from last semester to this semester I found a leadership bug, if you will, in my system that I didn’t know that I had before. I’m learning a lot about myself in terms of what my habits are.”
- “I am getting a little better at organization I still have some work on that but I’m getting better. Just not leaving things for the last minute when it comes to keep up contacts.”

Compassion/Empathy. Understanding and vicariously experiencing the difficult conditions in which some people live, imagining what it would be like to live in lesser circumstances, or recognizing the challenge of dealing with difficult children much like oneself at the same age and then feeling a desire and determination to help people and make a positive difference in their lives are reflected as feelings of empathy, compassion, and altruism in the following examples:

- “I started volunteering at the shelter freshman year and so I sort of so I had that relationship established, but doing a lot more work with shelters opened up my heart to a lot more people. So I have grown in an number

of ways, in just learning to not judge people based on some physical appearance, trying to see what makes people, what brings people to the state they're in and how if that could be changed their life could be completely different.”

- “...it definitely was really eye opening in spending that night outside was probably one of the most impactful things, just because I didn't know what to expect ... and it was neat to be in their shoes and experience what they deal with day and day out.... That was just really enlightening, it was just amazing that people would do this every night and brave these conditions every night.... I was like, oh my gosh, how are we doing to have to go the bathroom if we have to go? Just certain things that I never really thought of until at that, until like experiencing it; just really putting myself in that situation just really opened me up to like a new appreciation.”
- “Well me personally being able to connect with the kids so that I can see how its like, and now I kind of see myself through a different adult view of what I went through as a kid. I was thinking that, God it's like 10 years ago that I was doing this and I was probably one of those kids that I can't deal with right now.”
- “I definitely knew that I wanted to be involved in environmental science for a really long time. I just recently, I would say maybe a year and a half or so, knew I would be interested in agriculture. Since being involved with this group of people, this program, I now know that I need to expand. I want to make an in impact that isn't just about my life personally.”
- “I really reflected, kind of like it is whenever working with marginalized population, how fortunate and how privileged you really are. You kind of become more resolute in trying, in trying to solve those inequities. It really feels like changing your life plans to reflect the values that you gain from service. So it's like you know a lot of folks come to college, go through college and get a job and never really think about pursuing a career that going to allow them to work towards equality or work towards increased participation for people that currently feel marginalized. So I think you know not just feeling privileged or feeling like I know more about specific issues that are pertinent to the homeless community but also feeling more determined that I need to pursue courses of action in my life that are going work to alleviate socio economic injustice....”
- “I think that this project has definitely made me more socially, social justice oriented and wanting to use my education to give back to my community. And it's really about your community, identifying the needs and doing what ...what you can to help them meet those needs. I think that's a big part being involved in this project.”

Tolerance. Tolerance and open-mindedness, adopting new attitudes particularly toward others who hold different views or practice lifestyles that one did not previously appreciate or accept were also reflected by students as significant personal impacts of their SIA experience:

- “I definitely learned not to judge somebody by the outside. You know, getting to know students on a different level. I think it’s kind of influenced why in the past year I’ve wanted to go into teaching special education. Just for the same reason you see someone on the outside and you don’t even know that they have a disability. You see someone on the outside and you don’t know what their sexual orientation is. They have no control over it, and a lot of people think they do. And going through this has taught me that you just can’t look at somebody and tell who they are just by looking at them.”
- “I went to church on my own when I was in high school and I have a lot of friends who are Christian. Even going to church now sometimes in church it’s not right, it’s not human, that’s how you were born. Through this experience that’s not a reason to totally shut down somebody and not look at them as a normal person and not think that they religiously aren’t going to get to heaven just because of their sexual orientation..... It was rough and it was really hard for me learning this stuff ...”
- “I look back and I’ve become ...more open minded towards other opinions and abilities. I’ve learned to appreciate other people’s talents that aren’t like mine, and basically I’ve liked the project with what we’ve done.”
- “This project in particular, really honestly, I didn’t know much about LGTB [Lesbian, Gay, Transsexual, Bi-sexual] issues.... I could say that service learning has opened me up a lot that I never even considered or thought about.”

Self-confidence/Optimism. SIA students shared their sense of optimism about the future and growth in self-confidence in achieving success in life and bringing about positive change for others:

- “... I kind of now see what my capabilities [are] and that I can be an effective organizer ... I feel like the experience that happened in this project, I would be capable and confident of organizing and doing a workshop in a completely different environment.”
- “I know that when I’m 30, 35 I will have made a positive impact, I will have made a difference because I’m already going down that way now. I’ve learned a lot about, like I said working with people, being a leader, a

manager in the field, but also doing it ethically. So, my ideas and plans sort of vague as they are, I think they will happen.”

- “. I just you know, knowing that I can make a difference. This project really taught me that I can make a difference this something that there was nothing before and I look at everything we have, and I hope to be a part of that, I hope to make a difference. It gives you a lot of pride.”
- “It’s like no, you have to do it to make a difference. It’s just made me more aware of what I can do with the community, than thinking, oh I’m one person, I can’t do anything about it.”
- “... I think that I am a little more outgoing when it comes to trying to get people enthused. I use to just sit back and kind of wait to find somebody that had the same interests as I did, and now I’m a little more active about going out and saying, ‘Hey this is what I am all about, and this is what our group is doing, isn’t this cool don’t you want to come out and be a part of it.’ That is definitely something that has changed in me.”
- “... the project ... helped me [be]very optimistic about the future instead of pessimistic which I was at one point, thinking that nobody cares and that is not true. People do care. You just have to seek them out and be one of those people, and you have to tell other people that I care. I definitely would put emphasis on the optimism category.”

Students’ optimism may be linked to two additional findings from the post-interview questionnaire: (1) 21 of the 22 SIA students said their “desire to perform community service work in the future increased” and (2) all 22 students felt that their “ability to bring about positive change in the community” increased as well.

In summary, interviews illuminated many different ways that students were affected by their SIA experience. In one degree or another all 22 students changed in some personally meaningful ways. For some students project impacts were experienced in just one or two areas of their learning and personal development. For other students several different areas were affected. In other cases it appeared that the SIA project had a very big and potentially enduring impact.

Up to this point the assessment of project impacts has been viewed from a content perspective. The content view has emphasized the changes that SIA students experienced in their knowledge, skills/abilities, interests, and attitudes/feelings. Our assessment now turns to a different way to view the impact of SIA projects.

SIA Project Impacts: Process Perspective

A process view of SIA project impacts shifts the focus from describing changes in student characteristics (i.e., content view) to describing the nature of the change process.

Analysis of student interviews differentiated the following four types of change processes:

- **Reinforcement:** A reinforcement change is a process by which a student comes to recognize that some learning or personal characteristic has deepened, broadened, or otherwise intensified. In this process an individual becomes a more complete person as opposed to a different person. The initial characteristics that a student brings to SIA do not undergo a basic or dramatic change. An interaction takes place between the students' initial characteristics and the SIA experience. A student chooses to participate in SIA because it is consistent or compatible with certain characteristics (interests, attitudes, etc.) he/she already possesses. These characteristics are then strengthened or accentuated through the SIA experience. In effect, the student becomes even more like the person he/she was before SIA.

Reinforcement effects of SIA were most clearly seen in the knowledge area. Students evolved deeper insight and more sophisticated understanding of the issues they were trying to solve. Reinforcement was also apparent in the area of interests where student decisions made about career pursuits prior to the start of SIA projects were validated through project experiences. Students who expressed heightened interest in social advocacy and commitment to advancing positive social change in their communities are further examples of reinforcement effects. In short, there is a good deal of evidence in this study to suggest that the process of reinforcement was active across different areas of students' lives.

- **Developmental:** A student who undergoes a developmental change discovers something new or different about himself/herself. Whether it is new or different knowledge, skills, interests, and/or attitudes, the student acquires greater capacity or potential in the process. For developmental change to occur the student must be open to change or predisposed to accept rather than resist what is new or different about himself/herself. Developmental change is additive and heuristic. It adds something of personal value or importance to one's life and has the potential to influence and shape one's ongoing and future development

Developmental outcomes of SIA were evident most prominently in the areas of skills and attitudes. Students reported adding valuable management, leadership, and interpersonal communication skills and at the same time identified areas of weakness that needed improvement. Students who not only learned new skills but also gained self-confidence in applying these skills were prime examples of building greater capacity and inner strength to face new life challenges beyond SIA.

- **Transitional:** A student who is in the process of moving from one point in his/her life to another without fully completing the process is making a transitional change. A student can experience varying degrees of uncertainty and/or psychological discomfort during a transitional change depending on its importance to the individual. A transitional process is forward, not backward looking. The individual who is making a transition is not likely to turn back to

his/her former self but rather to continue moving forward wherever the transition is likely to lead.

There were three or four cases in this study that exemplify the transitional change process as just described. Students who were in the process of exploring different career options but have not yet settled on a particular one are students in transition. It is important to stress it was the SIA project that triggered the transition process by presenting to the students new possibilities for their futures. The case that most fully illustrates the transition effect of SIA is the student who talks about how he has become increasingly tolerant and accepting of people who are gay but, as a consequence, experiences difficulties both in his relationships with his father and close friends during the process. This student shares his feelings this way:

“It’s interesting because me myself I was, before I came to college I was really outright Christian and my father is not that way. I went to church on my own when I was in high school and I have a lot of friends who are Christian. Even going to church now sometimes, in church it’s not right, it’s not human, that’s not how you’re born. Through this experience that’s not a reason to totally shut down somebody and not look at them as a normal person and not think that they religiously aren’t going to get to heaven just because of their sexual orientation. I’m still friends with them and I’m not going to not be friends with them just because of that. Sometimes we’ll be talking about it and they’ll say “well look at [the bible]... it says right there: ‘Man is not to lay with other man.’ I can’t look at it the same. It was rough and it was really hard for me learning this stuff and to realize that sometimes I still say things like that without thinking about it. Like sometimes I’ll still say ‘dude that gay’ without thinking about what I’m saying. You don’t know who you’re walking bye when you say that.”

- **Transformative:** A transformative change is marked by a significant, short-term and possibly long-term, life-altering impact. The change may represent a turning point or decisive point in one’s life which may carry through into some indefinite future. The individual is truly different now relative to the past and perceives this change to be very significant. Transformative change is also developmental but differs from the latter in the degree of significance that the individual attaches to the change. A transformed individual has made a major turnabout or changed the direction in some important aspect of his/her life. At the level of its greatest impact transformative change affects the whole person, not simply a narrow aspect of a person’s life.

The case of the student just described has some of the attributes that characterize a transformative change. That student is now (and is still becoming) a ‘truly different’ person who considers his attitudinal change to be highly significant in his life. There are other possible examples that also fit into this category. They are reflected by students who have decided on a different career path as a result of SIA and the student who shared her “dream” of establishing a restaurant with community gardens as a way to organize people around issues of hunger.

The four processes defined and illustrated above are not new. They occur in everyday life. People experience change in different ways, in different degrees, in different aspects of their lives. Interviews with students presented an opportunity to explore and clarify the nature of SIA project impacts from a process perspective. While there are no sharp dividing lines between these four processes, they were nevertheless conceptually useful ways to understand the dynamics of these impacts on students.

Conclusion

The results of this study strongly suggest that SIA projects provided students with a valuable learning experience. This conclusion is further supported by results from the post-interview questionnaire which asked students to rate their SIA experience on a six-point scale: Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, Poor, and Very poor. Ten students rated the project as “Excellent”, nine as “Very good”, and three as “Good.” Another strong indicator of the impact of SIA projects

The results of this study have shown that all students were personally affected by their SIA experience. Some students were affected mostly in one area of their lives while other students were affected in more than one area. The effects of SIA projects on student learning and development were shown to be reinforcing, developmental, transitional, and transformative, and these were more or less pronounced depending on the particular area (e.g., knowledge, skills, interest, attitudes) in which students experienced changes. While this study was carried out on just four CSU campuses with only 22 students, a larger study involving more SIA projects could have conceivably produced similar findings.