

**An Empirical Examination of Volunteer Motivations, Match, and Outcomes of a  
College Service Learning (Volunteer) Experience**

**Name:** Jeananne Nicholls  
724.263.9407

**Business School:** Michael J. Coles College of Business

**University:** Kennesaw State University

**Address:** 1000 Chastain Road, Kennesaw, GA 30144, USA

**Telephone:** 770.423.6425

**Fax:** 770.423.6539

**Supervisor:** Joseph Hair, PhD

**Supervisor email:** [jhair@kennesaw.edu](mailto:jhair@kennesaw.edu)

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**Abstract:** *This paper proposes an empirically-based theoretical model that describes the impact of the college service-learning experiences on the subsequent development of attitudes toward volunteering as well as behavioral intention-to-volunteer and satisfaction with the volunteer experience. The study will use the volunteer function model and the Clary et al.(1998) volunteer function inventory as well as the Stukas et al. (2009) total match index. As a research stream it will be cross disciplinary and cross cultural and will contribute to the fields of organizational and consumer behavior (commercial and nonprofit), social psychology, and higher education pedagogy (specifically service and experiential learning).*

**Keywords:** Nonprofit; volunteer; service-learning; attitude; satisfaction; volunteer intention; VFI; TMI

## **1. Introduction**

My proposed research will build an empirically-based theoretical model that describes the impact of college service-learning experiences (SLEs) on the subsequent development of attitudes toward volunteering as well as behavioral intention (intention to volunteer) and satisfaction with the volunteer experience. SLEs are believed to serve as an important antecedent to subsequent choices made about voluntary, discretionary behavior in nonprofit organizations and communities. Specifically, how does the SLE offered at many colleges and universities impact the future volunteering behaviors of participants—a key component for the success of the nonprofit sector. The implications of these early experiences become vital for nonprofits and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which rely on individuals with a keen sense of community to lead and staff their organizations. These early experiences are likely to be profoundly influential in drawing (or discouraging) an individual to future volunteer opportunities. This research stream is cross disciplinary and cross cultural and will contribute to the fields of organizational and consumer behavior (in both the commercial and nonprofit sectors), social psychology, and higher education pedagogy (specifically service and experiential learning). There is both a personal commitment to and investment in this research as it will become the basis of a dissertation and a long-term stream of research.

## **2. Model**

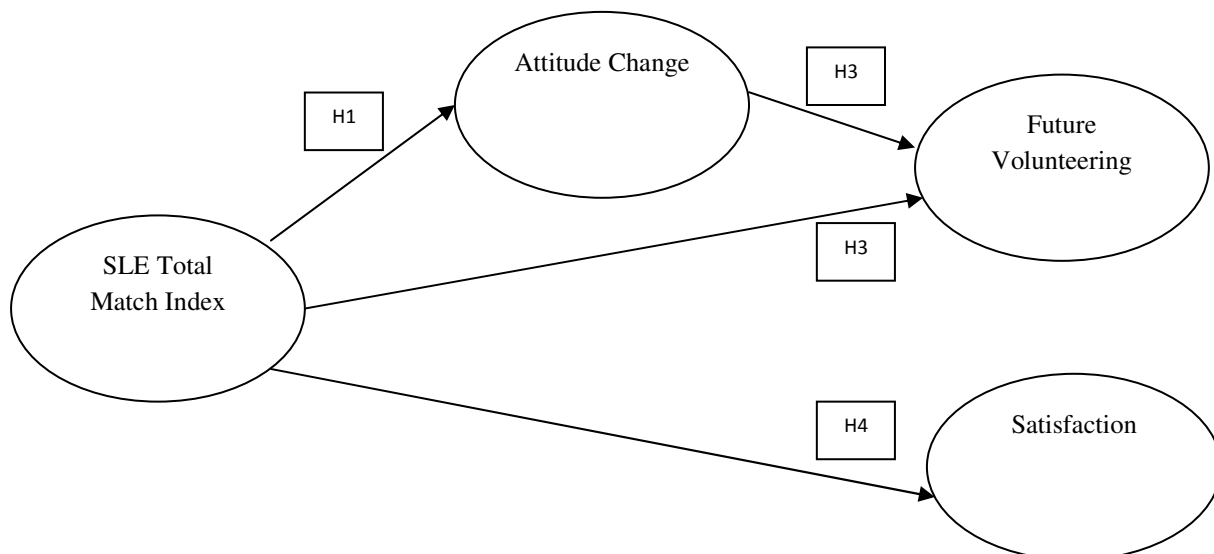
This proposed research will aid the understanding of how service-learning influences participants' attitude toward future volunteering and volunteer intentions.

Service-learning is touted as a means for students to apply classroom theory and gain hands on application of classroom theories while simultaneously developing citizenship behavior, a form of generosity (Berger 2004). This citizenship behavior can be defined as recognition of each person to extend himself/herself for a greater good (pro-social behavior/generosity). While research has considered the efficacy of the applied learning experience, such as that experienced in service-learning projects where students perform meaningful public service and on student understanding of course concepts (Berger, 2004; Kezar & Rhoads, 2001; Strain, 2005) in a college setting, a gap exists. The gap that exists (and where research is needed) is in how this required service-learning volunteer experience impacts and shapes the graduates' attitudes with respect to future volunteering and other generosity motivations, intentions, and behaviors in the organizations and communities in which they will work and live after graduation. Also of interest is the mediating relationship of attitude between the SLE and future volunteering behavior.

**2.1 Volunteer Function Motivation Model and Hypotheses**

Similar to consumer research where aspects of products and brands or the specific products/brands are evaluated to determine which ones appeal to (meet the goals/motives of) to groups/types of people, the functional approach to volunteering posits that certain aspects of volunteer work attract certain groups/types of volunteers. The functional approach uses a Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI) which examines what these volunteers are interested in receiving (what appeals to them) from their volunteer experience (meeting their goals/motives) (E. Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996). The VFI address these appeals through six motivations (reasons for volunteering) volunteers have and are associated (matched/mismatched) with volunteer’s goals and motives.

The following theoretical model represents the relationships among the variables.



- H1-In the evaluation of a SLE, the greater/lesser the TMI (match between VFI and Environmental Affordance) the greater the attitude change (+/-) toward the volunteer experience
- H2-In the evaluation of a SLE, change in attitude (+/-) toward the volunteer experience will mediate the relationship between TMI and future volunteering (behavioral intention)
- H3-In the evaluation of a SLE, the TMI will be positively related to volunteering in the future (behavioral intention)
- H4-In the evaluation of a SLE, the TMI will be positively related to satisfaction with the volunteer experience

**3. Measures**

**3.1 Participants and Procedure**

Data collection is proposed at a two universities, one public and one private, which offer (preferably requires) a service learning volunteer experience (SLE). To collect the data, a pre-/post-test design is proposed. For both the pre- and post-test, an online survey will be e-mailed to at least 1,250 SLE students, completion of which will be required as part of the SLE program. An online survey format is proposed for several reasons. First, online surveys are significantly less expensive than pen and paper surveys (Duffy, Smith, Terhanian, & Bremer, 2005; McDonald & Adam, 2003;

Wright, 2005). Second, the data is immediately coded as the respondents answer the questions which eliminates the possibility of transcription errors from pen and paper to a database (Fricker & Schonlau, 2002; Wright, 2005). Data collection is also completed faster online (Duffy, et al., 2005; McDonald & Adam, 2003; Wright, 2005). Further, online respondents are less likely to skip sensitive questions (McDonald & Adam, 2003) and online respondents are less susceptible to social desirability bias than surveys in face to face situations (Duffy, et al., 2005).

### 3.2 Independent Variable

The independent variables for this study will adapt the Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI) developed by Clary, et al, (1998) and adapt the Total Match Index (TMI) developed by Stukas, Worth, Clary and Snyder (2009) which requires the measurement of the VFI followed by a measure of environmental affordance (EA). The VFI and EA values create a score that comprises the TMI.

The VFI (E. G. Clary, et al., 1998) is a 30-item measure of the six functions or constructs of volunteer motivation. Each construct will be measured with five items using a 7-point scale anchored by 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *extremely* and assesses how important or how accurate each reason for volunteering is for the respondent. The six constructs within the VFI include values, understanding, enhancement, social, career, and protective. The following definitions explain the underlying functional constructs. *Values*: altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others. *Understanding*: the chance to exercise knowledge, skills, and abilities. *Enhancement*: personal (ego's) growth and development and involves self-esteem. *Social*: to be with friends or engage in an activity viewed favorably by important others. *Career*: prepare for a new career or gain career-relevant skills. *Protective*: protecting the ego from negative features of the self, reduce guilt or address one's own personal problems.

For the SLE TMI, environmental affordance (EA) will be measured by adapting the Stukas, et al. (2009) six construct, 12-item scale linked to the six VFI constructs. Each construct will be measured with two items using a 7-point scale anchored by 1 = *not at all accurate* and 7 = *extremely accurate* and is calculated by multiplying the VFI score on a construct by the EA score on the same construct then summing these six multiplicative scores.

The demographic variables to be collected are the ones routinely suggested in this literature. They will be collected from each of the respondents and used as control measures and include: age, gender, racial or ethnic background, employed, year in college, religion, marital status, previous volunteer experience, and family's prior volunteer experience.

### **3.3 Mediating Variable**

Perceived attitude change toward volunteers/volunteering is the mediating variable in the model and will be measured using Omoto's and Snyder's (1995) three-item, 7-point scale which rates changes in volunteer attitudes based on their volunteer experience with an organization. These items are anchored with 1 – *become less favorable* and 7– *become more favorable*.

A second five-item measure of attitude—is proposed that evaluates attitude toward nonprofit organizations (Webb, Green, & Brashear, 2000). This measure will be assessed in both the pre- and the post-test surveys. The difference score (pre-post) will represent the change in attitudes toward nonprofit organizations in general. Thus, both an attitude toward the target (nonprofit organizations) and an attitude toward the behavior (volunteering) will be assessed.

### **3.4 Dependent – Variables**

Behavioral intention to volunteer is a dependent variable that will be assessed using the Stukas, et al. (2009) two-item scale. The scale is anchored by 1– *not at all likely* and 7 –*extremely likely*. The items are “How likely is it that you will be volunteering for *this organization* in one year?” and “How likely is it that you will be volunteering for *a different organization* in one year?”

Volunteer satisfaction will be assessed using Omoto's and Snyder's (1995) 14-item, 7-point scales to rate two sub-dimensions of satisfaction. The first sub-dimension consists of nine items regarding volunteer experiences (satisfying, rewarding, exciting, interesting, important, disappointing, enjoyable, challenging, and boring) and the second, consisting of five-item regarding the volunteer's general satisfaction (for example "Overall, I am satisfied with my experience as a service learning volunteer").

## **4. Analysis**

The structure of the measures will be examined using a two-stage process. The first stage will be an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Once the EFA is conducted, a confirmatory factor analysis will be done using Amos (AVE and Alpha will be computed) in the second stage. Correlations between the variables will be assessed for multicollinearity issues.

Hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression will be used to test the four hypotheses. The first group to be input will be the demographic control variables the second group will be the variable of interest of the specific hypothesis. An interaction term for mediation will be computed.

## **5. Results, Implications, Future Research**

The proposed research is designed to model how the SLEs affect attitudes toward volunteering and nonprofit organizations and future volunteering behavior. This study will also be extended to include international/cross-cultural differences, religious, employee volunteer programs and

organizational citizenship behavior, corporate social responsibility, and corporate strategic philanthropy.

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