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# Examining the Relationship Between a Co-Curricular Service-Learning Experience and Moral Competence

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Examining the Relationship Between a Co-Curricular Service-Learning Experience  
and Moral Competence

by

Jamie Burns Burriss

A dissertation proposal submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career and Higher Education  
College of Education  
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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my loving and supportive husband. Justin, you have been my knight in shining armor throughout this process. Thank you for listening to my breakdowns with such patience and understanding, thank you for your constant willingness to keep the girls entertained when I had to write, and thank you for believing in me on the days when I didn't believe in myself. This Ph.D. journey has not always been easy but your support never once wavered and achieving completion would not have been possible without you by my side.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Summary of the Literature .....	4
Conceptual Framework.....	4
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Definition of Terms.....	7
Alternative Breaks .....	7
C-Score .....	7
Service-Learning.....	7
Moral Competence.....	7
Moral Competence Test.....	7
Moral Sensitivity.....	7
Moral Judgement .....	8
Moral Motivation.....	8
Moral Character .....	8
Organization of Remaining Chapters.....	8
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	9
Introduction.....	9
Service-Learning.....	10
Co-Curricular Service-Learning Experiences .....	13
Pedagogy.....	14
Service-Learning Outcomes.....	15

Challenges Related to Service-Learning.....	17
Alternative Breaks .....	18
National Overview of Alternative Breaks.....	19
Participant Preparation.....	20
Outcomes .....	21
Moral Education .....	21
Moral Competence Test.....	23
Summary.....	24
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS .....	26
Research Paradigm.....	26
Research Design.....	27
Context, Participants and Sites.....	29
Program Description .....	29
Service Sites .....	33
Instrumentation .....	33
Moral Competence Test .....	33
Bulls Service Break Post-Trip Reflection Questionnaire .....	35
Procedure .....	36
Data Analysis .....	37
Quantitative Analysis of the Moral Competence Test .....	37
Computing the C-Score.....	39
Qualitative Analysis of the Post-Trip Reflection Questionnaire.....	39
Limitations .....	40
Potential Research Bias.....	41
Summary .....	41
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS .....	42
Participant Demographic Characteristics.....	42
Thematic Analysis.....	48
Research Question 1 .....	48
Research Question 2 .....	49
Research Question 3 .....	53
Research Question 4 .....	56

Research Question 5 .....	58
Summary .....	62
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	63
Research Question 1 .....	63
Research Question 2 .....	64
Research Question 3 .....	67
Research Question 4 .....	68
Research Question 5 .....	70
Comparison Between Findings and Conceptual Framework.....	71
Limitations of the Study.....	72
Suggestions for Future Research.....	73
Practical Implications .....	74
Conclusion .....	75
REFERENCES .....	76
APPENDICES .....	87

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: 2016 Bulls Service Break Sites .....	33
Table 2: Participant Demographic Characteristics .....	45
Table 3: One-Sample Statistics for Research Question 1 .....	48

## **ABSTRACT**

Short-term service-learning experiences such as alternative breaks are increasing in popularity due to the focus on service in higher education and the institution's responsibility to ensure students are graduating with the skills needed to succeed in an increasingly competitive, global economy and contribute to a democratic society as citizens who address societal needs. To meet this demand, colleges and universities continue to explore ways to increase civic engagement in the form of curricular and co-curricular programs. Additionally, faculty and administrators in higher education are intensely seeking a revitalization of the public purposes of higher education, which include educating for moral and civic development (Colby, 2000). One specific need identified in the research literature includes developing a better understanding of the relationship between service-learning and moral competence. There are strong indications that service-learning experiences support psychosocial development in areas such as appreciation of diversity, empathy, concern for social justice, a greater sense of personal efficacy, and problem solving (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008; Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Marichal, 2010). While this limited research is hopeful, little to no research has been conducted to date to explore the relationship between a co-curricular service-learning experience and moral competence.

An exploratory, mixed methods study was conducted with participants of a short-term service-learning experience known as a Bulls Service Break at the University of South Florida. A pre-post analysis was conducted on participants to determine if there was a relationship between moral competence and the service-learning experience through use of the Moral Competence

Test. Additionally, a questionnaire was administered to participants upon completion of their service experience to explore the relationship between service-learning and Rest's Four Component Model of Moral Behavior. The questions focused on moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character. These data were analyzed using a combination of statistical analysis through SPSS for the quantitative research question, and through thematic coding for the qualitative questionnaire responses.

Results indicated that students experienced an increase in their moral competence as evidenced pre-post comparison of C-scores. Additionally, for the research questions pertaining to Rest's Four Component Model of Moral Behavior, relationships between moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation and moral character were confirmed via the themes generated from the qualitative data analysis. Participants experienced increased self-awareness and social awareness with relation to moral sensitivity. When exploring the data pertaining to moral judgment, participants expressed a realization of social injustice in our communities. This awareness then prompted participants to be morally motivated to combat social injustices by helping others and giving back to my community and by treating others equally and with respect. And finally, the participants' moral character was tested when they experienced situations that made them uncomfortable during their service but they persisted toward combating social injustices and helping the communities they served. Based on the findings of the study, suggestions for future research and practical implications are offered.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The history of higher education has been one of many challenges and advancements over the last several decades. Due to demands from accrediting bodies, state and federal governments, and educational organizations, colleges and universities are more closely examining their purpose and strategically thinking about the type of students they are matriculating. According to a special report by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (Wegner, 2008), higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has a fundamental responsibility to ensure students are graduating with the skills needed to succeed in an increasingly competitive, global economy and contribute to a democratic society as citizens who address societal needs. To meet this demand, colleges and universities continue to explore ways to increase civic engagement in the form of curricular and co-curricular programs. The purpose of these civically-oriented programs is to provide opportunities for students to become involved in surrounding communities and “link service activities to their educational experiences in ways that enrich and inform their preparation for their post-graduate journeys” while developing habits of recurrent civic engagement (Bringle, Studer, Wilson, Clayton, & Steinberg, 2011, p.150).

Additionally, faculty and administrators in higher education are intensely seeking a revitalization of the public purposes of higher education, which include educating for moral and civic development (Colby, 2000). With origins in moral education and experiential learning

(You & Rud, 2010), service-learning pedagogy in higher education has significantly expanded over the past two decades due to a national call for universities to return to their roots of civic engagement (Egerton, 2002; McBride & Mlyn, 2014; Schneider & Hersh, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Whiteley (2002) noted that “one of the fundamental obligations of the modern college and university is to influence intentionally the moral thinking and action of the next generation of society’s leaders and citizens” (p. 5). In the Presidents’ Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, university presidents challenge institutions of higher education to become engaged within the community by creating many opportunities for service, with the ultimate goal being to reinvigorate public purpose and civic mission (Campus Compact, 2000).

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) published its most recent version of the NACE Professional Standards for College and University Career Services, which outlines ways for career services to advance the institutional mission as well as “support academic and experiential learning programs to promote student learning and student development” (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2016, p. 4). The report highlights experiential learning as a key program component and states that career services “should provide or support experiential learning programs that include areas such as ... service learning, civic engagement, and volunteering experiences” (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2016, p. 9). Furthermore, a presentation given by Ann Colby (2000) at the Institute on College Student Values confirmed that colleges and universities have begun to place greater emphasis on student outcomes that concern community service, civic participation and leadership, and humane or ethical values and behaviors. Colby stated that “this is apparent in the proliferation of curricular and extra-curricular programs designed to foster the development of students’ moral and civic responsibility, such as ethics across the curriculum, service-learning,

and community service programs such as alternative spring break (2000, p. 4).

One way higher education is achieving the goal of focusing on service is through various models of service-learning including curricular and co-curricular. According to Taggart and Crisp (2011) service-learning can be defined as a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities. The term service-learning has been used in an assortment of academic settings to represent variations of this definition, including volunteer work and community service (Robinson, 2004; Robinson & Barnett, 1996), internships and work-study positions (Lester & Robinson, 2007), alternative breaks (Piacitelli, Barwick, Doerr, Porter, & Sumka, 2013; Porter, 2011), and academic courses requiring community service (Berson & Younkin, 1998). For the purposes of this research, service-learning will be defined as an alternative break in the higher education setting that involves service in the local or national community. According to Break Away: the Alternative Break Connection, Inc., a national nonprofit organization that “promotes the development of quality alternative break programs through training, assisting and connecting campuses and communities” (“Break Away: About”, 2016), an alternative break (AB) is a service-learning trip during which a small group of college students engage in the activities of learning about a problem within a community and then volunteer their services to work firsthand with the community’s needs. Furthermore, these encounters challenge students to think critically and contribute enthusiastically to the betterment of the community in which they are immersed.

Eyler and Giles (1999) stated that service-learning is an activity believed to promote intellectual and moral transformation in college students. Research on the psychological outcomes of students who participate in service-learning have consistently demonstrated meaningful benefits for students including social awareness and social responsibility (Taggart &

Crisp, 2011), moral reasoning (Boss, 1994), and concern for others (Palestini, Rowe, & Chapman, 1997).

### **Summary of the Literature**

A review of the literature identified a need for more research surrounding the relationship between service-learning and moral competence. While this area of research is still early in its development, there are strong indications that service-learning experiences support psychosocial development in areas such as appreciation of diversity, empathy, concern for social justice, and greater sense of personal efficacy and problem solving (Bernacki and Jaeger, 2008; Einfeld and Collins, 2008; Marichal, 2010). While this limited research is hopeful, little to no research has been conducted to date to explore the relationship between a co-curricular service-learning experience and moral competence. If the relationship between alternative breaks and moral competence can be proved, institutions of higher education can confirm that co-curricular experiences educate for moral competence, and thereby are meeting a societal need by graduating students who are prepared morally and civically prepared for their post-graduate journey.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Lawrence Kohlberg (1976) presented a framework for examining the relationship between educational experiences and moral reasoning. Through his research, Kohlberg found that “moral development depends upon stimulation defined in cognitive structural terms, but this stimulation must also be social, the kind that comes from moral decision-making, moral dialogue, and moral interaction” (Kohlberg, 1976, p. 49). However, it is important to mention one criticism of Kohlberg’s theory is the lack of female participants during his initial empirical research phase, and therefore, he did not adequately describe the concerns of women when developing his notable Stages of Moral Development (Gilligan, 1977).

James Rest (1986) adapted and extended Kohlberg's framework of moral growth to the Four Component Model of Moral Behavior. This adapted framework was used to develop research questions, select the Moral Competence Test as a quantitative instrument, formulate service-learning specific questions in the qualitative questionnaire, and guide the data analysis process in order to obtain a greater understanding of the connection between service-learning and moral competence (Scott, 2012). This framework includes the following four components: (1) moral sensitivity, (2) moral judgement, (3) moral motivation, and (4) moral character. These moral stimuli are present in service-learning experiences.

### **Purpose of the Study**

There is limited research examining the relationship between co-curricular service-learning experiences its connection to moral competence. Although substantial research has been conducted in the area of service-learning as it relates to academics, personal development, leadership skills, and communication, very few studies have evaluated the connection between moral development and participation in a service-learning experience. A mixed methods approach is deemed appropriate when the researcher wants to expand breadth, depth, and scope of the research by using different methods of inquiry, resulting in a more comprehensive analysis (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to conduct a quantitative and qualitative investigation to examine the relationship between moral competence and a student's participation in a service-learning experience. Specifically, the study explored the degree to which participants accepted or rejected arguments in a discussion on a moral issue through use of the Moral Competence Test and examined the relationship between service-learning and moral education specifically surrounding moral competence and moral growth.

## Research Questions

The conceptual framework by Rest (1986) was used to guide the development of the study and research questions. There was an interest in learning about the relationship between a student's moral competence and a student's participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience. Additionally, there was an interest in learning how participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience related to the student's reflection with regard to moral growth including moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral character, and moral motivation. Lastly, another interest focused on the difference in moral growth amongst participants who engaged in service-learning projects focused on people as compared to participants who engaged in service-learning projects focused on the environment or animals.

The first research question focused on the relationship between a student's moral competence and their participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience, commonly referred to as an alternative break, and employed the use of Lind's Moral Competence Test. Research questions two through five reflected Rest's Four Component Model of Moral Behavior and presented questions focused on moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character. The following research questions were used to generate information on these areas of interest:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between a student's moral competence (as indexed by the C-score through utilization of the Moral Competence Test) and a student's participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience?

Research Question 2: How does participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience relate to the student's reflection with regard to moral sensitivity?

Research Question 3: How does participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience relate to the student's reflection with regard to moral judgement?

Research Question 4: How does participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience relate to the student's reflection with regard to moral motivation?

Research Question 5: How does participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience relate to the student's reflection with regard to moral character?

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions apply:

**Alternative Break.** A service-learning trip during which a small group of college students engage in the activities of learning about a social issue and then volunteer their services to communities in need.

**C-score.** Score between 1 and 100 that indicates the percentage of “the degree to which individuals accept or reject arguments in a discussion on a moral issue in regard to their moral quality rather than in regard to their agreement with his or her opinion (or other non-moral properties)” (Lind, 2008, p. 200).

**Service-Learning.** A teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.

**Moral Competence.** “The capacity to make decisions and judgments which are moral (i.e., based on internal principles) and to act in accordance with such judgments” (Kohlberg, 1964, p. 425).

**Moral Competence Test.** The MCT measures two aspects of judgment behavior, a) moral judgment competence as defined by Kohlberg, and b) moral orientations or moral preferences as defined by Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Orientation.

**Moral Sensitivity.** Moral sensitivity occurs when a participant begins to identify conflicts and challenges facing a community through practices that conflict from their own moral

codes (Scott, 2012).

**Moral Judgment.** Moral judgment occurs when a participant struggles to determine a course of action to take that is just and fair (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, and Thoma, 1999).

**Moral Motivation.** Moral motivation occurs when a participant identifies and prioritizes competing moral values that motivate a course of action (Scott, 2012).

**Moral Character.** Moral Character occurs when a participant demonstrates the courage, integrity, and purpose to act on a determined course of action (Scott, 2012).

### **Organization of the Remaining Chapters**

The organization of the remaining chapters includes a review of literature, description of the methodology used in the study, results of the study, and a discussion of the findings. Specifically, Chapter Two includes a review of existing research relevant to the current study and will highlight best practices and outcomes, co-curricular learning experiences, pedagogy, and challenges related to service-learning. Chapter Three includes a description of the research paradigm, research design, participants, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and analysis. Ethical considerations and validity measures are also presented. Chapter Four includes demographic information, quantitative analysis of the pre-post administration of the Moral Competence Test, and qualitative analysis for the research questions pertaining to moral education. Finally, a discussion of the results, limitations, and suggestions for future research are presented in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

When reflecting on the historical prominence of civic engagement, the importance of democracy as notated by our country's most important leaders has been emphasized and encouraged for decades. In Franklin Roosevelt's inaugural address in 1933, he told his audience "we now realize our interdependence on each other; that we can not merely take but we must give as well; that if we are to go forward, we must...sacrifice for the good of a common discipline" (Roosevelt, 1933, para. 9). To quote famous words by John F. Kennedy, "And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you--ask what you can do for your country" (Kennedy, 1961, para. 25). President George W. Bush reiterated similar words in his inaugural address by stating the following, "What you do is as important as anything government does. I ask you to...be citizens, not spectators; citizens, not subjects; responsible citizens building communities of service and a nation of character (Bush, 2001, para. 25). And most recently, the same sentiments are taken from President Barack Obama inaugural speech.

What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility, a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining our character, than giving our all to a difficult task. This is the price and the promise of citizenship. (Obama, 2009, para. 29).

These statements confirm the importance of civic participation to develop the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to ensure quality of life in our communities. With the creation of federally supported programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933, the Peace Corps in 1961, VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) in 1964, the National Campus Compact in 1985, and the AmeriCorps in 1993 (Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer & Brahler, 2004), the federal government has long presented opportunities for civic engagement on a national level. Likewise, teaching the values of democracy by creating opportunities for students to practice and engage in their communities through curricular and co-curricular experiences has been a longstanding responsibility of higher education institutions (Campus Compact, 2000). Educating for personal and social responsibility unavoidably influences students' values, morals, and ethical development, obligating institutions of higher education to prepare "morally perceptive individuals who will positively contribute to the communities in which they participate" (Schneider & Hersh, 2005, p. 10).

This study argues the need for co-curricular service-learning experiences and seeks to fill a current gap in the literature by better understanding how such experiences impact student participants in relation to moral education surrounding moral competence and moral growth. In the following pages, this literature review will present a broad overview of service-learning including best practices and outcomes, co-curricular learning experiences, pedagogy, and challenges. Additionally, limited research on alternative breaks will be presented. And finally, a review of the literature will reveal the importance of moral competence in higher education and the need to better understand its impact through quantitative and qualitative analysis.

### **Service-Learning**

"Service-learning combines a strong social purpose with acknowledgement of the significance of personal and intellectual growth in participants (Giles, Honnet, & Migliore, 1991,

p. 7). In their summary report of the Learn and Serve America, Higher Education program, authors Gray, Ondaatje, and Zakaras (1999), break down the two components of service-learning to better define the purpose of each. The “service” component can be defined as any unpaid activity that is intended to address a societal need surrounding individuals, families, organizations or communities (Gray et al., 1999). The “learning” component encompasses organized efforts to promote the personal development of the individual volunteer. This can be achieved through various outcomes such as acquiring new skills or knowledge or reaching a deeper understanding of social problems (Gray et al., 1999). In addition to personal development of the volunteer, direct connection to the academic mission of the sponsoring university is what sets service-learning apart from community service (Rhodes & Neururer, 1998). Additionally, learning can occur through a course-based experience or can occur as a co-curricular activity (Gray et al., 1999). For purposes of this study, service-learning will be in the form of a co-curricular experience known as an alternative break.

Campus Compact is a higher education organization focused solely on campus-based civic engagement and is composed of nearly 1,100 colleges and universities. In 2014, Campus Compact conducted an online member survey to gain insight regarding student and faculty involvement in the community, assess institutional support, and identify community partnerships. To date, this electronic collection of data serves as the most comprehensive national survey of service, service-learning and community engagement in higher education (Campus Compact, 2014). With regard to institutional support, 85% of public universities confirmed their institutional mission drives policies supporting curricular and co-curricular community engagement.

A review of the literature on best practices reveals three main components are essential to enhancing service-learning outcomes and include reflection, confirmation that a community need

is being met, and adequate training or orientation prior to the service-learning experience (Cauley, Canfield, Clasen, Dobbins, Hemphill, Jaballas, Walbroehl, 2001; Johnson, 2000; Karayan & Gathercoal, 2005; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998; Robinson & Barnett, 1996).

The first component, reflection, encourages the participants to examine the relationship between the engagement of service and academic knowledge pertaining to the social issue thereby deepening the students' "social, moral, personal, and civic dimensions" (Hatcher, Bringle & Muthiah, 2004, p. 39). This requirement gives students and faculty an opportunity to better understand how the service-learning experience has impacted and challenged a participant's values, how course content is connected to the experience, and how a community need was addressed (Largent, 2013). As Robbins (2012) recognized through her research, "during the informal reflection sessions, students express excitement and pride in the work they have done, emphasizing the impact that this work has in the region and in the sense of stewardship in the community" (p. 35). Through reflection exercises, research by Jones and Abes (2004) noted a shift in the students' motivation from external reasons such as participating to fulfill a course requirement and resume-building to internal motivators such as a desire for continued community involvement, developing a sense self, and a more genuine interest in putting others needs before their own. Reflection comes in many forms and may include journals, essays, class presentations, poster boards, sharing questions, group discussion, guided activities, art, drama, dialogue or other expressive acts ("Service Reflection Toolkit", n.d.; Largent, 2013).

The second component of an effective service-learning experience focuses on meeting a community need. According to Hart (2015), this can be achieved by canvassing the community, establishing relationships with community partners, and identifying potential needs. It is also

important to set mutual goals and define measurable outcomes (Voss, Matthews, Fossen, Scott & Shaffer, 2015) with community partners to ensure needs are being addressed. Community organizations can include government agencies, civic organizations, non-profits, and other educational institutions.

Finally, an orientation component is essential for a successful service-learning experience. Orientation varies in regard to duration and required components but often includes an overview of the service project, activities to help the participants better understand the community they are serving, and an opportunity to answer questions or concerns presented by the participants. Effective communication skills and active listening skills (Katz, DuBois & Wigderson, 2014) are often part of service-learning training. Additionally, many programs utilize activities that focus on team-building and leadership (Marshall, Lawrence, Williams & Peugh, 2015). Role playing has also been found useful to improve communication skills with the population of individuals being served (Lambert-Shute, Jarrott, & Fuhauf, 2004).

### **Co-Curricular Service-Learning Experiences**

Although not as prevalent as curricular service-learning in the literature, co-curricular learning experiences and their positive outcomes are gaining recognition. Research by Bowman and his colleagues found that students in short-term service-learning projects benefit comparably in their emphases toward “attitudes and values related to diversity, poverty, justice, social change, and inequality” (Bowman, Brandenberger, Mick & Smedley, 2010, p. 26).

More specifically related to the content of this study, Rhoades and Neururer (1998) interviewed students upon completion of an alternative break experience and reported increased understanding of others, the community, and themselves. Plante and colleagues (2009) also conducted research focused on students who engaged in a week-long service trip through

administration of pre- and post-trip questionnaires in comparison to a group of students who did not participate. The results indicated a positive effect on the immersion participants' compassion, likely attributed to the reflection aspect that takes place during an immersion experience (Plante, Lackey, and Hwang, 2009). Consistent with the previously mentioned findings, McCarthy (1994) concluded that when conducted properly, short-term service-learning experiences lead to changes in the participants' commitment to further service.

### **Pedagogy**

The pedagogy of service-learning represents a breath of fresh air from the traditional lecture driven, content based and faculty centered curriculum by recognizing the learning is not a predicable linear process (Johnson, 2000). Although the literature is lacking as it relates to the correlation of service-learning to one specific pedagogical model, several scholars claim consistency with critical service-learning by promoting education through social justice experiences (Bowen, 2011; Doerr, 2011; Mitchell, 2008). According to Robbins (2012), complementary pedagogical models include community-based learning, practice-based learning and participatory action learning, which feature "critical consciousness development" in addition to examination and evaluation (p. 34).

Furthermore, service-learning requires a more collaborative education than traditional curricular and co-curricular experiences due to the leadership role necessary to connect students with the community (Butin, 2006; Hayward, 2014; Manring, 2012). According to Musil (2003), who deemed service-learning as one of the most powerful pedagogies to emerge in the past quarter of a century, service-learning has evolved from merely reflecting on experiences to addressing more critical problems by examining systematic causes and solutions and by developing more reciprocal, generative relationships with community partners. Furthermore, it

is a pedagogy that can be adopted by almost any academic discipline and can be incorporated across all levels of collegiate learning by designing for intricacy and scope of learning outcomes.

### **Service-Learning Outcomes**

The research surrounding the positive impact of service-learning experiences of all durations is well documented in the literature. According to research by Astin and Sax (1998), one of the largest studies to be conducted which surveyed over 3,000 students from 42 higher education institutions, service-learning programs are achieving their desired outcomes by “enhancing the student’s academic development, life skill develop, and sense of civic responsibility” (p. 251). The Higher Education Research Institute confirms service-learning is an affirmative predictor of five outcomes that include “critical consciousness and action, social agency, integration of learning, civic engagement, and political engagement” (Hurtado, 2012, p. 12). Jones and Abes’ (2004) research also emphasized an increase in participants’ sense of civic responsibility, scrutiny of social class, a strengthened desire to focus on others, an increase in open-mindedness, and a shift in career goals towards more civic-minded professions such as AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, or Doctors Without Borders.

In a recent study by Tinkler and colleagues, (2015), participants noted how their social justice service-learning experience impacted them with regard to several aspects of diversity including the need for diversity to be celebrated, reconsidering stereotypes, becoming familiar with how it feels to be the minority, and experiencing culture shock. Additionally, research by Robbins (2012) noted beneficial learning outcomes related to diversity, explaining how students are empowered to contribute their own expertise which creates a “mutual and shared exchange that breaks down the hierarchy between teacher and student in intellectually productive ways” (p. 33). Students who participate in alternative breaks often develop a deeper understanding of self-

awareness, social awareness, and relationship management through reflection exercises, which is a foundational element of the alternative break experience (Jacoby, 1996; Porter, 2011; Piacitelli et al., 2013). Personal interviews conducted at the College of William and Mary (Porter, 2011) provided insight into these life-altering encounters, as one student stated,

My expectations were to just go and do service, to just tutor, just to DO. It exceeded my expectations. [My alternative break] made me think, challenged my thinking, made me connect things I learned in class. [Now] I see education as a form of activism for children, not just a job (p.4).

Service-learning activities also impact test scores and grades. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that students who participated in service-learning activities tended to have higher test scores and grades as compared to those who did not participate in service activities.

And finally, recent research highlights the impact of service-learning on emotional intelligence. In a study by Mannring (2012), 140 undergraduate students majoring in management participated in a service-learning elective during which their reflection papers were subjected to a content analysis of emotional intelligence themes. Through content analysis of 256 statements, Mannring (2012) found all 20 emotional intelligence competencies portrayed in the students' reflection confirming significant increases regarding emotional intelligence awareness and behaviors resulting from their service-learning experience.

When specifically looking at the impact of service-learning on a student's moral growth, the research is overwhelming. Studies by Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont and Stephens (2003) found that service-learning activities, as compared to lectures or seminars, provide stronger support for moral and civic development. Charles Strain, who teaches service-learning courses at DePaul University, explained how his fellow service-learning faculty have seen a shift in students'

mindfulness from tolerance to social justice as it relates to the overall learning goal of moral development. He goes on to further explain

Yet my students tell me repeatedly that it is the relationships that they enter into with inspiring community leaders, with immigrants struggling to learn English, with inner-city kids in after-school programs, and even long-distance relationships with embattled human rights worker in Latin America that are morally transformative (Strain, 2005,p. 63).

Along the same lines, Judith Boss (1994) set out to determine if undergraduate ethics students who engaged in service-learning would score higher on a test of moral reasoning than those students who did not participate in the service component. She utilized the Defining Issues Test created by James Rest for the pre-post-test design and found that aspects of moral sensitivity, moral motivation, which are components of moral development, were enhanced by the service-learning requirement (Boss, 1994). Studies such as these confirm the impact that service-learning has on a moral development. However, research surrounding short-term service-learning experience such as alternative breaks is much more limited.

### **Challenges Related to Service-Learning**

Research by Hayward (2014) found service-learning outcomes to be promising, but issues surrounding sustainability were of concern due to the extra costs of program administration and operating costs. Despite her praises of service-learning as being the most critical pedagogy, Musil (2003) noted its challenges including the need for a strong infrastructure with professional staff who are committed to identifying, coordinating, and sustaining strong community partnerships. Butin (2006) agreed stating that rhetoric may be winning over reality given the institutionalization of service-learning in higher education is far from secure. Another

challenge noted is that pertaining to the curriculum already being overcrowded and the addition of a service-learning component would require an overhaul of current content to make room (Eby, 1998). And finally, academic professionals who are involved in service-learning have expressed a struggle to prepare students for the ethical challenges they face while in the community (Blosser, 2012).

From the student perspective, recent research conducted by Schoenherr (2015) highlighted several challenges related to service-learning including the logistics and expense of travelling to sites, time management issues such as coordinating meeting times with community partners that fit with their already packed schedules, and finally, the course requirement to engage in real world problems within a complex learning environment was more overwhelming than the usual memorization of lecture materials for course assessment.

Recommendations to combat the before-mentioned challenges include cost-sharing agreement (Hayward, 2014), grant funding (Bennett, Sunderland, Bartleet & Power, 2016; Hayward, 2014) investment in operating funds, and faculty development opportunities (Musil, 2003).

### **Alternative Breaks**

Institutions of higher education across the United States sponsor alternative breaks as a co-curricular opportunity for students to engage in a service, address social and environmental issues on a local, regional, national and international levels, and become catalysts for change through continued active citizenship (Piacitelli et al., 2013). The term “alternative” transpired given the experience differed from the conventional spring break travel to the beach or other commonalities (Bowen, 2011).

## **National Overview of Alternative Breaks**

Alternative breaks have become a tradition for many colleges and universities, with the first alternative break experience dating back to 1975 when a group of Georgetown University students spent their spring break in Appalachia (“Celebrating 40 years of the alternative breaks program,” 2015). Although there were a few universities ahead of the initiative, the majority of alternative break programs began in the late 1980s and early 1990s as higher education began to focus on institutionalizing community service on college campuses (Piacitelli et al., 2013).

Each year, the alternative break movement continues to demonstrate increases in the number of participants and direct service hours. According to Break Away, a national organization dedicated to every aspect of the alternative break experience, in 2014, 1,551 trips took place, accounting for more than 21,000 student participants, which was a 26% year-to-year increase in the number of alternative breakers (“Break Away: “2014-2015 National Chapter Survey,” 2015). In 2015, the number of trips and participants increased once again to 1,837 trips and 23,783 participants accounting for 1,229,903 hours of direct service (“Break Away: National Chapter Survey Results 2015-2016,” 2016). In 2016, 2,001 trips took place, accounting for 20,207 participants who engaged in service with 2,544 community organization partners (“Break Away: National Chapter Survey Results 2016-2017,” 2017). Break Away (2017) also reported the top ten trip focus areas of 2016 as (1) environment, (2) housing and homelessness, (3) education, (4) food and hunger, (5) health (HIV/AIDS, mental health, addiction, public health), (6) youth development, (7) disaster recovery and rebuilding, (8) animal welfare, (9) immigration and refugee resettlement, and (10) community organizing. Alternative breaks ranked fifth among the top 15 community service, academic service-learning, and/or engagement

programs amongst Campus Compact's (2014) participating member institutions, a national organization dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement.

Alternative breaks characteristically consist of 10-15 college students who participate in a one to three week service immersion, which takes place over spring, fall or winter break (Piacitelli et al., 2013). Each alternative break trip focuses on a particular social issue within a local, regional, national or international community. The top ten alternative break social issues in 2014-2015 were environmental stewardship, issues related to homelessness, work with children and youth, issues related to systems of education, hunger and access to food, issues of urban poverty, access to affordable housing, issues related to health, social justice and advocacy work, and work focused on cultural issues ("Break Away: "2014-2015 National Chapter Survey," 2015).

### **Participant Preparation**

According to the 2016-2017 National Chapter Survey conducted by Break Away (2017), 36% of alternative break trips were completely student led and 43% were mostly student led. Depending on college or university requirements, student participants spend varying amounts of time preparing for their alternative break experience. For example, American University has one of the most comprehensive programs requiring a year commitment from participants during which they participate in orientation activities the semester prior to engagement, weekly trainings on the social issue, service-learning, cross-cultural communication leading up the immersion, and the semester after direct engagement working on activism projects and reorientation activities ("American University: Alternative Breaks FAQ's," 2016). The University of South Florida's Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement begins preparation for their alternative breaks during the fall semester prior to the Bulls Service Breaks trips.

## **Outcomes**

There are eight components of a quality alternative break experience, as outlined by Break Away, which include the following: strong direct service, orientation, education, training, reflections, reorientation, diversity, and alcohol and drug free. The ultimate goal is to develop “active citizens”, a term used throughout alternative break programs to describe those who have considered the root causes of social issues and prioritize community in choices they make in life (“Break Away: Eight Components of a Quality Spring Break,” 2016).

## **Moral Education**

Moral education is a significant aspect of service-learning though an under-researched discipline. According to You and Rud (2010), learning outcomes focused on personal development, leadership skills, communication and academic progress have been well researched in existing studies; however, only a few have focused on the moral development of college students who participate in service-learning education (Glazner, 2013). This study aims to fill that gap by utilizing the Moral Competence Test as a pre-post design to better understand the relationship between moral competence and participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience in the form of an alternative break. It also seeks to determine how before-mentioned experience relates to students in relation to moral growth through administration of a post-experience qualitative questionnaire.

Moral education can be traced back to 1642, during which the Puritans believed the “main business of education was to prepare children for conversion by teaching them the doctrines of moral precepts of Christianity” (Power, Nuzzi, Narvaez, Lapsley, & Hunt, 2007, p. xvi). Influential educational philosophers such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and James Rest have noted the importance of moral reasoning and judgment, which have formed

the framework for theories such as service-learning (Blosser, 2012; Lind, Hartmann & Wakenhut, 2010; Strain, 2005; You & Rud, 2010). Some experts in psychology define morality as a reaction to socio-moral norms focusing on the individual's behavior, while others believe moral conduct is internal and is driven by motives that can be traced back to factors such as genetics and environmental influences (Lind et al., 2010). Simply put, moral behavior depends on the individual's ability to comprehend the ethical implications of a situation and to reliably apply moral ideologies and rules to that situation.

Moral education is a natural fit in higher education given the opportunity for powerful curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities. Chickering (2010) refers to higher education as a compelling environment for creating college students "who can function at the levels of cognitive, moral, intellectual, and ethical development that our complex national and global programs require (p. 3). Service-learning experiences provide an opportunity for personal and social responsibility and seek to develop moral competence during the college years (Swaner, 2004). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (n.d.) explored how higher education can foster personal and social responsibility on campus and concluded by developing Core Commitments that emphasize five dimensions: (1) striving for excellence, (2) cultivating personal and academic integrity, (3) contributing to a larger community, (4) taking seriously the perspectives of others, and (5) developing competence in ethical and moral reasoning and action.

For purposes of this study, as taken from Georg Lind (2012), an expert in moral psychology and developer of the Moral Competence Test (MCT), the definition of moral competence is the ability to integrate and differentiate moral principles and apply them to everyday decisions.

## **Moral Competence Test**

In order to test any hypothesis about the nature of moral competence or about the usefulness of a certain teaching method, we need to be able to measure it. The earliest scientific endeavors seeking an adequate approach of measuring moral competence, such as those presented by Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, were based on interviews that were assessed by researchers through use of carefully developed coding instructions (Pittel & Mendelsohn, 1966). In order to fill this void, more than 35 years ago, Dr. Georg Lind, alongside a group of researchers at the University of Konstanz, developed the first objective test with the purpose of measuring moral competence known as the Moral Competence Test. Since inception, it has been translated into almost 40 languages and has been used globally in research and efficacy studies (Lind, 2008).

A proper understanding of Lind's work in developing the MCT, and therefore the roots from which this study grows, requires further exploration. It is important to note that the MCT is a "multivariate behavioral experiment in the form of a questionnaire" (Lind, 2011, p. 576). When taking the MCT, the participant has to "evaluate the decision of the protagonists in dilemma stories and the arguments for and against their decisions via a nine-point scale ranging from 'I reject this completely' to 'I entirely agree'" (Lind, 2011, p. 576). The MCT measures two aspects of judgment behavior, a) moral judgment competence as defined by Kohlberg, and b) moral orientations or moral preferences as defined by Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Orientation.

As far as validation is concerned, Lind and his colleagues have implemented rigorous validation procedures to ensure the MCT has the same meaning for all participants regardless of the language in which they are completing the test and to allow comparisons of data among researchers. They achieved this by analyzing its realistic equivalence using three experimental

criteria derived from theory and research, which included Rest's Preference Hierarchy, Piaget's Affective-cognitive Parallelism, and Kohlberg's Quasi-simplex Structure (Lind, 2006a).

Findings from Lind's research confirmed these three criteria, and therefore, the MCT can be regarded as cross-culturally valid.

With regard to previous research utilizing the Moral Competence Test as pre-post-test design, 165 medical students at the University of Sao Paulo were given the MCT on the first days of a course on Bioethics and then again during the last days of the course (Serodio, Kopelman, and Bataglia, 2016). The study found that the students C-score slightly decreased throughout the semester, prompting the researchers to rethink their Bioethics course and modify the curriculum to include "pedagogical interventions aimed at the affective aspect of moral behavior" as well as "reflection on the system of values they are building and how it will serve as a foundation for their personal and professional lives (Serodio, Kopelman, and Bataglia, 2016, p. 87).

For these reasons, the Moral Competence Test was selected as a pre- post-test design for analysis to determine if a student's moral competence relates to his or her participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience.

## **Summary**

Through this review of the literature, best practices and outcomes, co-curricular learning experiences, pedagogy, and challenges related to service-learning were presented. Additionally, limited research on alternative breaks highlighted a national overview of these programs, participant preparation and outcomes related to the co-curricular experience. The importance of moral competence in higher education, particularly related to service-learning, and the need to better understand its impact through quantitative and qualitative analysis gives merit to the need

for this study, its research and the hopeful impact of its findings. In the next chapter, methods of the study will be presented.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODS**

This study examined the relationship between a co-curricular service-learning experience and moral competence. This chapter describes the methodology that was used to conduct this research. A detailed description of the research paradigm, research design, participants and service sites, instrumentation and procedures used to collect the data, procedures utilized for analyzing the data, limitations, and potential research biases are presented.

#### **Research Paradigm**

Cohen and Crabtree defined a research paradigm as “models or frameworks that are derived from a worldview or belief system about the nature of knowledge and existence...that guide how a community of researchers act with regard to inquiry (2006, para. 1). A researcher’s belief system is informed by certain philosophical assumptions about the “nature of reality” (ontology) and “how they know what is known” (epistemology) (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2003, p. 238). The constructivist paradigm was used to guide this principle investigator (PI) through the qualitative research process. This paradigm is often used by researchers who want to gain an understanding of an experience or subject matter from individuals who have experienced them firsthand (Patton, 2002). In its simplest form, constructivism is a philosophy of learning by which people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through life experiences and reflect upon those experiences (Crotty, 2003). In other words, we are functional inventors of our own knowledge; there isn’t one single truth, but rather, all truth is

relative and constructed by the individual.

This philosophy was selected due to the nature of a co-curricular service-learning experience. One of the key components of a quality alternative break is reflection, during which the participants synthesize the service, education and community interaction components of the experience (Eight Components of a Quality Spring Break, n.d.). The importance of reflection has been cited very heavily in relation to educational experiences based in service (Appleton, 1996; Confrey & Kazak, 2006; Cottone, 2001; Le Cornu & Peters, 2005). More specifically, the “contemplation of assumptions, values and the compatibility of actions with notions of social justice and fairness” is known as critical reflection because of its moral underpinnings (LeCornu & Peters, 2005, p.54).

Furthermore, given the measurement of moral competence is a key research question in this study, constructivism holds that there are normal truths, or moral principles, we should accept or follow in a hypothetical or idealized process of rational consideration (Bagnolia, 2016). The term ‘constructivism’ was tied to moral theory with John Rawls’ seminal article *Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory* (Rawls, 1980) in which he notated concern over “problems that arise in pluralistic contexts wherein citizens hold different and to some extent incommensurable moral views”.

## **Research Design**

To reiterate, this study intended to, first, examine the relationship between a student’s moral competence and a student’s participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience by answering the following research question: What is the relationship between a student’s moral competence (as indexed by the C-score through utilization of the Moral Competence Test) and a student’s participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience? Second, it aimed to better understand how the experience impacts the student in relation to moral growth by presenting

qualitative questions in the form of a post-service questionnaire. The questions were selected based upon recommendations by Scott (2012) who has studied the connection between moral growth and service-learning. Specifically, the questions correlate to aspects of moral judgment, moral motivation, moral character and moral sensitivity.

The data upon which analysis is based includes a pre-post, nonequivalent groups design involving 10 groups of students, encompassing both undergraduates and graduates, at the University of South Florida. Each group consisted of between 8-10 student participants. The 10 groups participated in a service-learning experience known as Bulls Service Break. Of these potential participants, 5 students participated in the pre-post comparison analysis of the Moral Competence Test and 31 students participated in the Post-Trip Reflection Questionnaire.

The instrument administered prior to the experience consisted of a quantitative pre-test known as the Moral Competence Test (see Appendix A) that was administered to all participants prior to the weeklong service immersion.

The post-test consisted of a re-administration of the Moral Competence Test as well as a questionnaire *Bulls Service Breaks: Post-Trip Reflections* (see Appendix B) containing both quantitative and qualitative questions surrounding the participants' Bulls Service Breaks experience. These instruments were administered at the conclusion of the service-learning experience. Scores will be compared between pre-test and post-test among participants.

The purpose of the mixed methods research approach is to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experience. The quantitative research questions were designed to test the hypothesis that participants' moral competence will increase as a result of the short-term service-learning experience. The qualitative questions presented in the post-service questionnaire were designed to achieve insight by bringing understanding, interpretation, and meaning to the experience (Lichtman, 2013).

## **Context, Program Description and Participants**

According to its website at the time this research was conducted, the University of South Florida System includes three institutions: USF, the doctoral granting institution in Tampa; USF St. Petersburg; and USF Sarasota-Manatee, each separately accredited by the Commission on College of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (“About USF,” 2016). Home to more than 48,000 undergraduate and graduate students, USF is classified in the top tier of research universities (RU/VH) by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, a distinction attained by only 2.3% of all universities and is a top producer of Fulbright U.S. Scholarship recipients (USF System Fact Book, 2013/2014).

The University of South Florida articulates the institutions’ concern with “partnerships to build significant locally and globally-integrated university-community collaborations through sound scholarly and artistic activities” in their Mission and Vision (“About USF,” 2016). USF’s commitment to the before-mentioned activities is evidenced through the Bulls Service Breaks program.

### **Program Description**

The Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement (CLCE) at the University of South Florida is responsible for the Bulls Service Breaks (BSB) program. The goal of the BSB program is to fulfill the following mission: “To raise awareness of social issues and injustices through education and intensive service learning experiences” (“Bulls Service Breaks,” n.d.). BSB offer students an opportunity to make an impact in local, national, and international communities while gaining a deeper understanding of diversity, social issues, service, and community in various settings. Bulls Service Breaks are “an experiential learning opportunity that challenges students to be effective, ethical leaders who serve as engaged citizens for the

global community” (“Bulls Service Breaks,” n.d.). BSB is part of a national movement of active citizenship, striving to create sustainable change and fight social injustice in all communities.

Each trip is rooted in Eight Components of a Quality Alternative Break and intentionally developed to provide strong direct service, orientation, education, training, reflection, reorientation, diversity and social justice, and full engagement.

Each spring, the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement offers students an opportunity to engage in the service-learning experience known as Bulls Service Breaks. No academic credit is received for participation. Approximately 10-15 trips are offered annually and each trip focuses on one or more social issue such as animal rights, individuals with disabilities, gang violence, the environment, immigration, LGBT, Native American culture, youth and education, poverty and public health. Because these social issues are present throughout the United States, Bulls Service Breaks take place in different cities and vary each year. Regardless of trip destination, participants pay the same fee of \$350, which covers transportation, housing, food and mandatory activities (“BSB Spring Break,” n.d.). Students are encouraged to seek sponsorship from their student organizations and engage in individual and team fundraising. The Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement also sponsors organization-wide fundraisers to award financial support to qualified individuals.

It takes a team to coordinate and facilitate a program as large as Bulls Service Breaks. The following roles contribute to the success of the overall co-curricular experience (“Bulls Service Breaks,” n.d.).

Executive Board. The Bulls Service Breaks Executive Board consists of six (6) student board members, which can be held by undergraduate or graduate students. There is one (1) graduate assistant and one (1) full-time staff member who share advising and supervising responsibilities for the board and program.

Prospective new student board members must apply to serve on the Executive Board. After receipt of applications, the outgoing student board members select candidates to interview for the vacant position. After interviewing, they then make final selections to fill vacant seats with support from advisors.

The Executive Board is responsible for planning, marketing, and maintaining the Bulls Service Breaks program. Various forms of communication are used to make students aware of the BSB opportunity. They include BullSync, social media, flyers, events, email, and other standard forms of campus advertising to recruit applicants.

Advisors. Graduate students, faculty and staff at the University of South Florida can apply to volunteer as an advisor for a Bulls Service Break. They are responsible for maintaining a level of safety for each trip and directly overseeing the Site Leaders. Advisors will not participate in the study.

Site Leaders. Two (2) Site Leader were selected for each trip by the Executive Board based on an application and interview process. Site Leaders must meet high expectations and uphold the responsibilities demanded of them throughout the Bulls Service Break experience. The Site Leaders were responsible for all aspects of trip planning including securing lodging accommodations, arranging and booking travel, devising a schedule, obtaining details of service activities with community partners, and any other logistics. Additionally, Site Leaders were responsible for educational training related to the social issue that the trip focused on (immigration, environment, youth and education, public health, and so on) while serving in the community, as well as reflection discussions and activities. Often times, site leaders have served as trip participants prior to applying for a site leader position. Therefore, they are aware of the responsibilities and commitments associated with this role prior to applying.

Trip Participants. Each Bulls Service break trip consisted of eight (8) to ten (10)

participants. Trip Participants apply for BSB online and select their top three (3) social issue preferences (hunger/homelessness, youth and education, public health, etc.). After submitting the application, Trip Leaders select potential participants to engage in an interview process and are matched to a trip based upon the social issue of their choice. The main role of the participant is to learn about the social issue through the eyes of the community served and become a catalyst for positive change. Trip Participants are expected to be active citizens, good team members who support each other, and are required to attend all mandatory BSB events including trainings, trip meetings, pre-service, and post-service. The thirty-one (31) student participants who responded to the Post-Trip Reflection Questionnaire ranged from freshman to graduate student and represented the following academic colleges: arts and science (39.53%), behavioral and community sciences (6.98%), business (6.98%), education (4.65%), honors college (2.33%), nursing (4.65%), public health (4.65%), arts (2.33%) and undeclared (27.91%). Both the “Site Leaders” and “Trip Participants” were administered the Moral Competence Test and the post-trip questionnaire.

Purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, was used due to the research pool being limited to individuals participating in the 2016 Bulls Service Break experience. This method is useful with qualitative and quantitative research, particularly suitable to those interested in understanding a particular group of individuals (Palys, 2008). Furthermore, purposive sampling is the method of choosing participants due to the qualities the participant possesses (Tongco, 2007), in this case, a group of students who possess a commitment to civic engagement by devoting their spring break to a co-curricular service-learning experience. There is no academic credit given for participation in a Bulls Service Breaks.

### **Service Sites**

Various locations were selected for Bulls Service Breaks, which change from year to year. Table 1 outlines the social issues, locations and organizations with whom the 2016

participants engaged during their alternative break experience.

**Table 1.**  
**2016 Bulls Service Breaks Sites**

Social Issue	Location	Organization
Hunger and Homelessness	Atlanta, GA	Medici Project
Animal Rights	Savannah, TN	Horse Creek Wildlife Refuge
Sustainability	Tellico Plains, TN	Agata Mountain Organic Ranch
Youth & Education	Birmingham, AL	Junior Achievement
Youth & Education	Selma, AL	Freedom Foundation
Immigration	McAllen, TX	LUPE
Environmental	Cumberland, TN	Cumberland Trail Association
Public Health	Atlanta, GA	Medici Project
LGBT Awareness	Raleigh, NC	Campus Pride
Youth & Education	Nashville, TN	Boys and Girls Club

### **Instrumentation**

The data collected for this study originated from pre-post administration of the Moral Competence Test (Lind, 2013). Additionally, a mixed methods questionnaire was presented to participants upon completion of the co-curricular service-learning experience approximately two weeks upon return from the Bulls Service Break. Participants provided personal information about their gender, race/ethnic identity, class level, academic college, importance of religion in their life, and their political view.

#### **Moral Competence Test**

The Moral Competence Test (MCT), previously known as the Moral Judgment Test, was developed in 1977 by Dr. Georg Lind, a German psychologist, to assess moral attitudes and moral judgment competence of university students in five European countries including Austria,

Germany, Netherlands, Poland, and the former Yugoslavia (Lind, 2006b). The instrument was renamed to align with the construct it measures, moral competence via the C-score, which is an experimentally designed functional measure and has been rigorously validated using theory-based criteria (Lind, 2015). The C-score is obtained through a computer-based analysis from the 24 items that are on the 8-point Likert scale. It can be considered as a composite score for moral competence. According to Lind (2008), competence is an enduring human trait while judgment is a momentary phenomenon, and additionally, moral competence can be observed only when it shows itself in apparent action. For definitional purposes, moral competence, in relation to the MCT, is derived from Kohlberg's work (Lind, 2015), which states that the instrument measures moral competence by analyzing how a participant deals with arguments that dispute his or her position on a challenging problem. Participants were asked to read two moral dilemmas and contemplate arguments for and against their opinion on solving each dilemma (Lind, 2015). There are 28 items on the MCT and all but 4 questions are scored on an 8-point Likert-type scale, from -4 (I strongly reject) to 4 (I strongly agree). The Moral Competence Test takes approximately ten (10) minutes to complete. The C-score indicates, to use Piaget's terminology, the degree to which moral principles have become "necessary knowledge" (Lourenço & Machado, 1996, p. 154) for the participant (Lind, 2015). The scoring of the MCT takes the whole pattern of the participant's responses to the test into account. Therefore, as stated by Hegazi and Wilson (2013) in their study utilizing the MCT with medical students, the C-score reflects a participant's ability to judge arguments according to their moral quality. "C" ranges from 1 to 100, with the higher the score indicating a "more developed moral judgment competence" (Hegazi & Wilson, 2013, p. 1023).

In his online guide to use of the MCT, Lind (2015) recommends using a special code

instead of the names of the participants to protect privacy for comparison of pre-post responses. The code consists of the house number (last two digits, e.g., 05), the day of birth (e.g., 24, when the birthday is Oct. 24), the first two letters of mother's first name and the first two letters of father's name or, if the father is not known, grandfather's first name. Therefore, a code generated using such recommendations would look something like "1108lite" or "7811cala". This coding suggestion was utilized for pre-post comparisons.

### **Bulls Service Break: Post-Trip Reflection Questionnaire**

The purpose of the post-trip questionnaire is to explore reflections related to moral growth resulting from the co-curricular service-learning experience. Questions were decided upon collaboratively by the Principal Investigator and Mallory Trochesset, Associate Director in the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement (CLCE), and were supported in Scott's (2012) research surrounding the connection between service-learning and moral growth and based upon James Rest's Four Components Model of Moral Behavior. Intentional reflection is an essential component of a co-curricular service-learning experience and helps the participants to deal with struggles surrounding feelings, beliefs, and anxieties that are necessary to expand moral reasoning and development (Kohlberg, 1971; Rest, 1986). The post-experience survey asked the participants to reflect on their BSB experience and qualitatively respond to questions pertaining to their core values, how values motivate them, observations or experiences that challenged their worldview, and whether their career plans were impacted as a result of the experience. The questionnaire also included a variety of quantitative questions pertaining to how the participant felt with regard to making a positive contribution, meeting community-identified needs, and developing relationships with people in the community being served (see Appendix B).

## **Procedure**

The Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement (CLCE), specifically, Mallory Trochesset, Associate Director, signed a letter on October 5, 2015, to formally indicate CLCE's willingness to collaborate on this research. Ms. Trochesset was the primary communicator between the Bulls Service Breaks and participants allowing the PI to remain removed from the data collection process.

Participants in the Bulls Service Break experience submitted an online application consisting of questions pertaining to demographics, insurance policy information, social issue preference, and four open-ended questions about service, interest in social issue preference, group/team contributions, and personal responsibility to be considered for participation. After receipt and review of applications, a Site Leader for the social issue in which the participants expressed interest contacted the applicant and conducted an interview.

Upon selection to participate, participants attended two Participant Connections prior to the Bulls Service Breaks experience. The purpose of the Participant Connections was to serve as the orientation phase of the Bulls Service Breaks experience. Participants engaged in teambuilding exercises and educational sessions focused on the social issue pertaining to the service aspect of their trip. They were also trained in skills necessary to successfully participate in BSB experiences such as meal and budget planning, risk management procedures, and general expectations.

Bulls Service Breaks took place the week of March 13-19, 2016, in conjunction with the University of South Florida's regularly scheduled spring break. Prior to departure, during the BSB Connection event, Mallory Trochesset, Associate Director in the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement gave an overview of the Moral Competence Test to attendees and explained

the purpose of the pre-post programmatic research. The MCT was administered via paper and pencil at the BSB connection event and participation was voluntary. The MCT was administered again via paper and pencil, within two weeks of return from the service-learning experience, at the Post-Trip Catalyst Showcase Banquet. Again, participation was voluntary.

The qualitative aspect of this research, the *Bulls Service Breaks: Post-Trip Reflection Questionnaire* was administered upon completion of the service-learning experience by Mallory Trocheset. It was administered two weeks after the participants returned from their immersion trips via email using a computer-based interface (Survey Monkey) and stored through a Survey Monkey account created for and accessible by the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement. If accommodations were needed for a student with disabilities, arrangements were made with the Office of Services to Students with Disabilities at the Tampa campus. Participants received directions for the questionnaire through electronic communication and participation was voluntary. Thirty-one participants completed the questionnaire.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Quantitative Analysis of the Moral Competence Test**

In order to answer the first research question which seeks to determine if there is a relationship between a student's moral competence and a student's participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience, the *C-score* was computed to measure the degree to which the participant allows his or her judgment behavior be determined by moral concerns or principles rather than by other psychological forces like the human tendency to make arguments agree with one's opinion or decision about a certain issue (Lind, 2015). In other words, the *C-score* reflects a person's ability to judge arguments according to their moral quality, rather than

their opinion agreement or other factors.

To compare the pre-post C-scores, a one-sample t-test was used. Scores were coded and entered into SPSS. This statistical procedure was selected because it is often used to analyze the mean of a single sample to a specified constant (Hess & Hess, 2017). In this case, it was used to measure the competence score (C-score) of a student before they participated in the Bulls Service Break experience and then again after the service-learning experience to determine if there was a difference in C-score.

The *C-score* ranges from 1 to 100. It indicates the percentage of an individual's total response variation due to a person's concern for the moral quality of given arguments or behavior. In general, a C-score between 0 and 9 can be interpreted as "very low" or "zero moral competence", between 10 and 29 is the "medium" range in which most (educated) people seem to be. All scores above 30 can be considered as "high moral competence". According to Lind (2015), the behavior of people with a score higher than 30 is guided by moral considerations and often consists of individuals who lend help to others during challenging times, engage in democracy, and adhere to their morals.

The dependent variable is represented by the subject's judgment behavior, or rather, by his or her rating of the arguments on a scale from -4 to +4. The moral factor determining subjects' judgment behavior is represented by the moral quality of the arguments (Lind, 2015). With the MCT, moral quality was defined using Kohlberg's six stages of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1964; 1984).

As Lind (2015) explained, the task factor, opinion agreement or disagreement, is represented by the implication of the argument pro or contra the subject's opinion about the decision of the story's protagonist. The pro-arguments indicate which ideal level of moral

discourse the subject prefers; the contra arguments indicate how much the subject let this moral ideal determine his or her judgment of arguments in the presence of other powerful psychological forces.

In sum, the MCT is designed as a multivariate experiment, with a 6 x 2 x 2 dependent (or multivariate) design, whereby the three design-factors are orthogonal or non-correlated. Its main index, the *C-score*, is computed by a MANOVA-like method, namely by partitioning sum of squares (Lind, 2015).

**Computing the MCT's C-score.** The *C-score* was computed analogously to multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). It can also be computed 'by hand' using a pocket calculator. For larger data sets, as with the quantity collected for this research, the use of a computer is strongly recommended by the author.

To compute the MCT for this study, the PI solicited assistance from the Consulting Office for Research in Education (CORE) at the University of South Florida. Funded by the College of Education Dean's Office and provided by the Department of Educational and Psychological Studies, CORE supports the student through the planning of research, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of data (Consulting Office for Research in Education, 2018). This service is free to USF students. To utilize these services, the PI collaborated with the assigned CORE consultant primarily through email communication initially. For the data analysis portion of the MCT, the PI met with the consultant on campus to conduct the statistical analysis and review the data.

### **Qualitative Analysis of the Post-Trip Reflection Questionnaire**

In order to analyze the qualitative data obtained from the *Post-Trip Reflection Questionnaire*, thematic analysis was conducted. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a procedure used when analyzing qualitative data to identify patterns and themes. To achieve thematic analysis, the process was two-fold. First, the PI utilized

ATLAS.ti, a computer-assisted software package designed to facilitate the qualitative analysis of textual data. Second, the PI petitioned consultation of an expert in thematic analysis from the Consulting Office for Research in Education at USF.

First, to become acquainted with the functionality of ATLAS.ti, the PI watched several training videos and attended a webinar presented by the software company. After gaining a familiarity with the program, the responses from the qualitative questions were uploaded to ATLAS.ti, which aided in the understanding of code frequency and enabled the PI to organize and synthesize the qualitative responses. Throughout this analysis, themes became apparent with relation to each of the research questions.

After completing the analysis and organization of data using ATLAS.ti, the PI reviewed the themes with a consultant from CORE. During the process of reviewing the data, the relationships among categories were further examined and conceptual themes were identified.

### **Limitations**

This study utilized a pre- post-test design for students participating in a short-term service-learning experience over spring break in 2016 at the University of South Florida. One limitation is that the students applied and were selected for participation in the BSB. Additionally, participants in this study chose to spend their spring break focused on service and were committed to fundraising, pre-service activities, and post-service activities as a result of their desire to participate. Therefore, it could be anticipated that the participants might have already possessed an advanced level of moral competence.

Test weariness was another potential limitation. Lind (2015) explained that pretest-posttest studies may present issues of test weariness, resulting in a lowering of the C-score on the retest. In order to help circumvent this potential problem, Lind recommends conveying the following to participants during post-test: “Some of the questions will be the same as you have been given the

first time. We want to know whether your thoughts have changed. Please fill them out as sincerely as you did the first time.” This recommendation was taken into consideration and expressed to participants prior to administration of the post-test.

And finally, the number of participants who completed the pre- post-test was relatively small and may not represent the majority of the students who participated in the Bulls Service Break.

### **Potential Research Bias**

Prior to conducting research for this dissertation, the principal investigator (PI) participated in two alternative break experiences. The first alternative break experience took place in 2007 when the PI was serving as a graduate assistant in the Office of Student Organizations and Service at Middle Tennessee State University. This alternative break experience focused on the environment during which the group travelled to the Biscayne National Park and Everglades National Park in Miami, Florida. The second alternative break experience took place in 2011 when the PI served as an advisor for an alternative break at the University of South Florida. This trip focused on education and took place at the “I Have a Dream” Foundation in New York, New York. The PI managed potential bias by removing herself from the collection of data and using de-identifiable data from a public source and notating limitations.

### **Summary**

This study aimed to better understand the impact of a co-curricular service-learning experience in the form of an alternative break on a participant’s moral competence through use of the Moral Competence Test as a pre-post test design and the reflection questionnaire to gain insight by examining qualitative feedback surrounding the participant’s moral growth.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of this mixed methods research according to each research question outlined in Chapter Three. The data analyzed represent information provided by the students who participated in a Bulls Service Break during the spring semester of 2016 at the University of South Florida. First, demographic information on the participants in the study is provided. Second, the quantitative analysis pertaining to the Moral Competence Test is presented. Third, the themes generated from a thematic analysis based on the research questions are presented. These data were analyzed using a deductive approach to content analysis, which allowed the researcher to examine the questionnaire responses for theoretical commonalities and to describe and measure thematic occurrences (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). Quotes provided by participants are identified by their gender and the social issue they served during their Bulls Service Break. For example, a female participant who focused on youth and education would be displayed as (female, youth and education).

#### **Participant Demographic Characteristics**

A total of forty-three students initially responded to the Post-Trip Questionnaire. After removing the twelve submissions that were incomplete due to lack of answering the qualitative questions presented, thirty-one participants remained. Demographic characteristics are reported in Table 2. These data were collected from the questionnaire given to the Bulls Service Break participants upon returning from the alternative break experience. The gender breakdown of the

participants was 26% male and 74% female. Participants were from various ethnic backgrounds including Caucasian/White (n=12), Asian/Pacific Islander (n=5), Black/African American (n=4), Hispanic/Latino (n=9) and other (n=1). Of the 31 participants, there was a mixture of those who served as a participant (n=23) and those who served as a site leader (n=8).

All class levels were represented from freshman to graduate students as well as various academic colleges including Arts and Sciences, Behavior and Community Sciences, Business, Engineering, Education, Honors College, Nursing, and Public Health. The participants were asked about their political view and the importance of religion in their life. The majority identified as having moderate (n=13) political views, followed by very liberal (n=8), slightly liberal (n=5), slightly conservative (n=4), and very conservative (n= 1) political views. As for the importance of religion, responses were evenly distributed among not at all important (n=8), somewhat important (n=9), important (n=8), and very important (n=5).

Table 2. Participant Demographic Characteristics

Participant ID	Gender	Race/Ethnic Identity	Class Level	Academic College	Importance of Religion	Political Views
1	Female	Hispanic/Latino	Freshman	Arts and Sciences	Somewhat	Moderate
2	Male	Asian/Pacific Islander	Sophomore	Business	Important	Very Liberal
3	Female	Other	Junior	Arts and Sciences	Not at all	Very Liberal
4	Female	Asian/Pacific Islander	Freshman	INTO USF	Not at all	Moderate
5	Female	White Black/African	Senior	Business	Important	Slightly Conservative
6	Female	American	Senior	Arts and Sciences	Somewhat	Very Liberal
7	Female	Hispanic/Latino	Sophomore	Education	Very Important	Moderate
8	Female	White	Freshman	Nursing	Somewhat	Moderate
9	Male	White Black/African	Sophomore	Arts and Sciences	Not at all	Very Liberal
10	Female	American	Junior	Arts and Sciences	Very Important	Moderate Slightly Liberal
11	Female	Hispanic/Latino	Freshman	Engineering	Not at all	Very Conservative
12	Male	Hispanic/Latino	Sophomore	Arts and Sciences	Important	Slightly Liberal
13	Female	White Black/African	Sophomore	Engineering	Not at all	Slightly Liberal
14	Female	American	Sophomore	Arts and Sciences	Important	Slightly Liberal

Table 2. Participant Demographic Characteristics

Participant ID	Gender	Race/Ethnic Identity	Class Level	Academic College	Importance of Religion	Political Views
15	Female	White	Senior	Arts and Sciences	Not at all	Very Liberal
16	Female	Hispanic/Latino	Freshman	Engineering	Very Important	Slightly Conservative
17	Female	White	Senior	Public Health	Somewhat	Moderate
18	Male	Hispanic/Latino	Freshman	Arts and Sciences	Somewhat	Moderate
19	Female	White	Junior	Engineering	Important	Very liberal
20	Male	Hispanic/Latino	Senior	Engineering Behavioral/Community Sciences	Somewhat	Moderate
21	Female	White	Junior	Engineering Behavioral/Community Sciences	Not at all	Very Liberal
22	Female	Asian/Pacific Islander	Sophomore	Arts and Sciences	Very Important	Slightly Conservative
23	Female	Hispanic/Latino	Sophomore	Social Work	Important	Moderate
24	Male	White	Junior	Arts and Sciences	Somewhat	Moderate
25	Female	Asian/Pacific Islander	Senior	Arts and Sciences	Somewhat	Slightly Liberal
26	Female	White	Freshman	Education	Very Important	Slightly Conservative
27	Male	Hispanic/Latino	Sophomore	Public Health	Somewhat	Very Liberal

Table 2. Participant Demographic Characteristics

Participant ID	Gender	Race/Ethnic Identity	Class Level	Academic College	Importance of Religion	Political Views
28	Female	White	Sophomore	Behavioral and Community Sciences	Important	Moderate Slightly Liberal
29	Female	White Black/African American	Senior	Arts and Sciences	Important	Moderate
30	Male	American	Freshman	Engineering	Important	Moderate
31	Female	Asian/Pacific Islander	Sophomore	Arts and Sciences	Not at all	Moderate

## Thematic Analysis

### **Research Question 1: What is the relationship between a student’s moral competence (as indexed by the C-score through utilization of the Moral Competence Test) and a student’s participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience?**

Bulls Service Break participants were asked to complete the Moral Competence Test (MCT) prior to their service-learning experience and then again upon return from their service- learning experience.

Forty-one participants filled out the Moral Competence Test prior to beginning their Bulls Service Break experience. Twenty-six participants completed the Moral Competence Test upon return from their Bulls Service Break experience. Out of the twenty-six, only 5 of the respondents had also completed the MCT pre-trip giving the researcher a sample size of 5 for pre-post comparison.

To compare the pre-post C-scores, a one-sample t-test was used. This statistical procedure was selected because it is often used to analyze the mean of a single sample to a specified constant (Hess &Hess, 2017). In this case, it was used to measure the competence score (C-score) of a student before he or she participated in the Bulls Service Break experience and then again after the service-learning experience to determine if there was a difference in C-score. As shown in Table 3, the mean was 10.95 (SD=16.97) when comparing the pre-test C-score to the post-test C-score, confirming an increase in moral competence by almost 11 points upon completion of the co-curricular service learning experience. Therefore, the hypothesis that there is a relationship between a co-curricular service-learning experience and moral competence was confirmed.

Table 3.  
One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
C-Score	5	10.9595	16.97563	7.59173

**Research Question 2: How does participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience relate to the student's reflection with regard to moral sensitivity?**

Moral sensitivity materializes in service-learning when students are immersed in the community and begin to identify conflicts and challenges facing the communities in which they serve (Harkavy, Puckett, & Romer, 2000; Scott, 2012). To address this research question, the students were asked the following in the post-trip questionnaire that was administered via Survey Monkey: What about your Bulls Service Break experience was eye-opening? This question was presented by Scott (2012) as an example of a reflective question and is classified as the "early" stage of the Service-Learning Stages of Development, during which participants are building relationships and beginning to understand the service environment.

The following themes were associated with moral sensitivity: (1) I am more self-aware as a result of this experience, and (2) I am more socially aware of the struggles that communities face on a daily basis.

Theme 1: I am more self-aware as a result of this experience. The majority of the Bulls Service Break responses (n=17) expressed increases in self-awareness as a result of their service-learning experience. One particular group of participants spent the week focused on sustainability working in a Mennonite community. Their responses to this research question emphasized how they had the opportunity to "not only witness, but adopt (albeit temporarily) an agrarian lifestyle that rejects so much of the technology we simply take for granted" (female, sustainability). Additionally, the participants demonstrated self-awareness when they noticed a difference in the way people interacted with each other. One participant stated:

instead of using technology (such as cell phones) as a social barrier between one person and another, technology was used as a practical tool for teamwork such as using an

electric saw to cut a tree trunk into smaller pieces. That observation alone opened my eyes on how I view modern-day technology – instead of it being a growing hindrance between two people’s relationship, it can be used as a tool to bring two people closer together through teamwork (female, sustainability).

Other students who also served the Mennonite community noted how “simplicity of living can be done” (female, sustainability) and another expressed that it was enlightening to see how different people live. Two students became more self-aware of their surroundings. “The nature surrounding the site was eye-opening” (male, sustainability) and “seeing how beautiful nature was” (male, sustainability) exemplify the importance of being present and appreciating the area in which they served.

One participant who served the community of Atlanta, Georgia mentoring young girls talked about how she “came out of the experience knowing more about myself than I could have imagined. I grew as a person, and I am very appreciative for that” (female, youth and education).

Another response pertaining to increased self-awareness was exhibited by a participant whose service trip focused on animal rights. She noted:

I became more aware of the amount of dedication and passion one should have in order to take good care of animals. It’s not simply having them there in your house and being the owner. You have to be the care taker, be the mom, the family, the friend of your pets.

They are not just pets. They are your own family (female, animal rights).

These examples present confirmation of a theme pertaining to increased self-awareness and moral sensitivity during the service-learning experience.

Theme 2: I am more socially aware of the struggles that communities face on a daily

basis. During the Bulls Service Break experience, participants were immersed in a variety of different communities, vastly different from their own. This submersion gives them an opportunity to gain insight into a group of people they might not have otherwise encountered, thus increasing their social awareness.

Two different trips focused on youth and education, both of which took place in Alabama. One service trip served with Junior Achievement in Birmingham, Alabama, while the other service trip served the Freedom Foundation in Selma, Alabama. All seven participants noted a greater awareness of the struggles faced within the communities they served. For example, one participant described the lack of uniformity in the students' education.

There was no consistency in the students' education. In one class, half the class would be excelling and catching on quickly, while the other half struggled. There was a 1st grader who didn't even know how to write her alphabet. It was clear they didn't receive the support or positive reinforcement they needed. It was also sad to see their family situations. Several students would sleep during class because they were not able to sleep at home. Other students would act out and be violent with each other. It was sad to see so much deviant behavior beginning at a young age. Without proper intervention, it was clear that it would only continue to exacerbate as they got older (female, youth and education).

Another participant also on the youth and education BSB trip noted that she realized just how much the availability of education and social resources can affect a child's educational development. Other observations included the lack of mentorship in the community (n=2) and the fact that Selma (Alabama) is still so segregated (n=2) in the 21st century.

Another group of BSB students (n=4) spent the week in McAllen, Texas tackling immigration issues with LUPE which stands for La Union Del Pueblo Entero. LUPE is a

community union founded by two labor rights activists with the goal of building “stronger, healthier communities where colonia residents use the power of civic engagement for social change” (“About Us”, 2016). These participants noted increased awareness with regard to the number of immigrants and undocumented workers in the Texas community. One stated that “the amount [sic] of people that are undocumented and are educated but cannot work because of legal status” (male, immigration) was eye-opening. It was also mentioned how many people are affected by the poor structure of immigration services (n=3).

Participants who went to Nashville, TN to work with the Boys and Girls Club also notated an increased awareness in the community they served. Several of the students commented on their elevated awareness of hardships experienced by those who live in a low income area (n=4) and seeing the “direct connection with the community and the school to prison pipeline” (female, youth and education).

Collectively, these examples demonstrate how Bulls Service Break participants increased awareness of the communities they served through their service-learning projects. Greater awareness pertaining to the lack of resources for youth, struggles faced by undocumented workers and immigrants, apparent and unnecessary segregation, lack of consistency in education, and a lack of mentorship in our communities are some of the most frequently notated eye-opening experiences encountered by participants. Other comments related to this research question that did not fall into the before-mentioned themes but are still notable include “truly everything” (female, public health) and “everything!!” (female, disability awareness), how everyone worked together to better the community (n=4), experiencing the beauty of nature (n=3), and “learning that no matter your religion or faith, all people are trying to transmit love” (female, sustainability).

**Research Question 3: How does participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience relate to the student's reflection with regard to moral judgement?**

When participants become invested in their service-learning environment or become invested in the people with whom they are working or serving, they are eager to suggest solutions to the problems they are observing or experiencing (Scott, 2012). Moral judgment emerges in service-learning when students experience a struggle to determine a course of action to take that is just and fair (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, and Thoma, 1999). To address this research question, the students were asked the following in the post-trip questionnaire that was administered via Survey Monkey: While engaged in your Bulls Service Break, what did you observe or experience that challenged your worldview? This question was presented by Scott (2012) as an example of a reflective question that challenges a greater sense of conflict with moral judgment and focuses on philosophies and ideologies rather than merely right-or-wrong rationales. Moral judgment falls in the “early to middle” stage of the Service-Learning Stages of Development, during which participants have increased investment in relationships that have emerged in their service environment. There was one primary theme that was associated with moral judgment: The realization of social injustice in our communities challenged my worldview.

Theme 1: The realization of social injustice in our communities challenged my worldview. As mentioned previously, moral judgment focuses on the greater philosophies and ideologies contemplated by the participants in a service-learning experience rather than just right versus wrong rationales (Scott, 2012). The theme of social injustice was mentioned by the majority of the Bulls Service Break participants (n=19). One student who worked with LUPE (which stands for La Union Del Pueblo Entero) on immigration talked about how she witnessed

the social injustices related to nationality.

I observed the struggle of identity and citizenship. It challenged the thought of pride that a lot of people have about their nationality. Seeing people who struggle and work very hard to become a citizen [sic] also made me challenge the laws from the US government that make it harder for immigrants to do so (female, immigration).

This is a strong example of how the participant's moral judgment was challenged as a result of her BSB experience. As her philosophy of immigration became more enlightened, she struggled with determining a proper course of action that should be taken by the US government to deal with the issue of immigration. Another participant on the same trip explained how he was surrounded by a community whose language he could not speak well during his service experience. He went on to explain how the inability to speak their language fluently gave him insight into how immigrants coming to this country experience social injustices due to their lack of ability to communicate.

Another participant who served the homeless population in Atlanta, Georgia noted how someone working at the homeless shelter shared a thought pertaining to injustice of actions in the workplace that relate to homelessness.

Sometimes it feels like we are going down to the river and pulling these people out.

Now, I'm not asking you to go out, be a saint, and volunteer your time at a homeless shelter. I'm asking you that whatever career field you find yourself in, find the people who are throwing them in (male, hunger and homelessness).

This challenged the participants' moral judgment by making him contemplate how these people end up homeless in the first place and how the lack of social justice in the workplace might impact the outcome of homelessness.

The Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life spent a week in Nashville, TN focused on youth and education. One participant became more aware of the social injustices that lower income areas face. She stated:

I have never been in an under privileged area before. I've driven through them but I've never worked with kids from those areas. It blew my mind that the place we were volunteering at did not have mentors for the students that regularly attended the Boys and Girls club. I really could see that mentors in a community like that really could have an impact on a child's decision to attend college (female, youth and education).

Lack of resources (n=4), including access to education resources (n=2) was another social injustice mentioned by participants when answering the question pertaining to moral judgment. Some of the following responses from participants demonstrate these observations: “I saw a wide range of social disparity. It opened my mind to just how many people are affected by public health, or lack there of” (male, public health). “It was clear how much privilege I have. The students I taught were born into a lifestyle where they lacked a lot of resources, positive role models, safety, and opportunities” (female, youth and education). “People suffer and help is well needed. I wanted to lend a hand. It felt good to do so” (male, immigration). “We were able to think of our worlds differently through the girls we encountered on the trip. We dove deep to find things to relate back to our lives in Tampa” (female, youth and education).

Religious conflict (n=3) became apparent for a student who served the Mennonite community. He stated:

Many of the residents of Tellico Plains, Tennessee (and neighboring communities) are devout Christians. Their worldview is rooted in the Bible, while mine is not – as a result, the religious beliefs they talked to me about challenged my worldview, which is purely

based in secular reason. For me to better understand the needs of the communities I engaged with, I needed to imagine myself as someone who subscribes to a Christian worldview, which is an arduous task.

Two other participants who served the Mennonites' also faced religious conflict, "experiencing life in a very religious community challenged my world view" (female, sustainability) as did seeing how the Mennonites commitment to their religion impacted their way of living challenged my worldview.

Discrimination (n=2) and homophobia (n=2) were also mentioned as social injustices that challenged the worldview of Bulls Service Break participants.

**Research Question 4: How does participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience relate to the student's reflection with regard to moral motivation?**

Moral motivation occurs when a participant identifies and prioritizes competing moral values that motivate a course of action (Scott, 2012). To address this research question, the students were asked the following in the post-trip questionnaire that was administered via Survey Monkey: What are your core values in life right now? How do these values motivate you to act in a socially just or responsible manner? These questions were presented by Scott (2012) as examples of reflective questions and fall in the "middle to end" stage of the Service-Learning Stages of Development, during which participants have a high investment in relationships and commitment to the community they are serving. This is often a time when participants are processing conflicting or competing values and when they firmly identify beliefs, passions, and convictions. According to Rest and his colleagues (1999), moral motivation is an important outcome associated with service-learning because the greater the participant identifies with a moral value or values, the more motivated the participant is to act. There appeared to be two

competing moral motivation themes that emerged through the participant responses: (1) Help others and give back to my community, and (2) Treat others equally and with respect.

Theme 1: Help others and give back to my community. When asked about their core values, fourteen (n=14) of the participants mentioned the desire to help others and give back to their community. For example, one participant mentioned how she was “indifferent” and tried not to get too involved prior to her service-learning experience. But now, she feels like she can contribute to society in a different way. Other responses that emphasized the importance of helping others and giving back to community include “one of my core values is to give help when needed and asked” (male, youth and education), “willingness to help -- I try to help people as much as I can” (female, youth and education), “I am motivated to help others obtain happiness” (female, LGBT) “helping others, being selfless, being an advocate for others without voices and bring together communities” (female, public health), “helping others and being the best person I can” (female, public health), “there are people that will always need our help. We need to be the person to try and find it” (female, youth and education), and “to help those around me and give back to those around me” (female, youth and education). Another impactful response was given by a student who focused on youth and education during her Bulls Service Break experience.

To give back to my community. This motivates me to act towards others and be empathetic toward everyone if I can. If I see a situation where I can help, I see it as my social responsibility to do whatever I can, especially when it involves people who many not be as privileged as I am (female, youth and education).

And finally, a participant whose service focused on youth and education explained how her core values are to help others by empowering them. She states:

There is little I can do alone, by myself, but as a group we can cover a lot more ground. I am down to earth and kind-hearted and like to give people the tools to empower themselves. This is the only way they can learn and grow and excel on their own. I once was a young girl and would have loved a mentor and someone to look up to. I enjoy volunteering because it is a way to directly impact individuals' lives (female, youth and education).

Theme 2: Treat others equally and with respect. One participant who worked with LUPE on immigration issues stated, "My core values are to treat others equally. This motivates me because people are being treated unfair of legal status. I believe everyone should have equal rights" (female, immigration). Another participant whose service-learning experience focused on youth and education responded, "My core values in life revolve around equality and fairness, and I try to act as fairly as possible with other people and ensure that I do my part to makethings equal for the people around me" (female, youth and education). Spending time with the Mennonites helped one participant realize the importance of respecting others' opinions. He stated, "a core value of mine is to respect others' opinions. This value helps in interacting in my community because it is important not to crush others' belief system, way of life or anything" (male, sustainability).

**Research Question 5: How does participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience relate to the student's reflection with regard to moral character?**

Moral Character occurs when a participant demonstrates the courage, integrity, and purpose to act on a determined course of action (Scott, 2012). According to Strain (2005), service-learning and other similar active learning experiences provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their evolving values and beliefs that contribute to the continual process of moral

character development. To address this research question, the students were asked the following in the post-trip questionnaire that was administered via Survey Monkey: On a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being extremely comfortable), rank your comfort level during your BSB experience. When did you feel most comfortable? When did you feel least comfortable? These questions were presented by Scott (2012) as a collective example of a reflective question challenges the participant to make evaluative connections between their service experience and who they are becoming as an individual of moral character. Moral character falls in the “middle to end” stage of the Service-Learning Stages of Development, during which participants have high investment in relationships and commitment to personal and intrapersonal growth. During this stage, participants experience increased self-understanding and self-assessment. Participants are also noticing a connection between their values and the actions they take resulting in increased moral character and integrity.

The average response to the first part of the question, which asked the participants to rank their comfort level during their BSB experience on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being extremely comfortable) was 7.44. Out of the 32 responses, 19 participants responded fully to the question by answering the latter half of the question: When did you feel most comfortable? When did you feel least comfortable? The numerical value assigned by the participant is noted in the responses prior to the written responses when quoted in the following paragraphs.

Two students who were serving the social issue of immigration responded to the questions with great detail, expressing challenges to their comfort level pertaining to their inability to understand and speak Spanish. The first participant responded, “5. I felt most comfortable hanging out with the BSB group, least comfortable when I had to communicate one on one with people who did not speak English” (male, immigration). The second student gave the

following answer:

7; I was most comfortable when I was given something to do or work on and when people would share their stories/experiences with me. I felt less comfortable at times because I did not speak Spanish very well and some of the people we worked with only knew Spanish, sometimes it was hard communicating at first (male, immigration).

Several participants who served the social issue of youth and education in Atlanta, Georgia ranked their comfort at varying levels. The lowest response on this Bulls Service Break was a 7 during which the participant responded,

I felt most comfortable once I developed relationships with the students and they were affectionate towards me and exhibited appreciation. I felt least comfortable when I first started teaching and when I had to discipline students for not being respectful, or when I encountered situations where students opened up about their personal lives (female, youth and education).

Two other students on this trip ranked their comfort level at an 8. They responded to the latter part of the question stating, "I was most comfortable with my group, least comfortable answering some questions the little girls had" (female, youth and education) and "I felt most comfortable working with my fellow participants during our service. I do not think I felt uncomfortable during the experience" (female, youth and education). The only participant to rank their comfort level at a 9 said "The only time uncomfortable was when we first arrived. I had to get used to the new environment" (female, youth and education). And finally, one participant ranked his comfort level at a 10. This participant responded,

I felt most comfortable after my team and I went through orientation, and our site contact went through the expectations of the project. The least comfortable was the times the

children would talk about the negative attributes at home, or even the teacher (male, youth and education).

Other students who were serving the Mennonite community on a sustainability-focused service project shared varying degrees of comfortability. One participant stated the following,

6. I felt most comfortable when I was engaging in service (such as chopping wood or helping cook a meal) - when we were doing a physical task together and everyone was working towards a shared end goal. However, I felt least comfortable when people in the Mennonite communities we visited were sharing with us their faith and religious beliefs. For me, it was extremely uncomfortable listening to these folks because of the fact that their worldview is polar opposite to mine (male, sustainability).

Yet another student on the same trip said they felt extremely comfortable throughout the duration. She stated, “10. I felt most comfortable with the family at the house and with my BSB group. It's hard to say a moment I felt least comfortable with because I was always comfortable during the trip” (female, sustainability). Both of these students rated the importance of religion as “not at all important” and classified themselves as “slightly liberal” with regard to their political views.

Some of the other responses from participants of varying service projects include the following, “9 - The girls in my group made a safe environment both on and off sight” (female, animal rights), “10. I feel most comfortable even though I did not talk much at the beginning, we all opened up and had fun later on. I feel least comfortable dealing with insects on site” (female, animal rights), “9, most comfortable whenever I was with the animals, least comfortable during times of conflict” (female, animal rights), and “9, I felt most comfortable helping in the community and bonding with the group members. I did feel under-prepared for

the long days. It was just something we had to adjust to” (female, youth and education).

### **Summary**

The results presented in this chapter represent the reflections of the 2016 Bulls Service Break participants. Five research questions were addressed and answered as part of this study. The data were analyzed based on the research questions to ensure that all research questions were answered through the analysis process. The research was conducted via pre-post comparison of the Moral Competence Test and through a systematic review of questionnaire responses.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with a presentation of the findings associated with each research question. The conceptual framework used to guide this exploration will then be discussed and adaptations will be presented that integrate the findings of the study. This chapter will close with a presentation of the study limitations followed by suggestions for future research and practical implications.

**Research Question 1: What is the relationship between a student’s moral competence (as indexed by the C-score through utilization of the Moral Competence Test) and a student’s participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience?**

As described in the previous chapter, the results of the pre-post analysis of participants’ C-scores as they relate to the Moral Competence Test confirmed a 10.95 increase in moral competence upon completion of the alternative break experience. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest a positive relationship between the participation in a short-term service-learning experience and moral competence. To recall, the definition of moral competence was described by Lawrence Kohlberg as “the capacity to make decisions and judgments which are moral (i.e., based on internal principles) and to act in accordance with such judgments” (1964, p. 425). The Moral Competence Test presented two dilemmas, or brief stories, of individuals making moral decisions. The first is called the workers dilemma. In this predicament, the employees of a company suspect their managers of spying on them and using the information collected to

terminate some of the workers. The managers deny the accusations, which lead the workers to break into the company and steal transcripts to prove the managers were spying on the workers. The second predicament presented in the Moral Competence Test is called the doctor's dilemma. This scenario presents a woman who has terminal cancer and her doctor concludes there is no hope of saving her life. The woman is in a great deal of pain and asks the doctor to assist her in dying, to which he agrees and gives her an overdose of morphine.

After reading through each dilemma, students rated their level of agreement or disagreement with the actions taken by the characters in the predicament on a 7-point likert scale (-3 = strongly agree to +3 = strongly disagree). Next, the students rated the acceptability of six arguments in favor of the characters' actions on a 9-point likert scale (-4 = strongly reject to +4 = strongly accept). Then the students rate six arguments in opposition of the characters' actions. The six arguments presented in favor and in opposition reflect each of the six stages of moral judgment defined by Kohlberg (1964) and are presented in random order within each set of pro and con arguments (See Appendix A). Students were then presented with the second dilemma and the process of ratings was repeated again.

Upon completion of the MCT, the C-score, or "the ability of a subject to accept or reject arguments on a particular moral issue consistently in regard to their moral quality even though they oppose the subject's stance on that issue" (Lind, 2008, p. 200) was then calculated. In a comparison of C-score pre-trip and post-trip, the participants C-scores increased, confirming a positive relationship between the alternative break experience and moral competence.

**Research Question 2: How does participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience relate to the student's reflection with regard to moral sensitivity?**

To gain a better understanding of how a service-learning experience relates to the

participants' reflection of moral sensitivity, they were asked the following question: What about your Bulls Service Break experience was eye-opening? Two themes emerged from responses to question: (1) I am more self-aware as a result of this experience, and (2) I am more socially aware of the struggles that communities face on a daily basis. Moral sensitivity materializes in service-learning when individuals are engaged in the community they are serving and begin to identify conflicts and challenges within those communities (Harkavy, Puckett, & Romer, 2000; Scott, 2012).

To elaborate upon the first theme, "I am more self-aware as a result of this experience", we must first define self-awareness. According to the Oxford Dictionary, self-awareness is "conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires" (Oxford University Press, 2018). The connection between moral sensitivity and self-awareness has been evidenced in the literature in a variety of studies from various disciplines including nursing, human resources, management, and psychology, to highlight a few (Borhani, Keshtgar, & Abbaszadeh, 2015; Caldwell & Hayes, 2016; Travis, Arenander, & DuBois, 2004). From a communicative perspective, moral sensitivity is an arrangement of feelings and beliefs that stimulate behaviors associated with social helping (Calatayud & Nos Aldas, 2016). It may be helpful to think of it as a two-step process. First, the participant experiences moral sensitivity during which they identify specific challenges within the community served. Then, the participant experiences increased awareness of how those challenges tie into their feelings, motives and desires.

Given the importance of reflection in service-learning experiences, participants were encouraged throughout the Bulls Service Break to think about how their feelings, motives, and desires formed their understanding of the community they served. This intentional reflection

increased their self-awareness, which was evidenced through their responses to the research question focused on moral sensitivity. For example, a participant who served the community of Atlanta, Georgia mentoring young girls talked about how she “came out of the experience knowing more about myself than I could have imagined. I grew as a person, and I am very appreciative for that” (female, youth and education). Another response pertaining to increased self-awareness was exhibited by a participant whose service trip focused on animal rights. She became more aware of the dedication and passion it requires to take good care of animals. In addition to these examples, the other findings presented in Chapter 4 confirm a theme pertaining to increased self-awareness and moral sensitivity during the service-learning experience given the intentional reflection and connection between the community they served and their conscious knowledge of their own character, feelings, motives, and desires.

The second theme presented from the research question pertaining to moral sensitivity is “I am more socially aware of the struggles that communities face on a daily basis”. Social awareness is most often associated with emotional intelligence and can be defined as the ability to understand and respond to the needs of others (Goleman, 2015). This alignment to moral sensitivity becomes clear when reading the reflections presented by the students in the post-trip questionnaire. Throughout the Bulls Service Break experience, participants were absorbed in the community they served, and through that submersion were able to gain a deeper understanding of the community members’ feeling and perspectives, and take an active interest in their concerns. For example, the students who served with Junior Achievement in Birmingham, Alabama, and the Freedom Foundation in Selma, Alabama noted social awareness pertaining to the lack of uniformity in the students’ education. They also mentioned that they became more aware of family situations in the community they served, and better understood how a negative

family environment can impact a child's success in school.

Further evidence of social awareness and its connection to moral sensitivity was evidenced when a participant noted that she realized just how much the availability of education and social resources can affect a child's educational development. Other observations related to increased social awareness by participants from various sites included the lack of mentorship in the community, segregation in the 21st century, increased awareness with regard to the number of immigrants and undocumented workers in the Texas community, the poor structure of immigration services, and hardships experienced by those who live in a low income area. The examples set forth in this section display evidence of how the Bulls Service Break participants increased social awareness of the communities they served through their service-learning projects.

**Research Question 3: How does participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience relate to the student's reflection with regard to moral judgement?**

The major overarching theme associated with the student's reflection to moral judgement was "the realization of social injustice in our communities". To reiterate, moral judgment emerges in service-learning when students experience a struggle to determine a course of action to take that is just and fair (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999). The association between moral judgment and perceptions of justice, or the lack thereof, can trace its roots to Western political thought and Judeo-Christian ethics by which citizens can be educated to respect and protect the rights of their fellow man and ensure individual rights are fostered in the structure of society (Hogan & Dickstien, 1972). When students are engaged in a community that exhibits signs of injustice, they internally contemplate ways to better the situation and ensure fairness for their fellow man. For example, the students who focused on immigration observed struggles

related to identity and citizenship. Their questionnaire responses exhibited a frustration with the immigration process, which resulted in a variety of outcomes including one of the students questioning her own pride for the US government after seeing how hard that same government makes it for immigrants to obtain legal status. This experience demonstrates how the student's moral judgment was impacted by her view of social justice. As her knowledge of immigration became more enlightened, she struggled with determining a proper course of action that should be taken by the US government to deal with the issue of immigration. Similar struggles were shared amongst participants serving various social issues including homelessness, youth and education, public health, and sustainability, confirming the correlation between moral judgment and social justice.

**Research Question 4: How does participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience relate to the student's reflection with regard to moral motivation?**

Themes related to the third research question included “help others and give back to my community” and “treat others equally and with respect”. Moral motivation occurs after moral judgment has taken place. Kaplan so eloquently describes moral motivation as “a developmental process of self-organization and self-regulation out of which moral judgment and action emerge through the interplay of dynamically intertwined cognitive and emotional components” (2017, p. 195). In this study, as mentioned in the previous section, the students experienced moral judgment when they realized the lack of justice in the communities served. Upon this realization, moral motivation ignites and the individual becomes motivated to take action to remedy the injustice. Therefore, the themes that emerged from this research question are ways the participants are motivated to help others and given back to their community, and to treat others equally and with respect.

According to Johnson (2007), two factors that play an important role in moral motivation are rewards and emotions. Helping others and giving back to a community in need and treating others with respect can be extremely fulfilling, especially for individuals who value these actions, such as many of the students who participated in the Bulls Service Break experience. For example, one student talked about how he was indifferent to injustices prior to this experience and now “one of my core values is to give help when needed and asked” (male, youth and education). Another student talked about how the experience “motivates me to act towards others and be empathetic toward everyone if I can. If I see a situation where I can help, I see it as my social responsibility to do whatever I can, especially when it involves people who many not be as privileged as I am” (female, youth and education). Yet another student stated “a core value of mine is to respect others opinions. This value helps in interacting in my community because it is important not to crush others belief system, way of life or anything” (male, sustainability). Similar sentiments were echoed consistently by participants who confirmed the intrinsic reward of being morally motivated to help others and treat them with respect, regardless of differences in ethnicity, educational background, religious beliefs or economic standing.

Due to the connection between moral motivation and emotion, the fundamental basis for moral motivation is maintaining a continued desire to put emotions into action. As individuals become less motivated morally, their actions can become complacent, and if they shift from a positive outlook to a negative outlook by harboring feelings of anger or personal distress, those negative emotions can inhibit one’s ability to carry out moral motivations (Johnson, 2007; Kaplan, 2017).

**Research Question 5: How does participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience relate to the student's reflection with regard to moral character?**

To address this research question, the students were to rank their comfort level during their Bulls Service Break experience on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being extremely comfortable) and to give examples of when they felt most comfortable and least comfortable in their environment. These particular reflective questions were asked because they challenge the student to make connections between their service experience and who they are becoming as a moral being. Johnson explains the link between moral character and these questions extremely well, "Carrying out the fourth and final stage of moral action – executing the plan – requires character. Moral agents must overcome active opposition, cope with fatigue, resist distractions, and develop sophisticated strategies for reaching their goals" (2006, p. 72). Therefore, when students are asked to rank their level of comfort, they should exhibit some signs of battling with the before-mentioned obstacles such as fatigue, distractions, opposition, but must also exhibit the willingness to persist with moral action despite those obstacles. Persistence then becomes a positive moral character trait necessary for successful implementation of the actions cultivated from moral motivation.

The average response to the first part of the question, which asked the participants to rank their comfort level during their BSB experience on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being extremely comfortable) was 7.44. Participants associated increased levels of comfort when spending time with their service group, having a direct connection to the community they were serving, being given specific tasks to complete, and cultivating relationships with community members at their service site. Participants noted challenges to their comfort level when experiencing a language barrier, listening to the young children and homeless tell stories about their personal lives, answering questions presented by the little girls at one of the sites, hearing the kids talk poorly

about their teacher, witnessing the students being disrespectful and giving consequences, experiencing conflict, listening to opposing religious views, and getting used to the new environment.

As evidenced in these responses, the students encountered some situations that challenged their comfort level, and ultimately, their decision making process. But their persistence to serve the communities in need and their overall commitment to the service-learning experience fueled their moral motivation to accomplish what they set out to achieve. This triumph is a demonstration of the participants' moral character through the ability to overcome opposition, cope with unforeseen circumstances and develop strategies for reaching their goals.

### **Comparison Between Findings and Conceptual Framework**

In order to assess theoretical validity, it is necessary to compare the research findings to the conceptual framework. Theoretical validity “goes beyond concrete description and interpretation and explicitly addresses the theoretical constructions that the researcher brings to, or develops during, the study” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 50). At the inception of the study, the PI identified a conceptual framework to guide the development of the research questions, select the instruments, and inform the data collection and analysis process. This conceptual framework was assessed throughout the study for its continued validity and practicality. This framework was based upon Rest's Four Component Model of Morality and adapted based upon Scott's (2012) research in order to obtain a greater understanding of the connection between service-learning and moral competence. The conceptual framework includes moral sensitivity, moral judgement, moral motivation, and moral character. Evidence of these components was identified through analysis of the qualitative questions presented to the participants upon

completion of their service-learning experience. Furthermore, an increase in moral competence was demonstrated through pre-post analysis of the Moral Competence Test. Given the alignment of the data collected to the conceptual framework, the PI believes there is no threat to theoretical validity and can confirm the conceptual framework selected for this research was appropriate.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations to the current study that merit discussion. Subjective, interpretive and contextual data validity are often concerns surrounding qualitative research (Maxwell, 1992). One type of limitation applicable to the research conducted includes the threat to interpretive validity. This type of validity is defined as the degree to which the research accurately depicts the participants' importance of events and/or behaviors (Maxwell, 1992). Because the questionnaire data were collected via electronic communication rather than in-person, the researcher did not have the opportunity to make assumptions pertaining to tone or body language. If the questions had been presented to the participants in the form of a focus group or face-to-face interview, an opportunity for further prompting and observation of non-verbal communication by study participants would have increased the interpretive validity.

Another limitation relates to internal validity. Internal validity, or credibility, refers to the degree to which the research findings can be justified (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). As previously noted, the PI was responsible for data analysis and interpretation. While it is apparent that a correlation exists between participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience and the likelihood of increased moral competence, the PI cannot confirm a causal relationship due to the lack of internal validity. Additionally, given that students were not selected by random sampling or random assignment but rather applied to participate in the alternative break program, internal validity was compromised.

External validity was another limitation present in this study. External validity, or transferability, is the degree to which findings can be generalized to other populations, situations, or settings (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). This study examined the relationship between a co-curricular service-learning experience and moral competence. The sample size was small and the participants were not selected at random. Additionally, the students who participated in the Bulls Service Break experience volunteered for the study and may have already possessed a heightened level of morality related to their beliefs, perceptions, and experiences as compared to those who declined to participate. Findings of the study may not be representative of the experiences of alternative break participants from different universities, nationally or internationally.

Additionally, the pre-post methodology of the MCT is very weak given the lack of random assignment to the study population and the lack of a control group, therefore eliminating a true experimental design. Given this limitation, the PI cannot draw direct conclusions of the results.

The final limitation pertains to generalizability, which is the ability to apply the theory derived from the study to the universal population (Maxwell, 1992). Oftentimes, generalizability can be problematic for qualitative research due to concern with concepts and characteristics of a particular group, and therefore, the findings may only be applicable to a similar group (Auerbach & Silverman, 2002; Maxwell, 1992). While the themes pertaining to moral education may be applicable to other alternative break programs, each situation will have unique characteristics which may affect its generalizability to the entire population of individuals who participate in co-curricular service-learning experiences.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The findings from this study confirm a relationship between moral competence and participation in a co-curricular service-learning experience. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, there are many future areas of research to be recommended.

First, it would be important to replicate administration pre-post of the Moral Competence Test to other populations of alternative break participants, both at the University of South Florida and at other universities nationally and internationally, to determine if there is a significant relationship between moral competence and alternative breaks. It would also be worthwhile to conduct similar research on other types of co-curricular service-learning experiences to see if the same findings are present.

Additionally, it would be worthwhile to continue investigating alternative break participants' perceptions and insights pertaining to the domains of moral education to determine if the results of this study can be replicated and whether these perspectives are common amongst participants at other universities, both nationally and internationally.

Finally, it would be significant to use a controlled or experimental design to enable future investigators to control for threats to internal and external validity.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings generated from the current study have practical implications in higher education, particularly for the individuals or departments who organize and support co-curricular service-learning experiences or alternative break programs. Participants in this study shared meaningful perspectives pertaining to their Bulls Service Break experiences as they related to moral growth through reflective opportunities presented in the post-trip questionnaire. The themes generated from the qualitative analysis confirm Scott's (2012) research surrounding the connection between service-learning and moral growth, which was based upon James Rest's Four Components Model of Moral Behavior. Therefore, reflective questions presented in the qualitative methodology of this research may prove useful for programmatic design of experiential learning and service-learning curriculums.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings of this study revealed a relationship between a co-curricular service-learning experience and moral competence through the increase in moral competence as evidence by the Moral Competence Test C-score comparison, and through the exploratory discussion related to Rest's Four Component Model of Moral Behavior. Potential avenues of research were discussed that can expand the existing literature base and lead to a greater understanding of the relationship between service-learning and moral competence. Practical implications were also defined as related to the findings of the current study. These practical implications has the potential to promote short-term service-learning experiences for students within institutions of higher education both nationally and internationally.

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## **APPENDICES**

APPENDIX A:

MORAL COMPETENCE TEST

The *Moral Competence Test* (MCT)\*  
- English version -

© Copyright for this and all other language versions  
by Georg Lind<sup>1</sup> 1977 - 2014 (last revision of this text: Nov 15th, 2014)  
\* formerly called *Moral Judgment Test* (MJT), German: MUT

Dear participant,

On the following pages you will find two short stories. In both stories someone has to make a decision. You will be asked: What do you think about that decision?

After each decision you will find reasons pro and contra this decision. You will be asked: Do you agree with these reasons or reject them?

Please respond to all questions. Do not skip any. There is no time limit. But do hesitate too long, either.

Please do not write down your name anywhere.

I will repeat this survey with you sometime. In order to be able to couple your answers I need some information. Enter always two letters or digits only.

Please turn over

---

(Instruction for second MCT administration, e.g. in evaluation studies)

What follows are the two stories which you know already. You will also be given the same questions as the first time, so we can see whether your responses have changed.

Please turn over

## Workers

Recently a company fired some people for unknown reasons. Some workers think that their bosses are listening in on their private conversations through cameras and microphones in the building and using the information against them. The bosses say that they are not listening in.

The workers cannot legally do anything until they can prove that their bosses are listening in on their conversations.

Two workers then break into the main office and take the tapes that prove their bosses were listening in.

1. Would you agree or disagree with the workers' action...

I strongly disagree I strongly agree

-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
----	----	----	---	---	---	---

How acceptable do you find the following arguments *in favor* of the two workers' action? Suppose someone argued they were *right* for breaking in . . .

2. because they didn't cause much damage to the company.

I strongly reject I strongly accept

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

3. because the company did not follow the law that says that they should not listen in, the actions of the two workers were allowed to bring back law and order.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

4. because most of the workers would approve of their action and many would be happy about it.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

5. because trust between people and individual dignity count more than the company's rules.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

6. because the company had done something wrong first by listening in, the two workers were right in breaking into the main office.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

7. because the two workers saw no legal ways of proving the company misused their trust by listening in, and therefore chose what they considered the lesser of two evils.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

How acceptable do you find the following arguments *against* the two workers' actions? Suppose someone argued they were *wrong* for breaking in . . .

8. because if everyone acted as the two workers did, we would be going against law and order in our society.

I strongly reject I strongly accept

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

9. because a person must not break such a basic right as the right to protection of property and take the law into one's own hands, unless there is universal moral principle that says it is o.k. to do so.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

10. because risking getting fired from the company in order to help other workers is not very smart.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

11. because the two workers should have used all the legal ways available to them without breaking a law.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

12. because a person doesn't steal if he wants to be considered decent and honest.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

13. because the firing of other workers had nothing to do with them, the two workers had no reason to steal the tapes.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

## Doctor

A woman had cancer and she had no hope of being saved. She was in terrible pain and was so weak that a large dose of a painkiller such as morphine would have caused her to die. During a brief period of improvement, she begged the doctor to give her enough morphine to kill her. She said she could no longer stand the pain and would be dead in a few weeks anyway. After some thinking, the doctor decided to give her an overdose of morphine.

14. Do you agree or disagree with the doctor's action?

I strongly disagree I strongly agree

-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
----	----	----	---	---	---	---

How acceptable do you find the following arguments in favor of the doctor's actions? Suppose someone said he acted in a right way . . .

15. because the doctor had to act according to his conscience and what he believed was right. The woman's pain made it right for the doctor to ignore his moral obligation to preserve life.

I strongly reject I strongly accept

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

16. because the doctor was the only one who could do what the woman asked; respect for her wish made him act the way he did.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

17. because the doctor only did what the woman talked him into doing. He does not need to worry about negative consequences.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

18. because the woman would have died anyway and it didn't take much effort for him to give her an overdose of a painkiller

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

19. because the doctor didn't really break the law. Nobody could have saved the woman and he only wanted to shorten her suffering.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

20. because most of his fellow doctors would most probably have done the same thing in a similar situation.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

How acceptable do you find the arguments presented *against* the doctor's action? Suppose someone said that he acted in a *wrong* way. . .

21. because he acted opposite to other doctors' beliefs. If the rest of them are against mercy-killing, then the doctor shouldn't have done it.

I strongly reject I strongly accept

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

22. because a person should be able to have complete faith in a doctor's commitment to save every life even if someone with great pain would rather die.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

23. because protection of life is everyone's highest moral duty. We have no clear moral way of telling the difference between mercy-killing and plain murder.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

24. because the doctor could get himself into a lot of trouble. Other doctors were punished before for doing the same thing.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

25. because he could have had it much easier if he had waited and not interfered with the woman's dying.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

26. because the doctor broke the law. If a person thinks that mercy-killing is illegal, then one should refuse such requests from the patient.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

27. How difficult was it for you to fill out this questionnaire?

Not difficult at all Very difficult

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

28. Roughly how much time did it take you to fill it out? \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

APPENDIX B:

BULLS SERVICE BREAKS  
POST-TRIP REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. I attended BSB 2016 as a:

- Participant
- Site Leader
- Other (please specify)

2. What type of work did you perform during your BSB trip? (choose all that apply)

- Manual labor (e.g., construction)
- Direct involvement with people receiving service (e.g., tutor, coach, visit)
- Prepare and/or deliver meals
- Clerical or administrative work

3. Please reflect on your 2016 BSB experience and select the response that most closely aligns to the statement below.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	----------------

I was emotionally challenged by the experience.

I was physically challenged by the experience.

I was an active participant rather than an observer.

I engaged in a variety of tasks.

I felt that I was making a positive contribution.

I had an important level of responsibility.

I received input from on-site supervisors.

I was appreciated by on-site supervisor.

I developed relationships with people in the community being served.

I worked directly with the community.

I met a community identified need.

Any other reflection or thoughts you would like to share with us?

4. What about your BSB experience was eye-opening?

5. What are your core values in life right now? How do these values motivate you to act in socially just or responsible manner?

6. While engaged in your BSB, what did you observe or experience that challenged your worldview?

7. On a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being extremely comfortable), rank your comfort level during your BSB experience. When did you feel most comfortable? When did you feel least comfortable?

8. For the next few questions, please think about your BSB experience and your career plans. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	----------------

My BSB experience had no influence on my career plans.

My BSB experience made me want to change career plans completely.

My BSB experience made me want to stay with the same general career plans but alter them in some way to focus on helping others.

My BSB experience made me want to take time off after college (or graduate school) to participate in a volunteer program such as the Peace Corps, Americorps, Teach for America, or Doctors without Borders.

How else (if at all) did your BSB experience influence your career plans?

9. Complete this sentence: Because of my Bulls Service Break experience, I am....