Experiential Learning in the "First in the Nation" Primary State: Efficacy and Impact of a REAL Political Science Educational Experience

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Introduction

In January 2016, during the run up to New Hampshire's "first in the nation" presidential primaries, a cohort of Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) political science faculty and students traveled to New Hampshire to engage in an upper division undergraduate study-away course on Political Campaigns and Communication. Responding to enthusiastic evaluations by students who participated in the course, this distinctive experiential learning course was repeated with a new cohort of students during the January 2020 New Hampshire primaries. In their respective cohorts, these two groups of students spent ten days crisscrossing the state, meeting presidential primary candidates, hearing lectures from state officials, campaign operatives, media professionals, and VCU faculty, and then volunteering with various presidential campaigns to get a feel for primary campaigns as they occurred both on the ground and within the highest offices in the New Hampshire statehouse. Student costs for the program were funded by three generous donors who were persuaded to support this experiential approach to studying American politics, believing it had the potential for important, transformational learning for the students. Additionally, university funds, secured by the primary instructor for other service work, helped

offset some of the remaining costs. In 2016, donations paid for all student expenses, while the donations for the 2020 program covered students' transportation, lodging, and meal costs; but not their tuition.

In fall 2021, VCU launched its Relevant, Experiential and Applied Learning (REAL) education program, requiring every undergraduate to complete at least one REAL course before graduation. The university reasoned that the goal of launching REAL was to ensure that every enrolled student will do "something that matters" and take a course that is going to "make an impact" (Frisa, 2021). However, questions remain as to how REAL activities, in general, impact the students who participate in them. Similar questions remain concerning specific REAL activities, including short-run study-away courses like the Political Campaigns and Communication class' trip to New Hampshire. Does this kind of study-away experience impact student learning? Does this kind of study-away experience carry the potential for long-term beneficial outcomes related to democracy and citizenship? Does this kind of study-away experience carry the potential for long-term personal and professional growth? Does this kind of study-away experience have positive spillover effects for the university and the department?

To answer these questions our research examines the impact of the experiential learning iterations of the course as compared to students who take similar courses in more traditional, didactic, classroom settings. Using a mixed-methods approach our research explores the impact on student learning associated with participation in our study-away courses. To strengthen our design, the responses of these two New Hampshire respondent groups are compared to the responses of a second group of students who were enrolled (in 2016, 2018, or 2020) in the more traditional, on-campus, in-class versions of the Political Campaigns and Communication course.

The Arc of Experiential Learning – literature from theory to practice to impact

Experiential learning is a student-learning-centered educational approach in which students are put into or observe real world experiences in order to fully immerse themselves into a subject. It is an "active learning" pedagogy generally characterized by courses designed to augment classroom-based learning centered "hands on" coursework or field-based experiences (Bennion, 2016). Educational philosopher, John Dewey, is generally credited as the founder of the experiential learning movement (Miettinen, 2000). Dewey "sought to develop a theory of experience and present his thoughts about experience as an optimal stimulus for learning" (Beard, 2018). His foundational work emphasized continuity and interaction and pointed to how the interaction between conditions of learning (mental, external, etc.) influence participant's experience and how experiences continually influence the future. He defined it as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Beard, 2018).

Building on Dewey's foundational work, Kolb defines experiential learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." (Maddie/Hollie cite?) His widely cited 1984 theory, argues that experiential learning pedagogy is characterized by a four-stage model: concrete evidence (feeling), observations and reflections (watching), formation of abstract concepts and generalizations (thinking), and testing implications of new concepts in new situations (doing). Thus, experiential learning emphasizes learning over teaching, focuses on the student experience, is a deeply engaging method of learning, offers unexpected forms of professional development, and encourages experimentation (Cahill, 2020). Increasingly, experiential educators in higher education use experiential learning theory to enhance teaching effectiveness and student engagement and learning (Kolb, 2017).

The array of higher education courses included under the experiential learning umbrella has grown quite large. Learning-centered classroom-based courses now might include simulation, role-play, gaming, and laboratory experimentation. Field-based experiential learning courses increasingly include service learning, internships, student teaching, independent research, practicums, field exercises, studio performance, study abroad, and study away course designs. Moore holds that it is important to distinguish experiential learning pedagogies from other types of "hands-on" learning. Doing so can be problematic, however, given that similar applied experiences can also be found in job training programs in some areas of both the business and governmental sectors (Moore 2010). To help make clear the distinction, Moore argues that clear educational goals must be articulated, and any experiential learning program must include an ample length of immersion time for learning, with a minimum of a few weeks, recommended. Others argue that reflection is also key, particularly when it relates back to information the students learned in the classroom. J.W. Roberts argues experiential learning goes beyond simply "learning by doing," noting that experiential education as a philosophy, draws from other philosophies such as service learning: combining learning goals with community service, cooperative learning: organizing classroom learning to involve students working together, action learning: individuals learning to problem solve on their own, etc. (Roberts, 2011).

Experiential learning has taken hold across virtually all academic disciplines, from STEM fields, to business education, to the humanities, arts, and social sciences (Oxley & Ilea, 2015) (Peppas, 2005) . While the early experiential learning literature focused on the philosophy and origin of experiential learning, the psychological implications of experiential learning, and

techniques for developing experiential learning courses, recently, questions of efficacy and application have become a substantive part of the experiential learning research.

According to one meta-analysis of the experiential learning literature, between 1960 and 2019 nearly 50,000 articles were published on the subject, including theoretical, application, and evaluation research on experiential learning across the disciplines (Seaman, Brown, & Quay, 2017). According to Roberts' findings, however, much of the current experiential learning literature is focused specifically on service learning with much less attention devoted to study abroad, internships, or hands-on, student-led research (Roberts, 2018). (For an excellent review of the Service Learning literature see (Salam, Ikandar, Ibrahim, & Farooq, 2019) There is a considerable case study, cross-disciplinary literature that reports on methods, course design, and describes "how to" construct and direct experiential learning courses of various modalities.

A portion of the literature addresses experiential learning techniques without specificity to disciplinary requirements or modalities. Campbell's work, for example, identifies four objectives educators can use to measure student experience and learning outside of the home university. These four objectives: academic or intellectual advances, intercultural sensitivity evolvement, personal goals, and professional benefits can be used to help structure further experiential learning studies or surveys on its impact (Campbell, 2016). Marlin-Bennett explored the pros and cons of experiential learning generally and provided suggestions for alternative ways to structure future internships, recommending goal setting, an integrated curriculum, and student evaluation alternatives. Their work found that the combination of experiential and classroom learning was beneficial and essential to the program (Marlin-Bennett, 2002).

Much of the increasingly robust literature assessing the impact and efficacy of experiential learning is predicated on both disciplinary differences and pedagogical design

features, however (Burch, et al., 2019). A 2019 meta-analysis located more than thirteen thousand journal articles, dissertations, thesis articles, and conference proceedings written about experiential learning, though their analysis yielded a mere 89 studies containing empirical data with both a treatment and a control group (Burch, et al., 2019). While more research is needed on experiential learning in higher education and on student learning outcomes related to their learning experiences, there are significant niches of research centering on either specific disciplines such as language learning, which has a long tradition of immersive pedagogies, or on particular experiential learning designs, such as service-learning course, which have a wider presence across the American higher education landscape (Roberts, 2018).

Not all experiential learning disciplines and approaches lend themselves easily to efficacy assessments or comparisons to traditional didactic learning. Language and culture study abroad programs, for example, are a familiar experiential learning model across most college campuses as they provide both "visibility and prestige" to universities that provide them, but Milleret found that evaluating the efficacy of programs like study abroad language programs, particularly in comparison to learning outcomes in traditional language classroom-based courses, is difficult. This is so, she holds, because of the small numbers of participants, because each student placement is unique, and because language and cultural acquisition are inherently personal, and thus difficult to assess (Milleret, 1990). By contrast, Stone, et al, used an active learning survey to measure the impact of a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program. Their results suggest that the study abroad was critical to "disrupting the hegemony of traditional goals of tourism programs by helping students connect with more critical issues (Stone, Duerden, Duffy, & Hill, 2016). Finally, Varela's meta-analysis of 72 study abroad programs found that student outcome success varied by the type of course immersion and the specific program content (Varela, 2015).

Drawing on the more traditional model of study abroad experiential learning pedagogies, many higher education (HE) institutions are now embracing the idea of "study away" experiential learning course structures and pedagogies (Lane, Huffman, Brackney, & Cuddy, 2017). Study away education argues that the benefits of international study, including developing diverse and new cultural competencies and enhanced self-identity formation, can be equally as powerful when students apply study abroad pedagogies to domestic programs, as well (Sobania & Braskamp, 2009). The impact of such "study away" courses has been examined within academic disciplines as varied as fashion design (Gomez-Lanier, 2017) to nursing (Hayes, Huffman, Brackney, & Cuddy, 2017) to athletic training programs (Abe-Hiraishi, Grahovec, Anson, & Kahanov, 2018). It is worth noting that the foreign travel/ domestic travel distinction that initially delineated study abroad and study away has begun to erode within both higher education and the experiential learning literature, with the traditional measures of value and success originating in study abroad now more frequently applied to study away courses, as well (Sobania & Braskamp, 2009). For example, increased cultural awareness and sensitivity is a consistent finding for study abroad research, but now is used as a measure for assessing study away, as well (Abe-Hiraishi, Grahovec, Anson, & Kahanov, 2018). In Rust's study on the impact of an embedded study-away experiential learning component to student development of intercultural learning, she found positive change in intercultural learning when compared to students in courses without the embedded study away experience (Rust, 2015). Overall, however, there has been little literature examining the efficacy of this kind of study away, immersive domestic course, generally, and an even greater paucity of research examining study away in political science, specifically. While political science has an active and engaged literature about experiential learning, generally, the bulk of it is primarily descriptive, narrative, or qualitative in

format (Pruce, 2021). Within the political science experiential learning research only a small portion of the literature examines experiential learning impact and efficacy through quantitative data methods.

Experiential Learning in Political Science

As a discipline, political science has a long tradition of taking seriously pedagogical conversations about best practices for teaching political science. For example, two major publications in the field have been devoted to teaching political science literature and discussions over the past fifty years of the discipline (PS and The Journal of Political Science Education). The American Political Science Association's annual national conference on Teaching and Learning (TLC) in Political Science is a well-attended annual event in which primarily political science faculty share their research, experiences, and insights about teaching political science across all levels of higher education. A core subject of this on-going conversation continues to be consideration of experiential learning strategies within political science education (Bennion, 2016) (Freeman, 1991). Within political science, classroom-based experiential learning predominantly features simulations, role-playing and games (Cohen, Alden, & Ring, 2020), while field-based experiences are most often internships, practicums, and service-learning courses (Kapiszewski, McClean, & Read, 2015). Undergraduate research and independent study courses, common throughout political science undergraduate programs, provide a sort of hybrid experiential learning model, as well. While these types of courses represent the overwhelming majority of political science experiential learning classroom situations (Kammerer & Higashi, 2021), political science study abroad courses within the curricula of international relations and comparative politics, are also fairly common. Such courses offer a fully immersive experiential pedagogical class structure, with students taking classroom-based courses, often while also living

in settings and locations away from their home institutions and countries of origin and citizenship. A good deal of political science experiential literature, in particular, focuses on simulations, particularly within international relations (Kelle, 2008) (Lantis, 1998) and American politics courses (Smith & Phillips, 2021) (McQuaid K. , 1992). Shellman & Turan found that IR simulation use "increases students' interest in political science and international relations and provides a memorable experience that they will not forget" (Shellman & Turan, 2006).

In general, the literature reports positive impacts on student learning within political science experiential learning pedagogies. Doherty, for example, found that giving women in particular "hands-on" political science experiential learning makes them more confident professionally and in the political science field in general (Doherty, 2013).

In terms of enhancing student civic engagement, service learning and other experiential learning methods, have become an increasingly important component of much American government curriculum. Such courses have generally been found to be effective in cultivating the skills, efficacy and identities that increase student involvement in learning and in public life. (Strachan, 2015); (Glover, Lewis, Meagher, & Owens, 2021); (McQuaid K. K., 1992); (Chickering, 2008); (McCartney, 2006); (Galston, Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education, 2001); (McLauchlan). (George, Lim, Lucas, & Meadows, 2015) (Coker, Heiser, Taylor, & Book, 2017). Cabrera and Anastasi, for example, compared students who participated in their experiential learning course, Transnational Justice – a service learning course that included students completing twenty hours of service work for a transborder food drive, with students in a similar class that had no service learning component. Their research found participation in the experiential learning course increased students' valuation of service learning work, generally, an increased likelihood of future service learning activities, increased

recognition of the importance of valuing others, and students felt they had a better understanding of individuals from other populations (Cabrera & Anastasi, 2008). Conversely, however, other research has questioned the efficacy of "beyond the classroom" methods for teaching civic engagement (Galston, 2001)**.**

Experiential learning courses have increased political knowledge and political attention. Gorham (2005) argues that learning is inherently political, and as such should cultivate political thinking, defined as students thinking critically about their own interests in politics and judging the political world. He notes that this can and should be accomplished by answering the question, "what makes a good citizen?" (Gorham, 2005). Political thinking, the author notes, cultivates and increases political knowledge among students. Students engaging with and exploring their civic power increases interest in the nature of the government and political discourse.

Participation in political science experiential learning courses has been found to have positive impact on student success generally, and may influence student post-graduation career and educational goals development. In surveying students who had participated in Model UN and judicial internships at their institution, Bradberry and De Maio found that their experiential learning courses resulted in several contributions to the success of the participants, including improving students' time to graduation and increasing the likelihood of attending law school or other graduate school after graduating. Their data also suggested that participants show increased rates of finding employment after graduation. In post-participation surveys, their student participants indicated that they thought participation had helped them in several practical skills areas and provided insights that helped them prepare for future professional success (Bradberry & De Maio, 2019).

Participation in experiential learning may influence how students think about their institutions after graduation. Some research suggests that experiential learning positively influences how alums and graduates respond to their home institutions (Carlston, Szyliowicz, Ouyang, & Sablynski, 2018) (Larsson, Marshall, & Ritchie, 2021).

VCU's REAL Experiential Learning Course: New Hampshire Primary Politics

Our project examines VCU political science's unique "study away" model of experiential learning, in which students traveled to another, *domestic* locale, to engage in an immersive learning experience that combined "on the ground" learning with more traditional classroom-based pedagogical work. A 2007 qualitative study examined the impact of a similar study away class to the New Hampshire primaries. The researchers in that study found that participation in their immersive experiential course in New Hampshire, demonstrated "a substantial impact on engagement and a modest effect on some measures of political efficacy" among students surveyed ten months after the course ended (Elder, Seligshohn, & Hofrenning, 2007). One of the dimensions they used to capture civic engagement was "interest in politics as a vocation," with "questions about the respondents' future interest in running for political office, pursuing a career in politics, or getting involved in future campaigns" (Elder, Seligshohn, & Hofrenning, 2007). Additionally, using student course evaluations and journals, Fullmer found that students participants in a 2020 New Hampshire First in the Nation study experienced learning that "complemented and enriched their classroom lessons" (Fullmer, 2022).

Our research picks up where these assessments left off. Whereas past research used data collected within months of the students' experiential learning experiences, and thereby measured short-term effects of such programs, our research project is able to expand our understanding of such programs' potential effects to include long-term effects as well. By following up with

students who were enrolled in both the New Hampshire study away iteration of the Political Campaigns and Communication course, as well as their counterparts who enrolled in the traditional on-campus iteration, and by doing so years after their participation in the program ended (between 3 to 7 years, depending on the cohort), this study provides quantitative and qualitative data to examine the potential impact and efficacy of short-run political science study-away programs.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

Does this kind of study-away experience impact student learning?

H1: Subjects who participated in the New Hampshire study away trip will report evidence of the presence of experiential learning components in the course.

H2: The rate at which subjects who participated in the New Hampshire study away trip will partake in REAL activities (Relevant Experiential and Applied Learning) will outpace the students who participated in the traditional classroom iteration of the course.

Does this kind of study-away experience carry the potential for long-term beneficial outcomes related to democracy and citizenship?

H3: Subjects who participated in the New Hampshire study away trip will exhibit higher levels of political engagement than students who participated in the traditional classroom iteration of the course.

H3a: Students from the NH cohorts will report higher rates of voting in both high-salience (presidential, congressional, gubernatorial) elections and low-salience (state and local elections) than students in the traditional on-campus cohorts.

H3b: Students from the NH cohorts will report higher levels of political engagement via campaign activities than students in the traditional on-campus cohorts.

H3c: Students from the NH cohorts will report higher levels of political engagement via activities that are not inherently related to campaigns or elections than students in the traditional on-campus cohorts.

H4: Students who participated in the New Hampshire study away trip will report higher levels of political trust and political efficacy than students who participated in the traditional classroom iteration of the course.

H5: Students who participated in the New Hampshire study away trip will report higher levels of political attentiveness and be more politically knowledgeable than students who participated in the traditional classroom iteration of the course.

H6: Students who participated in the New Hampshire study away trip will report higher levels of political ambition than students who participated in the traditional classroom iteration of the course.

Does this kind of study-away experience have positive spillover effects for the university and the department?

H7: Students who participated in the New Hampshire study away trip will exhibit higher levels of institutional affinity than students who participated in the traditional classroom iteration of the course.

H7a: Students from the NH cohorts will report higher levels of alumni engagement than the students in the traditional on-campus cohorts.

H7b: Students from the NH cohorts will report higher favorability ratings of the university and the department than students in the traditional on-campus cohorts.

H7c: Students from the NH cohorts will report a higher intention to engage in philanthropic efforts than students in the traditional on-campus cohorts.

Does this kind of study-away experience carry the potential for long-term personal growth?

H8: Students who participated in the New Hampshire study away trip will report higher levels of personal growth as a result of the course than the students who participated in the traditional classroom iteration of the course.

H8a: Students from the NH cohorts will report higher levels of internal growth, societal relationships, and professional development.

H8b: Students from the NH cohorts will report higher levels of satisfaction with their current career path and higher levels of optimism about their future career path than students in the traditional on-campus cohorts.

H8c: Students from the NH cohorts will report higher levels of confidence than students in the traditional on-campus cohorts.

Survey Methodology

Recruiting Subjects from past Political Campaigns & Communication cohorts

In order to test our hypotheses, we used a multi-staged and multi-pronged strategy to recruit subjects from both of the Political Campaigns and Communication New Hampshire cohorts (2016 & 2020) and from four semesters of the same course's traditional on-campus cohorts (between 2016-2020). To build our contact list we exported old rosters and cross-checked them with email addresses and phone numbers within the university's data platform; although a majority of contacts are now alumni the platform maintained a record of their most recent contact information the school had on fire. Additionally, personal outreach through social media helped update out-of-date information for a portion of the study population.

The recruitment protocol for our two Research Assistants called for up to four separate points of contact. First, potential subjects were contacted via email; the email introduced the purpose of the study, linked the study directly to the authors (their former professors), made a direct appeal to the contact based on their enrollment in the Political Campaigns & Communication course, and hyperlinked the survey before closing with gratitude. If, after at least 72 hours, no survey response was recorded, the Research Assistants again reached out to those potential subjects again. This second contact was attempted via text messaging and contained much of the same information as the first email; however, the text message did not include the hyperlink to the survey. Instead, our contacts were prompted with a question at the end of the text message: "Is this something you're willing to help out with?"

If a contact answered in the affirmative, our Research Assistants sent another text in response; this third point of contact thanked them for their willingness to participate, reminded them of where the survey had initially been sent via email, and asked them to provide an alternative email address if they no longer check the email we had on file. Alternate responses were provided during this third point of contact if a potential subject said they did not wish to participate ("Okay, thanks for your consideration anyway. If you change your mind please just let me know.") or if we did not hear any response; in this latter case, our third attempt at making contact reminded our contacts that "wanted to check back in to see if you had given any more thought to helping" the researchers (their former professors) and then reiterated the information that was in the second text. This third point of contact occurred 48 hours after the second point of contact. Finally, after another 48 hours had elapsed, our Research Assistants made a fourth attempt at recruiting subjects; this, too, was made via text messaging and provided much of the same information as they had received in previous texts or emails.

Recruitment began on December 17, 2022 and culminated on January 5, 2023. In total, we attempted to reach a study population of 54 students and alumni who had participated in the New Hampshire cohorts and 101 alumni who had participated in the traditional on-campus cohorts. We received our first survey response on December 17 and our last response on January 29. Our response rate was 76% for the New Hampshire cohorts and 26% for the traditional on-campus cohorts, totalling 67 total subjects (41 New Hampshire; 26 on-campus).

Because the subjects who participated opted into our study voluntarily, and were not randomly selected, the demographic composition of each cohort differs in substantial ways: the New Hampshire subjects included higher proportions of women, first generation students, and Pell Grant recipients, while including lower proportions of white students and alumni. Because we don't have these sorts of demographic records for non-responding contacts we cannot decipher whether these demographic differences emerged as a result of differences in who participated in each of the two iterations of the course, or whether these demographic differences emerged as a result of which students opted into the study.

Designing a survey to determine whether the New Hampshire study away trip embodied Kolb's model of Experiential Learning

In order to gauge whether our Political Campaigns and Communication study away trip to New Hampshire can be appropriately categorized as experiential learning, we borrowed from Kolb's model and asked students a battery of twelve questions related to experiential learning pedagogy. Each of the four stages in Kolb's model (concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) were operationalized using three indicators. Students were asked to agree or disagree with the statements as they pertained to the New Hampshire class using a seven-point ordinal scale. Because this may have been a

challenging task for some subjects, due to the length of time that has passed since the trips occurred, we provided the option of saying they did not remember.

Designing a survey that measures the effects of the New Hampshire study away course

Subjects in each of the two cohorts were given near-identical surveys. Each survey consisted of questions operationalizing metrics to test our hypotheses; however, the subjects who participated in the traditional classroom iteration were not asked a battery of questions measuring the presence of experiential learning as were the subjects from the Political Campaigns & Communication: New Hampshire course. Similarly, while demographic traits and open-ended questions about memories or takeaways from the classes appeared on both versions of the survey, only the New Hampshire subjects were prodded with questions about their willingness to participate in a focus group as well (the traditional, on-campus subjects were not). In total, the New Hampshire subjects answered 54 questions while the on-campus subjects answered only 47.

To measure subjects' rate of *political engagement (H3)* the survey included four different types of questions.[1] First, to measure the rate of participation in elections, subjects were asked to indicate which (if any) of seven recent elections (2016-2022) they had voted in: the 2016 presidential election, the 2017 Virginia gubernatorial election, the 2018 midterm elections, 2020 presidential primary election, the 2020 presidential election, the 2021 Virginia gubernatorial election, and the 2022 midterm elections. Subjects were able to choose from four answer options in order to indicate whether they had voted or not and, if not, to indicate whether they had not voted because they were ineligible to vote at the time (for example, because they were not yet 18, because they were not a resident of Virginia, because they were not a citizen, etc.). A second

[1] This section of the survey also included a battery of items asking subjects about their perceptions of good citizenship (specifically asking whether good citizenship required certain political behaviors); however, as these findings are not presented in the study, the questions themselves are not detailed herein.

political engagement question asked about voting as well; this question asked subjects to "think about local elections: for example things like state legislature and city council. How often would you say you vote in your local elections?" and provided a five-point ordinal scale ranging from never to always for subjects to select from (the question also included an option to indicate whether they are ineligible to vote in these types of elections).

Two other political engagement questions used batteries of questions to measure political engagement outside of the voting booth. A third question -- interested in measuring both the between-group effects of the New Hampshire and on-campus cohorts, and the within-group effects of subjects before and after taking the Political Campaigns and Communication course -- asked subjects to indicate whether they had participated in seven different types of political activities that are related to campaigns (or, in some cases, political campaigns or political causes) before they enrolled in the class, after they enrolled in the class, or whether they had never participated in an activity (they were allowed to select both before and after if necessary). The types of activities covered in this question battery were: working on a campaign, volunteering on a campaign, donating to a campaign, attending an event or rally, displaying support for a campaign (for example, yard signs, stickers, buttons, etc.), trying to convince somebody to support a candidate, or posting on social media about a candidate. And a fourth political engagement question provided a battery of items that were not specifically related to campaigns or elections, but that also demonstrate participation within or outside of the political system in order to bring about change; these activities were: participating in a protest, boycotting or engaging in consumer activism, signing a petition, contacting a public official, helping a community group try to solve a political problem, and talking to people about political issues

(either in person or online). This question asked subjects to consider only the years 2020 through the present, thereby allowing for a direct comparison of both groups of subjects.

The survey also included questions to measure subjects' levels of *political attentiveness* and *political knowledge (H5)*. To measure attentiveness to political information we used a five-point ordinal scale (never to always) asking subjects to answer "how often do you actively seek out political news and information?" We then asked subjects to rate how often they engaged with political social media in a variety of ways: following political accounts, liking political posts, sharing political posts, commenting on political posts, and posting their own political content. To measure political knowledge, we crafted a campaigns- and elections-oriented battery of questions concerning recent news events; a decision to focus on content featuring this specific type of political knowledge was chosen because of the specific content of the course.[2] These twelve questions were presented as multiple choice questions (one correct answer and four plausible, yet incorrect, answers); subjects were not able to skip questions or say they did not know the answer.

Although additional questions pertaining to other sorts of political knowledge could have been introduced, concerns about the length of the knowledge battery (and the overall survey) persuaded us to keep our focus on political knowledge more limited in scope. Additionally, these sorts of questions (surveillance questions focusing on people and players rather than static rules of the game) seemed more appropriate when measuring the political knowledge of subjects who were primarily political science majors. Finally, due to the way the selection of substantive (issue-oriented) questions about domestic and foreign affairs can bias our perceptions of whether

[2] The knowledge battery also included two questions that were not campaign- or election-related; however they are not included in our analysis herein. These questions were added in order to provide greater descriptive representation of our subjects since the answers were otherwise primarily white and male.

a subject is politically knowledgeable (interest, relevance, and certain demographic traits may dictate the types of issues that one is more or less likely to know about), and due to the evolving nature of the substance of politics (combined with the lengthy process of soliciting IRB approval and subject responses), such questions were not included in our battery either.

And because the survey was administered online, where nobody could monitor their behaviors during the course of completing the survey, we prefaced that section of the survey with the following: "This section is interested in learning how much you know about certain people & parties in U.S. politics. Although there are right and wrong answers to these questions, it is important that you not look up the answers or ask anybody for help. Please answer these questions honestly even if you do not know the answer." We also reminded subjects that "it is important that you answer this question without looking up the answer or asking for help" prior to each and every one of the twelve questions. And, finally, the end of our survey included the following information, "Because our data will be invalid if you looked up answers to the questions measuring what you know about current political parties and elections, we ask that you confirm whether or not you looked up relevant information earlier. If you did, we will keep all of your other answers, but we will not include your answers to the political knowledge questions in our data set," before asked "Earlier in the survey, when we asked you fact-based multiple choice questions about current political parties and elections, did you look up any information to help you get the right answers?". In order to try to get students to answer this question honestly, and avoid social desirability problems, we presented only two answers -- the answer admitting that they had looked it up also included the word "sorry" as so to provide subjects a way to express regret and solicit vague forgiveness from the ether; however, this was either ineffectual or our

subjects all took our requests not to look information to heart, because all of our subjects said that they could confirm that they had not looked up the answers using outside sources.

The survey also included questions designed to measure subjects' levels of *political trust* and *political efficacy (H4)*. Using a seven-point ordinal scale, subjects were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with four different statements. To measure political trust they were asked about whether "the federal government can generally be trusted to do what is best for the country" and "politicians who run for office generally want to help people and fix society's problems." Thus, these two questions captured feelings about abstract, aggregated political actors in the nation's capital (federal government) as well as individual political actors (politicians). To measure political efficacy, subjects were asked to agree or disagree with the following: "I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics" (a measure of internal efficacy) and "There are many legal ways for citizens to successfully influence what the government does" (a measure of external efficacy).

In order to test whether subjects in our New Hampshire cohort were more likely to engage with *REAL activities (H2)* than their on-campus counterparts (and to test whether there were within-group differences in both cohorts before and after taking the Political Campaigns and Communication course) subjects were asked to indicate whether they had participated in a wide range of experiential learning activities at VCU before and after enrolling in the class (they could also choose that they had never participated, or check both the before and after box if appropriate). These activities included: internships, study abroad or study away, service learning coursework, independent studies or research with a faculty member, joining a club on campus, and a generic "other experiential learning opportunity" option (although students were unable to specify what "other" opportunity they were thinking of).

Measures of *institutional affinity (H7)* included a few different types of questions. First, subjects were asked to use a modified feeling thermometer ranging from 0-10 (rather than 0-100) to indicate how "very unfavorable or cold" or "very favorable or warm" their feelings are toward VCU and also toward VCU's Department of Political Science. Second, subjects were asked about their level of connectivity to the university and department as alumni by reporting whether they had engaged in a number of activities since graduating; these included following (or continuing to follow) an official social media account, attending alumni events, attending events open to the public, donating money, contacting faculty or staff (about something other than a letter of recommendation), and recommending that somebody they know apply for admissions to VCU (subjects who had not yet graduated were allowed to indicate that and were not included in our analysis of this question). Third, subjects were asked two questions about their openness to act philanthropically in ways that benefit future students and/or the university and department. One question asked subjects whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "I think it's important to pay it forward and help current and future students have the same opportunities I did at VCU" (seven-point ordinal scale). The other question was organized as a matrix, asking students to indicate how likely or unlikely (seven-point ordinal scale) they are to donate "in the future, after you are financially stable" to VCU (not necessarily the political science department), to a VCU scholarship fund, to the Political Science department's general operating fund, and to a political science study abroad or study away program. An emphasis was placed on the potential for future donations, after a subject feels financially stable, because we assume that the ability to donate must precede any real deliberation about whether one will donate or not.

To test whether subjects in the New Hampshire cohorts exhibited higher signs of *personal growth (H8)* as a result of having taken the Political Campaigns and Communication course than their on-campus counterparts, subjects were asked a battery of questions designed to measure internal growth, societal relationships, and professional development. Using a seven-point ordinal scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree), subjects reported whether they thought that taking the Political Campaigns and Communication course contributed to "a better understanding of myself and my values" and their "ability to be independent" (both categorized as internal growth), their "ability to accept differences in other people" and their "desire for more diverse friendships and social networks" (both categorized as societal relationships), and their "willingness to work hard and sacrifice in order to do well in school or in my job," the importance they place on "developing my skills and talents," "developing skills and intercultural competencies which contributed to obtaining my first job after graduation," and "clarifying my professional goals" (each categorized as professional development). And because being comfortable in uneasy or unfamiliar contexts may be another way subjects could showcase personal growth, they were also asked a battery of questions (using a seven-point ordinal scale) about their levels of comfort with ambiguity, meeting new people, networking, speaking with people about things they feel passionately about (both those they know and those they do not know), and disagreeing with others (both those who are in higher positions of authority and those who have different political values or beliefs).

Subjects were also asked "regardless of where you're at on your career path right now, how satisfied would you say you are with where you're at in your career?" and "regardless of where you're at on your career path right now, how optimistic or pessimistic are you when thinking about your future as a young professional?" (both measured using seven-point ordinal

scales). For these two questions, subjects could also indicate if they were still an undergraduate student, in which case their answers were not factored in the analysis for these particular metrics. These two questions were also prefaced with wording that encouraged subjects to remember that "every career path is different -- some are longer than others, some involve lots of zigs and zags, some involve abandoning a path for another one, and some involve creating a new path entirely on your own." This decision was made primarily in order to ensure that this line of questioning would not make subjects feel disheartened and in order to make sure we were receiving subjects' accurate feelings and not what they thought would be most desirable; by making sure students knew that we understand the challenges young people experience in the beginnings of their careers, we hope to have avoided untruthful answers that subjects may have provided if they felt that they were being judged or that they would be disappointing us.[3]

Finally, the survey measured *political ambition (H6)* by asking subjects whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "at some point in the future, I may seriously consider running for political office (for example, local, state, or national government" (seven-point ordinal scale).

Running a Focus Group to dive deeper into the impact of the New Hampshire study away trip

We wanted to survey students about their experience in New Hampshire and included in that survey was a question determining whether students would be interested in participating in a focus group about their experience in New Hampshire. We reached out to those who said they

[3] Another question in the survey asked whether subjects had enrolled in a graduate or professional degree, held a job in politics, held a job in campaigns specifically, pursued a career in politics, and pursued a career in campaigns specifically. During coding, however, it became clear that the data may be inconsistent for two reasons: first, some subjects checked a box indicating they had worked or pursued a career in campaigns but did not do the same for the boxes concerning politics more broadly; second, some subjects may have interpreted that "pursuing" a job or a career could simply mean having made an attempt rather than actively making headway on that sort of pathway. Because of this we have not included this data in this study; if we can reconcile some of these we may do so in the future.

would participate in the focus group, and sent another survey to that group gauging their availability for the focus group. In order to survey students, we obtained their contact information through VCU records, in accord with the institution's IRB specifications. We created a spreadsheet with their names and contact information and as survey responses came in, we updated the sheet so we could cross-check survey results before moving on to each new contact. We contacted them four times about filling out the survey. First via email, we asked if the person would like to participate by responding to an attached survey. Second, within 72 hours we texted asking to answer the survey again but without the link included. Third, we texted within 48 hours of the last text if they responded to the second one, confirmed we had their correct email and if they did not respond to the first text, we sent a follow up again asking if they would be willing to take the survey. Fourth was a text within 48 hours of last contact and follow up to any responses or ask a final time to take the survey.

Once we did the four rounds of contact, we monitored who responded to the survey and who said yes they would be able to participate in a focus group. We reached out to that group of people twice with a google form link asking them what days would work best for the focus group. First via email, and then second within 48 hours of the first via text. The time with the most available participants was chosen (Jan. 22). A zoom link was sent out to those who said that date worked for them and reminders were sent out 24 hours and 72 hours in advance to the focus group.

We conducted a single, early evening, virtual ZOOM communication platform-based, systematic research focus group on January 22nd of this year. After participant introductions and refamiliarization with the functionality of the platform, the Focus Group was conducted by the Moderator, using a standard focus group research protocol. The moderator guided the hour

long discussion using a five area question guide focused on obtaining data designed to enrich the quantitative findings. The real-time ZOOM transcription of the discussion serves as the data source for this study.

Descriptive Findings

The effects of studying away on student learning

Subjects in our study provide support for the hypothesis that participating in the New Hampshire study-away Political Campaigns and Communication course contributed positively to their learning across four experiential learning metrics (H1): concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Using a seven-point scale, aggregated scores (reported in Table 1, below) provide evidence that subjects' perceived each metric to be present in the design of the course at a high degree. Of the four categories, subjects rated the three indicators of Concrete Experience as being the most present in the course; this finding is not surprising given that these indicators mentioned "direct practical" and "concrete" experiences, and "real-world experience" that is perhaps difficult to escape in a study away course. The importance of the course was also reiterated a number of times during our focus groups as well; in fact, one of the most-used words during the focus group was "formative" with one subject saying that the class was "the most formative thing that I did at VCU, personally."

TABLE 1: Evidence of Experiential Learning in New Hampshire	
Concrete Experience	6.85
Reflective Observation	6.51
Abstract Conceptualization	6.58
Active Experimentation	6.54

Perhaps because of the positive impact on their learning experience within the Political Campaigns and Communication course, subjects in the New Hampshire cohort reported more enduring participation in experiential learning (REAL) activities when compared to their counterparts in the on-campus iteration of the course (H2). Whereas students in the traditional on-campus course reported slightly higher rates of engagement in REAL activities before taking Political Campaigns and Communication, the reverse is true after taking the course. Upon completion of the course, subjects in the New Hampshire cohorts reported higher levels of REAL engagement, thus contributing to a larger within-group difference comparing REAL (Table 2) engagement before and after taking the course. One focus group subject spoke to this directly, saying, "It was kinda like a stepping stone to traveling abroad, because, I mean, you weren't completely alone. But you also weren't constantly like bombarded with like chaperones...I feel I would have studied abroad sooner, and I wish I did,"

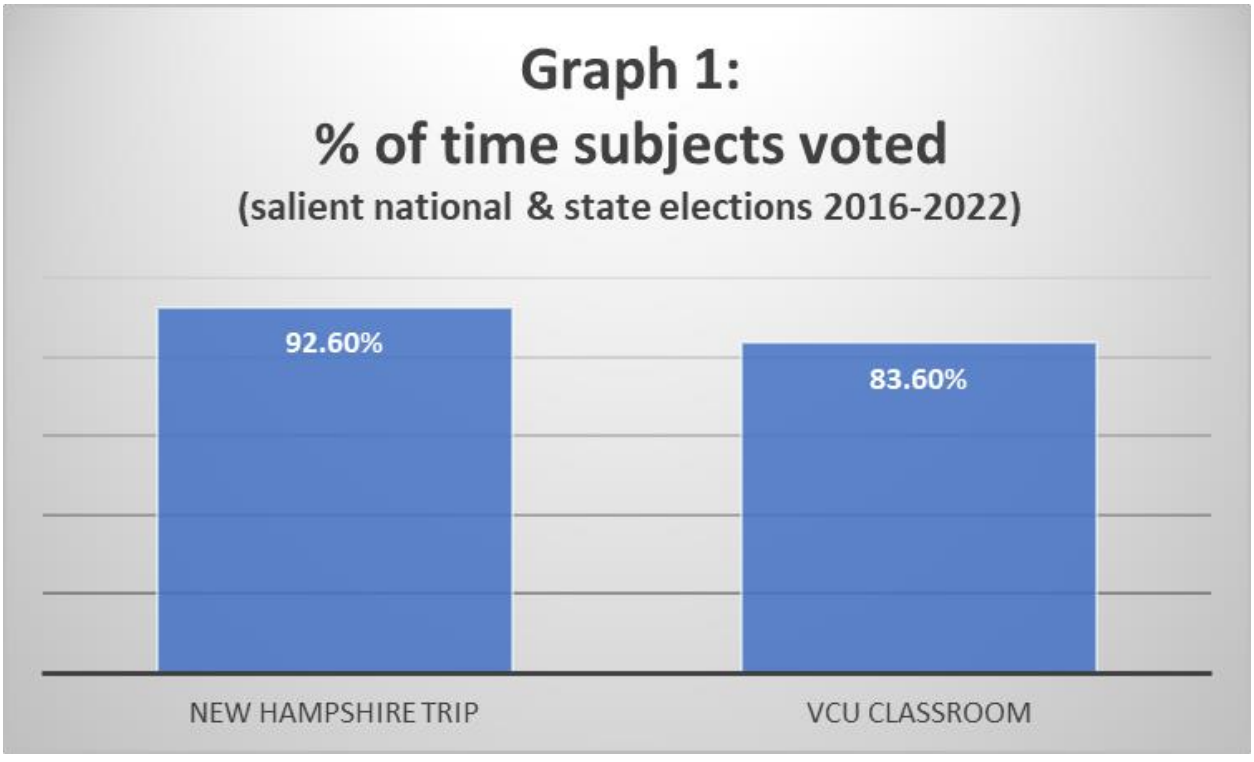
While these findings could also, potentially, be attributed to other factors -- for example, a practical concern; how long they had remaining in their studies at VCU after they took the course -- our data is unable to control for alternative explanations. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic may have suppressed subjects' ability to participate in some activities, though both the New Hampshire and on-campus cohorts (2020) would have been equally impacted by this unexpected global challenge.

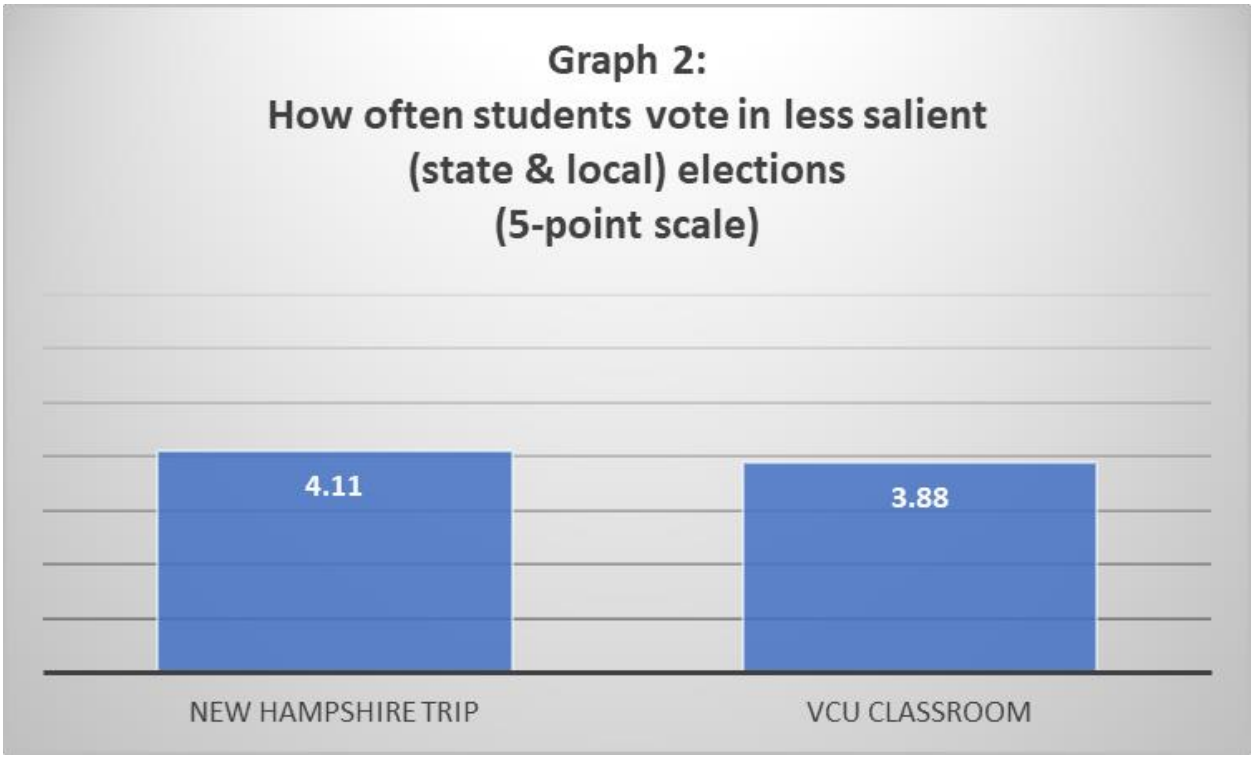
TABLE 2: Relevant Experiential and Applied Learning (REAL) Engagement

	New Hampshire	On-Campus
# of REAL activities participated in before taking the class	1.658536585	1.846153846
# of REAL activities participated in after taking the class	2.219512195	1.538461538
Difference in the # of REAL activities after taking the class compared to before the class	0.56097561	-0.307692308

Does this kind of study-away experience carry the potential for long-term beneficial outcomes related to democracy and citizenship?

Across all three metrics of political engagement (H3), subjects in the New Hampshire cohorts demonstrated higher rates of participation than those subjects who took the course in a traditional on-campus setting. Not only did the New Hampshire subjects vote more often -- in both more- and less-salient elections (H3a) -- than did their counterparts in the traditional classroom, but they also demonstrated higher levels of participation outside of the voting booth (Graph 1 & 2). When coding the rate of participation in salient elections, subjects who were eligible but did not register and/or vote were coded as a 0 and subjects who did vote were coded as a 1; these data points were then averaged together to produce a percentage of the time a subject voted when eligible (elections when a subject was ineligible, for whatever reason, were not factored into the average and, thus, do not penalize subjects).

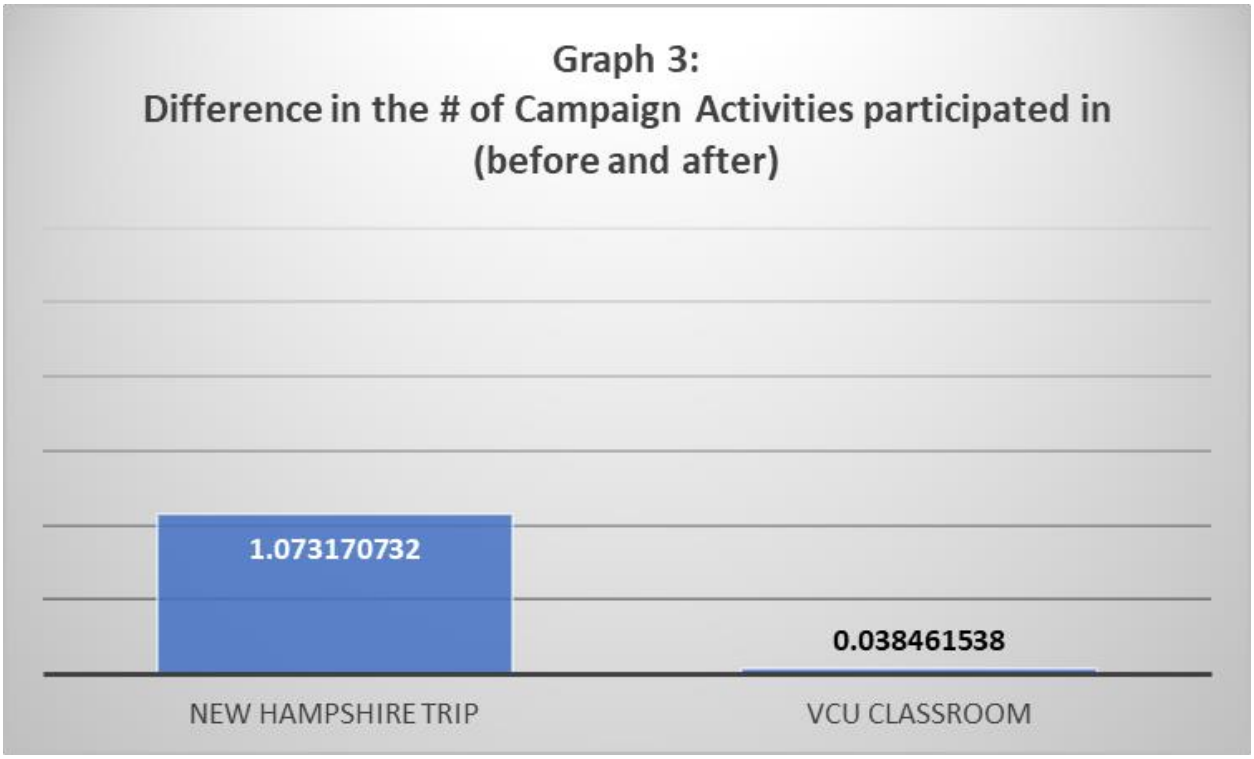




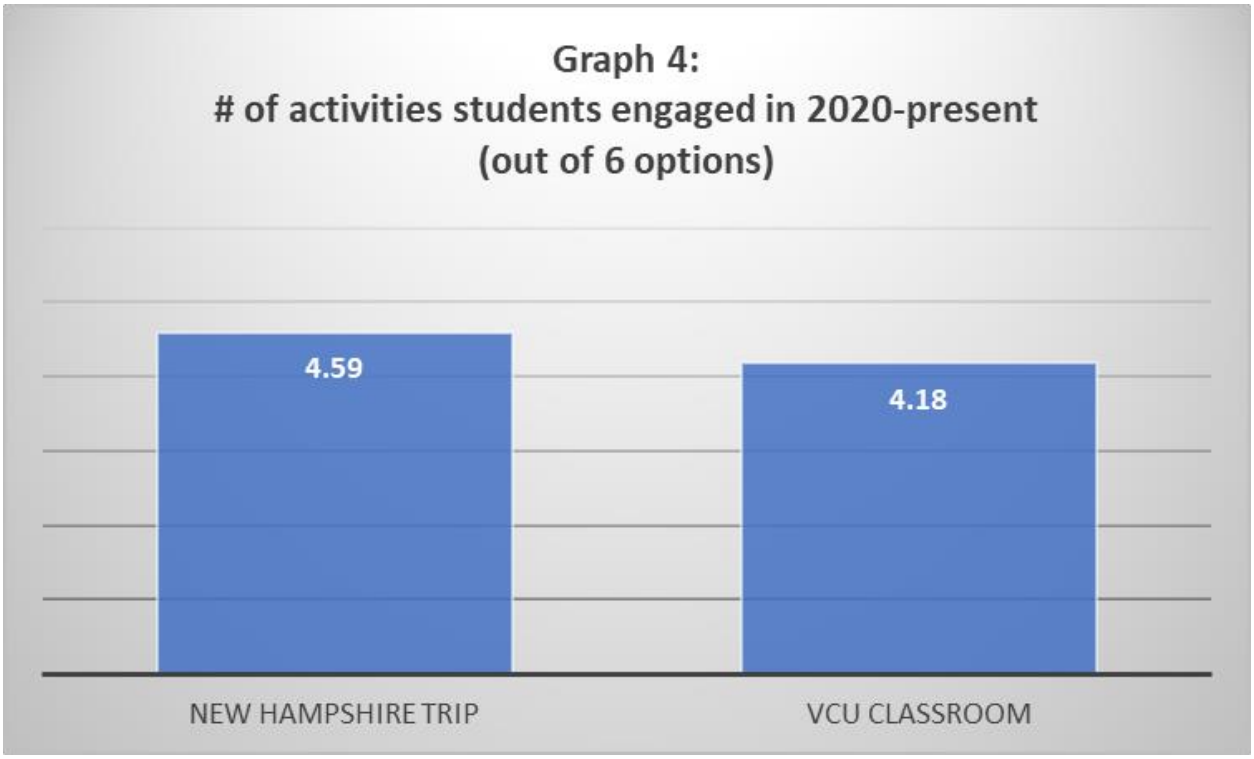
While both groups of subjects participated in campaign activities (H4a) at about the same rate prior to taking the course on Political Campaigns and Communication, their rates of participation differed upon completion of the course, with those in the New Hampshire cohort reporting participating in more of those types of activities after the trip than those who took the course on campus (Table 3 & Graph 3).

TABLE 3: Campaign Activities

	New Hampshire	On-campus
# of campaign activities participated in before taking the class	4.073170732	4.076923077
# of campaign activities participated in before taking the class	5.146341463	4.115384615
Difference in the # of campaign activities participated in after taking the class compared to before	1.073170732	0.038461538



Similarly, our New Hampshire subjects demonstrated higher rates of participation in non-campaign-oriented political activities (H3c) since 2020. It is worth noting that these effects could be driven by a recency effect wherein subjects in the New Hampshire cohort may have been demonstrating short-term effects that the classroom cohort lost in the long-term; however, our data cannot determine whether that is having an outsize influence. Additionally, many of the activities being measured in this index were amplified post-2020 (especially due to the Women's March and Black Lives Matter organizing); these activities were participated in at unusually high rates by people across the country, from varying backgrounds, and representing a multitude of demographic traits, so it is entirely within reason to expect that if long-term effects did exist for the on-campus cohorts that we would see them manifested in our metrics.



When measuring the impact of the New Hampshire experiential learning trip on other metrics that are normatively desirable for democracy and citizenship, we see less consistent results. For example, although New Hampshire subjects reported slightly lower levels of trust (H4) in the federal government compared to the on-campus subjects (-0.06 difference), they reported higher levels of trust in individual politicians (+.70). Given the opportunities for New Hampshire subjects to get up close and personal with candidates, and having the chance to speak with them directly about issues that concern them, it's possible that those subjects would consider politicians to be more apt to believe that they truly want to help people and fix problems, but still not trust the government in Washington, DC as a whole. Perhaps because the majority of subjects were political science majors, and even those who weren't completed and passed a political science course on political campaigning, there was not much difference between the New Hampshire and on-campus cohorts when comparing levels of internal efficacy (+.16). However, perhaps because trust and efficacy are often thought to be positively

correlated, the New Hampshire subjects were also more likely to report a higher level of external efficacy (+.51) efficacy. In this vein, it is possible that subjects who are more apt to believe that individual politicians generally care about helping people and finding solutions to problems would also think that citizens can find many ways to successfully influence what the government does.

On the other hand, while our New Hampshire subjects did report higher tendencies to seek out political news and information (+.22)[4], their higher levels of political attentiveness (H5) did not translate into higher levels of political knowledge (H5) about campaigns, elections, and relevant political actors within the two-party system. Instead, when taking into account the full 12-item index (coded 1 for correct, and 0 for incorrect), subjects from the New Hampshire cohort had a lower political knowledge index score than the subjects in the on-campus cohort (-.58). However, when looking at a very specific piece of political knowledge most closely related to the New Hampshire study abroad trip, the roles reverse. When asked to identify the state that Joe Biden has proposed to replace New Hampshire as the first state in the nation to vote in Democratic presidential primary elections, 66% of New Hampshire subjects correctly answered "South Carolina" versus 54% of on-campus subjects (+12%). As students in New Hampshire immersed themselves into the political landscape of the state, and as they often openly questioned the suitability of New Hampshire as the "first in the nation" state, they may have been particularly attuned to political information regarding changes to the primary calendar.

It is possible that the higher response rate from the New Hampshire cohort (76%) and the lower response rate from the on-campus cohort (26%) is having some effect on our findings

[4] A negligible +.06 difference was found when comparing rates of engaging with political content via social media.

pertaining to political knowledge. Because the survey was an opt-in survey, if the sorts of on-campus subjects who responded to the call were disproportionately better students than those who did not, it's possible that we could see those effects emerge in multiple choice political knowledge questions. It is also worth recognizing that both groups had a very high degree of political knowledge using our measures compared to students who might otherwise be considered fairly similar in composition.[5]

As had been hypothesized, subjects from the New Hampshire cohort did report more openness to running for office in the future, thereby signaling higher levels of political ambition (H6) than their on-campus counterparts (+.71). This finding is particularly interesting after engaging with subjects in our focus group, wherein subjects seemed to imply that the trip allowed them to develop a kind of political intelligence or sensibility **t**hat was generated from their experiences of "real" politics on the ground. For some, this encouraged them to engage further in politics, while others experienced a kind of disillusionment with the political world. The idea of political intelligence, here, is characterized as understanding the "realities" of political actors and candidates (their ordinariness, their pragmatic focus on what gets them re/elected), recognizing the sincerity and dedication of campaign staff, experiencing both the mercurial and ephemeral features of an actual campaign, and recognition that when one "pulls

[5] Specifically, we had piloted the majority of our political knowledge questions with a group of students who were currently enrolled in an upper-level U.S Parties & Elections course (similar to, but distinct from, the Political Campaigns and Communication course). These students, hopefully, held a similar interest in politics broadly, and elections specifically, as they had chosen to enroll in this particular course. Thus, we might have expected similar levels of political knowledge across our pilot group and our two cohorts for this study. This was not the case, however, Instead -- when using only the questions that appeared in both the pilot index and the study index -- our pilot group answered only 34% of questions correctly on average, a far cry from the 77% (New Hampshire) and 83% (On-campus).

back the curtain" the public facing appearance of politics is not the same as what may actually go on behind the scene of politics within the campaign.

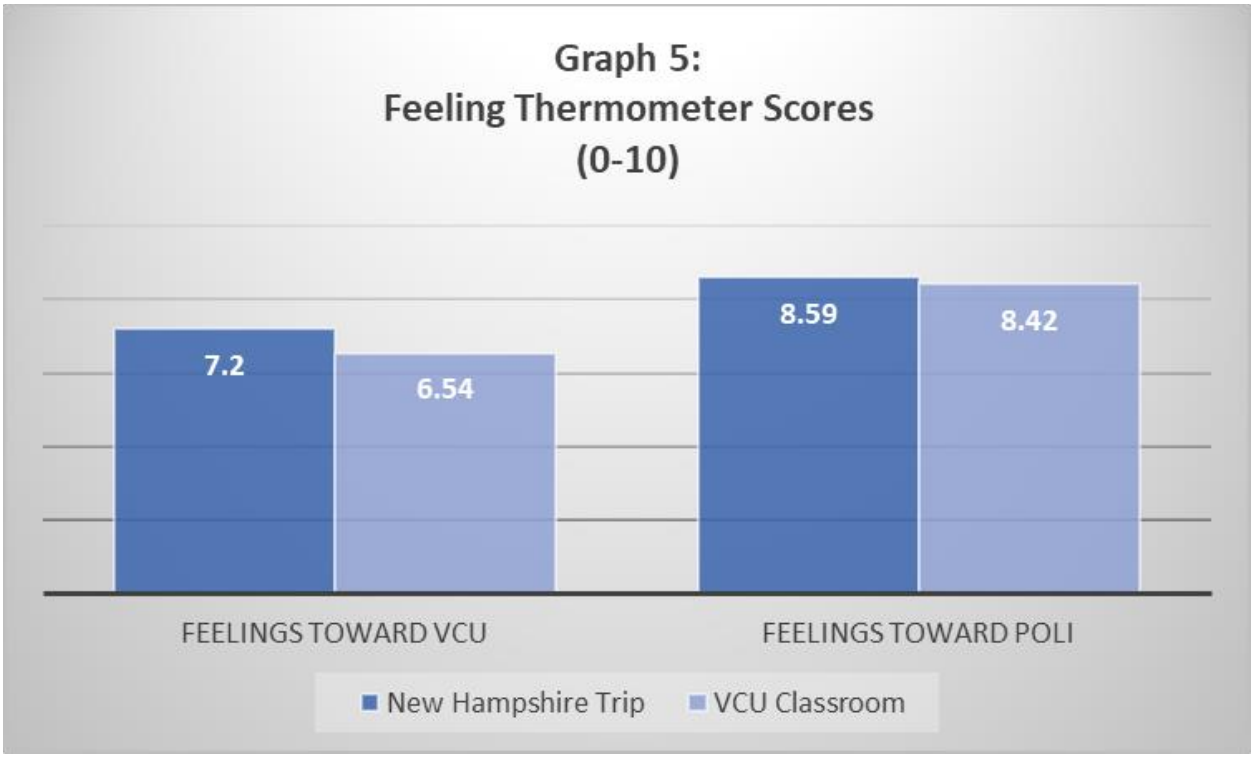
For example, as one participant put it, "I was just, I guess, kind of disappointing to have, like, the curtain pulled back. And you just see these people that they're just like, not all of them were buffoons, but some of them were just like regular people fumbling, and somehow, you know, I I don't know. They weren't any more special than anyone else." If, once the curtain is pulled back, participants on the New Hampshire trip realized that candidates were no more special than anyone else -- including themselves -- then it makes sense that some of them may have since determined that a career as a politician isn't something that is out of reach after all.

On the flip side, the trip seemed to make other participants realize that they had no interest in being involved in political campaigns at all, let alone as a candidate. As one participant put it, *doing* politics revealed to them that they didn't want to do politics: "I lost faith in a lot of things that originally got me in to politics."

Does this kind of study-away experience have positive spillover effects for the university and the department?

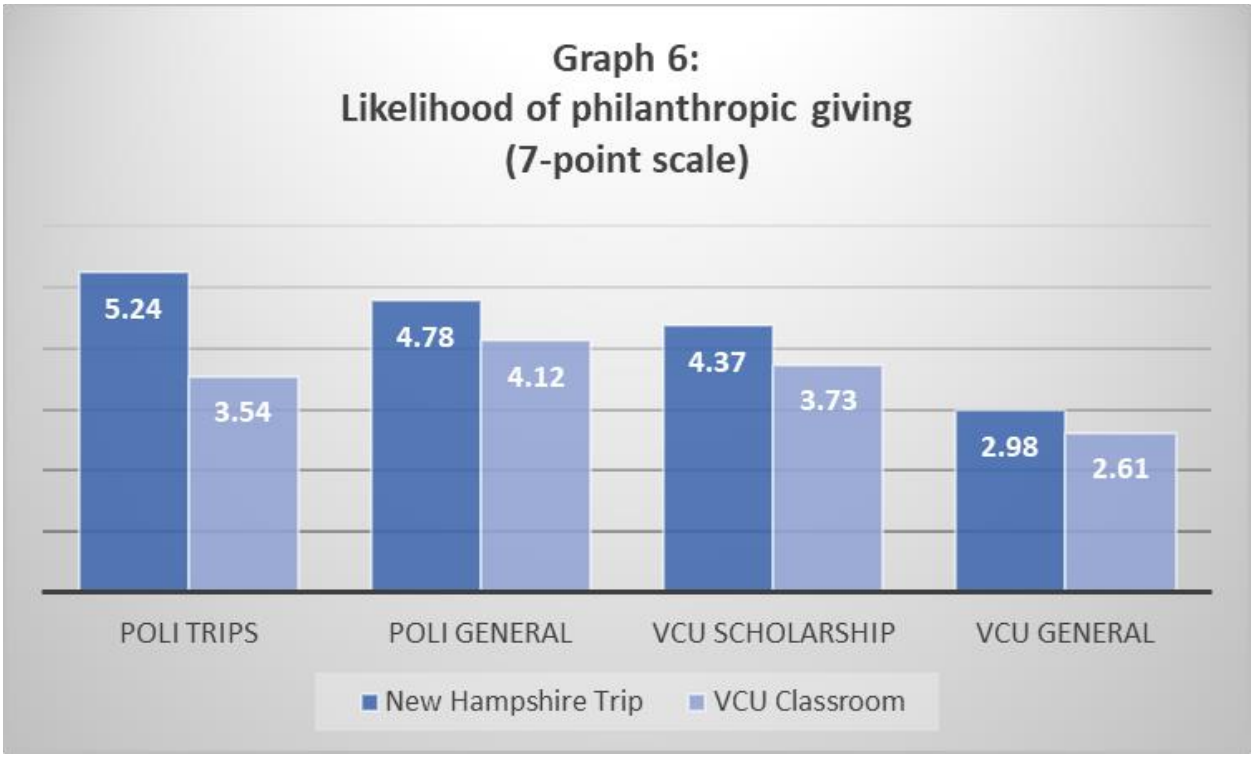
Across all measures of institutional affinity (H7), subjects in the New Hampshire cohort exhibited positive spillover effects that can be attributed to the experiential learning component of the Political Campaigns and Communication course. While New Hampshire subjects reported only marginally higher levels of favorability (H7b) toward the Department of Political Science at VCU (+.17), the gap between favorability levels for VCU as an institution was a bit more substantial (+.66) (Graph 5). Our department is fortunate enough to have students who generally feel a good deal of affinity toward us, so the smaller gap in feelings toward VCU

Political Science isn't wholly unexpected. However, these findings are more illustrative for institutions as a whole, especially larger institutions where students may feel a disconnect, or institutions with limited investments in their alumni, because they suggest that study away programs, like the one in New Hampshire, are one way of increasing positive feelings toward an alma mater more generally.



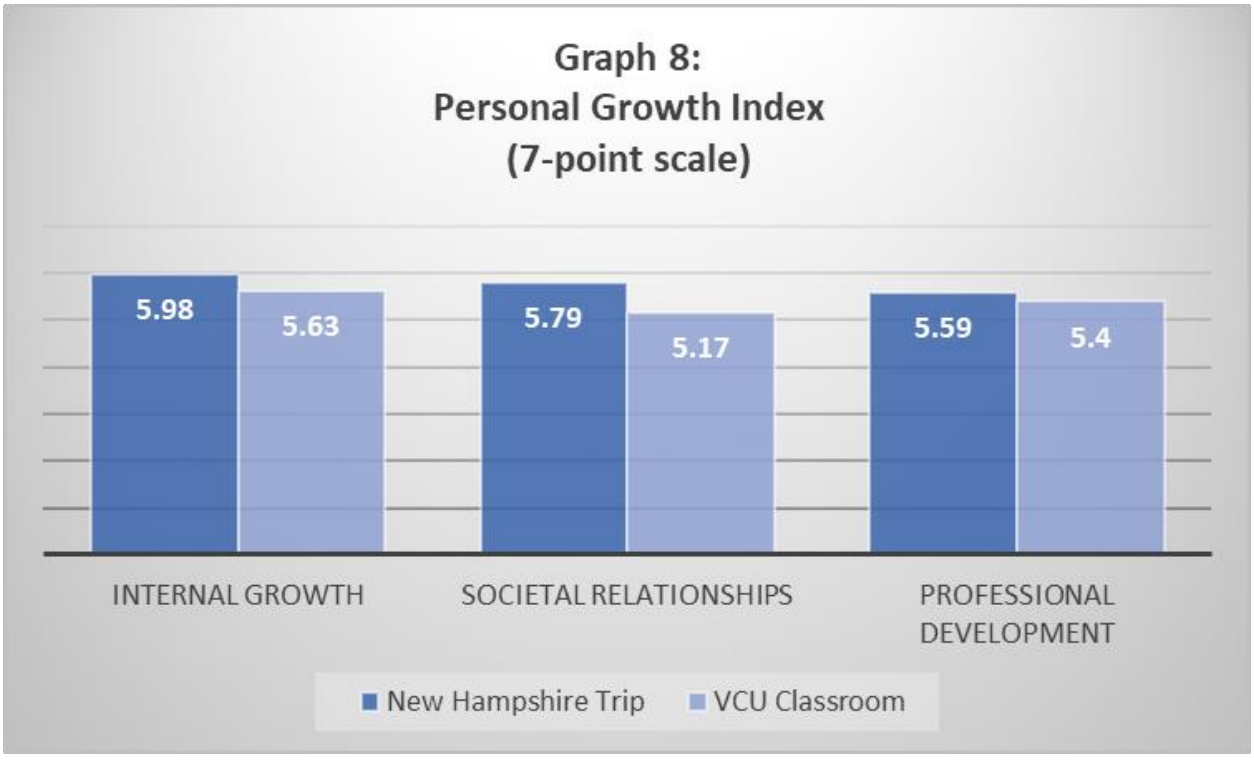
Another way that the New Hampshire cohort demonstrated a stronger relationship with our institution than those in the on-campus cohort is the number of activities they have engaged in as alumni (H7a). Out of six possible activities, varying in levels of ease and formality, New Hampshire subjects reported engaging in 2.58 activities versus the 2.19 activities engaged in by the on-campus subjects (+.39). And, perhaps most importantly from the perspective of the institution and their development teams, are our findings regarding the impact of our study away program on alumni philanthropy (H7c). Not only do subjects in the New Hampshire cohort report higher levels of agreement with a statement regarding the importance of "paying it

forward" to help current and future students have the same opportunities they had compared to on-campus subjects (+.91), but New Hampshire subjects also indicated a greater likelihood that they will become donors as measured by four specific metrics (Graph 6). It's also worth noting that their own trip propelled the likelihood that they will donate to similar study abroad or study away trips to the top of the four categories, while the potential to donate to trips was the second lowest category for the on-campus cohort. And while the average response for the on-campus cohort fell below the neutral option (a score of 4) for three of the four categories, the New Hampshire cohort's average response rated above the neutral option for three of the four categories. Finally, while the likelihood of donating to VCU more generally remains low among both groups, that, too, remains higher for the New Hampshire cohort.



Does this kind of study-away experience carry the potential for long-term personal growth?

Across three of our four metrics, New Hampshire subjects reported higher levels of personal growth than the subjects who enrolled in Political Campaigns and Communication in the traditional classroom setting. First, our Personal Growth Index (H8a) shows heightened levels of internal growth (+.35), societal relationships (+.62), and professional development (+.19) (Graph 7). Interestingly, the professional development questions netted the smallest gap, though subjects in the focus group reiterated that the hands-on, applied learning experience in New Hampshire positively impacted their future career options and job market successes. Some discussed the fact that simply having their campaign experience embedded in the class on their resume got them noticed by potential employers. Others indicated that the applied activities in the class "jump started" their career trajectories. One participant commented on how the hands-on experiences of the course gave them a kind of career readiness. And another suggested that it gave them "qualifications" that others might not have had.



And although the professional development category seemed to also have the lowest rating when compared to the other two categories, two additional questions on the survey continued to document a gap between New Hampshire subjects and on-campus subjects as it relates to our subjects' career paths. When measuring satisfaction about where they are currently at in their career (+.68), and optimism about their future career prospects (+.43), New Hampshire subjects reported higher ratings than their on-campus counterparts (H8b). For example, one focus group participant, one of the few student who has not yet graduated, tied the New Hampshire class to her future career directly, explaining, "I think it really helped and influenced me to become or be involved in political journalism and understand the jargon. Simply because, I mean, with the trip, I don't think I would have been able to be in the space, so it influenced me from the very jump of my career in political journalism."

Lastly, while New Hampshire subjects did report higher levels of comfort in potentially discomforting situations (+.11) -- what we've conceptualized as one aggregate level of confidence (H8c) -- the gap was quite small, and the specific breakdown of confidence related to varying scenarios differed, with on-campus subjects being more likely to report possessing the quality than their New Hampshire counterparts in some categories and not others. For example, though the New Hampshire subjects had marginally higher levels of confidence when speaking to people (either people they knew or strangers) about issues they're passionate about (+.11), they had lower levels of confidence when disagreeing with people (those in authority and those who don't share their beliefs and values) (-.47). Still, confidence was a topic that came up repeatedly during the focus group, with subjects reflecting upon the positive impact that participation in the course made on their self-confidence. One subject noted that they discovered they were "not scared" to work with high level officials ("supposedly powerful people") after the

class because of an exchange she had with Hillary Clinton -- one of *the most* powerful people in U.S. politics; she recalled that Clinton had never actually answered her question, and so now she feels compelled to keep pushing until she gets answers. Another subject said that the trip forced them to try things that they had not done on their own before, specifically referring to their tendency to be introverted as something that was challenged by the course, that took them out of their comfort zone, and that made them more confident to try new things. And another said that "this class definitely ...pushed me not to be afraid of politics, and it's given me a framework to discuss some of the things I've learned with other politicians."

And, according to our focus group, this sort of confidence, aligned with increased political intelligence, has paid dividends in the workplace as well, thereby contributing to participants' professional development. Said one subject, in speaking about their work with people who are generals, in the Department of Defense, or elected or appointed members of boards and agencies, "It's helped me be able to better work for them, because I understand some of the things they're thinking about with every action they're making about how they can maintain that position or how they can move up again. And it's giving you that little bit of insight at that little bit of the back to the mind...this is how it's gonna help you way down the road."

Discussion

What else did subjects who participated in the New Hampshire trip take away from the experience?

In addition to providing a "formative" learning experience for our students, in all the ways that this paper has already outlined, one other thing that our focus group participants revealed as being a definitive outcome of the study away trip was a heightened sense of

belonging -- whether a sense of belonging to their classmates, to the faculty, to the department, or to the university. This is one reason why we posit that the class led to heightened institutional affinity, but it is also a potentially important explanatory factor in subjects' political engagement and personal growth. Still, our survey missed out on asking about belongingness in the ways that our focus group subjects most readily shared -- the formation of friendships and communities of interest. For example, one subject said, "Getting to be with people that also share the same kind of interest in politics, and then to show me that professors actually do care about me, really made the next couple of years a breeze. I was able to make friends." Another subject said, "It made me realize, like, I'm not the only one who cares about all of the messed up horrible injustices that are going on out there. So it was great to be around people who finally care, instead of people that are, like, why do you care about insert random thing?" And another subject said, "But it was cool, like after the trip, like a lot of us did stay in touch, and it's kind of cool to see where everyone's gone." Overall, this sense of connection among their peers was expressed several times, and expressed in several ways.

What can educators take away from this study?

In addition to an increased sense of subjects' belonging, our data suggests that our study away trip to New Hampshire had a number of important impacts on their learning, as well as on their life outside of the classroom. One takeaway from this study is that even short-term programs (ours was only ten days) can have meaningful effects on students; another takeaway is that students don't have to travel across an ocean or a border in order to have an impactful experiential learning experience (ours was a study away trip within the continental United States, along the same coastline as our university). These courses provide students with transformative experiences that are easier to fit into their calendars and their budgets, yet provide just as much

of a punch as more traditional study abroad experiences. When designed with intention, these trips can provide students with concrete experiences, that lead to reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb's four stages of experiential learning), and they can lead students to take more chances and more opportunities to learn through other REAL pedagogies.

Our study also documents the ability of these sorts of programs to have enduring effects. We found evidence of long-term impacts on a number of metrics associated with political engagement; these include the formal act of voting, but also other political activities that work to make change in the world, some through traditional political means (for example, working or volunteering on campaigns, donating, attending events, signing petitions, and contacting public officials, among others) and some through less traditional political means (for example, protests, boycotts, and other types of consumer activism). We also found evidence that our trip, in particular, had a positive impact on levels of trust in individual politicians, and an increased sense of internal and external political efficacy; while these findings may not be duplicated for programs that are not directly related to politics, they are nonetheless important concepts for maintaining a healthy democracy and active citizenship.

In addition to the positive impacts programs like ours may have within the political realm, we also provide evidence that these sorts of programs have long-term impacts on participants' relationship to the university and their department. Relationships between alumni and their alma mater can be reciprocal in nature; our alumni reported being more engaged in some ways that allow them to continue to learn from their former faculty (for example, by attending educational events sponsored by the department, or by keeping in touch with old professors and advisors), and in other ways that benefit our institution (for example, donating

and recommending the school to people they know). As development campaigns become more and more important to institutions of higher education (especially in the wake of the enrollment cliff, a global pandemic, and decreased public funding), the positive impact these sorts of programs can have on raising money to support our students and our initiatives cannot be overstated.

And the long-term potential to impact participants' personal growth, whether it is better understanding their own values or talents, growing their confidence to be independent, to network, or cultivating a sense of optimism about their future, is also incredibly important, as one of our missions as universities is to help students fulfill their potential in whatever ways they can dream up, and to do so in a way that we can be proud of.

Taken together, then, this study demonstrates that programs of this nature are worthy of investments -- the investment of money from institutions of higher education, state governments, and donors to build successful programs such as this one; the investment of time and effort by the faculty and staff that make these sorts of programs come alive; and an investment of energy and enthusiasm from our students who can make the most of a once in a lifetime opportunity.

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