

Academic Service-Learning at Utah Valley University

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Abstract

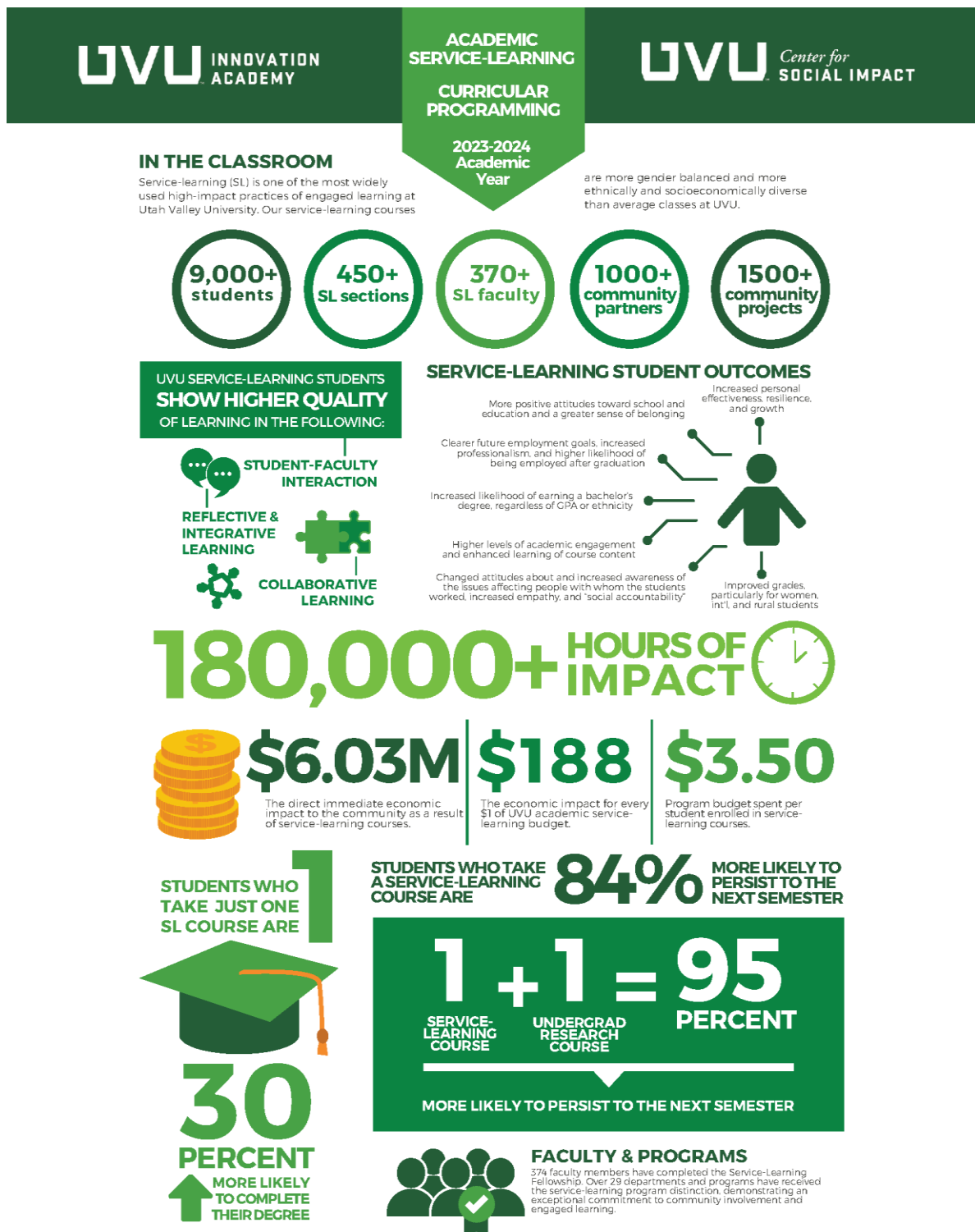
Utah Valley University's Academic Service-Learning program represents a highly effective high-impact educational practice that delivers significant benefits to students, faculty, and the community. During 2023-2024, the program engaged over 9,000 students across 450 course sections, involving 375 faculty members and 1,000 community partners. Research demonstrates that service-learning participants experience enhanced learning outcomes, improved faculty interactions, higher degree completion rates (30% more likely), and greater semester-to-semester persistence (84% higher). The program generated over 180,000 service hours with an estimated \$6 million economic impact, representing approximately \$188 in community value for every dollar invested. With its proven record of enhancing student diversity, academic achievement, and career readiness while serving community needs, UVU's service-learning initiative stands as a cost-effective model for engaged learning that advances the university's educational mission.

Keywords: Academic Service-Learning, High-Impact Practices, Student Persistence, Retention, Economic Impact, Community Engagement, Experiential Learning, Higher Education, Student Success, Career Readiness, Faculty Development, Institutional Commitment, Diversity, Utah Valley University, Engaged Learning

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The following represents a 1-page infographic factsheet with narrative description and references, in journal article format. For the original multimedia infographic 1-pager, go to <https://www.innovativehumancapital.com/article/academic-service-learning-at-utah-valley-university>.



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At Utah Valley University (UVU), Academic Service-Learning is a joint curricular program of the Innovation Academy and the Center for Social Impact. In the classroom, service-learning is one of the most widely used high impact practices of engaged learning at UVU. As highlighted in the accompanying infographic, our service-learning courses are more gender balanced and ethnically and socioeconomically diverse than average classes at UVU. During the 2023-2024 academic year, service-learning classroom statistics included more than 9,000 students enrolled, 450 service-learning sections, 375 service-learning faculty, 1000 community partners, and 1500 community projects.

Enhanced Learning Outcomes. An internal UVU study demonstrated that UVU students who participate in servicelearning courses show a higher quality of learning than their non-service-learning student counterparts in the following areas: Student-Faculty interaction; Reflective and integrative learning; Collaborative learning.

Student Benefits and Career Readiness. Extensive academic literature has consistently demonstrated a wide range of positive outcomes for students participating in this high-impact practice. Service-learning student outcomes include an increase in personal effectiveness, resilience and growth; more positive attitudes toward school and education, and a greater sense of belonging; clearer future employment goals, increased professionalism and higher likelihood of being employed after graduation; increased likelihood of earning a bachelor's degree, regardless of GPA or ethnicity; higher levels of academic engagement and enhanced learning of course content; changed attitudes about and increased awareness of the issues affecting people with whom the students worked, increased empathy and "social accountability"; and improved grades, particularly for women, international and rural

students (see Conway et al., 2009; Celio et al., 2011; Warren, 2012; Yorio & Ye, 2012; Gordon et al., 2022;).

Economic and Community Impact. During the 2023-24 academic year, UVU service-learning courses generated over 180,000 hours of impact. This translates to the equivalent of at least \$6,030,000 in direct, immediate economic impact to the community; slightly more than \$188 in economic impact for every \$1 of UVU academic service-learning budget; and only \$3.50 of program budget spent per student service-learning experience, making it the most impactful, affordable, accessible, and scalable high-impact practice offered at the university.

Student Persistence and Retention. Additionally, an internal study of service-learning impact on student persistence, retention, and completion demonstrated that students who take just one service-learning course are more than 30% more likely to complete their academic degree. Students who take just one service-learning course are 84% more likely to persist to the next semester. When students who take one service-learning course also take an undergrad

research course, that same metric goes up to 95%.

Faculty and Institutional Commitment. Three hundred and seventy-five faculty members across all of the seven colleges and schools have completed UVU's semester-long Service-Learning Faculty Fellowship training, which prepares them to redesign a course to include a meaningful and impactful service-learning project or immersive community experience and then successfully implement that newly designed course. Thirty academic departments and programs have received our service-learning program distinction, demonstrating an exceptional commitment to community involvement and engaged learning.

UVU's Academic Service-Learning program is a powerful, high-impact practice that enhances student learning, deepens community engagement, and strengthens student success. With demonstrated benefits—including increased academic persistence and career readiness—service-learning equips students with essential skills, delivers measurable community impact, and maximizes university resources. Expanding UVU's commitment to service-learning would strengthen its mission, providing students with meaningful educational experiences that extend beyond the classroom.

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- transformative experiences abroad in Brazil, Ghana, and Mozambique, which sparked her passion for international development work and travel. Summer began her career at United Way of Utah County, advancing from Business Relations Manager to Community Engagement Director and then Chief Operating Officer, where she led strategic initiatives and organizational growth. She later became Director of the Center for Social Impact at Utah Valley University, leading a major strategic shift and building a comprehensive social impact education framework. Now a Professional in Residence at UVU's Woodbury School of Business, Summer teaches in the Hospitality Management program and other management courses, sharing her experience in leadership and strategic development.*

Dr. Jonathan H. Westover is a professor and chair of Organizational Leadership in the Woodbury School of Business at Utah Valley University, Academic Director of the UVU Center for Social Impact and the UVU SIMLab, Director of Academic Service-Learning in the UVU Innovation Academy, and an Faculty Industry Impact Fellow in the Women in Business Impact Lab. He is Vice President and member of the Executive Committee of the Western Academy of Management, and he is an affiliate faculty member in UVU's Integrated Students, Master of Public Administration, and Master of Business Administration programs. Dr. Westover has been published widely in academic journals, books, and practitioner publications. He is a regular visiting faculty member in other international graduate business programs.

Author Bios:

Summer Barrick Valente holds a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities (philosophy emphasis) and a Master of Public Administration from Brigham Young University. During her college years, she had