

Teaching Philanthropy: How Can Public Relations Courses Prepare Future Fundraisers and Motivate Giving?

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have suggested that fundraising education is a specialty of public relations. This study examines how a fundraising-specific service-learning project may help prepare future fundraisers and motivate giving. A survey of qualitative and quantitative data was administered to public relations students in a fundraising-focused class and in other service-learning classes at a major public university. Students in the fundraising-focused class were more knowledgeable about nonprofits but were not more inclined to enter the profession. However, they were more motivated to donate after graduation, especially to their alma maters. Implications for public relations and fundraising curricula are discussed.

Keywords: service-learning, public relations, fundraising, higher education, ROPES

With more than 100,000 professional fundraisers in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), the field has become a popular career for many individuals (Shaker & Nathan, 2017). However, rarely do two fundraisers take the same path to the profession (Farwell et al., 2020). With no undergraduate degree programs designed specifically for fundraisers¹, these professionals enter fundraising with training in various industries—such as business, marketing, communication, and nonprofit management—and learn their profession on the job (Farwell et al., 2020; Mack et al., 2016). Although fundraising professionals hold positions across the nonprofit sector, higher education fundraising has developed more rapidly toward professionalization with norms, standards, and practices for its professionals (Skinner, 2019). Thus, higher education fundraising is a fitting place to start a study of educational training for the profession.

While the practice of fundraising has no clear academic home, public relations has laid claim to the theoretical development of fundraising (Mack et al., 2016). Because fundraising is based primarily on the practice of relationship building, the public relations paradigm of relationship management is a natural theoretical and practical fit (Kelly, 1991). Emphasizing the two-way symmetrical communication model of public relations, the ideal of fundraising practice relies upon ethical, mutually beneficial communication between donors and nonprofit organizations. Thus, fundraising is an important aspect in the study and education of public relations scholars and practitioners (Mack et al., 2016).

If fundraising is best informed by public relations and it has yet to be established in undergraduate education, can public relations curricula help to create better-prepared and better-informed future fundraisers? The

¹ As of early 2021, the closest existing program to an undergraduate degree in fundraising in the U.S. would be the Bachelor of Arts in Philanthropic Studies at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI, 2021).

current study seeks to examine the ways that public relations education may have an impact on the educational pathways students have to enter the profession of fundraising. While many fundraisers say they “fell into” the profession after earning their college degrees (Farwell et al., 2020, service-learning projects that expose students to fundraising tasks at nonprofits may be a way to bolster fundraising education. Specifically, this study investigates how a service-learning project for a higher education fundraising team at a major U.S. university may help students understand the profession of fundraising, consider entering the profession, and motivate them to give to their alma maters philanthropically. While the benefits of service-learning in public relations is well-documented (e.g., Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Fraustino et al., 2019; Rothberg et al., 2016), the study seeks to apply what is known about public relations service-learning to the underdeveloped study of fundraising education.

Literature Review

Service-Learning in Public Relations

Often found in upper-level communication courses, service-learning brings together students in the classroom with real-world community clients (Fraustino et al., 2019). The terminology emphasizes how students are engaged in solving actual community issues with the input and help of community members, which often means such projects are nonprofit-based. When practiced successfully, clients and students work together to address actual questions from the practice of communication, which may not be addressed without the student’s involvement.

The benefits of service-learning for teaching public relations to undergraduate students is manifold. Students gain actual experience working with clients and producing materials that reflect real industry questions rather than simulations (Addams et al., 2010; Rothberg et al., 2016). Therefore, students gain practice managing clients and peers,

addressing problems creatively, and putting basic communications skills to practice (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Muturi et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2021; Whitmer et al., 2009). Students themselves value the experiences of service learning, especially appreciating the opportunity to hone their writing skills and to manage teamwork toward a client's goal (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999). Working with nonprofit clients can also teach students the merits of being civically engaged and motivate giving back to their communities as professionals (Kim et al., 2021; Whitmer et al., 2009).

Working with nonprofits is a common practice of service learning because these organizations often need the extra capacity to accomplish some of their goals (McCollough, 2019). Student projects may even have an economic impact on the communities in which they serve through these class projects (Fraustino et al., 2019; McCollough, 2019; Rothberg et al., 2016). Students who complete service-learning projects for nonprofit organizations in their community have been motivated to continue their work for the organization beyond the project requirements (Addams et al., 2010). Students who feel motivated to work on the service-learning project tend to rate their experiences in the class more positively (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Kim et al., 2021). Thus, evidence exists that the benefits of service-learning can be mutual: students and local communities benefit from working together on projects addressing real society needs.

Certainly, not every service-learning experience is flawless. Students have reported facing unrealistic expectations from clients or clients' lack of understanding for the curricular knowledge students have before entering a project (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Fraustino et al., 2019). Additionally, clients report that instructors are unprepared to manage the relationship between the client and classroom, leading to mismatched expectations (Fraustino et al., 2019). Given that nonprofits already face burdens with external partnerships due to staff capacity (van Dyk & Fourie, 2015), service-learning should be approached as a way to

build mutual goals for undergraduate education and nonprofit community development (McCollough, 2019; Kim et al., 2021).

Service-Learning for Fundraising Education

Because service-learning so often incorporates clients from nonprofit organizations (Fraustino et al., 2019), applying the practice of service-learning to fundraising education is a natural fit. Because many fundraisers reported learning their professions “on the job” (Farwell et al., 2019), having students participate in fundraising-related service-learning projects may be one way to help prepare future fundraisers while they are still in the classroom. For example, assignments created for a university’s fundraising team by students in a business writing class showed similarly positive results to those in public relations courses. Students wrote a fundraising letter for their dean’s review, and the most impressive letters were implemented in an upcoming solicitation (Addams et al., 2010). Students in that class reported being motivated above and beyond earning a good grade. They wanted to perform well for the dean (the client) and to have their letter chosen for implementation. Like results reported from public relations service-learning (e.g., Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Whitmer et al., 2009), students reported retaining and understanding writing skills more readily and had more positive reactions to the project when performing for a client (Addams et al., 2010).

Because fundraising is a specialization of public relations (Kelly, 1991), it follows that fundraising-based projects or project components would fit well into service-learning in public relations courses. In an investigation of service-learning business impact, students helped a local community nonprofit raise \$16,000 during the semester (McCollough, 2019). Although the projects were not solely about fundraising, the goals of the nonprofit—which the students assisted with—were to raise funds to keep it financially healthy. Other projects that directly related to fundraising—such as writing a fundraising letter on behalf

of a nonprofit—resulted in actual donations to the nonprofit (Addams et al., 2010). Thus, service-learning projects incorporating fundraising activities are not only helping students learn public relations skills but also potentially preparing them to become future fundraisers.

Nonprofit management courses are also natural places to find instruction and service-learning projects related to fundraising. Grant-writing is one such skill that has been incorporated into nonprofit management courses and greatly benefits from service-learning applications (Falk, 2011). Other nonprofit programs have specific grant-writing courses that use service-learning as the basis of the entire course specifically because “service-learning” implies a mutual benefit to the nonprofit and to the student (Cuyler, 2017). This study, however, seeks to understand how fundraising-related service-learning projects can be incorporated into a public relations curriculum. Based upon the theory development in public relations which argues that fundraising is best informed by public relations theory (Kelly, 1991, 1998), this study seeks to further demonstrate the alignment between the fundraising practice and public relations education. It further builds upon the argument by Mack and colleagues (2016) that the educational home of fundraising should be in public relations due to its focus on relationship management. Furthermore, public relations education is beginning to incorporate the concept of stewardship into its practice by following the ROPES – research, objectives, programming, evaluation, and stewardship-- (Kelly, 2001) model of public relations campaigns (McCollough, 2019). The value of stewardship in public relations campaigns has been documented in research (e.g., Worley & Little, 2002) and in studies of service-learning projects (e.g., McCollough, 2019). For example, one criticism of service-learning is the lack of impact after the semester ends (McCollough, 2019). However, stewardship—a concept borrowed from fundraising—allows organizations and publics to keep communicating after a project is over

(Kelly, 2001; Worley & Little, 2002). Implementing this final step may enable the service-learning campaigns to have a long-lasting impact that ultimately is the desired outcome of such collaborations (McCullough, 2019). Thus, this study situates fundraising as of particular importance to public relations education, particularly in the setting of service-learning which aims to purposefully benefit students' communities.

Service-Learning Public Relations for Professional Fundraising Client

The current study examines the outcomes of a public relations campaigns course that partnered with a university fundraising team for a service-learning project. Specifically, the university team had great success with a small-donor challenge for food insecurity on campus and was looking for insights on next steps from the perspective of young donors. This project was targeted by the client because of recent trends in declining university donations and shifting philanthropic motivations from alumni donors (Root et al., 2017). Thus, the students in the class were tackling real-world questions for a client while simultaneously learning about the profession of fundraising. The project fits the definition of service-learning which emphasizes civic engagement (Fraustino et al., 2019) by helping students engage with their alma maters and reflect upon their motivations for giving back to this nonprofit institution in the future.

The class at the focus of this paper was one section of an upper-level public relations campaign course taught by one instructor to senior-level students. The curriculum began by teaching students about fundraising communication, the donor cycle of giving (e.g., Worth, 2002), and stewardship (Kelly, 1998) and by providing readings to introduce these concepts during the first few weeks of class. The client included representatives from the university fundraising team, and they joined one class session to present their requested tasks to the class and to share fundraising data from the university framing the success of the original football-game-related challenge campaign. Students were asked

by the client to design a follow-up communication campaign that would further engage donors who initially gave to the first giving challenge. Thus, the students were tasked by the client with the goal of creating and building ongoing relationships with these donors, which is articulated as the foundation of stewardship communication, rather than a singular fundraising event (Kelly, 1998). To execute this directive, students then followed the ROPES model and created a full campaign plan and deliverables for the client by the end of the semester. The 15-person class was split into four groups, each designing a campaign for a different audience of interest to the client: young alumni, athletics-only donors, parents, and current students. The actual campaign was not implemented during the semester, but the projects - including specific tactics and evaluation plans - were presented and delivered to the client at the end. This course syllabus closely matched syllabi from other sections of the same course taught by one different instructor. These other sections were partnering with other clients who were not university- or fundraising-based, and students did not know the client for each section prior to the start of the semester.

Given the lack of preparation for future fundraisers in traditional college degree programs (Farwell et al., 2020; Mack et al., 2016), this study seeks to understand how pairing a service-learning public relations class with a problem from fundraising-focused client may provide students with a basic knowledge of this potential career.

RQ1: How will student perceptions of the fundraising profession change over the course of a semester working on a fundraising-focused service-learning project?

Specifically, the paper examines how this curricular focus impacts future careers and giving behavior of students who are exposed to fundraising in service-learning projects. To help contextualize the insights, this paper uses the other sections of the same class as a comparison to

gauge the reactions of the students from the fundraising-focused project. Thus, the study seeks to explore these additional questions to better understand the impact of this curriculum choice:

RQ2: Will students in the fundraising-focused service-learning project be more likely to consider a career in fundraising than students in the other sections?

RQ3: How will students engaged in fundraising-focused service-learning project understand the profession of fundraising in comparison to students in other sections?

Impact of Service-Learning on Giving Behavior

A fundraising-focused project may help motivate philanthropic behavior on the part of the students as well. Millennials and Gen Z individuals have been shown to give less to institutions like higher education and more to problem-specific causes benefiting society, a sharp departure from giving behavior of older generations like Baby Boomers (Root et al., 2017). Fundraisers at higher education institutions specifically have been concerned about the drop in young alumni donations from these generations, fearing that the traditionally strong alumni support for higher education institutions may be disappearing (K. Hedberg & G. Hallett, personal communication, January 29, 2020). Thus, service-learning projects that expose students to the importance and significance of donations to higher education institutions may help to engage and educate this group of donors toward the importance of giving back. Evidence exists that undergraduates who are involved with their alma maters while students are more inclined to give back after graduation (Fleming, 2019; Skari, 2014). Other service-learning studies have been shown to motivate student giving and deeper involvement with their nonprofit clients (e.g., Addams et al., 2010; McCollough, 2019). Thus, if students are immersed in the work of a client who demonstrates the value of giving back to higher education institutions, perhaps students will be more inclined to

consider their alma maters as beneficiaries in the future.

RQ4: Will students enrolled in a fundraising-focused service-learning project be more motivated to give back to 1) other nonprofits and 2) their alma maters by the end of the semester?

RQ5: Will these students be more motivated to give back to 1) other nonprofits and 2) their alma maters compared to students working on other service-learning projects?

Methods

Procedure

Students in four sections of an upper-level public relations course described above received surveys at two time points: week 3 of the semester and then during the final week of the semester (week 15). Every student received the same survey, no matter what section they were enrolled in, and were asked to provide the name of their instructor. Responses were split into two groups: the author's section who completed the class for the university fundraising client and the three other sections, all learning from different instructors, but with non-fundraising-based clients. Of the author's section, 11 of 15 students completed the survey at time one, and 7 of 15 students completed the survey at time two. Of the other sections taught by a different instructor, 34 of potential 45 students completed the survey at time one, and 21 of potential 45 students completed the survey at time two. Responses at time one and time two were not linked to protect privacy. The survey was distributed using an anonymous link via Qualtrics software to ensure confidentiality; the methodology used for the survey included mixed methods as both descriptive statistics and qualitative open-ended responses were requested.

Students were emailed a Qualtrics link to the survey questionnaire outside of class per IRB regulations. The author emailed the instructor of the other sections to send the same link to those students in the other classes. Surveys were distributed via email simultaneously to students

and the other instructor; students were asked to list their instructor so the researcher could determine what sections the students were enrolled in during analysis. No incentives were given to protect privacy and ensure no undue influence on the author's students.

Measures & Analysis

Questions included Likert scale items as well as open-ended, free responses. Given the small sample sizes of each survey group, inferential statistics cannot be used for analysis due to lack of statistical power. To answer each research question, results were included both quantitative responses and qualitative responses to open-ended questions. The researcher examined the responses abductively, meaning previous theory on service-learning teaching and new evidence from the survey were analyzed together to develop new meaning to answer the research questions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Thus, results were coded and recoded until common themes were identified from the responses and then interpreted in answer to the research questions. This approach has been used in previous teaching-related research in public relations (e.g. Aldooray & Wrigley, 1999; Fraustino et al., 2019) and fundraising (e.g., Addams et al., 2010). Relevant measures from the survey include the following.

Interest in learning about nonprofits: Students were asked to rate "What is your level of interest in learning more about the nonprofit sector and career opportunities in nonprofits?" on a 5-point scale from "not at all interested" to "extremely interested." This question was included on both surveys (time one and time two).

Knowledge of public relations and nonprofit industries: Students were asked to "Rate your knowledge of the public relations industry right now" and "Rate your knowledge of the nonprofit industry right now" on a 5-point scale from "not at all knowledgeable" to "extremely knowledgeable." These questions were included on both surveys.

Giving likelihood: Students were asked “How likely are you to donate to a nonprofit in the future?” This question was adjusted slightly in the second survey to read, “How likely are you to give to a nonprofit after this class (class name) is over?” Both questions were measured on a 7-point Likert scale from “extremely unlikely” to “extremely likely.”

Free response questions: Students would see a specific set of open-ended questions based on their response to yes/no questions about giving behavior. For example, the question “Have you ever donated money to a nonprofit during your time in college?” would be followed with one to two specific questions depending on the student’s response. Questions are further explained in the results section.

Demographics

Demographics were not collected in the survey due to concerns that this information would reveal students’ identities to the author who was instructing one of the class sections. The author also had taught students in the other sections of the class in previous semesters. IRB and the author were concerned about the potential loss of confidentiality for respondents by collecting this information in the survey itself. Instead, the college-level data is reported here to present an estimate of the demographic makeup of the survey respondents. All students who participated in the survey were members of the college for which the following statistics are reported. For race, 70% of the students are reported as white only, followed by 10.3% international, 7.2% Hispanic/Latino only, 4.7% African American only, 3% two or more races, 2.7% Asian only, 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 0.1% American Indian/Alaska Native (University Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research, 2019). For gender, 64.9% of the college identified as female, 35.1% identified as male, and no other genders were tracked.

Results

RQ1: The first research question asked how student perceptions

of the fundraising profession will change over the course of a semester working on a fundraising-focused service-learning project. Only responses from the author's section were analyzed (time one $N=11$, time two $N=7$). Three of 11 students mentioned an interest in pursuing a career in nonprofits or fundraising when asked why they were a public relations major or what their career goals were at week three of the semester. While two seemed interested in nonprofit work, one was interested but afraid of entering the nonprofit industry: "I'd like to work for a PR agency in New York working with a variety of clients in different areas. I used to want to do PR for a non-profit, but after a poor internship experience, I'm skeptical of that now." One student specifically mentioned an interest in working in "development communications for a nonprofit or hospital."

At the end of the semester, two of the seven students who completed the survey said their goals changed. One in particular addressed a strengthening interest in working in corporate public relations: "As much as I loved talking about nonprofits and fundraising, this class made me realize how much I want to be in corporate PR or an agency." This student's resolve to work in the more stable corporate industry may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on job prospects during the semester. The other five students said their career goals remained the same.

In comparing time one to time two, students showed a slightly increased interest in learning about nonprofit career opportunities, but the increase was statistically nonsignificant, $t(16) = -0.31, p = .76$. At time one, the mean ($M=3.09$) was slightly over the midpoint with one student saying they were "extremely interested," four students indicating they were "moderately interested," and one student indicating they were "not at all interested." In time two, the mean increased slightly to 3.29 with two students indicating they were "extremely interested," three students were "slightly interested," and no students indicating they were not interested at

all. Therefore, descriptive statistics and open responses indicate students were anecdotally interested in learning more about nonprofit careers but were not motivated enough to change their career goals after taking a class on fundraising in the nonprofit sector.

RQ2: The second research question asked if students in the fundraising-focused service-learning project will be more likely to consider a career in fundraising than students in the other sections. In looking at the other sections that were not working on fundraising-related service-learning, one student of 34 respondents (time one $N=34$) mentioned working in nonprofits as their career goal, while two others mentioned possible nonprofit industries (museum curation and historical organizations) as career goals. Additionally, three of 34 students mentioned working in nonprofits as a reason for pursuing the public relations major. One of the respondents said:

I have a lot of interests. I'd love to work for a music agency, do something with sustainability, work for a nonprofit, etc. I thought PR would be perfect for this because I can go into any one of these fields with this major.

At the end of the semester, 10 of 21 students (time two $N=21$) said their career goals had changed. None of these respondents mentioned that they wanted to enter the nonprofit world specifically, but four students said they gained a broader understanding of the wide range of jobs available in the public relations field. For example, one student wrote: "I see how widely necessary and broadly defined public relations really is. It's so much more than flashy spirit events and Sean Spicer, and I'm excited to bring public relations tactics to any position I find myself in post-grad."

In comparing time one to time two, students in the non-fundraising service-learning sections showed a slightly decreased interest in learning about nonprofit career opportunities, but the changes were statistically nonsignificant, $t(53) = 0.93$, $p = .36$. At time one, the mean was slightly

below the midpoint ($M=2.91$) with five students (14.7%) indicating they were “extremely interested,” 12 students (35.3%) were “moderately interested,” and six students (14.7%) indicating they were not interested at all. At time two, the mean ($M=2.57$) decreased slightly with three students (14.3%) saying they were “extremely interested,” four students (19%) indicating they were “moderately interested.” More than half of the respondents (57.1%) said they were “not interested at all” or “slightly interested” ($n=12$). While the decrease in interest in learning about nonprofit careers could be a result of the impact of COVID-19’s paralyzing the economy at the second time point, the fundraising-focused section qualitatively saw an increase in interest about nonprofit careers over the same timeframe. Descriptive statistics indicate the fundraising-focused curriculum may have at least softened the impact of the COVID-19 shutdown on students’ interests to learn about careers in the nonprofit sector (see Table 1).

Table 1

Comparing students’ interest in learning about careers in the nonprofit sector

		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Median
Fundraising-focused class	<i>Time 1</i>	11	3.09(1.22)	3 (Moderately interested)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		34	2.91(1.29)	3 (Moderately interested)
Fundraising-focused class	<i>Time 2</i>	7	3.29(1.38)	3 (Moderately interested)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		21	2.57(1.36)	2 (Slightly interested)

RQ3: The third research question asked how students engaged in fundraising-focused service-learning will understand the profession of nonprofit fundraising in comparison to students in other sections. At the start of the semester, all students in the fundraising-focused class

($N=11$) rated their understanding of the nonprofit sector no higher than “moderately knowledgeable,” while 82.4% ($n=28$) of students in the other sections rated their knowledge of the nonprofit sector no higher than “moderately knowledgeable”. At the end of the semester, students in the fundraising-focused class rated their knowledge of both public relations ($t(26) = -.79, p = .44$) and nonprofits ($t(26) = 3.02, p < .01$) higher than those in the other sections, and the difference in knowledge about nonprofits was a statistically significant difference. All students in the fundraising-focused class ($N=7$) rated their knowledge of nonprofits at “moderately knowledgeable” or higher, nearly the opposite of their responses in time one, a statistically significant increase from time one to time two ($t(16) = 4.07, p < .01$) (see Table 2). Thus, students in the fundraising-focused class appeared to have greater understanding of the nonprofit sector than those in the other service-learning courses. Their knowledge of the public relations industry was comparable to the other students (see Table 2).

Table 2

Comparing students' knowledge of the public relations and nonprofit industries

		<i>N</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	Median
Public relations industry				
Fundraising-focused class	<i>Time 1</i>	11	3.64(0.81)	4 (Very knowledgeable)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		34	3.62(0.78)	4 (Very knowledgeable)
Fundraising-focused class	<i>Time 2</i>	7	4.14(0.69)	4 (Very knowledgeable)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		21	3.90(0.70)	4 (Very knowledgeable)
Nonprofit industry				
Fundraising-focused class	<i>Time 1</i>	11	2.55(0.69)	3 (Moderately knowledgeable)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		34	2.53(0.99)	2 (Slightly knowledgeable)
Fundraising-focused class	<i>Time 2</i>	7	4.00(0.82)	4 (Very knowledgeable)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		21	2.81(0.93)	3 (Moderately knowledgeable)

RQ4: The fourth research question asked if giving motivation toward 1) other nonprofits and 2) their alma maters would change for students in the fundraising-focused class over the course of the semester. Many of the students in the class had made donations to nonprofits before taking the course ($n=8$), but many of the causes were nonprofits unrelated to higher education. Of those related to the students' institution, two said they gave to the university's student-run philanthropy benefitting childhood cancer, and one gave to a university-led campaign for food insecurity. Only one mentioned the institution by name as a recipient of the donation. All but one student ($n=10$) said they had at least considered giving to a nonprofit during their time in college. Those who did not give money said they donated goods or posted messages on social media to support the cause. At the start of class, most students said they were likely to make a gift to a nonprofit in the future ($M=5.82$, $SD=1.83$). One student said it was "extremely unlikely," but the rest said they were at least "slightly likely" to make a future donation to a nonprofit. Many of them said their decision to make the future gift would depend on whether the nonprofit was "trustworthy" and handled their money honestly ($n=4$) while the majority said they would give to a cause they cared about ($n=7$). Thus, the students enrolled in the fundraising-focused project were already philanthropically inclined, likely due to the strong emphasis on a student-run philanthropy at their university. However, few said they had made a gift to their institution unless it was connected to a cause (e.g., cancer research, food insecurity).

By the end of the semester, two of seven students (28.6%) said they had made a donation to a nonprofit during the course of the semester. One of these students said they gave to two hunger-related nonprofits because of the impact of COVID-19 on people's lives. Of the five who did not, all cited the impact of COVID-19 on their finances or mental health, which prevented them from donating. However, six of seven

students (85.7%) said they would give to nonprofits in the future because of their experiences in the fundraising-focused service-learning class. They cited the importance of the work of many nonprofits and a sense of personal duty to give back as reasons for their future donations. One student specified that they would give once financially stable. All students said they would be at least “slightly likely” to give to a nonprofit after the class was over ($M=6.00$, $SD=0.82$), but the increase was not statistically significant ($t(16) = 0.25$, $p = .81$). Additionally, five of the seven students (71.4%) said they would give back to their alma maters after graduation because of their experience in the fundraising-focused public relations class. Three said they would give to specific causes at the university (e.g., food insecurity, student-run philanthropy), but others said they would give back generally to the university. Said two respondents: “I see how it’s important to give back (to my alma mater)” and “(I would give) to support a place that has had such a big impact on my life and those within the university.” Thus, to answer RQ4, evidence exists to show that students were at least similarly or more inclined to give to their alma maters and nonprofits after class concluded, and qualitative evidence shows new interest in giving to their alma maters.

RQ5: The fifth research question asked if students in fundraising-focused service-learning project would be more motivated to give back to 1) other nonprofits and 2) their alma maters than students in the other sections. Like the fundraising-focused class, students in other classes were philanthropically inclined, with 31 of 34 students (91.2%) saying they had donated to a nonprofit during their time in college. Only one of these students said they gave to the student’s university in general, while six said they gave to university-affiliated causes. The other nonprofits mentioned were those combating domestic violence, natural disasters, and cancer or supporting environmental and religious causes. Like the fundraising-focused class, students in the other sections were already philanthropically

inclined when they started their public relations service-learning projects.

By the end of the semester, 10 of 21 students (47.6%) in the regular service-learning courses said they had made a gift during the semester. One of these students specified that they gave to COVID-19 relief efforts, while four said they gave to the student-run philanthropy at their university. Six of the students who did not give cited lack of money or COVID-19-related fears that prevented them from making a donation during the semester, similar to the fundraising-focused class section. Fourteen of 21 students (66.7%) said they would donate to a nonprofit in the future based on their experience in the service-learning class. Said one student: "In working with a client that is a local nonprofit, I was able to see what staff and resources can be directly provided by donations." Two other students cited their class projects as eye-opening to the financial needs of local nonprofits and reasons that they would give to nonprofits in the future. Two students who said "no" to the question explained that they will give to nonprofits in the future, but their experience in the class was not a motivation for doing so. Overall, students in the non-fundraising-focused classes said they would be either neutrally or positively inclined to give to a nonprofit after the class was over ($M=5.86$, $SD=1.15$). Additionally, only 11 of 21 students (52.4%) said they would consider giving back to their alma maters after graduation based on their experience in the class. One student who replied "yes" to this question said, "I'm not sure this donation would be monetary. I know how much networking resources have helped me and I'm eager to lend similarly [sic] in the future. (The university) doesn't need any more of my money any time soon." Other students said they would give of their experiences at the university as students. Said one, "The institution has done so much for me throughout my years here and I would love to help continue that for future students." Of the 10 who said "no," four students specifically said the course did not influence their decisions about whether to donate to their university in the future. One

said an internship with the fundraising office was more motivating than the public relations course; another said that they would only donate to the university to specifically benefit teachers who made an impact on the student's experience.

To answer the fifth research question, students in the fundraising-focused class had higher percentages of those willing to give back to their alma mater and stronger inclination to give to nonprofits in the future. They also specifically stated in open responses that the class helped them see the importance of giving to their university, while the other class did not. See Table 3 for comparisons between classes.

Table 3

Comparing students' motivation to donate to nonprofits and their alma maters after a public relations class

		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>n</i> (%) who would give
Fundraising-focused class	<i>Nonprofits*</i>	7	6.00 (0.82)	6 (85.7%)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		21	5.86 (1.15)	14 (66.2%)
Fundraising-focused class	<i>Alma mater</i>	7		5 (71.4%)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		21		11 (53.4%)

* $t(26) = 0.30, p = .77$

Discussion

The current study sought to understand how a public relations campaigns course focused on a fundraising service-learning project could help students better understand the profession of fundraising; more actively consider entering the profession; and be more inclined to donate to their alma maters in the future. Overall, students in the fundraising-focused class seemed to have a stronger understanding of the nonprofit sector and an interest in learning about nonprofit careers but not necessarily more motivation to enter the profession. While both the fundraising-focused and non-fundraising classes were inclined to donate to

nonprofits after the class was over, the fundraising-focused class was more motivated to give to their alma maters and cited the class specifically as an influence on future giving behavior. Thus, fundraising-focused service-learning projects may have important instructional impacts for public relations students: teaching them about the profession and encouraging future donation behavior.

Findings from this study support Mack and colleagues' (2016) assertion that fundraising has a home in public relations classrooms. Students in this study indicated they felt just as knowledgeable about the public relations industry no matter what class section they enrolled in. Additionally, students in all sections reported learning more about nonprofits and how they function through their service-learning projects, which is a well-documented result of working on service-learning for public relations (e.g., Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Kim et al., 2021; Whitmer et al., 2009). The majority of students--no matter their class project--were inclined to give back to nonprofits after the semester ended, reflecting previous work showing how service-learning can motivate student involvement in their communities (Fraustino et al., 2019). However, students in the fundraising-focused service-learning project mentioned how their class specifically motivated them to give back to their alma maters, while students in the other classes said they were inclined to do so based on unrelated factors. This finding reflects observations from previous service-learning studies that show how involvement in service-learning specifically motivates giving back to the class's nonprofit partner (Addams et al., 2010; McCollough, 2019).

The findings showed that students in the fundraising-specific project had a greater interest in learning more about and greater knowledge of the nonprofit sector at the end of class, which is not surprising. On the other hand, for students in the non-fundraising-focused classes, these results provide evidence that public relations service-

learning curricula may not strongly impact students' knowledge of the nonprofit industry, even if the class is working with a nonprofit client. Instead, curricula deliberately focused on nonprofit fundraising and the nonprofit sector may provide students with the knowledge necessary to understand the industry and pique their interest in future careers. This commentary is not to say that nonprofit service-learning must focus on fundraising to convey this understanding. Admittedly, a few students in the non-fundraising sections said their partnership with a nonprofit client helped them to see how important donations were to the programming capabilities of nonprofits. Instead, the takeaway here is that fundraising-focused service-learning projects and curricula may provide the nonprofit-focused skills-based learning that is lacking in the current educational structure of future fundraisers (e.g., Farwell et al., 2020; Shaker & Nathan, 2017). The fundraising-focused class learned how to raise funds; in contrast, the traditional service-learning class learned the importance of those funds for nonprofits. Additionally, the results showed that focusing on fundraising-specific public relations projects did not hinder students' ability to learn about the public relations sector. Thus, a fundraising-focused service-learning experience may provide a twofold benefit to students: learning important public relations skills while better understanding the profession of fundraising in the nonprofit sector.

While students in the fundraising-focused class did feel motivated to give back to their alma maters, the motivation was still tied to specific causes that the university supported. The cause of food insecurity was likely cited as a specific example because the university client project focused on this cause. Only a few students said they would give to the university generally, and only two of them came from the fundraising-focused class. Conversely, students explained how they would give to nonprofits with causes they felt "emotionally connected to," including disaster relief, COVID-19 relief, or societal ills like cancer or domestic

violence. These insights continue to underscore the concerns of current fundraising practitioners who acknowledge that giving back to one's alma mater is not as routine for Gen Zers and Millennials as it was for other generations (Root et al, 2017). Instead, capturing the attention of future donors may depend upon linking universities with timely, relevant, emotional causes. Additionally, getting students interested in pursuing careers in university fundraising may also depend upon making them feel like they are impacting an important, worthy cause, rather than lining the pockets of an institution that, as one student said, "already has too much of my money."

The impact of COVID-19 on the results of the study is certainly worth exploring here. The first survey (time one) was launched in mid-January 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic was fully understood and before shutdowns had occurred in the United States. By March 2020, the university in this study had moved to fully online instruction, and many students were told to leave campus for their safety. The second survey (time two) was distributed in the wake of this campus shutdown in mid-April 2020. Many students in the service-learning classes were seniors graduating that semester who were contemplating the demoralizing end to their college years. Due to the uncertain nature of the pandemic during those early months, the impact of COVID-19 likely decreased students' career motivations and inclination to give to nonprofits. The shuttered economy also presented pessimistic hopes of finding a job upon graduation. While these caveats could be considered limitations, the findings in this environment may help us to understand how students were affected by the pandemic. While donations nationwide increased during 2020 (Fidelity Charitable, 2020), students were contemplating their lack of job prospects and lack of financial certainty. However, students' overall strong motivation for future giving to nonprofits seen in this study ultimately reflects their positive view on the future and a deep

understanding of the importance of philanthropy. The findings show that the fundraising-focused service-learning project may have increased those motivations slightly over those in the other class sections. Perhaps learning about important causes that nonprofits work to address gave students some perspective about their privilege during the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus motivated their perspective to be generous to these organizations.

Practical Implications

This study provides more evidence to show how service-learning projects help students engage with their communities and learn important public relations skills (Aldoory & Whitmer, 1999; Fraustino et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021; McCollough, 2019; Rothberg et al., 2016). Thus, instructors should actively seek out partnerships in their communities to engage students with real-world nonprofit projects and help them learn about the unique nature of working in this field. This study also supports the idea that service-learning projects with nonprofit partners can also be fundraising-focused and still help students gain important public relations skills, backing theory from Mack and colleagues (2016). In focusing a class on nonprofit fundraising, instructors should follow the ROPES model of public relations to teach their students how to execute a fundraising campaign, as suggested by Kelly (2001). This model of public relations campaign instruction may help students learn to incorporate key elements from the fundraising practice like stewardship into future public relations campaigns outside of fundraising (McCullough, 2019). Thus, the benefits of teaching fundraising-focused public relations may also benefit the practice of public relations overall.

Additionally, evidence from this study shows that incorporating a fundraising-specific service-learning project in a public relations course may help address the current lack of fundraising education for future practitioners. Although the class curriculum was not solely focused

on fundraising skills or practices, the practice of fundraising can be theoretically linked to public relations (Kelly, 1991, 1998; Mack et al., 2016), and thus future fundraisers could benefit from public relations training and coursework. Instructors should consider advising their students who have an interest in nonprofit or fundraising careers to enroll in public relations campaigns courses to receive some of this skills-based training. Although this certainly does not substitute fundraising- or nonprofit-focused coursework like those in nonprofit management programs, it will help students receive some formal relationship management and communications training so they are not learning “on the job,” as is the current model (Farwell et al., 2020; Shaker & Nathan, 2017). Any preparation will be beneficial to the continual formalization of the profession (Skinner, 2019).

For clients such as those in the fundraising industry, partnering with public relations courses can provide specific benefits. Despite the drawbacks documented about service-learning for client outcomes, these relationships can help to add new supporters to the nonprofit’s cause, getting an outside perspective on a problem, or having students complete work that staff do not have time for (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Rothberg et al., 2016; Whitmer et al., 2009). Evidence for these impacts were also found in this study, although this study did not examine the client perspective. First of all, partnering with students to plan a future fundraising campaign helped the client to understand giving motivations of future alumni from Gen Z, which was one of the client’s motivations for initially workign with the class. Results from this study indicated that only few students would give back to their alma maters generally out of gratitude, partly due to student debt. Instead, higher education fundraisers may want to align fundraising appeals targeted at younger generations with specific causes that the university is addressing like curing diseases, assisting communities with social issues, or recovering

from natural disasters. This recommendation follows other recent research on fundraising trends (e.g., Root et al., 2017).

Additionally, having better trained and more interested students available to the fundraising profession will help managers hire more capable and prepared employees. Learning good writing, analysis, and communications skills found in public relations curricula will only help future fundraisers excel in their jobs, based on the skills required in this industry (Mack et al., 2016; Shaker & Nathan, 2017). Therefore, clients may be able to identify future fundraisers by partnering with an upper-level class project.

Limitations & Future Directions

Unfortunately, the unforeseen interruption of the semester due to COVID-19 pandemic likely had an impact on the results of the study. While the implications of the pandemic on the findings were discussed above, another limitation is its potential effect on the response rates for the second survey of the study, launched at the end of the semester after campus had closed. Motivating students to respond to a survey about their future careers and inclinations to donate to nonprofits was difficult during a time when their semesters and future career plans had been interrupted. Additionally, longitudinal studies commonly see drop-off in response rates from the first survey to the next (Groves et al., 2009).

Another concern could be that the researcher did not link first and second responses, so no specific changes in attitude could be tracked over the course of the semester. Instead, findings are analyzed in aggregate, but the small sample size allows for some general linking to occur. The researcher chose to not link these responses due to the researcher's personal knowledge of the students taking the survey and the survey requirement that they would need to disclose what section they were enrolled in. An IRB reviewer concurred with this concern.

Given the small sample size in this study, results can only be

interpreted using descriptive comparisons and qualitative data, and thus a mixed-methods approach was used. This analysis is not uncommon for studies of service-learning (e.g., Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Fraustino et al., 2019), but future quantitative measures with statistical power can help predict specific outcomes from service-learning experiences. Thus, this paper is meant to start a conversation about the ways to educate future fundraisers more deliberately and to incorporate donor-specific communications campaigns into public relations curricula. The hope is that additional studies will seek to build upon the questions posed here so that public relations scholars can better determine the educational home for fundraising and inspire future leaders in nonprofit communications.

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