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Civic Engagement and Peace Corps Recruitment Efforts in the State of Vermont

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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND PEACE CORPS RECRUITMENT EFFORTS IN THE
STATE OF VERMONT

A Thesis Presented

By

Kelly Dolan

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Science
Specializing in Community Development and Applied Economics

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ABSTRACT

The United States Peace Corps' recruitment offices actively seek a qualified volunteer base from its applicant pool for positions in over 60 countries. The state of Vermont, and colleges and universities within the state, have provided the agency with an unprecedented number of volunteers accounting for their consistently high ranking for the number of volunteers currently serving overseas.

This research considers the culture of civic engagement in Vermont and how this can, in part, explain the successful recruitment efforts within the state. Drawing on research done on the topic of civic engagement and how it is manifest in different states, this paper presents evidence provided by semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Vermonters that served in the Peace Corps. The motivation for this thesis is twofold; to better understand the civic culture of Vermont, and to explain the success of recruitment efforts within the state potentially providing the opportunity for more targeted recruitment efforts in the future for the Peace Corps and similarly oriented organizations.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In developing the research question for this thesis I considered two interesting pieces of information; the first is that the state of Vermont ranks first per capita for recruitment of Peace Corps volunteers. The second piece of information is that according to a study using an aggregate of several indicators, Vermont ranks at the top of the list for its level of civic engagement. There exists a wide range of explanations for what may compel an individual to participate in volunteer based activities and motivations for volunteering that have been studied extensively. There are none, however, that look at what has often been described as the “unique character” of Vermont and how this influences the decision to join the Peace Corps. The motivation for this thesis is twofold; to better understand the civic culture of Vermont, and to explain the success of recruitment efforts within the state potentially providing the opportunity for more targeted recruitment efforts in the future for the Peace Corps and similarly oriented organizations.

The United States Peace Corps seeks a diverse volunteer base with professional and educational backgrounds able to fulfill requests from countries across the globe. Many Peace Corps volunteers (PCVs) apply to the organization finding affinity with its values of service, community, and education. Although volunteers have served from all 50 states and the United States territory of Puerto Rico, the organization has found an unprecedented number of volunteers from the state of Vermont (“Volunteer”). The Green Mountain state repeatedly ranks as the top producer per capita for Peace Corps volunteers. At last count, 8.3 out of every 100,000 Vermont residents was serving

(“Peace Corps Announces Top Volunteer-Producing Colleges”).

As the organization looks for competitive applicants, strong consideration is placed upon factors, which motivate individuals to apply and commit to two years of service, and the backgrounds of currently serving PCVs and Returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCVs). Recent shifts in streamlining the application have made the online application a far less daunting task, but apart from the facility of the process, PCVs decide to apply for both pragmatic and personal reasons (“About Us | Green Up Vermont”). Through my work as a Peace Corps recruiter based at the University of Vermont during my graduate studies, I was able to discern the breadth of such motivations and applicants’ backgrounds through informal conversations as well as the more formal interview process. Individuals often described personal histories awash with educational and professional experience grounded in community service and civic engagement.

My research for this thesis will take a deeper look at what compels individuals to apply apart from more practical motivations such as career advancement; in particular, I will examine how the high levels of civic engagement documented in Vermont have impacted the number of applicants to the Peace Corps (PC) in the state. This research will use the four components of a civic community created by sociologist, Robert Putnam, to see if a relationship exists between individual experiences of civic life in Vermont and the decision to serve: 1) civic engagement, 2) political equality, 3) solidarity, trust, and tolerance, and 4) social structures of cooperation (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti) Information will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with Vermont residents

that have spent more than 75% of their life in Vermont and served in the PC. This thesis will also explore the historical relationship between the organization and the state to provide context with a focus on educational institutions.

Vermont is often characterized as having a unique culture and an engaged citizenship. As Vermont political scientist and University of Vermont professor emeritus stated, “The little green-clad state of Vermont may well become the place to show Americans how liberty, democracy, and community can be restored” (Bryan). In the same vein, the PC, a mere liner note in the United States’ robust governmental budget, stands as a symbol of a significant, but marginal commitment to service and community engagement for the country. Although both are unique as prospective statehood and agency, this thesis will examine if there in fact exists a commonality of character between the two through a shared veneration for civic engagement.

2 PEACE CORPS

The unique character of the PC, grounded in civic engagement, has much to do with the organization’s history as well as the volunteer base that it attracts. The PC was started in the year 1961 through an executive order by former president John F. Kennedy (“The Founding Moment”). Over the last 55 years, the organization has grown and developed, but its primary mission has remained the same. The Peace Corps Act states the agency’s purpose as the following:

To promote world peace and friendship through a Peace Corps, which shall make available to interested countries and areas, men and women of the United States qualified for service abroad and willing to serve, under conditions of hardship if

necessary, to help the peoples of such countries and areas in meeting their needs for trained manpower.

(“Act of September 22, 1961 (Peace Corps Act), Public Law 87-293, 75 STAT 612, Which Established a Peace Corps to Help the People of Interested Countries and Areas in Meeting Their Needs for Skilled Manpower”)

Currently, there are 7,209 volunteers serving in 64 countries. They provide support to communities according to countries’ requests in the 6 different service areas: agriculture, community economic development, education, environment, health, and youth in development (“What Volunteers Do”). What makes PC unique is that volunteers both live and work in the communities they serve. Like the volunteer work they most often did in their home town or city, volunteers are able to see the impact their work has on their neighbors and friends in a very tangible way.

The PC has a very distinct role within the United States government, which has, for the most part, allowed it to stand outside of partisan politics. The organization has generally had strong support from both political parties (“Reconsidering the Peace Corps | Brookings Institution” 1). It functions as an independent governmental agency within the executive branch. Regardless of its status as “independent”, it is still firmly seated within the US government as recognized in its appointed leadership and funding. The director and deputy director are appointed by the US President and then approved by congress (“Peace Corps – Leadership”). Additionally, the operating costs are covered by the government; for the fiscal year 2016 President Barack Obama requested an 8% increase in funding, which would put the annual budget at \$410 million dollars (“Peace Corps Congressional Budget Justification FY 2016 | Peace Corps”). During his campaign

in the year 2008, Obama pledged to double the size of the PC, which has not come to fruition, but at the least ideologically indicates his support for the agency (“What Happened to the Promise of 16,000 Peace Corps Volunteers by 2011? | Huffington Post”)

Like many involved in development work, the PC is both lauded and criticized for its work. There are academics and development professionals that cite what they perceive as shortsighted goals and a modern day form of patriarchal colonization posturing as community development. Robert Strauss, a former country director in Cameroon, is one such naysayer. According to Strauss, the issue is Peace Corps “... unwillingness to decide if it is a development organization or an organization with a mission to promote world peace and friendship, as stipulated by Congress in the Peace Corps Act” (“Think Again: The Peace Corps | Foreign Policy”). In reality, the organization exists as both, and applicants should be made well aware of this reality when beginning the application process. Often critiques stem from a lack of knowledge of what the actual goals of the organization are. The organization’s emphasis of cultural exchange is often diminished by naysayers as extraneous to the nuts and bolts of more quantifiable results.

Described here are the three goals:

1. To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women
2. To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served
3. To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans (“Peace Corps”)

Volunteers coming from tight knit communities in the United States, such as those found in small Vermont communities, are accustomed to seeing relationships as an integral part of community life and accomplishing goals. A key finding to the 2014

Annual Peace Corps Volunteer Survey was that 85% felt that they were successfully accomplishing the second goal while only 65% felt as though they were accomplishing the first goal (“2014 Annual Volunteer Survey Results: Global Tabular Report | Peace Corps...”). This reality should be made apparent to applicants. Concurrently, the 85% accomplishing goal two according to the survey should not be diminished. Vermonters, often coming from relatively small, tight-knit communities, are well equipped to understand the value of relationship building and are capable of sharing their experiences upon returning to the United States with community members at home accomplishing the third goal as well.

2.1 Peace Corps Recruitment

Recruitment is anything but a stagnant process and the agency is consistently

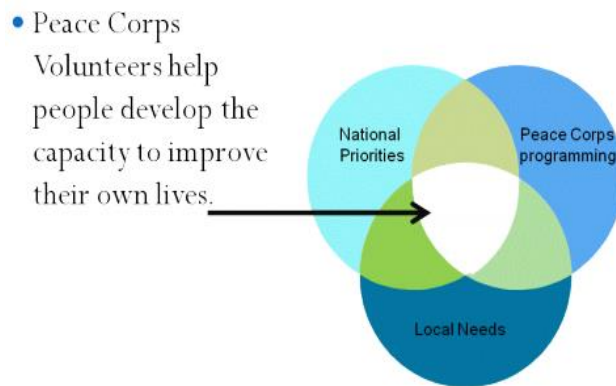


Figure 1: “Peace Corps Model of Development”. Kerley, Janet and Susan Jenkins. The impact of Peace Corps Service on Host Communities and Host Country Perceptions of Americans. Washington, DC: Peace Corps’ Office of Strategic Information, Research and Planning, 2010.

responding to changes in the domestic economy, employment opportunities and educational needs. Additionally, the recruitment office is responding to changing requests

made by host countries propelled by local communities. At times as a PC campus recruiter, the shifting focus of the organization felt reactionary even within the two year span of my role, but the core of recruitment remains stable with a focus on recruiting volunteers with technical skills and volunteer experience. We see the overlap of the differing factors contributing to recruitment in PC' Model of Development (see Figure 1). As the organization continually seeks to streamline the application process, they carefully consider the best ways to attract qualified volunteers. Part of this is determining what circumstances, experiences, and personal attributes compel an individual to apply including a background in areas such as civic engagement.

The aforementioned Annual Peace Corps Volunteer Survey has been gathering feedback from PCVs since 1975. It provides information on the agency's progress on strategic goals and also in additional areas including training, and personal experiences in the field including health and safety ("2014 Annual Volunteer Survey Results: Global Tabular Report | Peace Corps..."). Part of the survey crucial to recruitment efforts is the portion on volunteers' motivations for joining the PC. There are parallels between the expressed "motivations" in the volunteer survey and the components of a civic culture used by Robert Putnam (Putnam 87). For example, "The opportunity to help others" indicator in the Volunteer Survey is similar to "Solidarity, trust and tolerance", "Civic engagement" used by Putnam. These connections are more explicit, however. Interestingly, but not surprisingly "The opportunity to help others" was the strongest motivation for applying to the Peace Corps according to survey results with 97% rating

this as “Important” or “Very important” (“2014 Annual Volunteer Survey Results: Global Tabular Report | Peace Corps...”)

The PC application process in years past was notoriously lengthy and cumbersome. Recent changes have helped to expedite and facilitate the process, however. Individuals are now able to apply to specific programs and select countries where they wish to serve. Additionally, the agency has significantly shortened the application process, which historically took approximately a year, to 6 months from the initial online submission to arrival in host country (“In Response To Dwindling Applications, Peace Corps Makes Big Changes”). According to PC current director, Carrie Hessler-Radelet, the recent changes signify “...the most extensive reform effort (the) agency has ever undertaken” (“In Response To Dwindling Applications, Peace Corps Makes Big Changes”). The organization saw a 70% increase in applications between July 2013 and July 2014 largely attributed to these changes marking a 22 year high (Pratt). Recruitment efforts could be made even more successful, it is crucial the organization pay attention to the backgrounds and motivations of current PCVs and RPCVs.

2.2 Program areas and partnerships

PC emphasizes that the decision to establish or maintain a program in a country is based on the desire of the host country to accept volunteers, demonstrated need, and the existence of infrastructure, health and security services capable of supporting a volunteer population. The same stands true for the partnerships established with what are referred to as “host country agencies”; they may be initially approached by PC about the possibility of having volunteer support, but they must request a PCV. A host country

agency can be a school, national park, health center, non-profit organization, municipal office, or other establishment capable of hosting a volunteer. They are typically pillars of the community making significant contributions that benefit local populations through their presence and efforts.

Many of the volunteer assignments do encourage civic engagement either directly or indirectly. The 6 program areas available to volunteers include agriculture, environment, health, youth and development, education, and community and economic development. For example, the “youth and development” program description talks of “promot(ing) engagement and active citizenship” (“What Volunteers Do”). As a volunteer in Guatemala, I witnessed fellow volunteers who were part of the “community and economic development” program working with town offices that encouraged equal participation in local politics for women. The PC responds to requests from both the local and national governments, and host country agencies.

3 VERMONT AND THE PEACE CORPS

The United States PC has found a natural ally in the state of Vermont; the state and its colleges and universities year after year are hotspots for recruitment efforts. Additionally, RPCVs often return to the state following service and begin careers reflective of the work they completed during their service. This population and the intimacy of small communities in Vermont mean that many residents know someone, and very likely, have a personal relationship with someone that served as a PCV. I saw this again in again while recruiting. Since its start, 1,530 Vermonters have served and the number continues to increase (“Home States of Peace Corps Volunteers | Peace

Corps...”). In 2015, Vermont yet again ranked as the top state per capita with 8.3 Vermonters serving out of every 100,000 residents (“Home States of Peace Corps Volunteers | Peace Corps). As Peace Corps Director, Carrie Hessler-Raddelet put it during a recent trip to the state, “You lead the nation in so many categories, so we are deeply grateful to you” (“Peace Corps Director Praises Vermont”).

3.1 Higher Education, Peace Corps, and Vermont

Both the PC and Vermont have longstanding traditions of upholding the value of higher education. Although the PC seeks out volunteers at all stages of adult life and professional development, recent college graduates have been the bread and butter of the organization since its inception over fifty years ago. Young adults often lack the economic, career, and familial constraints that can make volunteering later in life a challenge. The historical development of the Peace Corps relationship with educational institutions started with President John F. Kennedy’s campaign speech at the University of Michigan at 2 a.m. on October 14, 1960:

“How many of you who are going to be doctors, are willing to spend your days in Ghana? Technicians or engineers, how many of you are willing to work in the Foreign Service and spend your lives traveling around the world? On your willingness to do that, not merely to serve one year or two years in the service, but on your willingness to contribute part of your life to this country, I think will depend the answer whether a free society can compete. I think it can! And I think Americans are willing to contribute. But the effort must be far greater than we have ever made in the past.”

(“Peace Corps - John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum”)

The Peace Corps has solidified its value of education through partnerships with graduate programs, opportunities for college loan forgiveness, the presence of campus recruiters or STRATs (Strategic Recruiters), the PC Prep program (helps college students build the

skills that will help them to be successful as PCVs through volunteer projects, language acquisition, and targeted course offerings in technical areas), and also, the Campus Ambassador program (internship opportunities on campuses). At present, 90% of volunteer positions require a bachelor's degree meaning those that have a degree in a relevant technical area, are well poised to apply ("University Programs").

In recent years, particularly since the 1980s, there has been an increasing interest at higher education institutions in the role of civic engagement. Colleges and universities in Vermont were among the first to recognize its value. In the "Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education" created in 1999, university and college presidents stated, "...we can think of no nobler task than committing ourselves to helping catalyze and lead a national movement to reinvigorate the public purposes of and civic mission of higher education" (Ostrander 76). Among the signatories of this declaration were the former sitting presidents of Saint Michael's College (SMC), the School for International Training (SIT), and the University of Vermont (UVM), all located in Vermont ("Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education - Campus Compact").

3.1.1 University of Vermont

Appropriately, UVM reflects many of the state's values through its academic and service priorities. UVM ranked 6th among mid-sized colleges and universities for the number of PCVs currently serving in 2016 ("Peace Corps Announces Top Volunteer-Producing Colleges"). It is the fifth oldest university in New England established in the

year 1791 and has been an essential component in shaping the character of the state (“History and Traditions | | The University of Vermont”).

As a land grant university, UVM has worked to strengthen the state’s agricultural capacity with an emphasis on sustainable practices through research and collaboration with farmers, environmentalists, and preservationists and its extension programs (“UVM Extension Home”). With the PC’s evident focus on recruiting students within the aforementioned six service areas, including agriculture, the academic pursuits of students and those of the Peace Corps find overlap among many of the university’s majors. Consequently, recruitment efforts and UVM are a natural fit. Although only 5% of PCVs serve in the agricultural sector, in terms of recruiting efforts, it was a primary focus during my time as a recruiter at the university due to the state’s farming traditions, the College of Agricultural Sciences (CALs) at UVM, and the program area requests from PC at that time (“What Volunteers Do”).

Although there are many academic departments at UVM, which are well poised to partner with the PC, CDAE (Community Development and Applied Economics department) has proven to be a well suited partner. There is a clear focus within the department on local development driven by both the interests of faculty and students. That being said, local development is often examined through the lens of partnerships with international communities much like in the PC. Currently, CDAE has projects and research in Belize, Honduras, and Saint Lucia. Additionally, professors and students have conducted research in China, Sudan, Mali, Brazil, Pakistan, among other countries (“Community Development and Applied Economics”). CDAE students are well versed in

the challenges of local and international development, and this experience makes well poised applicants and graduate students.

An essential component of the relationship between CDAE, and the PC is the department's participation in the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program (PDCF). The PDCF, formerly known as the Peace Corps Fellows program was established in 1985 through a collaborative relationship between the organization, Dr. Beryl Levinger, an RPCV and professor at the Teachers College at Columbia University, and her colleagues. At its inception, the program was targeted at finding teachers that would thrive in urban schools ("Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program"). The educational programs available to PCVs through PDCF and its sister program, Masters International, have expanded throughout the years to include all service areas. The experience gained through PC is invaluable in educational and professional environments and RPCVs are able to contribute unique perspectives to graduate programs based on their service. Recipients are given credit and/or scholarships toward advanced degrees.

UVM recognized this program's value and has recruited students as part of the PDCF since January 2005 for CDAE's principle master's program and also to its master's in public administration. At UVM, Fellows are provided in-state tuition and also provided 6 academic credits towards their degree in exchange for additional community service hours in the Burlington, Vermont community and the completion of a paper that explores an aspect of their service in light of their academic pursuits. The purpose of the paper is dual fold: It is both reflection and research, which ties the RPCVs service to their academic expertise developed in the CDAE program. Currently the CDAE department

provides scholarships to participants in two academic programs: Masters of Science in Community Development and Applied Economics and also, a Master's of Science in Public Administration ("Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program: University of Vermont").

CDAE also promotes the PC through supporting a campus based Peace Corps Recruiter also known as a STRAT (strategic recruiter). In addition to being a PDCF, I also worked as the Peace Corps Recruiter or STRAT based at the UVM. This provided me with additional funding and also a unique opportunity to understand the agency from the inside out. Through my work, I gained a better understanding of the agency's values, internal challenges, and relationship with the United States government. Above all, recruiting provided me the opportunity to have in depth conversations with current applicants and RPCVs, many of whom were Vermonters. The themes of community service and civic engagement were continually cited as primary motivations for applying to the PC. Such comments came from those born and raised in the state as well as those that sought out Vermont and PC finding affinity with its values. In an interview during my time as the STRAT with Wilson Ring of the Associated Press, I stated, "One of the fortunate things about being a recruiter here is I don't have to spend as much time explaining what the organization is, because there is such a tradition of it within the state" ("Vt., N.H., Maine Still Providing to Peace Corps - Brattleboro Reformer").

Previously, the recruiter position was in charge of UVM and Burlington area colleges and residents. Now the STRAT, Abraham Rash, works solely with college students and there is a Vermont recruiter previously based in Brattleboro and currently working in Burlington, Zoe Armstrong ("Meet Your Recruiter: Zoe Armstrong."). The

STRAT is also now in charge of directing the Peace Corps Prep Program (PCPP), which aims to further recruitment efforts. Participants are required to complete specific coursework and “field experience” with the goal of preparing students for work in one of the service areas (“Peace Corps Prep at the University of Vermont”). With the program being so new, it is hard to determine the number of participants that will end up becoming PCV, but regardless, PCPP offers mentoring through the STRAT and the opportunity to gain skills proving beneficial for both participants and the PC.

3.1.2 Other area colleges - Saint Michael’s College and Middlebury College

In 2016 Saint Michael’s College (SMC) ranked 11th for the number of PCVs and Middlebury College ranked fourth among small colleges (“Peace Corps Announces Top Volunteer-Producing Colleges”). Like the Peace Corps, the schools value local and international communities; service and civic engagement figure prominently reflecting the state’s character. According to the central volunteer office on campus, Mobilization of Volunteer Efforts (MOVE), “...not every student comes to Saint Michael's to volunteer. But once they are here, most are inspired to do so by experiencing its importance in the community” (“MOVE”). According to the college’s website, by the time they are seniors, 75% of SMC students have participated in community service or volunteer work compared with 59% of all college students according to the National Survey of Student Engagement (“Service + Activism”).

With over 100 programs available, the school's extensive study abroad offerings also foster interest in the PC. Students elect to experience other cultures through SMC’s abroad programs, or those of external organizations. Over a third of students’ opt

to participate in a program (“Study Abroad”). SMC students with this type of international language and cultural experience are well poised to apply to PC. Many of the programs emphasize service and cultural immersion and a large amount of students, including myself, study abroad through the School for International Training based in Brattleboro, Vermont.

Since 2000, SMC has collaborated with PC to establish a Master's International program that permits participants to combine service with abbreviated coursework to get a master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (“TESOL Peace Corps' Master's International | Saint Michael's College”). The school also participates in the Peace Corps Prep program allowing potential future applicants to gain relevant experience for possible future service as a PCV. Professor Dan Evans, an RPCV who served in South Korea and the Director of the Masters International and PC Prep on campus, support the program by organizing the requisite coursework and organizing. According to PC director, Carrie Hessler-Radelet students now “are interested in not just imagining a better world, but rolling up their sleeves and doing something about it” (“College Launches Peace Corps Prep Program”).

Middlebury College also has a strong base of support for the PC reflected in its ranking, 6th among small colleges (“Middlebury College Among Peace Corps' 2016 Top Volunteer-Producing Colleges and Universities | Middlebury”). The community engagement office describes a very concrete relationship between civic engagement and service: “Locally and around the world, our office helps Middlebury College students explore civic identity, develop essential lifelong skills, and pursue projects in

collaboration with communities, all while striving to contribute to the public good”. Over 1,500 students connect with local and global communities through volunteering every year (“Community Engagement | Middlebury”). The school also has a strong reputation for its language immersion programs for both enrolled students and others that come to the campus for their intensive summer programs. The school’s reputation is grounded in its reputation for engagement through service and education.

3.1.3 School for International Training (SIT) and World Learning

No college’s relationship with the Peace Corps is more evident than that of the School for International Training. The school originally was founded as the Experiment in International Living and sent students abroad to “expand their worldviews” (“History - World Learning”). Over the years, the Experiment in International Living has evolved to include study abroad programs for high school and university students and a graduate college. It is now a well-established international non-profit 501 (c) (3) named World Learning.

Sargent Shriver, President Kennedy’s brother-in-law, was one of the first participants and went to Germany in the year 1934 through the Experiment in International Living. His experiences abroad as a young high school graduate are often cited as inspiring the idea for the PC. Sargent Shriver became the first PC director when the agency was founded in 1961 (“History - World Learning”). According to World Learning, “This fostered a special bond between the two organizations, and The Experiment soon began to apply its teaching methods to train PC volunteers prior to their

deployments, emphasizing cultural nuances and culture shock preparedness.” (“World Learning, Inc.”).

In terms of philosophy, there are very evident overlaps between the two: An emphasis on cultural immersion, civic engagement, and service. As an undergraduate I spent a semester studying abroad through SIT’s Culture and Development program in Ecuador. The country director for this program had previously worked as a trainer for the PC and the overlaps between the two were evident. The most essential component of every study abroad semester with SIT is the month long independent study. This is often proffered to students as a “mini-Peace Corps” where students are sent typically alone to a community to conduct research which often includes a service element. For mine, I worked with a former PCV that was developing environmental education programs in a small coastal community that abutted a national park.

The graduate college branch of SIT first emerged in response to RPCVs seeking advanced, specialized studies following service. The SIT Graduate Institute now includes Masters International programs, which permit individuals to combine service with graduate studies. They also participate in the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows program providing scholarships to RPCVs (“Peace Corps’ Master’s International Programs”).

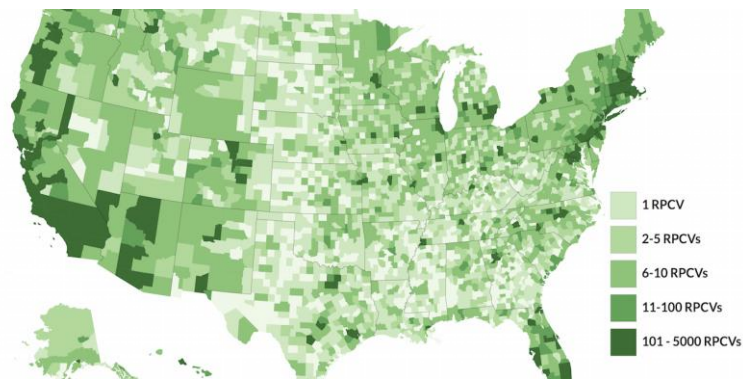
In terms of civic engagement, part of SIT’s “Approach” is a focus on “civil society and governance”, which focuses on efforts that support civic education, anti-corruption efforts, and improving governance for civil society organizations among other things. Their educational programs allow students to be active collaborators with communities furthering democratic and participatory governance through research,

capacity building, small grants, and policy advocacy (“SIT Graduate School | International Education | Development | Social Justice.”).

3.2 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Vermont

With over 1,530 RPCVs living in Vermont, many further the third goal of the organization by sharing PC’s mission and what they learned about the culture and community they served in with people in their own communities at home (“Home States of Peace Corps Volunteers”). The map shown in Figure 2 reveals areas in the United States with both high and low concentration of volunteers (darker shade reveals higher density). The RPCV network in the state of Vermont has had ebbs and flows over the years.

As was evident in interviews, many PCVs from Vermont are eager to return to the



state following service for both personal and professional reasons. According to the

Figure 2: Krieshok, Gabriel. “Data Visualization”. Web. 7 Feb, 2016.

National Center for Charitable Statistics, Vermont ranks at the top of the list for nonprofit organizations per capita with 5,363 registered nonprofits at last count in the year 2013 (“NCCS - US/State Profiles”). The RPCV network community in Vermont provides

ample opportunities for career networking in fields related to areas of service. PC experience is very desirable for many professional fields and can demonstrate resiliency and maturity to many employers. Some of the area organizations with large numbers of RPCV employees include ARD Tetrattech, the area colleges including the University of Vermont, and other nonprofits there are ample opportunities within the state.

RPCVs have also been active organizing volunteer events with organizations such as Pedals for Progress and Habitat for Humanity. As was apparent in the interviews and will be further discussed in the “Results” section, part of the efforts of RPCVs include civic engagement through various avenues such as holding public office, voting, and supporting local community efforts. There are two active Facebook pages for the state used to disseminate information about volunteer projects and events. With the leadership of RPCVs Wendy Rice, Tess Gauthier, and Kelly Dolan the organization recently was reinstated as a nonprofit organization hoping to regain some of the momentum, begin to create more regular events, and improve the structure of what is now a fairly decentralized group. A survey was disseminated this past year asking RPCVs in Vermont about their level of interest in participating in the organization and also the type of events, or efforts they would be interested in. A total of 90 responded providing much needed details to help move the organization forward.

4 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOLUNTEERING/SERVICE

Ample research has been done examining both volunteering and civic engagement, and also, much in the same vein as this thesis, if a causal relationship does in fact exist between the two. Civic engagement, in particular, has proven to be a fluid

term changing overtime as individuals find new ways to participate in politics and community life. Researchers Richard Adler and Judy Goggin indicated the many ways the term has been defined in their research and chose to summarize civic engagement as the following: “Civic engagement refers to the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future” (236). In recent years, particularly with the emergence of volunteering as a more formalized activity and its emphasis in the classroom environment, there has been substantial research conducted on the relationship between the two.

Civic engagement’s definition often changes according to the population it is referring to. Adler and Goggin break civic engagement down into four components:

1. Community service
2. Collective action
3. Political involvement
4. Social change (236)

Researcher Robert Putnam interestingly did not see community service as a component of civic engagement, but rather a symptom of a civically engaged community:

“...volunteering is part of the syndrome of good citizenship and political involvement, not an alternative to it” (132). Before looking at the particularities of the civic culture and volunteering in Vermont, reviewing previous research will indicate potential areas worth delving into during interviews.

4.1 Volunteering/service

Volunteering is defined by Sociologist John Wilson as “...any activity in which

time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization” (Wilson 215). Studies have explored individuals’ and populations’ demographics and perceived impact on rates of participation. Others have explored how participation in volunteer work influences an individual’s well-being and the impact on the communities being served. According to Wilson, less attention has been paid to the “contextual effects of volunteering and... the impact of organizational, community, and regional characteristics on individual decisions to volunteer” (Wilson 215).

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) first began to track volunteering in the mid-1970s. This “federal agency helps more than 5 million Americans improve the lives of their fellow citizens through service”, including the PC, and also tracks statistics related to volunteering (“About CNCS”). According to data collected by the CNCS, just under 35,000,000 Americans volunteered in the year 1974 compared to 62,614,700 in the year 2013 demonstrating a significant increase in the last forty years.

The decision to participate in volunteer service, whether it is helping a neighbor in need or committing to two years of service in the Peace Corps, has been extensively researched. Understanding an individual’s motivations may help to facilitate recruitment and also properly place a volunteer in a position, which are crucial elements of PC work (Shye 184). Researcher Samuel Shye looked at the perceived impacts of volunteering on an individual’s quality of life using “16 human functioning modes” (183). Found as the most important modes among volunteers and non-volunteers were, “Can strengthen volunteer’s feeling of belonging to his society or community”, and “Enables the

volunteer to develop friendships”. The study clearly indicated that the benefits of volunteering are perceived as providing social connectivity (194). Less popular were more self-serving modes including, “Can improve the volunteer’s economic condition”, and “Relieves the volunteer from personal worries”.

Gil Clark and Mary Snyder, both psychologists, have a take on volunteer work rooted in their profession. Their research suggests that individuals may be more likely to want to volunteer in the future if they have more flexibility when selecting their type of activity. They mention this in reference to volunteer requirements often given to students (159). They go further and suggest that overall satisfaction with volunteering can be impacted by proper placement: “...volunteers whose motivational concerns are served by their participation would derive greater satisfaction than those whose concerns are not met” (158). Peace Corps has moved in this direction allowing prospective volunteers to select their work area and even the country they would like to serve in, an option not previously available.

A study that revealed much more personalized motivations for volunteering is the research of college students conducted by Robert Serow. As Serow states, popular media are likely to attribute rising volunteerism to increased idealism and social awareness while policy makers and educational theorists point to its connection with civic education. Again, the results showed primarily altruistic motivations with, “Sense of satisfaction from helping others” mentioned most (549). Serow found in interviews that volunteering, “encourages student to become directly engaged with the problems of vulnerable individuals rather than viewing them in terms of broader, abstract social or

political phenomena” (553). This same perspective was often mentioned in interviews with prospective PCVs.

4.1.1 Volunteering Among Youth and Young Adults

Sociologist Mary Kirlin examined the connection between pre-adult experiences in service and its impact on civic engagement in adulthood. By examining previous research, Kirlin determined that one of the principal elements missing from service learning was connecting it with civic engagement (Kirlin 572). Participation in groups provides young people reference points for understanding how to properly engage in organizational processes and becoming engaged participants and often times, leaders (Yates and Youniss 496). These pre-adult experiences can engender confidence and make entering into an unknown process and a new civic culture in a new community perhaps, less intimidating.

Colleges have been pushing volunteer programs since September 2001 and according to the report by the CNCS, *College Students Helping America*, the push for service is in part a “...response to concerns that civic and political engagement may be in decline” (“College Students Helping America). According to researchers, Constance Flanagan and Peter Levine, rates have declined in 9 out of ten “important characteristics of citizenship” save one: volunteering (261). In a review of motivations among volunteering college students, “Although most of the literature indicates that egoism is the primary motivator for volunteers, many studies... indicate that altruism still plays an important role” (Winniford et al. 142). Although young people (18 to 24) are the least likely to vote among age groups with only 38% doing so in the 2012 presidential election,

there are other ways that many young adults see themselves as engaged including through volunteer service (File 2).

Most notably there is an evident generational divide when civic engagement refers to older versus younger people (Adler and Goggin 236). Relevant for my research, although there are no age restrictions on PC service, the average age of a PCV currently serving is 28, firmly seated as a young adult (“Fast Facts...”). Research on civic engagement among youth and young adults by researchers Constance Flanagan and Peter Levine found that young adults are particularly well suited to take action and contribute to debates that affect their age group including youth violence, high school dropout rates, and the rising cost of higher education (160). Flanagan and Levine conducted a survey of youth and young adults and civic engagement with a focus in particular on the impacts of ethnicity, race, social class, and education on levels of engagement (159). They conclude that “opportunities for civic engagement are not evenly distributed by social class or by racial and ethnic group, and wide disparities in political participation exist” (173). They also note that it is possible that civic engagement has been delayed in individuals due to societal and cultural shifts such as economic downturn and a prolonged transition to adulthood. They cite organizations, such as AmeriCorps, as possible avenues for encouraging ever greater levels of engagement among young adults (174). AmeriCorps is similar to PC, but is open to those coming out of high school and operates on a national level.

Other researchers highlight the impacts service has on individuals on an individual level for young adults. Aaron Einfield and Denise Collins interviewed former

AmeriCorps volunteers and determined their commitment to social justice and civic engagement. Much like my own research Enfield and Collins used qualitative research through interviews with individuals that had completed service; in this case AmeriCorps service (174). Their research found that all interviewees expressed a commitment to future civic engagement although they did not necessarily increase their awareness of social inequality (95). Much in line with my own experiences as the PC recruiter, service during college increases interest in related activities, like the PC, after graduation.

Another research project conducted by Alexander Astin and Linda Sax, a survey of 3,450 college students examined how undergraduates are affected by service participation. A survey enumerated 12 different measurements of civic responsibility. All were shown to be positively impacted by participation in service (254). Interestingly, this study relates to how service impacted participants upon completion where as my research is primarily concerned with examining experiences prior to service and their influence on the decision to serve.

4.1.2 Volunteering and Peace Corps

The PC is decidedly unique in terms of the tangible benefits it provides to volunteers, which has caused some to question its legitimacy as actual “volunteer” work. PCVs are provided financial, educational, and career opportunities, but these are all considered secondary by the organization. The agency states that, “The most significant accomplishment will be the contribution you make to improve the lives of others” (peacecorps.gov). Volunteers do indeed rate working to improve their communities, aiding the less fortunate, and doing something for their country higher than non-

volunteers (Flanagan et al. 159). This is very much so in the same vein as Wilson's definition and what PC states to be the "most significant contribution" (peacecorps.gov). Regardless of how the organization chooses to frame their message, undeniably there are professional and educational benefits including opportunities for government jobs and scholarships upon completion. Reflective of the organization's viewpoint, however, every candidate I interviewed during my time as a recruiter for the PC expressed a desire to volunteer and serve abroad and most cited it as the principal reason for applying.

4.2 Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is broadly defined as, "...an understanding of active citizenship and a commitment to serving one's community" (Einfield and Collins 103). The unique civic culture of the United States was early on characterized by French historian, Alexis de Tocqueville. During his travels in the United States, he noted that citizens had a way of joining associations for most every purpose (Tocqueville 192):

As soon as several inhabitants of the United States have taken up an opinion for a feeling which they wish to promote in the world, they look out for mutual assistance; and as soon as they have found one another out, they combine. From that moment on, they are no longer isolated men, but a power seen from afar..." (196)

Notably, sociologist Robert Putnam shaped our understanding of the social world at the turn of the 21st century and pointed to the significant role of a civic culture in creating an equitable society. In his groundbreaking book, *Bowling Alone*, Putnam examines the changing landscape of community and civic engagement at the turn of the 20th century. Although researchers choose to focus on different aspects when defining a "civic culture", there is substantial overlap in many areas. Putnam says a civic

community consists of the following 4 components: 1) civic engagement, 2) political equality, 3) solidarity, trust, and tolerance, and 4) social structures of cooperation (*Making Democracy Work* 87). The “Methods” section will discuss how these four principal characteristics were used to review interviews.

4.2.1 Putnam’s Measurement of Civic Engagement

Putnam uses four different indices to measure the existence of a civic community including newspaper readership, voting on referendums, “preference” voting, and the presence of sports and cultural associations (*Making Democracy Work* 96). Like Tocqueville previously, Putnam theorized readership of newspapers as an indicator of civic engagement. Putnam’s work does acknowledge that, even in 1993 when his book on Italy was published, many individuals access their information through other media. Still, at the time of his research, this was still “the medium with the broadest coverage of community affairs” (*Making Democracy Work* 92).

Putnam also uses voting as an indicator for civic engagement. Putnam, due to the political process in Italy, looks at turnouts in two areas: referendum voting and what is referred to as “preference voting”. Referendums are votes on specific issues such as divorce legalization, nuclear power, and public financing or political parties. Putnam theorizes that unless a particular referendum impacts an individual personally, the motivation to vote comes from a sense of civic duty. Putnam also used a second type of voting to examine the presence of a civic community. Preference voting is when individuals vote along party lines and highly sought after in areas of the country where

business relationships and factionalism take precedent over the collective public good (*Making Democracy Work* 94).

To measure “associations”, Putnam accessed available census data on all associations (*Making Democracy Work* 91). Putnam found that some regions of Italy typified what Tocqueville deemed as “joiners” in the United States while others had a more insular take on life tending to be more focused on the immediacy of family and suspicious of those external to these close ties (*Making Democracy Work* 92).

In addition to these four indicators, Putnam used “agree-disagree” responses to statements posed to regional councilors that included the following to take a more in-depth look at political equality:

1. People should be permitted to vote even if they cannot do so intelligently.
2. *Few people really know what is in their best interests in the long run.
3. *Certain people are better qualified to lead this country because of their traditions and family background.
4. *It will always be necessary to have a few strong, able individuals who know how to take charge. (*Making Democracy Work* 103)¹

Putnam does stress, and it is evident in his successive works, that the definition of a civic community is not static. His later works examine civic life and its relationship with religion, youth, technology and modernity, and politics in even greater detail with a focus on the United States.

4.2.2 Subsequent Research Based on Putnam

Putnam’s examination in Italy has figured prominently in subsequent research on civic communities in a range of studies; some simply cite Putnam for shaping the

¹ *Indicates measured inversely.

conception of the civic community while others have used the same or similar indices to complete their research. Notwithstanding those that have chosen different measurements, he is still acknowledged as fundamental in shaping and defining subsequent research.

Most in line with my own research, because of its results and regional relevance, is the work of Tom Rice (Iowa State University) and Alexander Sumberg (University of Vermont). Rice and Sumberg examined civic culture and its impact on performance of government in the United States. They looked at Putnam's research, which showed that in regions of Italy where individuals are more likely to be civically engaged governments, "are more efficient and effective, meeting many citizens' needs in a timely and professional manner". Putnam also found that a high level of civic engagement corresponded to economic development (Rice and Sumberg 100).

Using Putnam's four components of a civic community and influenced by the indices, employed by Putnam, Rice and Sumberg established a means of measuring civic community in the United States. To measure the first component, civic engagement, they used the following: 1) newspaper circulation (same as Putnam), 2) number of books per capita in the public libraries in each state, 3) number of community improvement and philanthropic groups per capita in each state (Rice and Sumberg 101). To measure political equality, the second component of a civic community according to Putnam, they used four different indices: 1) percentage of public school teachers who are men, 2) percentage of public officials who are women, 3) number of civil rights groups per capita that are "non-white", and 4) a gauge of income distribution. Putnam's third component of a civic community, "solidarity, trust and tolerance", was measured using the following 3

indices: 1) crime rate, 2) number of lawyers per capita, 3) default rate on student Perkins loans. They theorized that crime rates would be lower, there would be less need for lawyers, and that former students would be less likely to default on loans out of respect for their governmental lenders. (Rice and Sumberg 102). Lastly, social structures of cooperation were measured using an index of 26 types of non-profit organizations. Like Putnam, Rice and Sumberg contend that the organizations do not need to be civically oriented in order to have a positive influence on the existence of a civic community (Rice and Sumberg 103).

Rice and Sumberg's study is of particular interest for my research not only for its utilization of Putnam's framework, but also because of its results; Vermont ranked first using a positive correlation to civiness. Discovering Rice and Sumberg's research is what initially resulted in my hypothesis that perhaps a relationship exists between civic engagement in Vermont and its ranking for participation in the PC. As my own research was qualitative, Rice and Sumberg's was quantitative. Still, their measures did shape the selection criteria for information drawn out from interviews.

Researcher Amber L. Seligson (Cornell University) used Putnam's research to examine the relatively new democracies Central American countries. Seligson states that those concerned with the success of the region's democracies are looking for the proper "fertilizer" to ensure these nascent governments continued existence. Many contend, in light of Putnam's research, that encouraging civic participation is critical (Seligson 342). Seligson's research is of particular interest for my own in that it suggests that the implications of Putnam's research have reached beyond academia and have influenced

international development agencies' support of civically oriented organizations and projects as are facilitated by the PC and others.

Seligson supports Putnam's view that involvement in community groups is influential in developing a civic culture, but is skeptical that all groups have the same influence; For example, as Seligson questions, "How does membership in a bird-watching group lead to a high-level of civic engagement?" (344). Also, the economic constraints and political volatility of the developing world make the examination of civic life very different and not necessarily transferrable (344). As a result, Seligson separates out the types of organizations into seven different categories and places them on a four point scale according to its relevancy to civic engagement. Seligson also, understanding the context of Central America, chose to use how often citizens in each of the 6 different counties make demands on four different types of public officials including the local mayor, a legislator, a central governmental agency, and the national president (347). Unlike in Italy, because of different barriers, voting and newspaper readership do not accurately demonstrate civic engagement. For Seligson's study, data was gathered in collaboration with institutions using individual surveys of those living in metropolitan areas in the 6 different counties. Seligson did find a positive relationship for civic engagement with demand making and participation in community development based organizations. Unlike Putnam, however, Seligson did not find that the attitudinal factors of interpersonal trust and tolerance had any predictive ability in terms of developing a civic culture (356).

Anja van Heelsum's (University of Amsterdam) article, "The Relationship between Political Participation and Civic Community of Migrants in the Netherlands", also used Putnam's research in Italy to develop its framework. Like Seligson, Heelsum emphasizes the particularities of the place and population she has elected to study; in her case, ethnic minority groups and immigrants, also having a lower socio-economic status (Heelsum 19). Heelsum utilizes three different field studies to gather measurements: 1) study on voting behavior, 2) study on local councilors, and 3) study on migrant organizations (21). Looking at the Surinamese, Moroccan, and Turkish populations in the country, Heelsum created aggregates that looked at the number of councilors and voter turnout. Heelsum also used mapping research to determine the number of ethnically based organizations, their density and the percentage of isolated organizations. Similar to Seligson, Heelsum does not see participation in any organization as relative to levels of civic engagement, but rather those that were socially/politically oriented (23). Her results, using the theory first developed by Putnam, pointed to a relationship between civic engagement and political participation.

Similar to Seligson, Christopher Marsh has looked at the implications of Putnam's research for relatively recently emerging democracies; Marsh's research looks at Russia. As he states, "...the implications of (Putnam's) findings are of tremendous importance for the democratic-development of post-Communist states" (Marsh 183). Marsh in particular emphasizes Putnam's view that civically engaged communities tend to have more horizontally integrated political climates as opposed to the more hierarchical governments and cultures found in southern Italy and more traditional areas of Russia

(Marsh 185). Also, of particular interest based on the culture of Russia and Putnam's study are what Marsh identifies as corruption and mistrust, barriers towards developing a civic community (186). Compared to other researchers identified above, Marsh is most concerned with maintaining as close to identical as possible indicators of a civic community in alignment with Putnam (187). In place of Putnam's "preference vote", Marsh uses voting in elections to the regional legislative assemblies. He also uses referendum voting. For Putnam's readership of newspapers, Marsh uses newspaper production per 1,000 people (189). Like Putnam, Marsh also uses the number of social clubs and is unconcerned if they have a particular purpose related to civicness such as politics or community development (189). Marsh's results show that there are clusters of areas showing higher rates in the civic community index. Often lower rates were found in areas with high percentages of "non-Russian" and indigenous populations (192).

In reviewing research subsequent to and influenced by Putnam, one element is clear: Researchers are concerned with the implications Putnam's research has for places striving to create greater social, political, and economic stability. The studies that I found were most often of emergent democracies (Marsh and Seligson), and ethnically and/or socio-economically marginalized populations (Heelsum). Researchers are concerned with determining the extent to which these populations do in fact have civic cultures and how encouraging a more horizontally integrated society may influence their political and economic future. Possibly, as Seligson mentioned, this research may serve to influence international developmental agencies hoping to encourage the development of more civic communities (342).

Others, inspired by Putnam, have chosen to study the efficacy of government based on civic engagement and other related factors. A study conducted by Margit Tavits examined the impacts of social capital on governments by examining local governments in both Germany and the United States and looking at two factors: Policy activism and administrative efficiency. The results indicated, "...that more civic communities tend to be more effective in pressuring their governments to provide more public goods and services" (Tavits 223).

Putnam's work caused many researchers to focus on the perceived decline of civic culture. Researcher Erik Amna, however, decided to focus on examining these concepts to help develop a clear definition. Their work expanded and altered the term to be more inclusive and reflective of modern interpretations (282). As they write, "If civic engagement is used by scholars to mean completely different things, it is basically a useless concept—it confuses more than it illuminates" (284). The researchers chose to distinguish by separating into manifest and latent forms. Manifest action is observable and action oriented demonstrated by the term "political participation". This can include boycotting, running for office, handing out leaflets, and politically motivated damaging acts on property. Latent "civil participation" (which includes civic engagement, according to Amna) is demonstrated when one recycles, takes interest in politics and society, volunteers, or identifies with a certain ideology or political group (295). As is evident, it is much more passive in nature. Either political participation or civil participation can be politically or socially oriented.

4.2.3 Critiques of Putnam

Margaret Levi chose to examine Putnam's idea that cultural norms and networks as part of civic engagement are related to local government's effectiveness in serving its people (Levi 45). Levi is largely critical of Putnam's theories describing them as romanticized: "Ultimately Putnam cannot account for the relationship between a civic community, institutional performance, and democracy" (Levi 51). Putnam's most recent book, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, does look with almost a sense of nostalgia to the country's past, but perhaps not without reason in terms of prospects for future success for young people. Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone*, has also been critiqued for perceived romanticism of years passed. Putnam, however, does provide ways of measuring governmental performance and civic engagement whereas Levi's critique rests on her belief that his ideas are false without offering alternative measures. Levi states that more evidence is needed to support the claim that there exists a connection between civil society and governmental performance (Levi 52).

Like Levi, researcher Sidney Tarrow also puts a critical lens on Putnam's work. Putnam hypothesizes that northern Italy's more effective system of governance can be attributed to its civic culture (Tarrow 384). Tarrow questions the idea of measuring governmental efficacy by looking at policy performance. He poses the question in criticism, "Would that make fascist northern Italy more democratic than the South in Mussolini's heyday?" (396). Although he recognizes the milestone of Putnam's work, he also questions Putnam's ability to apply the simplified concepts of modern social sciences to a country with a complex history. As he puts it, "Putnam dared to traverse the

gap between the presentism of much social science work and the less certain terrain of history and culture” (Tarrow 396). Still, again, he praises Putnam’s ability to marry both qualitative information found in the country's history with the quantitative measures of modern day (396).

4.3 The Economics of Civic Engagement

According to Eric Uslaner and Mitchell Brown, “Great (economic) equality and higher levels of trust are two pathways to (civic) participation” (2). Their study examines the widening income gap in the last forty years and how often those in a higher income bracket will have more political clout and, because of this, more of an impetus to participate in political actions and organizations having more potential for gain. Also, comparatively poor populations will be less inclined to collaborate in both politics and civic organizations because they do not perceive a shared fate with wealthier populations (Uslaner and Brown 2). One component their study incorporates is the Gini coefficient, which examines income equality among states. Such divide between the “haves” and “have-nots” can be examined through the lens of the Gini coefficient. The Gini coefficient is used by organizations and governments to measure the depth of the economic divide within an area. Compared to other states, Vermont ranks 19th for the lowest Gini coefficient (“List of U.S. States by Gini Coefficient”).

4.4 Civic Engagement and Volunteering

Many researchers have spoken to the connection between civic engagement and volunteering. The definition for some of civic engagement has evolved to actually

include volunteering and service as part and parcel. Civically engaged individuals have shown to be more likely to volunteer, and there are many opportunities to volunteer with civically based organizations. As Tocqueville indicates, civic associations promote a more egalitarian society where there is more tolerance for opposing views (Elisasoph 17). Volunteering acts similarly; working for and with often disparate groups helps to bridge gaps and promote equality. Often the basis of such efforts is, to in fact, bridge that gap. This is found in the PC mission: to help promote understanding of Americans on the part of people being served, and to promote understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans (“Make the Most of Your World”). There is a basis for establishing connections through collaborating that are inherent in both volunteering and civic engagement.

As many decry the lack of interest in politics, others acknowledge that it is possible that how we participate may have shifted. Volunteering is one such outlet. With close to 78% not approving of the job congress is doing, it is clear that many do not see politics as the best vehicle for change and, therefore, may be seeking alternate routes to engage (“RealClearPolitics - Election Other - Congressional Job Approval”). Putnam most notably speaks of this shift; As volunteering has increased, engagement in more traditional organizations, such as religious groups, bowling leagues, and clubs, has declined. As Putnam puts it, however, volunteering should not be seen as an alternative to participation in civic life, but rather as an indication of “good citizenship” (Putnam 130-132).

4.5 Shifting Definitions of Civic Engagement

The more traditional organizations, such as religious organizations, bowling leagues, clubs, and civic groups had witnessed a steady decline at the time of the publishing of this book (2000) and this has continued in more recent years. Simultaneously, while participation in these organizations has declined, rates of volunteering have increased topping off in the year 2002 and remaining relatively constant with 62.8 million Americans volunteering in the year 2015 (“Volunteering in America”). As researchers Tom Bakker and Claes Vereese state, “questions arise if *all* forms of political participation are declining or if the existing literature is biased by a disproportional focus on institutional and limited measures of participatory behavior.” (Bakker and Vereese 3).

Shifts in recent years have shown civic engagement to be much more diffused and accessible to anyone with an expressed interest. As sociologist Nina Eliasoph puts it, “Local civic associations bring decision-making down to the reach of the average unexceptional person - even someone that does not have a special fondness for political affairs” (Eliasoph 15). This is echoed by one of Putnam’s components of a civic community, “political equality” (Putnam 87). As Putnam states, the effectiveness of government “is closely tied to the degree to which authority and social interchange in the life of the region is organized horizontally or hierarchically” (Putnam 105). According to Putnam, the more horizontally integrated a society is, the more likely that its government will be responsive to the needs of its people.

There is a growing tide away from hierarchical structures found in government

and more traditional civic based organizations. We find in more traditional organizations, as found in the government, a president, vice president, secretary, etc. As sociologist, Nina Eliasoph, points out in more diffused movements such as Occupy Wall Street, there is a push back against such formalities and structural leadership (145). Historically one leader, or few leaders, are characterized as spearheading movements; Martin Luther King Jr. for civil rights, Mahatma Ghandi in India, and Cesar Chavez for migrant farm workers are all characterized as heroes of their prospective movements. With the arrival of social media and the internet, however, the opportunities to connect are limitless and open to everyone. Individuals can hear of opportunities for civic engagement and volunteering through Facebook, Twitter, and other online resources and tap into what is happening almost immediately. The global and digital divide is decreasingly a factor as more individuals have mobile devices and internet access (Norris 4).

4.5.1 Civic Engagement and Generational Shifts

This shifting definition is seen among different generations as the ways individuals interact with politics and their communities change. Although there are many that have created definitions of “civic engagement” the term continues to evolve as people become engaged in different ways. Judith Ramaley, former President of UVM, pointed out that similar to a biological concept, the term “civic engagement” continues to evolve with new information (Adler and Goggin 238). One of the primary ways of being civically engaged is seen as being through volunteer service: “Civic engagement [is] an individual’s duty to embrace the responsibilities of citizenship with the obligation to actively participate, alone or in concert with others, in volunteer service activities that

strengthen the local community” (Diller 21). If the trend continues in terms of service, it is likely that this definition will become all the more widely accepted in the coming years.

Low voting rates, particularly among young people, are continually cited as indicative of waning civic engagement (“Young-Adult Voting: An Analysis of Presidential Elections, 1964-2012”). These rates may not tell the whole story, however. Much like the bowling leagues and religious groups of previous generations, voting may not be how young people chose to engage with the political system. Some indicate that this may be due to what has been seen as the inefficacy of elected officials in recent years (Zukin et al. 26). Research has shown that they are, however, participating in other civically minded events such as protests and consumer politics and that, based on turnout among young adults for the most recent elections, voter turnout may be having an upswing (Zukin et. al 90).

Putnam’s pessimism about the state of civic engagement maybe making a turn for the better; as mentioned in the previous section, use of social media technology are causing some researchers of civic engagement among youth to predict that the state of involvement is making a turn for the better (Bennett et. al 125). According to researcher Erik Amna, changes in how young people civically engage may cause concern, because it is unlike the ways of parents and grandparents, but there needs to be some perspective. Amna states, “The more the development of civic engagement becomes dependent on initiatives from above, the greater is the risk that adolescents will be tamed and disciplined rather than empowered and skilled” (612). In a way, this is reflective of how

young people are more likely to be civically engaged; Rather than being told what to do, they are to discover on their own and be their own leaders.

4.5.2 Civic Engagement and the Role of Changing Technology

The most notable change that has impacted how individuals interact in all ways of life, including how they are civically engaged, is technology. Where in the past, news and details on events or meetings in a community were accessed through more traditional means such as newspapers and the news on television, now anyone with a smartphone or a computer is capable of providing information, feedback, and essentially, becoming an organizer. Most notably, social media and the internet have allowed individuals the ability to connect and organize spontaneously and without having to be a registered member of an organization, political party, or group. “Unlike print, radio, and television, which are overwhelmingly managed by elites in a top-down fashion, these technologies allow for multidirectional pathways of user-driven production, consumption, appropriation, and pastiche” (Bennett et al. 124). Although there continues to be a divide in access to the internet among socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, this decreases with every passing year (Perrin and Duggan 2).

In an examination of why we engage with digital media as a means to be civically engaged, the ability to foster empowerment emerges, especially when communicating with like-minded individuals (Gordon et al. 10). Although there are pitfalls to digital platforms including the quality of available information, they are capable of “more variability in the ‘size’ and distribution of discussions, augment(ing) patterns of media

use, accessibility, and control over news resources, lower(ing) the barrier to entry to civic discussion, and increase discussion diversity” (Gordon et. al 12).

4.5.3 Politics Evolving Influence on Civic Engagement

The current political climate points to a level of disenfranchisement with the status quo in government, and also, not surprisingly, individuals are seeking more nontraditional avenues for being engaged. Interestingly, it has also created a burgeoning interest in candidates seen as non-traditional including Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont.

Barack Obama’s preceding campaign was revolutionary in how it used nontraditional means, in particular, social media platforms to recruit volunteers and solicit donations. The efforts for both of these campaigns were largely diffused although they centered on a central candidate. Obama was dubbed the “First Internet President” and at the end of his campaign had 13 million emails in their database (Greengard 16). Researcher Peter Dahlgren attributes this to “the often stale and unresponsive character of established political parties; the social distance between citizens and their representatives; and the growing, unaccountable power of the corporate sector” (2). Sanders campaign saw a markedly high number of first time voters and young people that engaged in his campaign through online platforms and volunteering. More young people voted for Sanders than for Donald Trump, or Hillary Clinton combined (“More Young People Voted for Bernie Sanders than Trump and Clinton Combined — by a Lot - The Washington Post”). At the recent Democratic National Convention, organizers emphasized the power of collective action through Hillary Clinton’s slogan “Stronger

Together” (“What Hillary Clinton’s Latest Slogan — ‘we’re Stronger Together’ — Really Says about Her Candidacy - The Washington Post”). This is in direct contrast to Trump’s speech at the Republican National Convention in which he stated, “I alone can fix it”. The contrast is causing some to suggest that the results of this election may indicate whether we are looking for a more horizontally integrated society, or a sole leader (“‘Stronger Together’ vs. ‘I Alone Can Fix It’ - The Boston Globe”). The contrast is evident.

5 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOLUNTEERING/SERVICE IN VERMONT

The following section will look at the culture of civic engagement and volunteering in Vermont. Often characterized as a unique state with a particularly interesting history in both of these areas, the state continues to be at the forefront of many social movements. As the state has been partially shaped by the strong presence of the PC and an RPCV community, jointly the organization has been shaped by its history, which in many ways, began in the state.

As national cultural shifts take place in the realm of civic engagement, we begin to see how they may be shaped and felt by the tradition, values, and landscape of the Green Mountain state. Former UVM professor Frank Bryan and John McClaughry of the Ethan Allen Institute describe the state of affairs in Vermont in the following: “Vermont stands at a crossroads. It may fashion a future after the metro-industrial model that its historical earlier isolation denied it. Or it may preserve and enhance the decentralized, communal environment it has been fortunate to have retained” (*The Vermont Papers* 4). Although this description may romanticize the state, it is repeatedly characterized in a

similar fashion and not without reason. A recent story by Vermont Public Radio considered the idea that many young people are fleeing the state, because of lack of opportunity. Interestingly, however, there are as equal numbers leaving as are entering the state. A young woman quoted in the article states her rationale for moving to Vermont as “the spirit of collaboration and community”. Although many are moving to the more urban Chittenden county, Jane Kolodinsky of the Center for Rural Studies at UVM hypothesizes that there may be a “resurgence of rural America again in the next 20 years”, which certainly would describe many areas of the state (Zind).

In interviews, participants did repeatedly note tracking community happenings through media based news sources and forums such as Front Porch Forum, VT Digger, Seven Days, and Vermont Public Radio. They are an integral way of how Vermonters now learn about what is happening in their communities, however. That being said, they do serve to connect members of a community on issues of concern, and can create palpable changes. In describing the value of Front Porch Forum, sociologist at UVM Tom Macias says it is easy to categorize individuals based on the sign on their front lawn or the bumper sticker on their car. As Macias says, “Front Porch Forum gives you an opportunity to actually hear from those people. And it might be about a political issue, but it might just be that someone's selling a table saw. And you go down and you talk to them.” It was instrumental, for example, in connecting neighbors after tropical storm Irene hit the state (“In Vermont, A Hyper-Local Online Forum Brings Neighbors Together”).

5.1 Volunteering in Vermont

Of the countless studies that have explored volunteering, there are less that have looked at the circumstances in an individual's life that compel him/her to volunteer. According to sociologist John Wilson, less attention has been paid to the “contextual effects of volunteering and... the impact of organizational, community, and regional characteristics on individual decisions to volunteer” (Wilson 215). This brings an even greater of relevance to examining the connection between Vermont and PC service. It will help to shed light on how the character of the state of Vermont has made the organization particularly appealing for its residents.

The CNCS has collected state by state data as well as national data on volunteer rates. In the year 2014, 34.7% of Vermonters participated in volunteer work compared to the national rate of 25.4% ranking Vermont 6th on the list in terms of volunteer rate (“NCCS - US/State Profiles”). This is an impressive rank and may partially explain Vermonters predilection to serve as PCVs. Of particular interest is Vermont’s ranking of volunteerism among young people; Vermont ranks the following for volunteerism: 3rd in the nation for young adults (31.5%), 3rd for college students (41.5%), 2nd for millennials (31.3%), and 5th for teenagers (37.5%) according to the NCCS (“NCCS – US/State Profiles”). If these statistics continue to hold true regarding volunteering among young people in Vermont, the PC should expect to continue to receive a large swath of volunteers from the state in the years to come. The culture of the state encourages young people to volunteer and in turn, many of these individuals are able to make the substantial commitment of 2 years of service already having often times significant volunteer

experience under their belt.

5.2 The “Vermont Way”: Civic Engagement in the State of Vermont

According to Robert Putnam, a civic culture consists of the following 4 principal characteristics: 1) civic engagement, 2) political equality, 3) solidarity, trust, and tolerance, and 4) social structures of cooperation (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 87). As stated in section 4.2.2, researchers Tom Rice and Alexander Sumberg (formerly of University of Vermont) examined civic culture among states controlling for demographic factors that could potentially impact results such as wealth, race, and education levels. Their study found that Vermont ranked highest for enacting civic culture through aggregating data related to the aforementioned four characteristics of civic culture outlined by Putnam (Rice and Sumberg 104).

Sumberg and Rice’s research determined that “the more civic a state is, the more likely it is to have a liberal, innovative, and effective government” (Rice 109). This conception of the role of civic culture points to states with predominantly liberal and progressive populations as they tend to see governmentally sponsored social programs and policies as encouraging change through providing support to disadvantaged populations unable to meet their needs through the market economy. In contrast, more politically conservative states may see change coming about through economic advancements in the market present in a more capitalistic and business driven system. Despite differences in political inclinations, neither conservative nor liberal attitudes precludes participation in volunteer activities. However, these differing views may impact the type of volunteer work that individuals decide to pursue. More conservative

individuals may select faith based organizations for volunteering while individuals with more progressive political views may be more inclined to seek out organizations like the PC.

5.3 Rural Character of Vermont: Small Town Community Life

As historian Paul Searls wrote, “Vermont must be appreciated both as a place and as an idea” (Searls 75). How does the relationship develop, then, between the decidedly rural landscape of the state and its traditions of political independence and community engagement? Political scientist Frank Bryan points out that the rural communities of Vermont promotes an elevated level of civic engagement because size necessitates cooperation through traditions such as town meeting: “...places where community and politics meet, where individuals learn the habit of democracy face to face, where decision making takes place in the context of communal interdependence” (Bryan and Mclaughry 40). Bryan believes that not in spite of its size, but because of it, the smallness of Vermont towns has much to teach others in terms of democracy:

America has often seemed transfixed by the big. I am captivated by the small. It is not a popular approach. For the policymakers of a continental republic this is understandable. For scientists investigating democracy I find it odd.
(Bryan 21)

With the second highest percentage of residents residing in rural areas according to the United States Census, just over 60%, Vermont’s well equipped to serve as an example of how community functions in a predominantly rural state. Part of small town community life is the annual Town Meeting Day. A quote by Charles Kuralt of Stratford describes in the following:

What is really on the menu today is government of the people... When finally they did adjourn and walk out into the snow, it was with the feelings of having preserved something important, something more important than their streetlights – their liberty. (Bryan 22)

Another annual event celebrated throughout Vermont is Green Up Day.

Celebrated every spring, community members participate in environmental oriented events and litter pickups to raise awareness to “promote the stewardship of our state’s natural landscape and waterways and the livability of our communities” (“About Us | Green Up Vermont”).

5.4 Political character of Vermont

Research has indicated that in states where a large number of people say they are leaders in their community and there exists a large number of community leaders there is a significantly higher rates of volunteering pointing to a more civic culture (Uslaner 888). Often requisite in small towns is the participation of many community members in local government to complete the diurnal functions of running a community and such is found in Vermont.

Recently the politics of the state of Vermont were catapulted into the spotlight with Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders’ candidacy for president of the United States. “Vermont... is unyielding in its resistance to big money in politics and given the town meeting tradition, this is not merely understandable but laudable”, according to political columnist Geoffrey Norman (“Weekly Standard”). We see the same sentiment echoed in Vermont State Senator Bernie Sanders current campaign; Senator Sanders refuses to have a Super Political Action Committee (PAC) which allows special interest groups to

support a candidate's campaign, and has made wealth inequality, rallying against Wall Street, and pushing for campaign finance reform all central themes to his campaign ("On the Issues").

The senator, who grew up in Brooklyn, New York, came to the state along with many other "flatlanders" as part of the so-called "back-to-landers" movement of the late 1960s and 70s. Those that came were drawn to Vermont as much for its bucolic landscape as for an opportunity to be involved in a progressively oriented political movement. In previous generations, many young people flocked to urban areas to seek community and employment, back-to-landers of the era were seeking a civically engaged and more intentional community. As two Yale law students, James F. Blumstein and James Phelan, wrote of the migration, "The goal of this takeover would be to establish a truly experimental society in which new solutions to today's problems could be tried, an experimental state which would serve as a new frontier and encourage imaginative local innovation" ("How the Back-to-the-Land Movement Paved the Way for Bernie Sanders").

5.4.1 Secession Movement

The state of Vermont was independent during the years of 1777 to 1791 and, particularly after the events of September 11th, there was a resurgence in the state to secede from the union to create an independent republic. There are differing ideas among those supporting secession, but many are opposed to what is seen as an imperialistic federal government. As secessionist Thomas Naylor, puts it the state is "smaller, more rural, more democratic, less materialistic, less violent, and more egalitarian than most

states” (Naylor 18). *The Vermont Commons*, a local newspaper no longer in publication, proliferated the idea of an independent Vermont reaching its height in 2011 with approximately 12,000 subscribers (“Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence”). Its publisher, Rob Williams, along with 60 other Vermonters held court on the issue according to a press release from its sponsoring organization: “Could it be possible to hold a statewide convention on political independence in a state house chamber...? ‘Only in Vermont,’ explains Vermont Commons editor Juliet Buck” (“Only in Vermont?! A Vermont Independence Party (VIP) in the State House | VTDigger”). Although having less momentum recently, the level of interest in the state secession movement can be cited as one example of a civically engaged populous with an independent nature.

5.4.2 Town Meeting Day

Vestiges of times past have more staying in power in Vermont’s small towns. For example, the aforementioned Town Meeting Day continues on as a state holiday the first Tuesday of every March. A New England tradition with roots reaching as far back as ancient Greece and more recently, to England and Massachusetts’ Bay Colony, the town meeting provides a forum for residents to voice concerns (“The Vermont Way Is Myth-Riddled and Hard to Define | VTDigger”). Historically seen as a logistical affair for perfunctory votes on budgets, it has come to be both pragmatic and symbolic in its ability to unite a community in one place for one day.



Figure 3: Rockwell, Norman. "Town Meeting in Vermont". *The Saturday Evening Post*, Feb 20, 1943. Norman Rockwell Collection, Indianapolis, IN. 1 March, 2015.

Town Meetings have also become known for its votes on resolutions concerning often national issues. In 2012, 64 Vermont towns had voted to amend the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in favor of Citizens United (corporate personhood). It was in support of long standing Vermont politician and current US senator, Bernie Sanders, the only Socialist member of the House of Representatives (Nichols). In 2013, 29 towns voted for a resolution against the transport of Tar Sands oil through a proposed pipeline (Stein). In 2006, five Vermont towns voted for a resolution calling for the impeachment of President George W. Bush ("Vermont Town Calls on Congress to Impeach Bush"). The tradition first rose in the late 1970s when over 40 Vermont towns created anti-nuclear resolutions. Even though these resolutions are largely symbolic, this continuing tradition indicates that many Vermont communities feel as though voicing opinions on issues is a worthwhile practice and not a wanton use of time.

5.5 Religion and Vermont

Driving down the main highway of Vermont running north to south, visible from the road are the white steeples of churches. How has religion shaped the character of

Vermont? Individuals that identify as socially and/or religiously conservative may seek to do volunteer work through religious and faith based organization. According to Rice and Sumberg, religious fundamentalists may not be particularly accepting of diverse views and lifestyles, but they are often very responsive and generous with both their time and money to those in need particularly within the religious community (Rice and Sumberg 109). Reflective of this, Utah, a highly religious state is ranked number one in the nation for volunteering with 44.6% of residents volunteering (“NCCS - US/State Profiles”).

Interestingly, Vermont is ranked as the least religious state according to the Gallup Poll (“Mississippi Holds as Most Religious State”). According to Putnam, “...religious sentiments and civic engagement seem to be mutually incompatible” (Putnam 107). Consequently, it follows that more progressive states have a higher incidence of volunteering through nonreligious pathways including the PC. The two figures below compare the type of volunteer activities individuals participate in both nationally and in the state of Vermont:

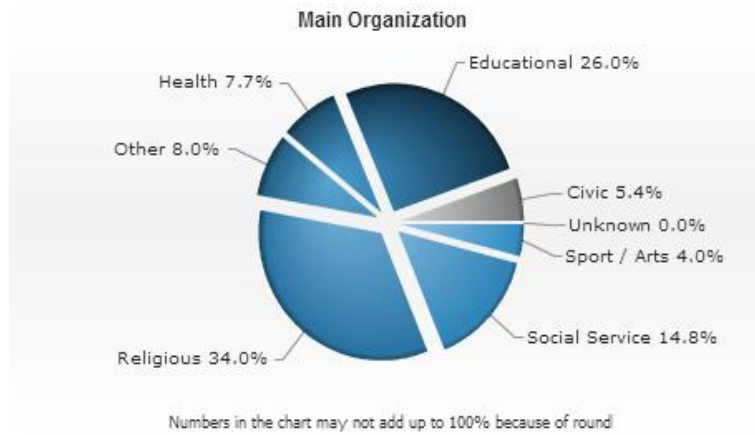
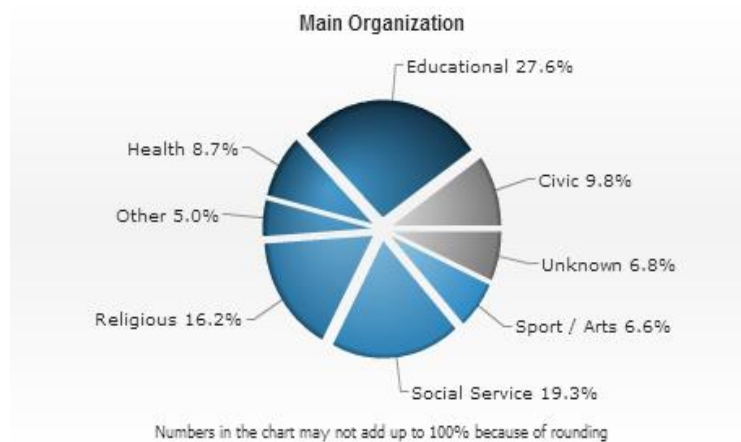


Figure 4: “Volunteering and Civic Engagement in Vermont”. *Corporation for National and Community Service*. 7 April 2016. Web.



5.6 State demographics

Figure 5: “U.S. Profile on Volunteering”. *Corporation for National and Community Service*. 7 April 2016. Web.

The demographics of Vermont, like the PC, are less diverse and have a more educated population compared to the rest of the United States. Only 24% of PCVs are minorities compared to 38% of the general United States’ population. In the state of

Vermont, 5% are minority (“UNITED STATES QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau”). Some studies have found that a personal connection to a network or group trumped demographic details, or interests specific to the individual. Mary Kirlin conducted a study asking why participants chose to join a model legislature at a YMCA. She found that 65% said that friends got them involved indicating that personal connections, as often seen in Vermont, can be influential (Kirlin 573). While working as the PC recruiter, numerous applicants noted that they decided to apply because they knew someone that was an RPCV. The “smallness” of Vermont and the sheer number of returned volunteers lends itself well to these types of personal connections. Regardless, it is worth reviewing the demographic makeup of the state as a possible contributing factor.

Civic engagement is most common among “advantaged groups”: “...studies of citizen participation in America find political activists to be unrepresentative of the public at large” (Verba et al. 164). At the heart of PC is creating partnerships with diverse and disadvantaged populations. Ironically, those most likely to be civically active in the United States and also serve abroad as PCVs tend to be those that have greater economic and educational opportunities despite the organization’s efforts to recruit diverse candidates.

The state of Vermont ranks 8th for educational attainment according to US Census information reviewed by the Wall Street Journal. 34.9% of Vermonters have at least a bachelor’s degree and 92% have at least a high school diploma. This does exceed the national averages. The state also has one of the lowest unemployment levels, 4.1% (“America’s Most (and Least) Educated States - 24/7 Wall St.”). According to

researchers Verba, Scholzman, and Brady, one of the three main contributing factors to participation in civic life are “capacity and skills”, and economic security (18). For a professionally based volunteer organization like the PC this means that they draw off of individuals with traditional academic preparation in one of their outlined program areas. As much as there are a wide variety of volunteer opportunities available fitting many people’s skill sets, those offered specifically by the PC preclude many without the volunteer and educational experience more commonly found in Vermont than in other areas of the country.

5.7 Developing a Conceptual Model

Taking into consideration the information provided by Putnam on the components of a civic community and information provided by other researchers, I developed a conceptual model. Putnam uses the following in describing a civic community: 1) civic engagement, 2) political equality, 3) solidarity, trust, and tolerance, and 4) associations: social structures of cooperation (*Making Democracy Work* 87). The indicators are shown in the table below:

Table 1: Conceptual Model - Indicators of a civic community

Civic Engagement	Political Equality	Solidarity, Trust, and Tolerance	Social Structures of Cooperation
1) Family members or personal involvement in governmental, school, nonprofit, or religious organization work 2) Service/Volunteering 3) Attendance and/or participation in Town Meeting Day or Green Up Day 4) Tracking local community issues 5) Importance of voicing opinions on social issues 6) Voting	1) Accessibility of local politicians 2) The value of equal participation in political realm for all people 3) Ability to create political/social change	1) Instances of helping neighbors 2) Examples of resiliency of local population 3) Openness and acceptance of diverse populations, opinions, and views	1) Any type of social structure, group

Subsequent researchers, which have used Putnam’s work to study most evidently emerging democracies and marginalized populations show, with or without intention, what the value of Putnam’s research has been. In a similar vein, my hope is that this research will shed light on how the existence of civic communities influences participation in the PC, an organization with a strong focus on the aforementioned populations. It is without a doubt an iterative relationship. The civic culture in the state of Vermont has provided a climate highly auspicious for PC recruitment. PCs’ work abroad often serves to encourage civic engagement. Following service, many Peace Corps volunteers that are Vermonters choose to return to the state finding affinity in the state they grew up in that shares their values. Through telling their stories and continuing to be

civically engaged members of their communities, they accomplish the “third goal” encouraging their relatives, neighbors, co-workers, and students to serve.

6 METHODS

This section details the research methods used for this thesis. I considered different approaches, both quantitative and qualitative. I selected in-depth, open ended, semi-structured interviews as the principal method for gathering information from participants. This research seeks to “understand the lived experience of persons that share time, space and culture” as both Vermonters and RPCVs (Frankel and Devers 113). As qualitative research, it was important to select a method that would allow me to capture the individual experiences of interviewees and permitted them the freedom to relay their personal experiences without being prescribed to provided answers as with, for example, a survey or close ended questions. Interviewees were gathered using the purposive sampling method, snowballing, because of the specificity and relationality of sought after research participants. Participants were then interviewed using open ended questions and results were examined using grounded theory. Interviews were conducted between April 2015 and February 2016.

6.1 Filling in a Research Gap

My research examines whether the civic community of Vermont is connected to the state’s number one ranking per capita for recruitment of PCVs. Although extensive research exists in the areas of civic engagement and volunteering, there is no research that is on the PC specifically. As much as there is overlap with other volunteer pursuits,

PC service is unique in many different ways, and therefore, not necessarily comparable; It is an extensive time commitment, there are professional and economic benefits, it is internationally based, and an operating agency of the United States government.

Also, in considering the PC, the organization and other similar organizations might be interested in what factors contribute to an individual's motivation to serve for the purpose of future recruitment efforts. The extensive annual survey of PCVs touches on current service, but does not question on what motivated an individual to apply at the beginning. Worth noting, too, is that one might not even mention their past experiences in a civically engaged community, because it is at times hard to have an almost external view of something that is simply part of everyday life.

Through research I found much written on the "unique character of Vermont", but little that was research based. Providing individual testimonies that speak to this in particular can further the understanding of what distinguishes the Green Mountain state from others. The often romanticized bucolic setting is often tied up with descriptions of civic mindedness. The interviews I conducted, however, gave a much more varied depiction of the state. Although there was talk of town meeting day, pitching in after tropical storm Irene, and community suppers, there was also mention of frustrations of often rural life including isolation and political contentions. My research will contribute to a more complex understanding of the life experience of participants, and how those contributed to their motivations to commit to service.

6.2 Interviewee Selection

The extensive “bites’ of information” revealed through interviews necessitated keeping the sample size relatively small (Ritchie 84). A total of 15 interviews were conducted beginning in the spring of 2015. Given the particularity of my research needs, I selected interviewees using purposive sampling. I required “information-rich cases”, which would provide detailed, in-depth responses in the particular area of research (Patton 169). Participants needed to fit specific criteria, which would “enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles” I was seeking to study (Ritchie and Lewis 78). They needed to be self-identified “Vermonters” who spent at least 75% of their lifetime (preferably youth years) in the state and were current residents of the state. They also needed to be RPCVs having successfully completed two years of service abroad. I was interested in a diverse group of respondents, in terms of age and gender, but had no restrictions. The research was not particularly interested in how demographics impacted interviewees’ experiences, so this was not a significant concern in the selection process. Resultantly, a sample group was selected with the objective of “describ(ing) some particular subgroup in depth” (Patton 173).

To gather participants, I contacted Zoe Armstrong, the PC Recruiter in Vermont. Armstrong forwarded an email to a list serve of RPCVs in the state describing my work as a graduate student and research interests, which received 18 responses from potential participants. All 18 were contacted and followed up with according to the permissiveness of their schedule. During the interview process, many participants suggested I contact others that were friends or acquaintances from the RPCV community. Hence, the

snowballing method was utilized: "...an approach which involves asking people who have already been interviewed to identify other people they know who fit the selection criteria" (Ritchie and Lewis 94).

As Vermont is a relatively small "community", the same names were repeatedly suggested by interviewees as described by social researcher, Michael Quinn Patton: "In most programs or systems, a few key names or incidents are mentioned repeatedly" (176). In snowballing, there is often the risk that interviewees may be inclined to provide names of individuals similar to themselves, or perceived as more fitting of the research area (i.e. not only RPCVs that are Vermonters, but also those that were more civically engaged, which could potentially skew results in the direction of participants having a strong inclination towards civic engagement.) (Ritchie and Lewis 94). To mitigate this, I asked that they provide the names of any RPCVs that were Vermonters they thought may be available. Also, this concern was largely quelled given that this is a relatively small community to begin with.

6.3 Interview Process and Questions

In accordance to my described research needs, I selected semi-structured interviews. The format of semi-structured interviews is described in the following:

- 1) Formal interviews between researcher and subject are conducted.
- 2) The interview follows an 'interview guide', which includes open ended questions and topics, which need to be introduced.
- 3) The researcher is permitted to follow related trajectories that emerge during the course of the interview, thereby permitting a comprehensive interview, which may include unanticipated information.

(“RWJF - Qualitative Research Guidelines Project | Semi-Structured Interviews | Semi-Structured Interviews”)

Interview questions were developed based on two factors. The first was very basic information gathering through asking for a biographical overview that covered the following: 1) growing up in Vermont (Pre-service experiences), 2) experiences as a PCV, 3) current life in Vermont (Post-service experiences). The second was gathering information related to civic engagement as a Vermonter. Crucial to this were questions oriented towards Robert Putnam’s components of a civic community: 1) civic engagement, 2) political equality, 3) solidarity, trust, and tolerance, 4) associations: social structures of cooperation (Putnam 87)). Consequently, the sets of questions were broken down into two sets; one set was to gather more general information and the second was meant to draw out more specific details related to the research question and Putnam’s components of a civic community.²

The purpose of the selected interview structure was to “provide topics or subject areas within which the researcher is free to explore, prove, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate (the) particular subject” (Patton 283). This format also took into consideration the constraints of working with a relatively small sample size; quantitative methods would most likely not garner any formidable results. Additionally, using semi-structured interviews allowed me to pursue unanticipated topics that arose within the course of the interview and not included in the interview guide while still under the umbrella of the four components created by Putnam as main themes. Interviewees were

² Interview questions located in the Appendix.

permitted similar freedoms: “Interviewees are allowed a great deal of latitude in the way they answer, the length of their answer, and even the topics that they discuss” (Packer 43). The interview process provided opportunities to gather information on emergent issues that appeared through the lens of civics in Vermont and PC: “A qualitative design needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry” (Patton 196).

The interview questions needed to collect data pertaining to the topic, but it was crucial that data not be skewed towards the specific indicators found in the conceptual model. For this reason, the questions were left open ended and with the space for participants to speak about their experiences prior to, during, and after service. The questions permit responses that speak on daily life as a Vermonter, community life in general, and their motivations for choosing to serve as volunteers. During the interview process, I said as little as possible allowing interviewees to follow their thoughts and reflections, and encouraging them to provide more information. Appendix A provides a list of both the primary and secondary interview questions that were touched on during every interview.

A total of 15 people were interviewed starting April 14, 2015 and ending on February 5, 2016. The location of interviews was determined by the participants’ convenience. Locations needed to permit a degree of privacy and the ability to permit audible recordings. Interviews were recorded using a personal recording device. The duration of interviews was anywhere from just over half hour (30:03) to just over an hour

in length (1:01:13). The average duration of an interview was approximately 46 minutes in length. Interviews were then transcribed by me primarily. An assistant was also hired to assist with the transcription process.

6.4 Methods for Data Analysis

As Patton states in qualitative data analysis, “The challenge is to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (Patton 372). In accordance with my thesis topic during the analysis process, I was particularly concerned with how interviewees experienced Vermont as a civically engaged community and whether or not this played a role in their decision to serve in the PC. I used the qualitative analysis method of content analysis examining the content provided by interviews and also how the context of Vermont and PC service shaped responses (Ritchie and Lewis 200).

To begin, in accordance with Patton’s analysis suggestions, I read through all of the data ensuring that it was complete (379). I selected four main coding categories in accordance with the aforementioned components that Robert Putnam used in his book, *Making Democracy Work*, to define a civic community: 1) civic engagement, 2) political equality, 3) solidarity, trust, and tolerance, and 4) social structures of cooperation (*Making Democracy Work* 87). All four categories point to Putnam’s idea of a civic community and also served to highlight the relationality between them. This process is described in researchers Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis’ description of grounded theory’s

tradition in the field of sociology: Grounded theory involves “...developing ‘emergent’ theories of social action through the identification of analytical categories and the relationship between them” (12).

While reading through the data, I highlighted quotes that I considered applicable to any of the four categories (Patton 381). Quotes were drawn out and defined by the four categories. Certain quotes fell into more than one category not surprisingly. Rather than limit a quote to the category that is most relevant, quotes were able to be coded more than once. I searched for emergent themes using grounded theory within these existing categories, “bringing out underlying uniformities and diversities” (Glaser and Strauss 114). The “Code Book” appendix includes descriptions of the categories. Although the four categories were already defined, they were coded a second time as described below in the section on the conceptual model. This coding allowed the data to speak to how these could be demonstrated as part of inductive analysis: “...patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data” (Patton 390). For this research, I used what Patton refers to as sensitizing concepts. I brought the categories to the research with the intention of “examin(ing) how the concept(s) are manifest in a particular setting or among a particular group of people” (Patton 391). The analysis serves to both better define the categories while also unifying them under Putnam’s umbrella of a civic community.

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6.5 Using the Conceptual Model’s Indicators to Collect Information

The selection of criteria for indicators within the four components of a civic community was shaped both by Putnam, additional researchers work in the area described in the literature review, and the culture of Vermont. Indicators drawn out for “civic engagement” included the following: 1) family members or personal involvement in governmental, school, nonprofit, or religious organization work, 2)

service/Volunteering, 3) attendance and participation in Town Meeting Day or Green Up Day, and 4) Voting.

“Political equality” came up continually in mention of areas including the following: 1) accessibility of local politicians, 2) the value of equal participation in political realm for all people, 3) ability to create political/social change.

For, “Solidarity, trust, and tolerance”, I considered the small towns, often rural populations of Vermont, and sense of community, and the interview results were reflective of this. Data points drawn out included mention of the following: 1) instances of helping neighbors, 2) examples of resiliency of local population, 3) openness and acceptance of diverse populations, opinions, and views.

There was a diversity of associations that could be, according to Putnam, under the umbrella of “social structures of cooperation”. Some researchers (Heelsum and Seligson), believe it is appropriate to put more weight on organizations that have a social mission. All quotes related to participation in organizations were drawn out. Particularly in Vermont, groups such as sports teams seem to be elemental in developing community, which is at the root of civic engagement. Also, because I was primarily guide by Putnam’s work, I decided to use his definition of this component. They were coded as, 1) any type of social structure, group. The results section does discuss, however, groups which are oriented towards a social/political mission.

7 RESULTS

As described earlier a total of 15 RPCVs were interviewed between April 2015 and February 2016 providing details on their experiences both in the Vermont and as

volunteers serving abroad. The conceptual model I developed allowed me to break down Putnam’s four components further into indicators that, in theory, indicate the presence of civic engagement. The table below provides numerical counts of the different indicators within the four components:

Table 2: Number of Occurrences of Indicators

Components of a Civic Community:	Indicators:	Number of Occurrences in Interviews	Percentage of total occurrences
Civic Engagement	1) Family members or personal involvement in governmental, school, nonprofit, or religious organization work	16	7%
	2) Service/Volunteering	27	12%
	3) Attendance and/or participation in Town Meeting Day or Green Up Day	20	9%
	4) Importance of voicing opinions on social issues	12	5.5%
	5) Voting	14	6%
Political Equality	1) Accessibility of local politicians	6	3%
	2) The value of equal participation in political realm for all people	6	3%
	3) Ability to create political/social change	8	3.5%
Solidarity, Trust, and Tolerance	1) Instances of helping neighbors	32	14.5%
	2) Examples of resiliency of local population	23	10.5%
	3) Openness and acceptance of diverse populations, opinions, and views	17	8%
Social Structures of Cooperation	1) Any type of social structure, group	39	18%

7.1 Civic Engagement

The component, Civic Engagement, was broken down into 6 different indicators:

1) family members or personal involvement in governmental, school, nonprofit, or religious organization work, 2) service/volunteering, 3) attendance and/or participation in Town Meeting Day or Green Up Day, 4) tracking local community issues, 5) importance of voicing opinions on social issues, and 6) voting.

There were 16 different mentions of the first indicator. This was mentioned often in reference to involvement on town boards, or holding local political office. The relatively small size of towns was often mentioned as a reason for either personal or family involvement in local civics. Interviewee Josh Smith describes this in the following:

When you are from a small town you have the same amount of duties any town would have. When you are from a town of 500 people, the duties are split up with less amount or people. When you have a town of 2,000 or 10,000 or 5,000 you have a lot more people. Growing up, there were opportunities to do more civic things. My father for instance was the road commissioner the fire chief, he was on the town select board, and he was the town grave digger. He had all of these different things. My brother is still living there and he's the town clock winder. When you are from a town that small you end up by default having to do a lot of civic things because you have a lot of positions that need to go around.

Smith is from the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, an area particularly known for its rural character.

As in the case of Smith, mention was often made of family member's involvement and how this shaped interviewees perception of the value of civic engagement. Pollaidh Major's experiences growing up in southeastern Vermont demonstrate this:

My family has done pretty much every board you can. My grandparents at the last town meeting were honored. My grandmother I think was honored the town citizen of the year. Largely what she does now is work in the library. They both ran for office at separate times. My grandfather ran for I think it was

representative for the state, not in the legislature here, and he walked the length of Vermont as part of his low budget campaign and my grandmother is a teacher, so very involved in school board. My father worked on the school board, so that sort of civic involvement through the town has always been very strong in my family.

Major was an intern for the PC in Washington, DC during college, served abroad as a PCV in Uganda, and is currently serving as an AmeriCorps volunteer continuing her family's tradition of public service.

The second indicator for civic engagement was mention of volunteering or other service related activities. There were 27 mentions of this outside of PC service, something common to all interviewees. Christine Nole expressed this stating, "...through service learning and volunteerism efforts in the state, we are seeing young people grow up with a service ethic that perhaps doesn't exist elsewhere." Interviewees distinguished Vermont from other states because of this tradition of service.

The 3rd indicator, "Attendance and/or participation in Town Meeting or Green Up Day", was mentioned a total of 20 times indicating the importance of both events for individuals living in the state. They provide opportunities to participate in service and to give voice to political opinions.

Town Meeting day was described as "where the magic happens" and the "best thing since sliced bread" by interviewees. There were some who felt as though its popularity and relevance have waned in recent years. Mary Woodruff describes her experiences with Town Meeting growing up versus now:

It was really important. People looked forward to going. You wanted to go. People were going to be there that you wanted to see. And people participated... All we hear about is how nobody goes anymore. I don't go. I don't go, because there is nothing discussed that hasn't been discussed ad nauseum at multiple

meetings through the course of the year on evenings. Or there is nothing to vote on. Or there is no discussion because we are just going to vote.

Although it is hard to attribute declining attendance to something specific, it could be that, like the evolving definition of civic engagement, people are finding alternative ways to be part of their community. Green Up Day is one such alternative avenue and there were 3 interviewees that mentioned it as a way they engaged with their local community.

The fourth indicator, “importance of voicing opinions on political/social issues”, came up a total of 12 times. As Christine Nole put it, “I think that to actually give physical voice to politics is a really powerful thing”. Ellen Hill describes her view on expressing her beliefs through her work:

I feel like my conduit to my voice is increasing awareness and supporting the education of others, so I feel like I’m a convener, networker, and collaborator of trying to help support a growing cadre of people who are committed to the social issues.

The last indicator was mention of voting. This came up a total of 14 times during interviews. Patty Bouliette summed up her sentiments stating, “So I’ve always thought you can’t complain and you can’t say that they aren’t doing what you want if you don’t actually get out there and support and do your voting.” Christine Nole described how she saw Vermonters as more informed; not voting along party lines, but for the “best” candidate:

So I think that while Vermont has a fairly liberal ethic, I think it also really looks to the candidate, and I think what that requires is an informed electorate and a pool of folks that are willing to dig deeper and better understand the candidate rather than vote along, around party lines.

Pollaidh Major described this as part of her family’s tradition of civic engagement saying,

Every single family member cornered me and made sure I voted. There was one

contested thing on that ballot. It was a school board seat and I voted for my uncle, but so certainly voting is very important and that's strong in my family.

7.2 Political Equality

In terms of Political Equality, this term was broken down into three indicators: 1) accessibility of local politicians, 2) the value of equal participation in political realm for all people, and 3) the ability to create political/social change.

Interviewees often cited the accessibility of local politicians during interviews. This could simply be a result of the geographical setup of the state; small towns facilitate more intimate political exchanges. Interviewees explained this more in the sense of approachability, however, and not just a matter of proximity. They described attending school with politicians or their children, and having a level of familiarity with them as part of the community. RPCV Tess Gauthier talks about her local legislator and neighbor:

She was just like our buddy and next door and kind of there. So I think that had a pretty significant influence. Like, learning from really young how accessible government is, is something that I've carried with me kind of everywhere I went, because there is always a way to change something.

RPCV Natasha Duarte expresses the same sense of accessibility with Senator Bernie Sanders:

My mom, especially in her job, definitely felt like she could walk into Bernie Sanders office any day of the week and talk with him because he was a person and a member of our community, so it was almost like those lines were blurred. It wasn't like, "Oh, well you're this elected official person". It was like, "You're my neighbor" sense of politics.

Duarte's quote does show how politicians are often seen as members of the community as opposed to in a more bureaucratic, or hierarchical fashion. This indicator appeared a total of 6 times during interviews.

The second indicator was “the value of equal participation”. This indicator also appeared 6 times during the interview process. Christine Nole summarizes, “...not only is it important that I feel like I get to vote, but I feel like it really important to break down barriers for other people to vote”. Ellen Hill, an RPCV and the current Director of the Center for Service learning at Johnson State College, relayed this value with a particular emphasis on young people:

For me it’s about encouraging and supporting young people to realize that they do have power; that they do have the power to influence positive social changes whether it’s through the dollars they spend or the vote they cast, or the grassroots they are engaged in, or the connections with others that share similar values, or completely different values, but to find commonalities.

The last indicator was, “The ability to create political/social change”. Again, Dorothy Delaney explains this in part because of the bucolic nature of the state centered on small communities:

The smaller towns, you’re going to make more of a difference because the population is smaller. Everyone spans out a bit. Everyone is known and, um, I think that you feel you have more of a choice, more of a voice. You mean more in a smaller community. You’re not just a number or a blank face. You are somebody.

Josh Smith, who spent 13 years working for international nonprofits following his four years in the PC, echoes this sentiment in the following: “I feel like Vermont is so lucky because it is totally the size where you can change things. If I lived in Texas, I would be like, “Who cares? My voice doesn’t matter”, but here it totally does.” Although there are many states with a similarly rural character, it seems to have shaped how its residents see civic engagement and political equality. This indicator appeared a total of 8 times in the course of interviews.

7.3 Solidarity, Trust, and Tolerance

The component of a civic community, “solidarity, trust, and tolerance”, is more conceptual making them challenging to measure. To help define this component, the following indicators were used: 1) instances of helping neighbors, 2) examples of resiliency of local population, and 3) openness and acceptance of diverse populations, opinions, and views.

The first indicator appeared a total of 32 times. It was very common for interviewees to describe their experiences growing up and living in Vermont through their relationships with fellow community members. Interviewees often spoke of the importance of “getting along” with neighbors because there was a sense that you would rely on them at some point. Dorothy Delaney explains this saying, “For Vermonters, I think when other people come in (to Vermont), we know how it is going to be tough for them. So we sympathize and try to help them out and try to integrate.” Being able to have these relationships was of value in making community decisions. Anna Smith describes in the following:

I think somehow the closeness of Vermont, the smallness, how essential it is to rely on one another maybe makes you sort of appreciate things... I think somehow Vermont forces you to cultivate within yourself an appreciation for your neighbors and an appreciation for your food because we are so ag reliant even if now our ag is not so local. We are still farmers. It requires that you cultivate a gratitude for your neighbors, your food and how nature can totally kick your butt no matter how technologically advanced you become. I think there is just something really humbling about needing the people around you to help you in times of need and to feed you, or to like help maintain your local economy, so that you can live your lifestyle and something really humbling about winter, or the joy that comes with summer. I think somehow there’s a humility and a graciousness for how good our life is at a really base level.

There was also mention of there being two different kinds of Vermonters as

Delaney implied, but there is still a need to work together when this is needed. The “two Vermonts” were often divided by those having lived in Vermont, often times for generations, versus those that have moved to the state also commonly referred to as “flatlanders”. This was also discussed in terms of those with conservative versus more liberal views, and geographic divides (Burlington/Chittenden County in contrast with the rest of the state). Tess Gauthier explains her experiences of this:

As far as the culture there are also two different kinds of people. I think there’s those that came here in the 60s and are liberal and kind of came here to come back to the land, and there are people who are from here and they have a pretty different mentality and you kind of see that... It’s not really a clash. I think that people are pretty like, harmoniously together in these small towns, because people have to get along.

The next indicator was, “Resiliency of the local population”, which came up a total of 23 times. In many ways, this helps to establish community by creating a unified sense of identity for Vermonters. This was often tied to farming traditions. Gauthier describes her experience growing up in the northern Island of South Hero:

I grew up in a rural area in a farmhouse from the 1800s in the winter that didn't have heat upstairs, so you would have to sleep downstairs by the fire, or if you slept upstairs in any of the upstairs rooms without heat you would wake up with 3 inches of heat on your windows, so I think those small things remembering like, if you slept on super cold nights, you would either have an electric blanket warming the bed or hot water bottles before you got in there, so I think those things and having to deal with really harsh climate to thicken your skin in some way. Like, I was outside all of the time. Of course Peace Corps wasn't that abrasive, but like, I was sort of also tough and a little bit of a tumbleweed from growing up with farming. Basically, yeah, my grandparents were farmers. My aunts and uncles had farms. We were riding tractors, dirt bikes, and ATVs and I think it could have given me thick skin.

Many, like Gauthier, noted that the “toughness” that growing up in Vermont cultivated

was advantageous for PC service. Pollaidh Major expresses this sentiment saying, “That’s one of the things that they are referring to and that other people notice; that tenacity, which definitely helps when you’re trying to get through Peace Corps.” She explains how this came up during the interview process:

When I was going through the application process and getting ready for the interview, they said, “We want to call you one more time, because we are looking at a post for you and we want to check on it.” They couldn’t reach me, because I was working on a farm in Vermont. So they had to call the farm office, and the kid I was working with had to come and get me. And they said, “We just want to check, would you be okay with living without cellphone service...? Oh, you already are.” That aspect of, and certainly for me, I grew up in a farm and that is just an added kind of toughness: Total disregard for food safety. Flexibility that goes along with that. And like, mud season. My counterparts in Uganda would say, “Have you ever seen roads as bad as ours?” And I would say, yes, no problem. This is not that bad.

The final indicator for “solidarity, trust and tolerance” was “openness and acceptance of diverse populations. This came up a total of 17 times during the interview process. In a state that is known for its lack of diversity, many interviewees wondered at, commented, or alluded to the fact that it is interesting that so many Vermonters are drawn to the Peace Corps, where they will without doubt interact with a wide range of individuals. Natasha Duarte spoke of the curiosity of Vermonters:

I think Vermonters may ask questions other people may feel uncomfortable with, but it is out of genuine interest about why someone is different, or where they are from. It’s not fear based about differences, so I’d say that’s one thing I think is true about Vermont. Is that we are overall we are pretty open group of people to people from other parts of the world with different thoughts or orientations.

Often brought up was Vermonters respect for others and how this was engendered through their formative experiences in Vermont. Mary Woodruff explained, “My father would comment on differences, but was respectful of people’s differences and how they

would approach things.” Dorothy Delaney describes her current perspective in her work environment as a nursing director:

I try to treat each (person) as a glorious human being and it’s easier because of my past experiences. Everyone should be treated as an individual and deserve a place... I like to hire diverse people and sometimes I have been marked as, ‘Oh, she likes black people’. And I laugh when I hear that. And I say, ‘Well you know, if you are around them enough, you just see them as people. Trust me, you will see them as individuals, but you have to be around them.’

7.4 Social Structures of Cooperation

The last component of a civic community according to Putnam is “Social Structures of Cooperation”. There were a total of 39 mentions of such groups and they were in various areas: Religion, sports, hunting, homemakers, 4-H, rotary club, volunteer fire departments, environmental groups, scouts, and town boards to name some. Allen Ploof describes the social structures he interacted with growing up in Vermont:

Well, it was centered around the school and the church. My parents were active in the church and fraternal organizations, the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs and encampment. Those particular groups had a lot of things going on. And my mother was involved in church suppers.

Anna Smith was a recently returned volunteer in her mid-twenties, but shared a similar value of such groups and pillars of the community:

The church always has a camp for kids in the summer. The firehouse hosts Lincoln Sports... Let’s see, there’s a variety show in the winter in Hill Country Holidays there’s a variety show at the town hall, and in the summer, the church hosts a car hop put on by the youth that attend the church. I think they have a youth group. The youth who attend church are the waitresses at the car hop, and that’s really fun and cute and they play old music. We have a field, so during sport seasons there are games and people will come and watch. One time we had a polar plunge to raise money for something in the river- I forgot what it was for, but they paid for a hot tub, so we had a hot tub right next to the river so everyone could jump in the river and then right back into the hot tub. The firemen have an auction, a firemen’s auction, they have a barbeque, a big department barbeque once a year. We have a ladies’ aid, a ladies auxiliary run happening on Friday that

I took the day off of work to attend. There's a lot of little, like, town groups that are sort of constantly active.

The vision of a small town with little to do does not seem to be reflected in Anna Smith although she does recognize the smallness of such groups. Interviewees really spoke to a vibrant social fabric, which facilitated connections and at times, provided opportunities for civic engagement.

8 DISCUSSION

8.1 Discussion of Results

At the onset of conducting this research, I wanted to explore whether a connection exists between the high level of PC participation in the state of Vermont and civic engagement. The results indicated that civic engagement was an influential factor for RPCVs in the state. Three indicators, in particular, relay the foundation, which the civic character of the state of Vermont rests upon: 1) Social structures and groups, 2) Instances of helping neighbors, and 3) Service and volunteering. Results showed how a collective identity present in the state made a strong inclination toward helping others and the community both locally and abroad. As the definition of "civic engagement" continues to evolve, it will be interesting to see if it moves even closer in alignment with service and volunteering. Certainly, how individuals engage with their community is changing. Still, interviewees of all ages spoke strongly of their appreciation for Vermont and how their formative experiences in the state engendered in them a sense of civic duty, and value for service and community.

The most significant finding was the strong influence that social structures of cooperation had on individuals. This was the most cited indicator accounting for 18% of all indicators. The organizations permit individuals, regardless of the activity, to organize, collaborate, and share time and ideas with one another. This was strongly evident as interviewees described that as an indispensable part of daily life in their communities. Like Putnam, and unlike some subsequent researchers, I believe that all social structures of cooperation have the ability to contribute to a civic community. They allow participants to work collectively, bridge gaps, share information, and accomplish goals.

The second most significant finding was “instances of helping neighbors” accounting for 14.5% of indicators of civic engagement. The most interesting part of this was the description of how communities and individuals came together in times of need. Also, it did not matter whether or not you necessarily “liked” your neighbor; there was a collective acknowledgement that individuals relied on one another despite disparate views or personality conflicts. The interesting part of this studies findings versus others that I looked at was the personal nature of responses. Many of the other related studies I found looked at quantitative information related to civic engagement as opposed to personal anecdotes. As with “social structures of cooperation”, how individuals come together to accomplish goals for collective action was a reoccurring theme throughout the research results.

The third most significant indicator was service and volunteering. As relayed in the literature review, this is increasingly becoming an integral part of the definition of

civic engagement. Vermonters that spoke of community life often relayed how volunteering was simply an expectation and part of belonging to their communities. There was a wide variety of volunteer efforts; some were locally based while others supported the larger Vermont or international community.

In examining these results and considering the significance of this research, the overarching finding is the sense of cultural and civic identity related to being a Vermonter. Reflecting on these three indicators, and also the others, which provided additional insight, evident is a strong sense of community and helping one another. Interviewees spoke of these more as an expectation for all community members as opposed to their actions being unique. Out of both necessity and a sense of identity, many relayed that being involved in activities, helping neighbors, and volunteering were simply a part of life. Rather than something superfluous, civic engagement was part of daily life and the described collective experience of living in Vermont. Considering Putnam's research in light of this research, I find it interesting that he refers to a "civic culture" often times more than to the presence of "civic engagement". I strongly feel the results I gathered are very much so related to the cultural fabric of the state and how this engenders a sense of civic duty.

8.2 Limitations of Research

In considering the methods for conducting research, I took strong consideration of the inherent limitations. The first and most evident is the small sample size. For my interviews, I sought RPCVs currently living in and from the state of Vermont; this certainly limited me in terms of those that could be participants. The sample size of 15

total interviewees is relatively small. To gather enough data from a small sample size I allowed for lengthy and detail rich responses in interviews. I was more interested in delving deep into personal experiences as opposed to developing generalizations based on numerical findings.

I did consider doing more quantitative based research, such as a survey or questionnaire, to have a larger number of results. I selected interviews after weighing options, because I was interested in the results telling a story as opposed to innumerating results. The results will be more compelling for sharing information with community members and others interested in the findings. Also, a secondary challenge of using a survey was that a survey was recently sent to RPCVs in the state of Vermont about their availability and interest in participating in an organization for RPCVs. The likelihood that they would respond to another survey is challenging to predict.

Another concern I had was the impartiality of the research questions. In considering interviews versus quantitative research, I felt that it would be harder to yield impartial results from quantitative methods. The questions in surveys, for example, would, most likely, need to be more specific such as, “Do you attend Town Meeting Day?”, or, “Do you vote?”. Conducting interviews allowed for open ended questions and more indepth responses to emerge from the research questions. They were kept as open ended as possible; I permitted myself to follow trajectories related to the research, but only when they were brought up by participants.

While developing the research question, I also considered the possibility that I was creating a tautological argument: Vermonters are more likely to be civically engaged

(according to previously conducted research). Therefore, Vermonters are more likely to participate in the PC, return to the state, and continue their civically based way of life. I did not take civic engagement as a given, however, even though Rice and Sumberg had found this in their research on the state. Certainly, researchers often find disparate results and so I saw Rice and Sumberg's research as a curiosity I wanted to pursue. There are a myriad reasons for pursuing PC service and I was anticipating uncovering many of them during the interview process. The salient emergence of civic engagement, however, really assured me of the connection between the two and the existence of a causal relationship. The strong presence of the indicators that I developed prior to conducting the interviews is further proof of the connection.

The next section describes opportunities for future research and certainly a limitation of this study is that there is no control, or secondary group to compare research participants to. I initially was hoping to interview current applicants along with RPCVs to compare the two results. Privacy guidelines outlined by the PC, however, made this infeasible. The number of occurrences of the indicators within interviews relay the significance of civic engagement. Subsequent research, as described below, may look at other groups using the same set of indicators to provide a basis for comparison.

8.3 Opportunities for Future Research

The research and findings from this thesis are a starting point for examining the culture of civic engagement and the connection with volunteering in Vermont. Future research may examine if such a connection exists in other states by interviewing RPCVs in other areas of the country and looking at measurements of civic engagement there.

This would provide an interesting basis of comparison. Also, Vermonters who are not RPCVs could be interviewed to assess if there is a difference between the two, and if not, then what compels RPCVs to serve.

A general finding from my literature review was that the definition of civic engagement, formerly associated with voting and politics, is now more focused on service and volunteering. Future research may examine this shift more in depth. With decreased approval levels in many areas of government, it would be interesting to see if this is, in part, responsible, or if it can be attributed more to increased interest in more formalized volunteer activities and service learning efforts. The constant I found in gathering information for the literature review was the evolving definition of civic engagement and how this was openly acknowledged by many researchers that sought to define the term.

Lastly, there have been many studies examining individual motivations for participating in service activities, but I did not find one specifically for the PC. Given the uniqueness of the organization, it would be interesting to look at personal histories and what figures most prominently in the decision to serve. This study looked at civic engagement specifically, but did not look at other factors, which may motivate individuals.

8.4 Sharing Results

During my time as a graduate student in the department of CDAE at UVM, we were continually stressed the importance of making any research applicable and accessible to participants and others that may be interested in the results. Unfortunately,

there are many theses that are not shared once the final document is completed and submitted to the graduate college.

I found more than anything the personal experiences shared with me through the interview process to be interesting and also awash with information. Many interviewees asked if the information would be made available to them once the research was completed. First of all, I plan on forwarding a copy of the thesis to all participants, so they have access to the results. Secondly, I am hoping to do a more public presentation of the research apart from the defense. Myself and a few other people have been working on revitalizing the Green Mountain Returned Peace Corps Volunteers group and we have discussed having speakers as part of possible events. This would be an audience that may be interested and I would like to invite research participants.

As a STRAT, I worked with Zoe Armstrong, the current recruiter for the state of Vermont. I would like to share the information with her, the current STRAT at UVM, and the Northeast Regional Recruiting Office (NERO). I collaborated and communicated with the NERO director and fellow campus based STARTs during my time as a recruiter. During weekly phone conference meetings with NERO, we discussed successful recruitment strategies and focusing on civic engagement in terms of partnering and conversations with potential applicants may help to yield more volunteers. The PC and other organizations looking to recruit a qualified volunteer or employee base may be interested to look further into the implications of civic engagement. It may prove useful to concentrate recruitment efforts in geographic areas with strong civic communities.

They may also want to connect more with civic based organizations for recruitment efforts and promote how PC volunteers are involved in civic engagement during service.

It also is important to share research to a wider audience. Those working in the fields of recruitment, volunteering, academia, and civic engagement may be interested in the results. There is a yearly conference organized by Peace Corps Connect, an organization that works with RPCVs. There are limited opportunities to present research at this conference, but I would be interested to participate and attend, and possibly share results.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Primary Open-Ended Questions:

Can you tell me about your experiences growing up in Vermont?

What was important to you during that time? What is important to you now?

How would you describe the culture of Vermont? What makes Vermont unique from other states?

Secondary Questions:

What experiences or individuals shaped how your perception of the local community and/or world?

What types of activities did/do you participate in during your free time?

What types of events do you attend?

Describe the political climate or your local community.

In what other ways do you engage with your local and global communities?

When did you first become interested in the Peace Corps? What motivated you to become a volunteer?

Describe your work as a Peace Corps volunteer. How did people there participate in community life? How do Vermonters, including you, participate in community life?

As you may already know, Vermont is the number one state per capita for Peace Corps recruitment efforts. Why do you think the Peace Corps has been able to draw comparatively large numbers of volunteers from Vermont?

How did you end up returning to Vermont following service? What contributed to this decision?

What do you currently do for work? Is your current work related to your life experiences in Vermont and as a Peace Corps volunteer? If so, how?

Appendix B: Recruitment Notification and Information Sheet

Fall, 2016

Title: Civic Engagement and Peace Corps Recruitment in Vermont

Principal Investigator: Kelly Dolan (401) 742-5172 or kkdolan@uvm.edu, Masters of Science candidate, Community Development and Applied Economics.

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Richard Watts (802) 656-0173 or Richard.Watts@uvm.edu

Sponsor: Department of Community Development and Applied Economics at UVM

Information for Participants:

You are being invited to take part in a research study. This study is being conducted as part of a thesis in Community Development and Applied Economics at the University of Vermont.

The purpose of this study is to examine the connection between Vermonters and the United States Peace Corps. Vermont has consistently ranked as one of the top states in the nation per capita for recruitment. The study will examine what formative experiences compel Vermonters to become Peace Corps volunteers. Particularly, the study will examine civic engagement as a contributing factor.

Themes touched on during the interview will include your views and recollections of the following:

- Experiences growing up in Vermont and participation in activities/organizations
- Engagement with local and global communities
- Motivations for joining the Peace Corps
- Your volunteer work with the Peace Corps
- Civic engagement in Vermont

- Your current work and how this relates, if at all, to your service as a volunteer

You will be asked to complete a semi-structured interview between 35 and 50 minutes in length. This interview will take place in Burlington, Vermont. Interviews will be recorded using a personal recording device. Recordings will be maintained in possession of the researcher and audio may be incorporated into future presentations of research.

Please inform the interviewer if you prefer that your name not be used in subsequent documentation and/or presentations of research. Your name and the information you provide may be used in the thesis document and additional presentations of research. This information will only be in regards to your experiences in the areas of civic engagement, volunteering, and the Peace Corps. Providing personal accounts will better relay the connection between formative experiences as a Vermonter and how these influenced the decision to serve.

Your participation in this research is fully voluntary and you may choose not to participate or discontinue at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact the investigator, Kelly Dolan, at (401) 742-5172 or kkdolan@uvm.edu. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research can be directed to the Director of the Research Protections Office at the University of Vermont, (802) 656-5040.

If you have any questions concerning your participation, please contact Kelly Dolan.

Recruitment Notification and Information Sheet Voluntary Approval

If you understand and agree to take part in this research study, please indicate “yes”. This will be considered your verbal permission to take part in this research study.

If you have decided to participate in this research study, please indicate “yes” to allow the researcher to use your name in subsequent documentation or presentations of research. Indicate “no” if you prefer that your name be omitted from subsequently produced materials.