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An Exploration of Community Engagement and
Immersive Learning in Higher Education;
Integrating Leadership Studies to Enhance Student Reflection and Development

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Abstract

This paper explores the implementation of community service-learning, community engagement, and immersive learning through the lens of higher education. There is a plethora of existing literature and research around the positive impact that experiential learning holds on shaping student participants' character development, identity formation, and understanding of others. More specifically, this paper examines the *potential* value and influence that experiential learning (ie: forms of community engagement and immersive learning) carry in relation to college students' identity formation, cultural and political awareness, and character development. While most of the literature in this field focuses on these areas, I found there to be a lack of emphasis and research around the ways in which higher-education professionals can best support students throughout the process of their community-based learning and engagement. This paper serves as a space to explore the potential value that community-based engagement and learning holds within higher education while simultaneously looking at how the use of leadership theories and concepts such as servant leadership, emotional intelligence, and humble inquiry can help enhance the reflection and learning that faculty and staff are supporting students in.

Keywords: community service-learning, community engagement, immersive learning, servant leadership, emotional intelligence, humble inquiry

Preface

In choosing a topic for my capstone project, I was drawn back to the theme of community engagement and immersive learning, specifically within the higher education because this theme holds significant value in my own intellectual and emotional development as a young adult. As a graduate student and growing professional, I have become more curious about this style of engaged learning in college. In researching this area, it brings me full circle to my initial motivation and interest for applying to be a master's level student in the Leadership Studies Program at USD. Looking back on the personal statement I wrote as part of my graduate application to SOLES, I'm reminded of the very clear connection that remains between my hopes and intentions for this graduate experience and where my interests and values lie two years down the road. I share the following excerpt to give you some context on my own experience in community engagement and immersive learning as an undergraduate student at USD and the lasting impact it holds on my interactions, beliefs, values, and practice of leadership.

“My time at USD can be summarized as four years of ongoing self-growth and transformation. USD not only gave me the foundation to be challenged within the traditional setting of a classroom but to experience learning in a number of diverse and beautiful spaces. Whether it was spending time with our vibrant host community in Jamaica, reflecting in Chicano Park after a weeklong immersion in our neighboring city of Tijuana, or tutoring at Monarch School in downtown San Diego, I found depth and meaning in each of these encounters. These moments of connecting and learning from others have shaped the person I am today and the person I strive to be. I believe SOLES is the school and community that will allow me to continue learning, exploring, and creating these kinds of positive learning experiences” (SOLES Personal Statement for Admissions).

Background

Now, as I explore my place as a professional in the higher education world at USD, I continue to come back to these words and find myself reflecting on *why* exactly I found these experiences during my undergraduate years to be so transformational. In this research paper, I hope to explore the possible relationship that lies within the act of community engagement and immersive learning and the development of undergraduate students' emotional and intellectual intelligence.

I believe this unique educational framework holds significant potential to create lasting change on both an individual and societal level. For my research, I will use a variety of scholarly resources to look critically at what others are saying around this topic. Additionally, I will connect this research back to USD by looking at what is being done to promote and enhance the existing role that community engagement and immersive learning hold on our campus today. As part of my course requirement for the Leadership Studies Program, I completed an internship with the Mulvaney Center for Community, Awareness and Social Action where I had the opportunity to support in the leadership of a week-long immersion trip with five undergraduate students. This internship provided me with a new space to further explore this topic and gain feedback from the undergraduate students who participated on the USD Immersion trip to Jamaica. In completing this internship, I am also left with new observations and questions related to the value and importance of this educational framework.

As part of USD's Initiative, "Envisioning 2024", it's important to recognize the implications and opportunities USD holds to enhance the ways in which we involve ourselves and our students in local and international communities. One of the questions I hope to explore revolves around *how* we are preparing our students to be "changemakers" that effectively

embody core values of servant leadership, compassion and empathy as they navigate opportunities for community engagement and immersive learning during their time at USD.

Purpose

We live in a world that is sharply divided by systems of privilege; systems that drastically shape how individuals live, interact, and are seen in society. These barriers stem from socially constructed labels and assumptions that are only created to separate us from connecting with the “other”. Colleges and universities hold the power and responsibility to acknowledge these systemic issues and problematic attitudes by not only creating space for discussion in the classroom but for connecting students to opportunities outside the classroom to connect with people experiencing a different reality than their own. Experiential learning such as community engagement and immersive learning opportunities act as promising pathways for students to expand their character development, increase emotional intelligence, and explore a relationally-based leadership practice.

Gap and Areas of Curiosity

Although Universities and colleges have implemented powerful experiential learning opportunities through community engagement outlets and various immersion trips for a number of years, a gap that I have observed and am curious about revolves around the continual support students receive before, during and after their specific experiential learning opportunity. I envision these experiences with three main phases: pre, during, and post. Each of these phases of engaged learning requires different kinds of preparation, reflection, and guided dialogue to help ensure students are receiving the appropriate intellectual and emotional support to process and gain the most meaningful growth from these experiences.

In this paper I will explore my curiosity around the the possible relationship between one's capacity to connect and empathize with others more authentically and the amount of community engagement and experiential/immersive learning that they have participated in, specifically looking at undergraduate students at USD. My first main question I will explore is the question of whether or not the practice of community engagement and immersive learning within higher education holds value in the emotional and intellectual development of undergraduate students?

I believe there is a clear connection between time spent intentionally engaging and immersing oneself in building relationships and working *with* communities and one's ability to feel a more increased amount of compassion and empathy for the life experiences and stories of others. The 4 walls of a classroom often don't naturally allow or encourage for this kind of human connection to be built into the traditional framework of learning. Experiences and relationships built *outside* of the traditional classroom setting have the power to expand one's emotional and relational capacity to build authentic connections with others.

In my understanding of what it means to connect authentically, I believe the embodiment of compassion and empathy are essential values to be observant of and reflect on with students in the context of community engagement and immersive learning in higher education. I also believe it is critical to recognize and highlight the key difference between sympathy and empathy to ensure students are learning to take up a more authentic practice of leadership and connection. I believe there may be a key connection between students who participate in community engagement and immersive learning opportunities and students who embody a more authentic and intentional form of empathy and compassion in their day to day interactions.

In addition to exploring the value and impact that lies within the educational framework of community engagement and immersive learning, I would also like to explore how we as a university, are preparing and supporting students throughout their experience of becoming involved in a partner community or immersion program. What ‘best practices’ is USD already implementing and is there room for improvement in this area?

In looking at the lasting change and inherent value that community engagement and immersive learning holds in shaping students’ emotional and intellectual development, I believe it is equally important to look critically at the systems in place that support and mold these experiences for students. Although many students at USD are driven to get involved in community engagement efforts or immersive learning by their own personal interest and motivation, many students become involved in these various paths because of a requirement attached to a “Community Service Learning” course. I believe it’s important to differentiate these two groups of students because they may require different kinds of preparation, training, and support during their experience working with and engaging in our partner communities. Overall, the education, support, and preparation provided by staff is significant in *how* our students show up in these different spaces. More often than not, USD students are coming from a place of privilege and hold very different life experiences than that of the community members USD works to build these mutually supportive and reciprocal relationships with.

Whether students get involved in these programs out of sheer interest or because it is part of class requirement, it’s essential that we look critically at how we as a university are supporting student participants through every stage of this experiential learning. My belief is that with a more fully supported learning process that provides and supports students with the necessary knowledge, preparation, and reflection before, during, and after their form of experiential

learning, then it is more likely these students will have positively grown and developed from this experience. With more intentional preparation, reflection and discussion throughout the students' experiences, I believe we can better prepare students to connect from a place of authenticity, compassion, and empathy when they step out of the "USD bubble" and into other communities.

Analysis of Existing Literature

Community Service Learning (CSL) in Higher Education

In my search to learn more around the themes of community engagement and immersive learning in higher education, one of the main buckets of literature I continuously came across revolved around the impact of Community Service Learning on students' character and leadership development. With community service learning as a subset of the larger umbrella of community engagement and immersive learning within higher education, I decided it would be beneficial to understand the lengthy research that has been done around community service learning as these findings related and affirm the value in community engagement and immersive learning taking place outside the formal structure of a CSL course.

With that said, I found a plethora of rich information within the context of our very own history here at the University of San Diego. In 1995, USD Alumna, Dr. Judith Rauner completed her dissertation titled, "The Impact of Community Service Leadership on Student Development, as Perceived by Student Leaders". Although Rauner's research project was designed to look specifically at the beneficial learning and development that occurs for student leaders/coordinators of community service projects and trips, I would argue that her findings can also relate to those students who identify as participants of some kind of intentional community engagement and/or experiential learning in college.

Over the course of two years, Rauner conducted four case studies on student service-oriented leaders at the University of San Diego and Santa Clara University. In her findings, she shares that “students from both SCU and USD reflected in their journals that, through reciprocal learning, mutual influence ensued among college students and those persons receiving service” (Rauner, 1995, p.217). Additionally, another one of Rauner’s key findings reaffirmed the value of learning *through* relationships. In this section of her dissertation, Rauner states “These interactions enhanced students’ skills and knowledge about major social issues” (Rauner, 1995, p.219). She goes on to explain how the student leaders reported gained understanding of “the importance in considering others’ perspectives, being observant, and showing empathy” (Rauner, 1995, p.220).

Similarly, I came across a scholarly article written by Lori Simons and Beverly Cleary titled, “The Influence of Service Learning on Students’ Personal and Social Development”. In this article, Simons and Cleary illustrate their specific findings around the impact that service learning courses hold within higher education. Published in 2006, Simons and Cleary argue that although there has been an increase in research related to community service learning at this time, there was a problematic gap between the differing designs of qualitative and quantitative research on this topic. Simons and Cleary explain this hypothesis by sharing that most quantitative studies on service learning have been known to measure “changes in students’ personal and interpersonal social development” while qualitative research in this field has more often than not, “explored the processes linked with students’ reduced stereotyping and increased community involvement” (Simons & Cleary, 2006, p. 307). With this past research laying a foundation of knowledge around the influence of serving learning for students, Simons and Cleary worked to design a unique research methods design that would provide a new lens of

scholarly analysis to this field. With this desire, came their implementation of an explanatory methods design, which they describe as an integrative method that allowed them to use quantitative findings as context in creating qualitative questions (Simons & Cleary, 2006). Throughout their article, Simons and Cleary highlight how their exploratory method allowed for increased reliability and depth compared to previous studies in the field which only collected data from one method, limiting the depth of their findings. Using a population study of 142 students, Simons and Cleary were able to affirm that through service learning, “students are able to not only advance in terms of diversity and political awareness while showing improvements in community self-efficacy and civic engagement scores over the course of a semester, but are additionally reaping the benefits of community engagement in their personal and interpersonal development” (Simons & Cleary, 2006, p. 307).

Character Development as a Result of Community-based Engagement

While most of the literature I found on community-service learning revolved around the cognitive development, increased awareness of self and students’ personal and interpersonal skills, there was a subset of literature that I found to be unique to this field. In my research, there was a small number of studies that have looked specifically at the relation between community engagement and immersive learning and students’ development and practice of authentic compassion. Another USD Alum, Dr. Michael Lovette-Colyer, compiled his findings from a mixed-methods study measuring how much or little students’ level of compassion changed in a two-year period, in his Leadership Studies dissertation titled, “Cultivating Compassion in Undergraduate college students: Rhetoric or Reality?”. Based on his findings from this two-year study, Lovette-Colyer reports that “students who engaged in forms of community service and or immersion trips were associated with an increase in compassion while students who were

engaging in these activities through Greek Life or community service-learning showed decreased levels of compassion over the two years” (Lovette-Colyer, 2013, abstract).

I found this study particularly fascinating as it leaves me to question the potentially negative impact that required forms of community engagement hold over students’ potential for positive self-development and learning. Perhaps the value in experiential learning is only possible when students hold a sense of agency and choice over their involvement in these forms of engaged learning. This could also be argued by looping back to Rauner’s study which looked specifically at the positive impact community service held on those students who identified as leaders and coordinators in this field. I believe Lovette-Colyer’s research affirms this idea that students who are self-motivated or personally attached to their involvement within some kind of community engagement or immersive learning positively contributes to their ability to increase in compassion and overall development of the self.

In a very similar study, Thomas G. Plante, Katy Lackey, and Jeong Yeon Hwang unpack their findings on increased levels of compassion for students participating in community-based immersion trips, in their scholarly article titled “The Impact of Immersion Trips on Development of Compassion Among College Students”. Over the course of two separate experiments, this study distributed the same questionnaire to a student participants of an immersion trip before and after their experience while simultaneously also distributing the same questionnaire to “comparison students” who were not participating in these kinds of immersive learning trips. Based on the results of both experiments which compared data between student participants and comparison students, the researchers of this study were able to conclude a significant increase in levels of compassion and empathy in addition to decreased levels of stress for student participants compared to students who were not participating in any immersion

experiences (Plante, Lackey, Hwang, 2009). I believe these last two articles hold great value for the leadership field because of their ability to demonstrate the relationship between community based-experiential learning and increased levels of compassion and empathy. Because these concepts of compassion and empathy can be extremely difficult to measure and portray, I find these studies extremely beneficial when looking at why these forms of non-traditional learning and engagement are so imperative to helping students create a positive outlook and ability to connect more authentically with communities outside of their own.

The University of San Diego; a Sample Population

Because so much of my research is motivated by my personal experience rooted in the University of San Diego's numerous pathways for community engagement and immersive learning that I have participated in during my time as an undergraduate student, graduate student, and staff member, I found it crucial to include a detailed look into what USD is already doing to promote the kind of community-based engagement and learning that I am speaking to. In looking at what the university is already implementing, I know it is equally as important to use a critical lens in thinking about how the university can also improve and continue to be a leading institution in this field.

The University of San Diego holds a few key campus organizations that are leading the way for community engagement and immersive learning including but not limited to the University Ministry department, the Mulvaney Center for Community, Awareness, and Social Action (previously referred to as CASA), and the Center for Community Service-Learning which falls within the Mulvaney Center as a tool to connect students to our wider community of San Diego.

To share some context for how these areas on campus are engaging their student participants in community engagement and immersive learning, I will share with you their mission and values statements which serve as a portrayal for the lens in which each of these centers view and take up their own kind of community engagement.

university ministry.

The University Ministry department uses USD's catholic social tradition as a framework for how they interact and encourage students to get involved in local and international service and immersion opportunities. Under the "Service/Social Justice" tab on their website, you can find more information about the department's Romero Immersion Programs and Local Service Opportunities. Specifically looking at their Romero Immersion Programs, I can see clearly how the University Ministry team is intentional in connecting students with the experiences and stories of others outside of USD. On this page of their site, they describe the Romero Immersion Programs as opportunities "designed to form hearts that long for justice; to empower students to always be conscious of the poor; and to encourage students to live in solidarity with the lost, the least, and the left out" (University Ministry, 2018).

the mulvaney center for community, awareness, and social action.

Although similar to USD's University Ministry department in some ways, the Mulvaney Center holds their own unique mission and values that shape their intentions and the way that they hope to educate and connect students to community based learning opportunities. To help compare and contrast these two campus organizations doing similar work, I have included the following mission and vision from the Mulvaney Center's website:

As a core value, community engagement reflects the mission of USD, and embraces the Catholic moral and social tradition by its commitment to serve with

compassion, to foster peace, work for justice, and prepare leaders dedicated to ethical conduct and compassionate service. Through reciprocal community-based learning, the Mulvaney Center engages USD students, faculty, staff, and alumni to learn and act in partnership with the community, and make lifelong commitments to promote social change and justice (Mulvaney Center, 2018).

What stands out to me from the Mulvaney Center's mission statement is their emphasis on their relationships between USD and the community being *reciprocal partnerships*. In my experience, the Mulvaney Center has made a very intentional shift in language and perspective on *how* they connect with members outside of USD, specifically transitioning from the term service to engagement. This change in language represents a desire to more fully and authentically be in that reciprocal relationship they speak of. When we use the term service, it carries the societal assumption that there is more of a vertical, top-down, relationship in action rather than a more horizontal, balanced partnership. I see campus organizations like the University Ministry team and the Mulvaney Center continuing to grapple with the push and pull to serve while also being more authentically engaged through reciprocal relationships and less engaged solely through acts of direct service and a place of privilege. More recently, I have observed a shift in perspective related to this topic that I feel is largely connected to the implementation of USD's *Envisioning 2024* campaign.

envisioning 2024, a strategic plan.

Envisioning 2024 was initiated by USD's President, Dr. James T. Harris and approved by the Board of Trustees in 2016. Ultimately, this campaign serves as a long term, and extremely detailed strategic plan, outlining almost a decade leading up to the year 2024 with specific pathways, goals, and next steps to take in order to help achieve this university wide plan. In the

formal strategic report, available in PDF format on the *Envisioning 2024* website, it states the following:

Since its inception, the University of San Diego has had a commitment to educating students to “a social awareness which impels to action”. The belief that a Catholic university must be committed equally to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and Catholic Social Teachings has compelled the University of San Diego to be more than just a Catholic university that prepares students for a personally fulfilling and meaningful life but also to be Changemakers prepared to confront humanity’s urgent challenges (*Envisioning 2024*, p. 3).

This statement is largely connected to USD’s implementation of community service learning into the educational framework and the university’s heightened emphasis and value placed upon the involvement of community engagement and immersive learning at USD. These educational opportunities are inherently connected to *Envisioning 2024* through goal 5 of the strategic plan, “Amplifying Local and Global Engagement and Reputation”. On the “Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Initiatives” website, we can see that goal 5 is supported by two specific pathways: “Anchor Institution” and “Practice Changemaking” (IESI-Strategic Plan, ND). These pathways are intended to support what USD is already doing but in a manner that will challenge our faculty and staff, students, and even alumni to look critically at these values and how we are living them out.

Through this detailed strategic plan, we can see that USD is clearly passionate about the value and potential that experiential learning holds through the practice of intentional engagement in both our local and global communities that we are connected to. Although I feel hopeful for what *Envisioning 2024* holds, I remain curious about how this work will continue to

adapt and unfold. I also question how our faculty and staff will continue to reflect, grow, and challenge one another to ensure we are providing the most meaningful and socially just opportunities for students to engage, learn, and grow in the context of being changemakers at an Anchor Institution. In a video promoting USD's strategic plan, key campus member, John Loggins explains how becoming an Anchor Institution will help establish the university as not only a source of public good but will ultimately allow us to place more energy, resources, and time into our already established community partnerships in San Diego and globally, in such a way that is *mutually beneficial* for both USD and our reciprocal partners (University of San Diego YouTube, 2016).

The culmination of this research provided me with ample information affirming the positive impact and lasting value that community engagement and immersive learning has on students' leadership practice, character development, and increased knowledge and care for diverse world views and realities. Although my assumption that these forms of engagement and learning within college are significantly beneficial and positive was proven to be true, I have noticed in both my research and own experience that there seems to be a gap in this practice. Most of the scholarly articles and dissertations I came across from this field of literature explored the *outcomes, results, and lasting effects* that these kinds of educational experiences hold on a student's personality, values, career path interests and understanding of self and others. Although research conducted from this angle holds power in reinforcing the value of related programs and curriculums within higher education, there seems to be a lack of research done from the lens of best practices. This paper serves as an exploration of my curiosity into USD's embodiment of community engagement and immersive learning and exploring the question of how could faculty and staff more fully support students in these formative experiences through.

More specifically, I hope to explore how leadership theories and frameworks such as servant leadership, humble inquiry and emotional intelligence have the potential to support and empower students participating in this transformational style of learning and engagement that has become such an integral part of USD's core values and vision for their future.

Connection to Leadership Theories

In my learning from this particular leadership studies program, I've found that numerous leadership theories and frameworks could easily be applied and used within the context of community engagement and immersive learning within higher education. Due to the limitations of this research paper and the need to be concise, I have chosen to narrow down the list and focus on the traits of servant leadership, emotional intelligence, and humble inquiry. While these three frameworks each provide their own unique leadership lens, I feel they all complement each other well and could provide significant support to the community-based learning and engagement taking place at USD and other schools alike.

Servant Leadership

In Afsaneh Nahavandi's textbook, *The Art and Science of Leadership*, she outlines servant leadership as a subset of value-based leadership referencing author and distinguished leadership scholar, Robert Greenleaf, who originally introduced this concept in his book, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (1977). Greenleaf is well known for his emphasis on service to followers, looking at how leadership connects to and is based in the overall development and effectiveness of those considered to be followers (Nahavandi, 2015). Although I don't think this *whole* leadership framework applies to USD's practice of community-based learning and engagement, I do believe several of the traits related to servant leadership can be observed in USD's work to become an anchor institution,

connecting students and community members to grow and learn alongside one another. In the “LEAD 545 Survey of Leadership Theories” course I took during my spring 2017 semester, Dr. Mariko Peshon taught the theory of servant leadership by outlining ten main principles of this concept. Of the ten, I have found the following four to be most applicable to my research in this area: listening, empathy, awareness, and building community (Peshon, 2017). In Peshon’s PowerPoint titled, “A Whirlwind Tour Through the History of Leadership Studies”, she describes how the practice of listening intently, striving to truly understand and empathize with others’ experiences, working towards and embodying self-awareness, and building an authentic sense of community in any given organization or setting are significant to identity of servant leadership. I believe there is significant similarity between Greenleaf’s vision of leadership and what USD seems to be striving for. Based upon my personal experience of being a USD student and staff member, I know that the concept of servant leadership is already being practiced and woven into the organizational culture in communities on campus like the University Ministry department. With that said, I believe there is definitely room to grow and enhance how we as faculty and staff are using this leadership framework to challenge and empower our students to connect these traits to the physical act of taking part in some form of community-based learning and engagement. My concern around this field of research is that students are often going out into the community, if at all, from a place of privilege and pity, a mindset that stems from top-down, hierarchical leadership. Although I appreciate much of what Green leaf has contributed to leadership, my hope in using this particular theory is to focus on the traits that support human connection while letting go of the heavy emphasis on a leader-follower mindset. Although it is important to consider the roles of leaders and followers when looking at organization leadership, I think it is even more important to let go of this perspective when striving to build reciprocal,

balanced, and authentic connections between a school and a partner community. Servant Leadership could serve as an extremely beneficial tool for student participants of community-based learning to use for deeper reflection and critical analysis of their intentions behind their involvement and the potential positive and negative impact these actions may hold on others.

Emotional Intelligence

Another leadership concept that I have found to play a large role in the actual relationship building and character development of community-based learning and engagement is one's understanding and ability to practice emotional intelligence. In Afsaneh Nahavandi's text, *The Art and Science of Leadership*, she refers to emotional intelligence as "an ability to interact well with followers, satisfy their emotional needs, and motivate and inspire them being central to effective leadership" (Nahavandi, 2015, p.113). Although it's up for debate whether or not emotional intelligence can actually be taught or if it is actually more of a natural trait for select individuals, I've chose to believe that the pieces of emotional intelligence can and *should* be talked about to encourage a fuller understanding and practice of it in our day to day relations. In Nahavandi's text, she displays the concept of emotional intelligence as being made up by the following five components: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy for others, and interpersonal and social skills (p.113). I believe incorporating these components into leadership development and reflection in the context of community engagement at USD would serve as a beneficial tool to help students gain self-awareness on how their behavior impacts others. Of the five components of emotional intelligence, I would argue that having empathy for others is instrumental in the act of building relationships between USD and outside communities. From my experience as both a student participant and intern for the Mulvaney Center, I have observed students participating in an immersion trip or form of community engagement and

displaying a sense of empathy and pity for those they are “serving”. Although this may be a common human characteristic, this mindset and behavior can be extremely problematic as it creates a boundary of privilege between the student and the community. By integrating these components of emotional intelligence into more reflective dialogues with student participants, I believe faculty and staff have the power to enhance our students’ ability to embody a stronger sense of emotional intelligence.

Humble Inquiry; the Power of Asking Questions

The gap in community engagement and immersive learning at USD revolves around meaningful question-asking and continued reflection and dialogue with students in an attempt to support them in connecting their experiences outside the classroom to their own values or lessons gained within the space of a classroom. Tools from the practice and concept of humble inquiry could be used as a beneficial tool for faculty and staff as they support and challenge students in processing these experiences. Additionally, I believe understanding and practicing the art of humble inquiry would serve as a tool for more authentic connection and understanding of those they engage with in communities outside of the USD bubble. In *Humble Inquiry, the Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling*, Edgar H. Shein insists that we as a society must learn to ask better questions, stating that “in an increasingly complex, interdependent, and culturally diverse world, we cannot hope to understand and work with people from different occupational, professional, and national cultures if we do not know how to ask questions and build relationships that are based on mutual respect and the recognition that others know things that we may need to know in order to get a job done” (Shein, 2013, p. 1-2). I believe Shein’s message around question asking holds great potential for helping students more fully understand the benefit of stepping into communities and building a relationship from a place of genuine curiosity and interest rather

than coming from a place of privilege, power, and the assumption that you need to give and serve others with *your answers* and knowledge on *their situation*. Looping back to USD's effort of becoming a well-respected anchor institution, I believe Shein's perspective on powerful and curious question-asking will complement USD's desire to build more reciprocal relationships through our involvements off campus.

Servant Leadership, emotional intelligence, and the practice of humble inquiry are just a few of the applicable leadership theories and frameworks that closely connect to USD's goals for enhancing our partnerships through community engagement and becoming a more well respected anchor institution. More importantly, I believe these concepts have the potential to enhance how USD works towards setting the standard for intentional community-based learning and engagement within higher education. By discussing and using pieces of the servant leadership theory, emotional intelligence framework, and Edgar Shein's book on the art of question asking, I believe we can improve the potential for a more valuable and reciprocal experience between our university and the communities we place ourselves in.

Considerations

Due to the time constraints of this leadership program and my personal schedule, I was not able to conduct any research studies related to the topic of community engagement and immersive learning at USD. If I had more time, I would have liked to conduct a detailed study and environmental scan of the structures in place that faculty and staff at USD use for the preparation, guidance, and post-reflection of experiential learning opportunities through our areas on campus like our Community Service Learning program, the Mulvaney Center and the University Ministry department. Another area that I would be curious to have focused on is in creating a sample curriculum for faculty, staff, and student leaders to use as a "tool kit" of sorts

to more fully support the three stages of community engagement and immersive learning. This tool-kit would incorporate the use of servant leadership traits, emotional intelligence components, and the humble inquiry framework to help strengthen intention setting, reflecting, and post engagement/immersion follow-up with students. My vision for this plan is based on the intention of giving students a framework to help them recognize and reflect on things like how we listen, engage, and connect with others in new or uncomfortable settings. Additionally, my hope would be that with the use of these leadership frameworks, there would be more opportunities to look critically at the positive and negative implications USD's presence may have in partner communities. I believe the specific leadership concepts I have identified would promote the growth and development of students' capacity to practice more authentic leadership stemming from a place of curiosity and compassion for others instead of being motivated from a place of entitlement and desire to fix or save others.

Future Implications for the field of leadership

I believe it is important to continue exploring the humanistic traits of empathy, compassion, and their connection to community engagement because these traits hold lasting value in the world around us. Living in a nation that many would call divided or broken, I feel that it is extremely important to continue challenging how we as individuals practice empathy and compassion in our communities, our work environments and our personal relationships. Through the use of servant leadership traits, components of emotional intelligence and the practice of humble inquiry, community-based learning and engagement within higher education has the potential to create a more significant and lasting change in both, the lives of students and our partner communities.

Closing Remarks

Based upon my internship with the Mulvaney Center and my research in this field, I believe there is a need for more in-depth preparation, group reflection and space for students to more fully process their experience, observations, and emotions attached to their time spent in a community engagement or immersive learning opportunity at USD. Although I believe USD is exceeding in that act of providing meaningful opportunities for our students, I do feel there is an important need for faculty, staff, and even student leaders to continue thinking critically about *how* we can best support the *whole* learning process that students experience when they step out of the classroom and engage with communities near and far.

This kind of learning is meant to challenge students to question their values, identity, passions, and most importantly their connection and understanding of their place in the world. Needless to say this kind of non-traditional learning is not meant to be easy or comfortable, it is meant to be quite the opposite and this requires added space for in-depth dialogue and reflection around the interpersonal pieces at play. Through the integration of leadership theories and frameworks like servant leadership, emotional intelligence, and humble inquiry, I believe faculty and staff could enhance the quality of learning and development that students are receiving through more direct dialogue and frequent reflection among their peers and classmates.

We know from the scholars in this field that there is lasting, reciprocal value in community engagement and immersive learning for both, students' and our partner communities. For USD to meet their goal of "setting the standard" as a catholic university providing this kind of intentional engagement and experiential learning at USD, it is crucial that we continue look at the learning process as a whole; supporting students in preparation with knowledge, providing them with support during their immersion/engagement, and creating space for further reflection

after these experiences have come to a close so that students can continue to connect and identify how this experience may have changed or impacted their self-awareness, personal goals and overall connection with others.

Whether or not, I find myself in a career within this specific field of community engagement and immersive learning within higher education, I am confident that this research is easily applicable to *many* other areas of work. As a staff member at USD, I do hope to continue exploring my professional career in higher education and believe that my research and arguments made in this paper hold value in the growth and development of students in other reflective learning spaces at USD. Through my time as a graduate student in SOLES, I know on a personal level how transformational the integration of leadership studies can be on one's self-awareness, identity formation, and leadership practice. Wherever my career path takes me, my intention is to continue using leadership studies as a tool for critical analysis, self-reflection, and compassionate leadership.

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