2021

Service Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Model of Temporal, Spatial, and Cultural Adaptability

Sherry Shaw  
*University of North Florida*, sherry.shaw@unf.edu

Mark A. Halley  
*University of North Florida*, mark.halley@unf.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/joi

Part of the Higher Education Commons, and the Other Education Commons

Suggested Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/joi/vol29/iss1/3
Service Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Model of Temporal, Spatial, and Cultural Adaptability

Cover Page Footnote
Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank Maryrose Claussen and Dawn Wessling for compiling the undergraduate data sources, Derek Willingham for designing Figure 1, and the following students for contributing their creative works to this manuscript: Mary Gill (CODA poem), Meagan Clement (Figure 2), and Kristen Sorge (Figure 3).

This article is available in Journal of Interpretation: https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/joi/vol29/iss1/3
Service Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Model of Temporal, Spatial, and Cultural Adaptability

Sherry Shaw
Mark Halley
University of North Florida

ABSTRACT

In this study, the researchers analyze the progress of undergraduate and graduate ASL/English interpreting students (n = 34) in service learning courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was an exploratory investigation of student adaptability and approaches to collaboration with the Deaf community amidst the global crisis. Using student assignments as the primary data source, the analysis yielded five themes that contextualized student growth throughout their service learning journeys: outlook, approach, effort, focus, and locus of control. Further, the findings are framed within the concepts of habitus and boundary work, resulting in a model of temporal, spatial, and cultural adaptability that conceptualizes student experience. Taken together, the data indicate that service learning activities and coursework continue to offer mutually beneficial opportunities to students and community partners even amidst challenging circumstances.

INTRODUCTION

In the early months following the declaration of a global pandemic (World Health Organization, March 2020), accurate information about COVID-19 prevention, treatment, and recovery strategies was difficult for the public to obtain, especially for people from linguistic minorities. Reduced access to information and the stress of constantly seeking information during a rapidly changing period put many people at risk for healthcare inequities, anxiety, depression, and social isolation (Sabatello, Burke, McDonald, & Appelbaum, 2020; Sigurvinsdottir, Thorisdottir, & Gylfason, 2020). In response to the spreading virus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued guidelines for mitigating COVID-19 impact through precautionary practices, such as shifting from in-person to remote interaction, limiting personal contact, increasing distance, reducing meeting size capacity, and sheltering in place.

The degree to which factual information was efficiently relayed and continuity of service was accomplished within the Deaf community during the first year of the pandemic has yet to be documented; however, this study seeks to contribute to our understanding of the pandemic’s impact on interpreter-community relationships and the adaptability of students within postsecondary interpreter education. Specifically, the researchers evaluated responses of undergraduate and graduate interpreting students to one program’s requirements for participating
in service learning initiatives to foster partnerships that support the Deaf community, despite restrictions and changes imposed by the institution in accordance with CDC guidelines. The relevance of this study extends beyond interpreting students to interpreters, with the underlying philosophy of service learning as a means of demonstrating responsibility to the Deaf community by allowing professional boundaries to be negotiated (Grbić, 2010). Additionally, we note that the term ‘Deaf community’ is used as a short form that implies inclusivity to the DeafBlind community, and the terms ‘student’ and ‘interpreter’ refer to Deaf or hearing students and interpreters.

**COVID-19 IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

In February 2020, The Chronicle of Higher Education began reporting pending changes to colleges and universities amidst the viral outbreak, including shifts to online learning and reduced campus services (Fischer, 2020). Institutions were thrust into a cycle of assessing the situation and attempting to mitigate the spread of the virus over the course of several semesters, while remaining accountable for instructional integrity as required by accrediting bodies (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020; Piotrowski & King, 2020). Beyond the logistics of maintaining financial stability and guaranteeing quality control over the student experience, institutions were tasked with considering the physical-social-emotional well-being of their students during a period of extreme psychological pressure (Suarez & Marcus, 2020). While disruption to traditional programs might have meant transitioning to technology-based learning (Besser, Flett, & Zeigler-Hill, 2020), the depth of the health crisis struck a severe blow to the experiential learning sequences of practice professional programs, such as interpreting and nursing (Combs & Schwartz, 2020; Zerwic, Montgomery, Dawson, Dolter, & Stineman, 2020). Moreover, interpreter education programs were seeking to comply (or remain compliant) with accreditation standards that provide the foundational competencies of “Deaf community engagement/responsibility to deaf communities, allyship, service learning, professional roles, boundaries, flexibility and interactions with the community” (Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education, 2019, Standard 6.2).

**FOUNDATIONS OF SERVICE LEARNING IN INTERPRETER EDUCATION**

Service learning partnerships between interpreters and the Deaf community embody the six essentials of deep learning: “character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking” (Fullan & Gardner, 2019, p. 66). According to Kolb and Kolb (2005, 2017), deep learning occurs in cycles of concrete experience, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation, and active experimentation, which promote new perspectives about one’s work and worldviews. Service learning, a form of experiential learning, is a philosophy of professional practice that applies to students, alumni entering the workforce, and experienced interpreters. It requires community engagement that is distinct from community service (volunteering) and field experience (i.e., mentorship, practicum, internship). Bringle and Hatcher (1995) noted two elements of service learning in academia that are critical for distinguishing it from community service: (a) relationship to a credit-bearing course focusing on meeting a community need and (b) reflective practice in which the students develop “a broader appreciation of the discipline and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (p. 112).
In an effort to instill community responsibility and develop professional dispositions in aspiring interpreters, service learning teaches students how to recognize the local community’s assets and identify opportunities for supporting the Deaf community. Additionally, faculty members within interpreting programs are responsible for (a) framing their approach to service learning as an opportunity for students to support the community and (b) modeling how community alliances can be formed without sacrificing professionalism. Summarily, Kolb and Kolb asserted that “questioning differences that arise from these multiple perspectives is the fuel for learning and new insights” (2017, p. 16), which complements the desire of interpreter education programs to develop critical thinking and equity-mindedness in their students through experiential learning.

**Building Trust**

Monikowski and Peterson (2005) were among the first interpreter educators to write about service learning as a means of recovering the trust element that is so critical for effective communication in interpreted settings. They described service learning as a “recursive phenomenon, wherein students learn the significance of membership in a community while reflecting on the importance of reciprocity and the symbiotic nature of learning and living” (p. 195). Other researchers documented how service learning causes students to shift their focus from self-development to alliance building (Shaw & Jolley, 2007; Shaw & Roberson, 2009) and to “keep the Deaf perspective always at the forefront of their skill acquisition...[taking them] beyond experience to an internalization of Deaf community values through reflection and responsiveness” (Shaw, 2013, p. 7). Students who are beginning to see themselves as future interpreters can be guided into identity-building and boundary work that does not oppose ethical standards of professionalism (Grbić, 2010).

When Monikowski and Peterson (2005) suggested that interpreters educated in a classroom had deviated from cultural, social, and linguistic immersion in the Deaf Community, they implied the resultant loss of trust is difficult to restore from within the metaphorical silo of interpreter education. Although students may not recognize precisely what they are learning during service learning courses, the restoration of trust and respect from the Deaf community is a worthy incentive for approaching service learning with as much energy and focus as possible. The principles of service learning include (a) being visible and active in the Deaf community, (b) listening to community members without imposing uninvited ideas, (c) contributing to partnerships by offering support rather than leadership, (d) prioritizing relationships over projects or activities, and (e) focusing on empowering community members (Shaw, 2013).

**Service Learning: Pedagogy and the Pandemic**

The pedagogy of service learning can be attributed to Kolb and Kolb’s experiential learning theory (2005) and John Dewey’s philosophy of democracy as a collaborative model for rational problem-solving, together and with mutual respect (1916). These foundations served as the impetus for service learning becoming an integral component of the Bachelor of Science and Master of Science (General Practitioner Concentration) degrees in American Sign Language/English Interpreting at the University of North Florida (UNF). In these programs, three courses are dedicated to student engagement in the Deaf and DeafBlind communities. The scope of these courses is far-reaching...
because both degree programs utilize distance learning (not campus-bound), and students attend from across the United States, Canada, and other countries that use ASL in addition to their indigenous signed languages. UNF’s service learning initiative is connected to credit-bearing coursework using a curricular decision that aligns with the concept often termed ‘academic service learning’ (Howard, 1998). Service learning courses are obligatory components of all degree plans (not extra-curricular or elective), with undergraduate students taking six credit hours (Introduction to Service Learning, Service Learning in the Deaf Community) and graduate students taking three credit hours (an accelerated, combined version of the two courses, also called Service Learning in the Deaf Community). Semesters containing service learning courses are either 12 weeks long (Summer, May-August) or 15 weeks long (Fall, August-December; Spring, January-May). The students learn how to conduct personal and community asset mapping, practice active listening to identify community goals, and establish responsible, yet flexible boundaries with community partners. Course objectives include learning how to apply critical thinking skills to their own biases and assumptions and working toward mutual goals that are defined by the Deaf community.

MAINTAINING THE SERVICE LEARNING COURSE SEQUENCE

While some interpreting programs might have decided to cancel, reschedule, or remove service learning requirements from their programs during the summer and fall semesters of 2020, UNF retained four sections of service learning classes as originally scheduled prior to the pandemic. The rationale behind maintaining the course sequence was twofold. First, rescheduling or removing service learning courses from the schedule would disrupt the students’ progress toward degree completion (a critical metric monitored by the institution’s administration) and leave students ill-prepared to enter advanced field experiences in subsequent semesters. In addition, the program’s faculty agreed that, while modifications to service learning course objectives might be warranted during these impacted semesters, there was plenty for students to learn by re-envisioning community support from a distance, especially with communities that were already at high risk for misinformation and social isolation during the pandemic.

The inclusion of service learning in interpreter education stems from a commitment to civic responsibility to the community members–stakeholders of interpreting services. Campus Compact (2021), an American coalition of over 1,000 colleges and universities, is a relationship-driven organization that promotes educating postsecondary students about their civic and social responsibilities. During a time when the best action was inaction (distancing, isolating, and quarantining), Campus Compact was urging programs and universities to remain cognizant of their community’s needs and reconsider what it means to be in partnership when travel and assembly are discouraged or limited. The COVID-19 pandemic made it all the more imperative to mobilize interpreting students for critical thinking about their roles in mitigating the effects of the pandemic on Deaf and DeafBlind people.

OVERVIEW OF SERVICE LEARNING AT UNF

In pre-pandemic years, local Deaf leaders, professionals, and retirees expressed concerns to UNF service learning students about pressing social issues that impacted their daily lives and quality of life. These issues centered around serious injustices and were relayed to interpreting students during individual meetings, small group settings, social media, and group panels representative of
a diverse Deaf community that is situated near the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind. Local senior citizens and retirees expressed concerns about social isolation, intergenerational (dis)connectedness, and emergency preparedness. Deaf professionals identified specific concerns for transition-aged Deaf people regarding language deprivation, literacy, self-advocacy, cultural identity-language heritage, transition from school to work, healthcare awareness, and the need for Deaf adult role models, among other life skills. The opportunities for interpreting students to collaborate on addressing the Deaf community’s concerns were plentiful, and students learned that when ideas flow from within the community, interpreters can support and contribute in a way that follows the leadership of Deaf community members. Furthermore, as future (or practicing) interpreters, UNF students were required to consider the potential repercussions of these concerns going unaddressed. Students critically analyzed how the community’s assets (e.g., leadership, resources, vision, organization, expertise, personal capital) could be combined with their own personal assets (e.g., time, resources, venue access) to co-create opportunities for action.

When COVID-19 disrupted the traditional approach to service learning, instructors were challenged to pursue student learning outcomes that had historically been accomplished through in-person, interactive relationship-building with Deaf community members, facilitated largely by the faculty. In the current situation, students needed to harness their creativity and resources to demonstrate culturally-appropriate interactions, active listening, and the ability to conduct strength-based community assessments as precursors to furthering the goals of the Deaf community; however, their efforts would necessarily rely upon what could be accomplished remotely and in accordance with university pandemic policies. The reimagining of service learning was likely to require tremendous reservoirs of creativity, flexibility, adaptability, energy, and self-discipline on the part of students and faculty members alike (Doody, Schuetze, & Fulcher, 2020). At the beginning of the Summer 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters, instructors urged students to prioritize people over projects and relationships over course requirements (and grades) so as to position the Deaf community’s concerns ahead of their own academic achievement. In doing so, students would come to realize that centering the Deaf community in their efforts would lead to enhanced academic achievement in service learning. Practically speaking, relocation circumstances driven by the pandemic repositioned some students as newcomers within unfamiliar Deaf communities, and in these cases, previous networks vanished, and instructors assisted students in forming new connections with local community members.

**Relevance and Purpose**

This study aimed to understand how reimagining service learning in the context of a pandemic placed new and potentially overwhelming expectations on students. More broadly, the assumptions that deep learning could occur, and alliance-oriented relationships could develop through service learning during tumultuous times of crisis would be tested in this investigation. The researchers were especially interested in learning how students adapted their thinking and strengthened their relationships with the Deaf community despite preconceived barriers or assumptions about their experiences being dampened by the pandemic. We were prompted to study adaptability during a health crisis in hopes that the results might help interpreter educators and mentors foster coping strategies in novice interpreters when uncertainty places a demand on their ability to manage the tasks at hand.
This study focused on an interpreting program where service learning courses and instruction were already fully online (graduate) or primarily online (undergraduate) prior to the pandemic, which meant there was no disruptive shift from traditional to distance delivery modes for which students needed to contend. The researchers acknowledge the benefit of students not facing abrupt delivery mode changes while they were navigating new territory in the form of virtual experiential learning. Although the strategy of inquiry employed in this study (qualitative document analysis) does not require predetermined research questions, the overarching question used to guide the study’s design was, “How did restrictions imposed as a result of COVID-19 affect the students’ abilities to establish community partnerships in service learning courses?”

**METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative design that utilized course documents as primary data sources. The co-researchers are full-time faculty members in the UNF Interpreter Education Program and experienced service learning instructors. The sponsoring Institutional Review Board evaluated the methods of data collection and determined that, because analysis did not involve interacting with students, faculty, or community partners, the study was ‘exempt’ from ethical review for research with human subjects. Informed consent from participants was not required as the data sources protected student confidentiality and the documents were not produced for the purpose of research.

**PARTICIPANTS**

A purposeful sample of 34 participants comprised one undergraduate section of *Introduction to Service Learning* in Summer 2020 and two undergraduate sections plus one graduate section of *Service Learning in the Deaf Community* in Fall 2020. The participant pool included students pursuing a Master of Science degree in ASL/English Interpreting with a concentration in *General Practice Interpreting* (n = 19) and students pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in ASL/English Interpreting at the same institution (n = 15). Participants primarily resided in the southeast region of the United States (n = 23), and others resided in the southwest (n = 5), the northeast (n = 5), and the west (n = 1). Participants in the graduate program were more likely than undergraduate students to have state and national interpreting credentials and be balancing young families, full-time employment in video relay service and community settings, and extended family responsibilities during the pandemic. While most undergraduate students were likewise employed, they were less likely to possess interpreting credentials, be qualified interpreters, or have the additional responsibilities noted in the graduate students. Some undergraduate students had relocated to live with family in spring 2020 for the duration of the pandemic, primarily in response to COVID-19 housing policies instituted by the university during the 2020-2021 academic year. Faculty anticipated this change alone would introduce a state of disconnectedness from the local Deaf community, particularly if there had been no relationships established prior to the student relocating. Despite their demographic differences, all students were subject to physical and psychological pressures that were inherent to coping with COVID-19 in their families and communities.
MEASURES

Service Learning instructors compiled the documents and artifacts that would serve as data sources for this project. The documents were written narratives, and the artifacts were abstract representations of service learning experiences, submitted in fulfillment of course requirements (e.g., plans, reports, poems, graphics) for four sections of service learning classes (see Table 1 for data sources associated with each course). Prior to analysis, faculty members redacted personal identifying information from the documents to preserve student and community partner confidentiality. Each data source contained rich descriptions of student experiences through narrative, poetry, and graphic representations.

Table 1. Data Sources and Affiliated Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Affiliated Courses</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning Prospectus</td>
<td>Introduction to Service Learning</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning Plan, Draft</td>
<td>Service Learning in the Deaf Community</td>
<td>Undergraduate and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning Plan, Final</td>
<td>Service Learning in the Deaf Community</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning Summary</td>
<td>Service Learning in the Deaf Community</td>
<td>Undergraduate and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Journals</td>
<td>Service Learning in the Deaf Community</td>
<td>Undergraduate and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Discussions</td>
<td>Service Learning in the Deaf Community</td>
<td>Undergraduate and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Meeting Reflections</td>
<td>Service Learning in the Deaf Community</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Syllabi</td>
<td>All courses</td>
<td>Undergraduate and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PROCEDURE

The researchers independently familiarized themselves with the data through strategic readings, initially to gain general perceptions about students’ experiences and eventually to organize the data into distinct categories as they became apparent. Debriefings after separate reading periods generated ideas for preliminary analysis, and the first step in the organization process involved dividing the data sources by student groups (graduate and undergraduate). As patterns of student experience began to emerge, the team became interested in learning how student perceptions and actions changed over time, resulting in further division of data along chronological lines. Using the course syllabi to plot assignment due dates, the undergraduate data were sorted into three segments for early, middle, or late semester. The graduate data fell along a timeline that resembled...
two phases: beginning-to-midterm and midterm-to-final. These divisions appeared to be logical starting places for making sense of the data and bringing the following questions into focus:

1. What components of adaptability were most prevalent in the two groups of students?
2. What tools did students acquire that might benefit their future work as community collaborators?
3. How did the students’ dispositions evolve over time?
4. Were there persistent mindsets that inhibited relationship-building? What role did locus of control play in mindset?

Researchers used a constant comparative process for forming tentative categories, or themes, from individual data items (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Coding the data began with a basic analysis of repetitive incidents, ideas, and thought patterns expressed by the students at any time during the semester. Original documents were reviewed often to ensure that key concepts were not overlooked, and passages of text were entered into several Excel spreadsheets for multiple layers of analysis. For example, one spreadsheet placed coded items in sequence so changes in attitude and activity could be observed over time. Another spreadsheet grouped data items according to ‘stance’, or the approach students took regarding the pandemic and its anticipated and realized impact on the semester’s outcomes. In a third spreadsheet, data were sorted by recurring attitudes, or dispositions. Building the spreadsheets over several weeks revealed five conceptual themes related to adaptability that can be superimposed on a multidimensional model across space, time, and culture.

**RESULTS**

The five emergent themes that summarized the students’ experiences are presented in Table 2, along with a brief description of each theme. These patterns represent holistic conclusions about students as members of a class group rather than the experience of individual students over time. The methodology selected for this study requires rich description of the data, and for this purpose, direct student quotations appear here in parentheses and italics or as bulleted items following each thematic description.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outlook</td>
<td>hope for trusting relationships, positive v. negative affect,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>defeatist v. optimist, anticipatory v. dread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>initiation strategies, opening conversations position of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in relation to community members, Deaf cultural norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for interaction; engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Effort strategies and activities, attempts to make progress; momentum; non-exploitation, cultural norms for communication and interaction, roles and responsibilities

Focus purpose clarity; self-absorption, Deaf community objectives, relationships over projects, grades and course requirements, distracted

Locus of Control external (bound by situation) or internal (resourceful, confident), negative affectivity (low self-esteem, anxious, uncomfortable) or positive affectivity (energized, comfortable)

OUTLOOK

Outlook could be described as the mindset with which students envisioned plausible options for community partnerships to address community ideas, needs, or concerns. In several instances, students described being overwrought and without hope that course requirements could be satisfied without face-to-face interaction with Deaf community members (I am scared COVID will be a big factor, making the proposal fail). At the beginning of the semester, these students perceived the disruption to normal life, paired with an atypical experiential learning course, to be a recipe for pending defeat (I am worried about the feasibility of completing the project during the current circumstances with COVID). As students became more familiar with their purpose in service learning (I am here to learn about the Deaf community’s needs and build a relationship with the local Deaf community), they navigated their reservations and recognized opportunities that might not have been as evident in a typical semester.

- I am eager and positive for the future of this course and my profession. I know that I will only support the project, so I cannot become anxious or frustrated if things are not going as planned or how I wanted it.
- I am supporting the Deaf leaders, not leading the project.
- I firmly believe the current COVID pandemic has given us a unique opportunity to be creative in our ability to connect with people.
- With today's technology availability, staying connected is much easier than it was 100 years ago, when the Spanish Flu pandemic hit our nation.
- It is vital that we challenge ourselves as students to prepare us for our future work as interpreters.
- I need to accept the service learning process for what it is—not perfect—and realize that I am not being graded on a completed project but rather the process itself and how I conduct myself during the process.
APPRAOCH: ADAPTIVE OR MALADAPTIVE

Operationally defined for this study, ‘approach’ means the way students presented their intentions to support the community, initiated community contacts, and entered into dialogue about community goals or needs. The data revealed two distinct types of approach: adaptive and maladaptive. An adaptive approach in which students allowed ideas to flow from the Deaf community was more prevalent than the maladaptive approach in which student-generated ideas were imposed on the Deaf community in order to satisfy a course requirement, thus perpetuating community exploitation (see also Focus). The data illuminated approach in terms of active listening, a principle of service learning that helps students enter into culturally-appropriate dialogue. Students exhibited the following listening types in their approaches to the community:

ORGANIZED LISTENING (ADAPTIVE)

- The whole purpose of our service learning project is to learn how to listen to our Deaf community’s needs and to support them in achieving their goals towards success.
- Learning how to listen outside of the classroom puts everything into perspective because it is an action that we are implementing while evaluating our thoughts before and afterwards. This aligns with a learning point of putting their needs above our needs and not exploiting the Deaf community.

FREE LISTENING WITHOUT PREDETERMINED PARAMETERS (ADAPTIVE)

- I have been listening to [Deaf community members] I interact with daily to get an overall sense of how they feel. Sometimes, their goals protrude right out!
- I became aware of how important ASL stories were during the pandemic...Due to COVID-19, many schools have resorted to closing and implementing distance learning to teach students virtually. Because of this, students are even more deprived of ASL than they have ever been.
- My favorite part about service learning is actively interviewing and talking with members of the Deaf community. I enjoy preparing questions, listening to their perspectives and experiences, and then reflecting after the conversations are over.
- What’s going to be challenging for me about this course is making sure I have listened enough to members of the Deaf community before moving forward with the project.
- I am thoughtful and listening more to what is being said by thinking twice before I speak.

DISENGAGED LISTENING (MALADAPTIVE)

- It is my commitment to encourage [Deaf community members] to talk about things they do not normally discuss during casual events.

Maladaptive approaches tended to infiltrate the other themes of Effort (inability to consider alternative plans), Locus of Control (external blame), and Outlook (defeat due to COVID), and in some cases, were attributed to the student’s weak community associations prior to the course (Because I had very little prior involvement with the local Deaf community, I had to work with the
limited contacts that I had). Conversely, several students revealed how their initial maladaptive approach (COVID-related or otherwise) gave way to an adaptive approach.

- I assumed COVID would prevent in-person meetings and make it difficult to complete the assignments. I have realized that regardless of COVID, I am able to figure out how to complete this successfully.
- At the beginning of the semester, my involvement in the Deaf community outside of work assignments was minimal.
- I was out of touch with the Deaf community at large and clueless to their current projects and needs. I made a lot of assumptions and thought that what I’d learned in my Deaf culture classes was enough to understand the community.
- I am actually paying attention to what the Deaf community is saying. I am seeking out and supporting Deaf businesses. I am following issues concerning Deaf people in the news. I am reaching out to people who ask for resources to offer my help...I am learning about their culture and trying to internalize their values.
- I still have a lot of work to do for the Deaf community to consider me an ally, but the attitude change I have experienced through this course is a step in the right direction. I feel inspired and energized at the idea of collaborating with Deaf community members in the future to work towards leveling the playing field between interpreters and the Deaf community.

**Effort**

Attempting service learning from a maladaptive approach led to ineffective efforts and ultimate disappointment about what might have been. Some students found it difficult to gain momentum in the early stages when they were required to spend time with community members to identify concerns or needs. Several students said they wished they had devoted more energy in the beginning rather than sacrificing interaction opportunities to complete course assignments. One student’s efforts were thwarted by low self-confidence and insecurity (*I felt like I was pestering people, and I worried that they would think I was trying to take advantage of them*) and the inability to identify workaround strategies (*The impact COVID-19 has had on this semester, especially with this kind of class, is very unfortunate and disappointing*). Some undergraduate students reported fearing rejection by the Deaf community, making their efforts guarded and ineffective. Some students were impacted directly (*On top of the pandemic, I personally went through two hurricanes within six weeks of each other, was battling with our insurance (we still are), cleaning and fixing up our house, and other personal issues*). Several students noted the importance of internalizing service learning for their future as interpreters:

- I will continue to use inclusive language and self-analyze my behaviors while working with the Deaf community.
- I am excited to apply what we’ve learned in this class already and do the work to earn the title of being an ally to the Deaf community.

**Focus**

Staying focused on the Deaf community was a prevalent theme and refers to the ability to be community-centered throughout the semester. The researchers anticipated undergraduate students
would be fully prepared to achieve community focus, having completed a prerequisite course with an introduction to service learning and information about an interpreter’s role and responsibility in the Deaf community. In contrast, we expected to find the graduate students struggling with a steep learning curve in the early weeks, possibly losing valuable time, as the vast majority were new to the service learning framework and protocols. These assumptions were not realized in the data. Graduate students were less likely to be preoccupied with assignment pressure, while the previous coursework and familiarity with service learning principles afforded undergraduate students did not appear to alleviate their preoccupation with grades, course requirements, and timelines. Students who repeatedly referred to ‘my plan’, ‘my ideas’, ‘my Deaf community’, ‘I have found/done/try...’ and other terminology about personal initiative were using a backward approach by presenting an idea to the Deaf community and asking them to lead it. Indicators of community focus and self focus were captured in these student reflections:

**FOCUSED ON COMMUNITY**

- I know everyone is struggling right now because of COVID...I cannot imagine the oppression that the community is facing with the lack of interpreters in emergency meetings.
- I understand that the things I think, or what I want, may **not** be best for the Deaf community. I know how the service learning process should work, which is reflected in how I have conducted myself thus far.
- The Deaf leaders took time out of their day to meet with me, so I made sure to provide my undivided attention. I was focused on the meeting, and I am ready to start working on the project.
- If I caught myself taking the lead, I would stop myself...It makes me very happy to see how excited [Deaf leader] is about this event. He is so happy to see people from the hearing community involved in the Deaf community and helping solve the issues led by Deaf individuals.
- I hope we continue to collaborate together by discussing ideas and working through potential conflicts. I hope the Deaf leaders will continue to value my contributions and effort as much as I do theirs.
- I believe to be an ally; you have to first become a successful listener and observer.

**FOCUSED ON SELF** *(underlining added for attention to focus errors)*

- My friend who is a Deaf parent has graciously **offered me** their support.
- I found a woman who understood the premise of this project and **why I am doing it**.
- I had to completely change **my project** and start from scratch twice!
- I am having a hard time contacting Deaf leaders who are **willing to set aside time in their busy lives to participate**.
- It is a challenge trying to **encourage my community** to do things.
- I am a little bit frustrated because **I found this need in the community**, but no one wants to address it.
- Service learning is very different from other things I have done in the past, and I so **desperately want to structure it and organize it to benefit my schedule and grade**. I know
that doing so is inappropriate but being aware of it and how I feel is essential for ensuring it does not happen (author note: statement reflects focus shifting away from self).

**LOCUS OF CONTROL**

The internal-external locus of control determines the extent to which one assumes responsibility for the outcomes of their actions and recognizes the ability to affect change by activating personal resources. The effects of an uncontrollable pandemic on mental health and the predictability of locus of control on psychological resilience (Sigurvinsdottir, Thorisdottir, & Gylfason, 2020; Türk-Kurtaşal & Kocatürk, 2020) correspond to student reports in this study that fell across the control spectrum. Superimposing the pandemic conditions over service learning requirements resulted in indicators of external locus of control, such as hesitance, anxiety, fear, and doubt (negative affectivity). Transitions from external to internal locus became remarkable as the semester progressed and as students accepted the realities of COVID-19 on their roles as Deaf community supporters.

**INTERNAL LOCUS**

- What excites me most is the idea of partnering with community members from the comfort of my home during these interesting times. I am excited to make lasting relationships with [community] members who once were strangers.
- I know that if frustrations arise, I have the means to control them.
- I will continue to evaluate my personal biases and schemas as I work and interact with different Deaf people and understand my role as a hearing interpreter working towards earning the title of ally.
- Pausing and re-evaluating our intentions as well as their needs and goals, helps guide us in the right direction.

**EXTERNAL LOCUS**

- I struggle with social anxiety, so this class scares me. I have to get out of my comfort zone and really get involved with the community.
- I am mostly nervous of rejection, as every time I have tried to have conversations about needs and wants in the community, I have been told that they do not like to discuss such in-depth and serious conversations.
- I am a little hesitant about this class for the main reason that we are in a global pandemic right now and not too many events, activities, or meetings are taking place at the moment. I feel that my event might not be able to happen.
- What scares me the most is not being able to reach the highest grade possible due to the pandemic as it has caused numerous daily problems/conflicts.
- I am also a little nervous about how our events will be affected by COVID-19. I hope you are still able to do an in-person event.
- Because of these restrictions, my relationship with the Deaf community did not change in major ways. I was able to meet a few new people and build a relationship with them, but that was the only contact I had with the Deaf community during my project.
CLAIMING AND RECLAIMING INTERNAL LOCUS

- I recently formed a new partnership, and I feel better about everything now. I was nervous about my previous topic and the feasibility...My attitude has become very positive, and I am ready to start working.
- Before this new partnership, to be honest, I was not as excited. I was nervous and scared things would not work out. I feel a lot more comfortable, especially with COVID-19, and I know the new plan is feasible.
- What scares me the most is the unknown of COVID-19 and how to handle it. As a mother of two children, I am extra cautious. COVID limits me in interacting in the Deaf community. Due to our reputation as interpreters starting now, I am worried that I may mix with the wrong crowd or do something that would upset a group of Deaf people. There is a lot of division in my local community and I don’t want to receive a label before I even have a chance to begin working in the profession...I want to learn to the fullest, but I am worried I may be missing out on some things due to how life is at the moment, thus not allowing me to do my best as an interpreter. Some things we can control and others we can’t. I wonder how I can alleviate that without burning myself out.

DISCUSSION

Service learning, whether in academic settings or in the professional field, requires a deliberate migration from one’s own development toward the Deaf community’s development. It is not uncommon for this adjustment to involve individual reckoning with boundaries, ethics, and selflessness. The findings obtained in this study reflect a combination of student progress we would expect in a typical semester and progress that was enhanced or impeded by the pandemic. The ever-present threat to physical and mental well-being introduced by COVID-19 likely played a part in student performance and disposition, but the data revealed little about the pandemic-related stressors the students were personally experiencing. Rather, a natural apprehension about the pandemic’s pending impact on the course neither dominated the process nor deterred students from finding space in the community to do their own boundary work without violating professional standards. The more students allowed themselves to think beyond the pandemic to the advantages of online service learning (greater reach to remote populations, reduced health concerns), the smoother their transition to community-led interventions became.

The research questions can be answered by viewing the five emergent themes through lenses of space, time, and culture. Figure 1 presents a three-dimensional model of adaptability that illustrates the three ways students adjusted to the service learning process during the pandemic. The Temporal dimension represents how dispositions and efforts evolved as students began to see themselves as alliance-minded supporters rather than community service volunteers. The Spatial dimension represents how students discovered welcoming space in the Deaf community, and the Cultural dimension represents how Deaf cultural norms permeated student experiences.
ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: ADAPTABILITY COMPONENTS

Focus, Approach, and Effort were the most prevalent components of adaptability and each of these themes represent the process students went through to become culturally responsive over time. Those students who focused on the community rather than themselves reported hope for their future space in the community, and those students who practiced active listening and controlled their impulses to take charge reported transformations that will make a positive impact on future relationships in the Deaf community.

QUESTIONS 2 & 3: INTERPRETER TOOLS AND DISPOSITIONS

When students referred to the tools they obtained from service learning during the pandemic, they were primarily referring to the cultural norms they developed by channeling their efforts to give absolute attention to the community (Approach/Active listening), empower the community (Effort), and remove attention from themselves (Focus). The findings showed gradual, but steady dispositional changes over time, confirming that students can adapt to extenuating circumstances and academic pressure even when they are uncomfortable or disappointed that the pandemic circumstances were not ideal for relationship-building. This was borne out in the data by a frequent dual framing in student perspectives on their work during the pandemic (I think this project was the best it could be due to the circumstances of the pandemic and everything being virtual). Although students recognized the undeniable challenges posed by COVID-19, they expressed a level of satisfaction with their work and a hope for continued growth and action.
**QUESTION 4: PERSISTENT MINDSETS AND LOCUS OF CONTROL**

While some students never fully realized how internal locus of control could have improved their service learning experience, the data did not reveal counterproductive mindsets that persisted through the semester. On the contrary, internal locus was frequently noticed to replace external locus. In fulfillment of an assignment prompt to submit a creative demonstration of your ‘Personal Growth through Service Learning’ that captures the essence of your experience in this class, a transformed mindset was poetically portrayed by a student with Deaf parents:

A CODA Apology
Look, I apologize for getting frustrated all the time.
After you told me to calm down that you had it.
I apologize for being there too much.
I never thought you could handle the hearing world on your own.
I apologize for continually questioning you if you understand what this or that means.
All I wanted was for you to understand the hearing world.
When trusting you is what I should have been doing.
I apologize for being a control freak and not letting you do things on your own or experience the world on your own.
Maybe once if you looked in my eyes, you would know I meant it.
When I say, I apologize.

This student’s creative demonstration of growth parallels the transformative experience described by other Deaf-parented children in situations with complex roles, boundaries, and relationships. For example, Halley (2018) described the experience of interpreters with Deaf parents who worked during the 1988 Deaf President Now protest; their involvement in the “climactic moment” of the protest allowed them to develop “deeper insights into the capabilities of deaf people to take control of their own destiny” (p. 214). In a similar way, this student’s engagement with the community through service learning led to a realization of the need to step back and act as an ally rather than a leader.

**RELATIONSHIP OF HABITUS TO PANDEMIC ADAPTABILITY**

The adaptability model in Figure 1 shows the temporal, spatial, and cultural planes meeting at a central point identified by the researchers as the habitus students brought to the service learning process when they started the fall course. Bourdieu (1990) describes the principle of habitus as a social system of “durable, transposable dispositions” (p. 72) and “cognitive and motivating structures” (p. 76) that shape the way an individual lives and interacts. Additionally, Grbić (2014) points to the role habitus plays in establishing new spaces where “different expectations and different practices meet and might also conflict” (p. 101). We learned from the present study how the habitus influenced students’ attempts to achieve homeostasis, or a sense of equilibrium, as they found their footing in the Deaf community. Analyzing habitus through the work of practitioners in the context of interpreted asylum interviews, Inghilleri argued for an “alternative to viewing interpreters as forever trapped inside their socially constituted selves” (2003, p. 261) and that “the relationship between micro-interactional and macro-structural relations is fundamental to and informs all interpreted interactions” (p. 262). The analysis of service learning and interpreter-Deaf
community relationships through macro-structural relations (interpreter education programs and Deaf communities) offers a novel vantage point with which to contextualize the habitus of interpreters.

On the surface, we saw that all students demonstrated some amount of growth and awareness regardless of habitus. On a deeper level, we discerned fine distinctions in student behavior and disposition that most contributed to positive outcomes. Anxiety over grades and the perceived demands of a ‘project’ were manifestations of external locus of control that were apparently exacerbated by the pandemic, but the findings revealed subtle ways in which a student’s habitus strengthened the ability to restore internal locus. Figure 2 is a graduate student creation that shows the relationship of habitus (do whatever comes naturally to me or follow my assumptions) to adaptability (recognize the problem, then learn, think, reflect, and change before doing anything). The student is expressing how habitus, as an influencing factor, can be reshaped by service learning, and while it would be ideal for students to circumvent the ‘trial and error’ method of forming a community alliance, we are reminded in this figure that rushing into good ideas without nurturing relationships leads to lost opportunities that may not be remediated without extra work (if at all).

**Figure 2. Personal Growth Cycle in Service Learning**

![](image)

**SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS**

The central point of this study was to monitor student progress through service learning under pandemic conditions. While we gained valuable insight into the students’ journeys into Deaf spaces, the findings are limited by the subjective nature of personal documents that were produced in response to assignment prompts. Students were not followed individually, although with
additional forms of data, such as interviews and observations, multiple case studies on individuals could contribute a cross-sectional perspective of student adaptability during a global health crisis. There were multiple occasions during the data analysis of this study when the researchers questioned what might have been the perspective of the Deaf partners, and in that respect, the findings reflect a narrow viewpoint from only one member of the partnerships established. Given the purposeful sampling technique (as opposed to random selection) and parameters imposed by an exempt IRB status (using documents without including interviews and other data sources), the conclusions drawn by this study are not generalizable and should be applied with caution to other programs or student groups.

**Practical Application**

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to quantify student adaptability to pandemic conditions during service learning, the findings are meaningful to interpreters who question how they can become contributing forces in the Deaf community from places of support and respect. The rich descriptions of student experience can lead to personal reflection on new approaches to the Deaf community and extend the dialogue between interpreters (Deaf or hearing) and the Deaf community. Whereas pandemic restrictions are likely to continue over many months, the concept of spatial, temporal, and cultural adaptability will continue to be a vital feature of interpreter-community relationships. The *Model of Temporal, Spatial, and Cultural Adaptability* (Figure 1) can be used in a variety of contexts by interpreter educators and mentors for (a) assessment that involves isolating the three components for analysis, much like using Gile’s Effort Models (2020) to analyze attentional resources during interpreting, and (b) remediation that targets deficiencies likely to adversely impact community relationships. Further application of the model as a self-assessment tool could contribute to the student’s ability to monitor momentum toward productive alliances (temporal), refine the configuration of relationships (spatial), and re-align student values and behavioral norms with those of the Deaf community (cultural). Use of the model could be optimized by introducing the three planes of adaptability early during the Service Learning course sequence and measuring its application during field placements, such as practicum and internship courses.

**Future Research**

It is critical for future service learning research to investigate the perspectives of Deaf partners in response to student approach and effort. Further studies during semesters not influenced by a pandemic, but possibly impacted by other external factors, might yield complementary findings to discoveries made in this study. Combining interviews with document review would support triangulation of the findings and further describe the student experience in future studies. Additionally, a research design that incorporates full IRB review could result in cross-tab analyses of findings according to gender, location, age, credentials, and other demographic features that were not permitted in the ‘IRB Exemption Status’ of this project (no direct interaction with participants, separation of comments from individual students prior to analysis, diligent attention to non-identifiable reporting). Incorporating quantitative and mixed methods designs that incorporate larger samples could improve application of results and build the knowledge base about service learning and community engagement for interpreters.
Quantitative studies that compare the adaptability skills of working interpreters, graduate students, and undergraduate students who participate in service learning could be useful in understanding how prior interpreting experience and habitus condition the adaptability dimensions identified in this study. Quantifying features of habitus that affect locus of control at various stages of interpreter preparation could be useful in equipping students for service learning. Monitoring the extent to which graduates of interpreting programs sustain their supportive relationships in the community could contribute to our understanding of service learning efficacy for professional interpreters once they leave academia. Practicing interpreters generally understand the importance of being adaptable, given that their work involves following linguistic and cultural cues of consumers; therefore, applying the Model of Temporal, Spatial, and Cultural Adaptability to additional research designs could be very useful to working interpreters and interpreter educators as they refine their understanding of positionality within interpreting scenarios. Finally, we note parallels between this model and the role-space model proposed by Llewellyn-Jones and Lee (2014), which allows for an analysis of interpreter role in a three-dimension plot according to three factors: presentation of self, alignment, and interaction management. Comparative and complementary analyses of interpreters and interpreting students according to both models may provide fruitful insight into how interpreters develop their understanding of role and relationships with the Deaf community.

CONCLUSION

As this study ended, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to surge and impact higher education. In January 2021, a national survey reported that university students were becoming increasingly worried about finances, staying motivated, and remaining physically and mentally healthy (Williams, 2021). Beyond individual impact, COVID-19 has introduced numerous challenges to higher education that include accountability for student learning, a matter of paramount importance (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020). Ongoing program assessment is an accountability tool that not only satisfies internal quality standards, but also has potential to generate research that will benefit the profession at large. The same documents that the UNF program will use for measuring service learning outcomes as part of its internal assessment process were used in this study as data sources to increase our understanding of how a crisis can be a catalyst for adaptability.

The integrity of service learning as effective pedagogy for strengthening interpreter and community collaborations requires ongoing investigation into the themes identified in this study, particularly if we hope to understand student adaptability during a crisis. Our findings about approach, outlook, effort, focus, and locus of control exemplify the work of Gaus (1947), who described catastrophe as an opportunity for change, in which “relief and repair are required on a scale so large that collective action is necessary” (p. 17). Further studies of interpreter resilience and adaptability could substantiate the thematic trends identified in this study, laying a foundation for understanding interpreters who demonstrate responsibility to the Deaf community through service learning. Although COVID-19 is a lethal threat on a global scale, from a positive standpoint, the pandemic afforded students new opportunities for relinquishing the traditional sense of geographic place and experiencing the advantages of more widespread community impact in a virtual space (Sandy & Franco, 2014). In closing, Figure 3, Reconstructing Service Learning, underscores the transformation of a graduate student/interpreter who entered service learning during the pandemic with a transactional approach to satisfying course requirements, imposing
their own pre-set ideas onto the Deaf community. The realization that relying on personal assumptions and good intentions can lead to destruction was a turning point for this student and, eventually, the community was honored in its rightful place. The mantra expressed at the end of the cartoon is ‘Listen, Follow, Support’, and service learning during the 2020 pandemic magnified this important message to new and aspiring interpreters.

**Figure 3. Reconstructing Service Learning**
"Ack! Looks like my community partner doesn’t want to lead. Now what do I do??"

Finally! I found a community partner! An online parenting group! Good idea!

Mentorship.

Parenting.

Community partner, you can lead the group. I will support you! Done!

This isn’t working!

To Do List:
- Find Partner
- Plan Project
- Get an "A"

ARGH!!
HELP

Violent your net!
Don't over-assess!

Dr. Shaw

Think creatively!
Be aware of audism in your speech & approach! Let the Deaf community lead!

Dr. Halley

...
Indeed.com

Social media

Hm...

And I found a new community partner to act as our professional group leader!

Deaf community values

Creativity, flexibility, empathy, respect

"Looks like I won't be needing THIS anymore!"
REFERENCES


