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### Here They Are, SEND Them: An Evaluation of the SEND Program at Merrimack College

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Here They Are, SEND Them: An Evaluation of the SEND Program at Merrimack College

Jordan T. Mason

Merrimack College

2020

MERRIMACK COLLEGE

CAPSTONE PAPER SIGNATURE PAGE

CAPSTONE SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CAPSTONE TITLE: Here They Are, SEND Them: An Evaluation of the SEND Program at  
Merrimack College

AUTHOR: Jordan T. Mason

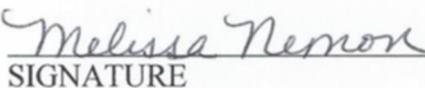
THE CAPSTONE PAPER HAS BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT  
PROGRAM IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

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May 4, 2020  
DATE

### **Acknowledgements**

This program has been not only a grueling and intensive year but a year of significant growth, knowledge, and appreciation. Merrimack was not only an opportunity to continue my academic experience, but a space and place for me to cultivate my passions into a thesis and a career that I hold so dearly. The sheer support from those around me gave me the energy and the hope to push it through the end of this program. I simply want to thank my family and friends for their support and unconditional love. To all of you: thank you for seeing my worth, my drive, my passion. Thank you for supporting my academic, career, and professional goals and dreams. Thank you for encouraging me to continue to learn and for listening to all of my battles and conquers throughout not only this program, but all of my academic experiences.

I would like to sincerely thank my Merrimack professors; each of whom brought me wisdom and knowledge that challenged my learning process and guided my academic experience. To Dr. Melissa Nemon, you have been a beacon of knowledge, inspiration, and encouragement through this year. Thank you for seeing my passion and guiding me through a capstone that not only highlighted my passion but allowed me to increase my knowledge that I can take with me into my professional career. To my cohort: you are a small group of wonderfully diverse, witty and bright individuals. Thank you for bringing your beautiful minds and ideas to my academic experience, I will forever cherish you.

Finally, thank you to everyone who had a hand in completing this capstone, especially Nicole Benevenia. To Nicole: Thank you! Without your understanding, guidance, and help, this capstone never could have been completed.

I will continue to travel, serve, and learn; Here I am, SEND me. I will continue to engage in experiences that cultivate learning, service, and compassion; Here They Are, SEND Them.

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to gather a deeper understanding of the SEND Program at Merrimack College. This program evaluation sought to determine if the SEND Program was meeting its short-term outcomes for the program. The current literature highlights the important and significant aspects of alternative break/global service-learning programs as they can provide great educational experiences for students. A survey was sent out to a cohort of alumni SEND participants to gather their perspectives of the program. Overall, the survey respondents noted positive responses of their experiences in this program, indicating that they had some level of a positive educational experience. Further, results demonstrated growth in leadership skills, teamwork skills, emotional intelligence, and increased knowledge of social and ecological issues in the real world.

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### Here They Are, SEND Them: An Evaluation of the SEND Program at Merrimack College

Higher education often seeks to find ways to make learning and education more applicable and real for students. With study abroad opportunities, alternative spring breaks trips, global service learning opportunities, and volunteer opportunities, youth on college campuses often have a wide array of options available to them to learn more about their community or to engage in issues and topics that are of concern to them. But within the classroom setting there are few options that can meaningfully connect core education and learning concepts to real world application the way service learning can.

More now than ever, students are choosing to participate in short-term service-based experiences, similar to study abroad. A broad term for these experiences is Community-Based Global Learning (CBGL). CBGL has been developed partly as a social movement, a pedagogy, and partly as an approach to community-driven development partnerships (Hartman, Kiely, Boettcher, & Friedrichs, 2018). The goal of global service learning is to provide students with the resources for critical reflection on community-based service, intercultural experiences, and global citizenship (Amizade, n.d.). Some learning tools that students should be using and taking advantage of during their experience to maximize their learning are service; intercultural immersion; readings, group/individual activities; journal writings; and reflective dialogue. Rather than studying for a semester in another country, global-based service-learning experiences focus on teaching students about global poverty and inequality, while also teaching them skills and tools for participating in successful community development during shorter trips (Mapp & Rice, 2019).

Students “collaborate with diverse community stakeholders on an organized service activity to address real social problems and issues in the community; integrate classroom

theory with active learning in the world; gain knowledge and skills related to the course content and advance civic, personal, and social development; and immerse themselves in another culture, experience daily reality in the host culture, and engage in dual exchange of ideas with people from other countries” (Kiely and Kiely, 2006, as cited in Hartman et al, 2018).

Additionally, students “participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; learn from direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally” (Bingle and Hatcher, 2011, as cited in Hartman et al, 2018).

A global service-learning trip, for example, may be a cohort of twelve students traveling to the Dominican Republic for one week to help with disaster relief. Meanwhile, these trips could be embedded in an academic course at a University. If students travel to the Dominican Republic for one week in January to help with disaster relief, and then come home to their Universities and take a course throughout their spring semester that unpacks that experience, it has now become service learning. Service learning combines a service experience with theory taught through a classroom component that enhances students’ skills and thought processes (Espino & Lee, 2011; Reed-Bouley & Kyle, 2015; Mapp & Rice, 2019).

In 2019, 172 alternative break programs were surveyed. Through the service provided by these programs around the country, there were 1,882 total trips; 17,170 participants; 2,676 community organizations; 3,002 site leaders; and 345,292 estimated hours of education,

orientation, and training. The median age of alternative programs currently running is 15 years, with Merrimack College reporting the oldest program at 59 years. When asked if the trips are student-led, 33% of programs answered “yes, completely,” while 46% reported for the most part. We have staff who serve certain roles, but it’s mostly student-led” (Break Away, 2019). 81 programs recorded having pre-trip curriculum around incorporating diversity and social justice training.

Some of the positive aspects to students studying abroad, participating in service learning or service experience trips include students having an international experience; a tendency to further explore global issues and travel; and to expose students to a different language and diverse culture (Garcia & Longo, 2017). Service learning is not merely volunteerism where the students’ complete work within the community as an isolated event. Instead, service learning intentionally pushes students to connect their service learning work in the community with the concepts, theories, and ideas that are being taught in the classroom to help these students gain and better meaning and understanding for the service learning (Reed-Bouley & Kyle, 2015). Service learning, global learning, and service experiences provide students with the ability to learn and expand their knowledge base through experience, real life practice and understand as opposed to listening to a teacher lecture on it. These experiences open the door for learning to be: “community based, applied, reflective, connected, visceral, integrative, and engaged; it is locally contextualized, historically informed, and theoretically grounded. Participants cross many borders: political, cultural, socioeconomic, environmental, and national. They undergo disruptive experiences that often trigger a reevaluation of closely held assumptions and understanding” (Hartman et al, 2018).

Service learning and service experiences focus on creating, sustaining, and/or disrupting the boundaries and norms by which we make sense of ourselves and the world (Butin, 2006). This way of analyzing service learning allows students to “see how the world works.” It may not change students’ beliefs or thought processes completely, but it allows them to understand the inequalities and a different way of the world through the lens, not of their own. This conceptualization of service learning describes the way that students’ learning and attitudes can be affected through practice of service learning. By focusing on both the goals and outcomes for the community and those of the students, coupled with meaningful classroom concepts to ground the information, a more effective version of service learning can emerge. Effective service experiences ensure that both the goals and outcomes of the community and students have been met by the end of the service experience (Butin, 2006).

This project will be a program evaluation of the current service-learning program offered at Merrimack College known as the SEND Program. The SEND Program, an alternative break program, focuses on the Catholic Augustinian tradition that is embodied by Merrimack College; with the hope that these experiences in turn will draw students closer to god and help them develop on their own personal and spiritual journeys (Grace J. Palmisano Center for Campus Ministry, n.d.). The SEND Program focuses on four pillars; *service, solidarity, community-friendship, and reflection*. Four major outcomes of this program were influenced by the pillars: 1) increased knowledge of social and ecological issues in the real world; 2) increased leadership skills by taking initiative; 3) increased teamwork skills; and 4) increased emotional intelligence. During these service experiences, domestic and global, students are immersed in the new culture by not only serving, but by living with community members and sharing their lives with mutual respect, assurance, and friendship. This affords students the ability to realize not only the impact

that they had on the community and community members, but the impact that they got in return by working and living within these communities.

### **Literature Review**

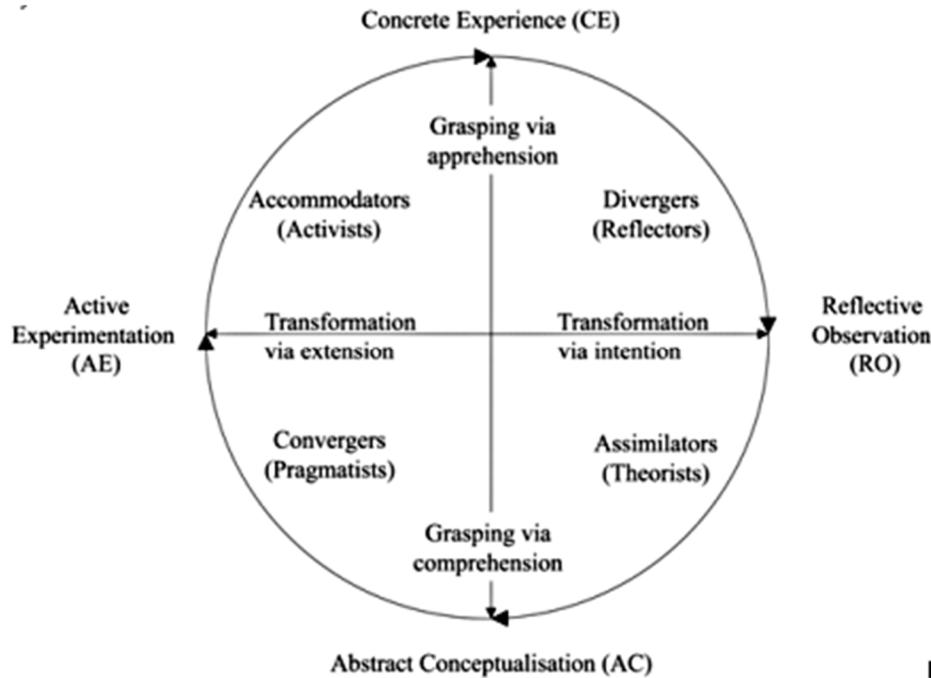
Traveling is a desire that many people have. The opportunity to travel the world and see things that they could not see in their own communities. People travel initially to lose themselves, then to find themselves; to open their hearts and eyes to learn more about the world than the newspapers will tell them (Iyer, 2000). The difference between tourist and traveler, however, is those who leave their assumptions at home and those we don't. Traveling spins us around, showing us sights, values, and issues that we probably wouldn't have seen before or if we had, probably would have ignored. It also shows us parts of ourselves that would have gotten rusty otherwise (Iyer, 2000). Being in a foreign place brings us to moods and states of mind that are open to being visited as a result of traveling. Traveling allows people to search and return to their more innocent self, be awoken by the world that they did not know existed. These just begin to cover the benefits that are seized when participating in global service learning.

There are different levels, versions, and terms that are used related to global service learning. Service learning is some varying level of service that is incorporated into a course component. This form of learning typically happens at colleges and universities are used to help educate students by connecting theory and practices learned in class, interests in service, real experiences and personal growth. Service learning happen locally, domestically, and internationally. It allows students to enhance academic work, learn about themselves and their roles in the community. Alternative Spring Break Trips (ASB) are opportunities for students to make meaningful experiences. ASB's can range in length, typically ranging around a week

involving college aged students during college/university vacations, Thanksgiving break, Winter Intersession, and Spring Break. Students travel to new communities; these trips provide them with meaningful travel and service experiences that benefit both students and host communities around environmental and social justice work (Fontein, 2016, as cited in Proulx, 2019; Nicole Benevenia, personal communication, October 8, 2019). Global Service Learning ranges in participants age, date of travel, and length of travel. It is praised for being able to teach students, make them aware of, and give them an appreciation for diversity. It allows for students to participate in experiential education where they engage in activities and service that tackle social, political, and environmental issues. These trips promote student learning through the actions of reflection that the students participate in throughout the experience (Espino & Lee, 2011). Often rooted in experiential learning, students participate in a dual process of learning known as action-reflection and experience-abstraction – where the students practice service, reflect upon it, and create abstract thoughts, ideas, and processes through their experiences (Dernova, 2015).

According to Jenkins and Clarke (2017), the first step in the learning process is Concrete Experience (CE) which encourages an open and experience-based approach to learning founded in feeling. Following CE, the second step is Reflective Observation (RO) or watching, where the student questions the thoughts and behaviors that are seen during CE. Next, Abstract Conceptualization (AC) is where students use their personal observation to think about new ideas or theories which can inform new action. Finally, Active Experimentation (AE) is where students actually “do” by testing their hypotheses in order to use that new knowledge to inform future situations and experiences (Jenkins & Clarke, 2017). It is understood that students who participate in all four steps of observation and reflection have the best opportunity for learning.

Figure 1: The Experiential Learning Process



The values that align with many service learning experience programs and those of experiential learning are similar. Experiential learning provides an open environment for students to learn through observation, action or participation, reflection and abstraction (Jenkins & Clarke, 2017) while sharing and collaborating with other students through each other’s personal opinions and perspectives. Experiential learning is fundamentally reliant on three things; experience, reflection based on prior knowledge (similar to the foundation of andragogy style learning), and learned experience, however among these three essential components, reflection remains as the key transition into experiential learning (Kuk & Holst, 2018). When a student is tapping into prior experience or knowledge in order to learn, the part of that experience for which the student reflects on is the basis for turning that experience into further meaning and a learned experience. This aspect of reflection allows the student to take that prior experience and turn it into a learning opportunity. Therefore, experiential learning provides an opportunity for students to tap into their prior knowledge and experience for which they can reflect and learn a

new concept through that process. It also allows them to work with other students, share their experiences and reflect to increase their knowledge. This level of exposure, learning, and experience domestically and internationally allows students to face issues of cultural adaptation and gives them a commitment to social justice (Liu & Lee, 2011).

Many students who participate in service learning come from a privileged background of education and socioeconomic status (Mapp & Rice, 2019). According to Williams (n.d.) companies that provide global service learning opportunities have a lot to do in terms of improving access and inclusion, “particularly for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, people of Color, and the LGBTQ community” (p. 42). However, contrasting students home communities, many of the host communities where service learning happens are diverse communities different than what students have ever experienced before. This form of education and experience through domestic and international service trips have the potential to promote understanding of local and global issues and the interrelatedness of communities across the world (Liu & Lee, 2011). It exposes these students to culture, people, and life that they are otherwise not used to or have never been exposed to. Students are faced with having to travel to another country, adapt to the culture, customs, and traditions of that country, change their initial perceptions of that country, and experience culture shock. When these students return home from their experience, they have a new awareness of issues even within their own country that they may not have seen or paid attention to before. The reflections that they participated in before and during their experience has provided them new insights that allow them to have a deeper understanding of the social, political, and environmental issues in their country, urging them to contribute to making a change (Liu & Lee, 2011). Finally, this type of learning allows for significant personal growth among the students. Students come home with a new view on the

world, they have a growing understanding and appreciation of culture, they become aware of their own personal strengths and future goals, and they begin challenging their old thinking habits about how they view or approach the world (Liu & Lee, 2011).

If these service trips are not coordinated or programmed properly, however, they can further the stereotype that American's are 'saviors,' harming those that they initially intended to help and harming the community partners (Hartman et al, 2018; Mapp & Rice, 2019). When students are not properly informed and prepared, their service trips can be associated more with charity than the fundamental idea of giving back (Cermak et al, 2011). When service-learning trips are not fully and effectively developed, and executed, the service learning takes a turn becomes 'volunteerism.' In this scenario, volunteerism, saviorism and charity are understood as students participating in service because they have a false belief that there is a community in need of help that only outsider – or the students – can provide. "It is incredibly unfair for you to impose yourself on a village where you are so linguistically deaf and dumb that you don't even understand what you are doing, or what people think of you. And it is profoundly damaging to yourself when you define something that you want to do as 'good,' a 'sacrifice' and 'help,'" (Illich, 1968). This quote explains the damage, disgrace, and disrespect that a Mexican community felt when students traveled there with the intentions of "saving them." In all cases, the lack of preparation may allow for students to have an underlying thought or feeling of pity or sympathy for the community they will be working with. These thoughts can cause danger for the community and the student because the student has a false understanding for why they are traveling to do service. Often, they also do not understand the cultural and social difference of the community to which they are traveling too, which can contribute to affecting the dignity and the rights of the community members (Hartman et al, 2018). Additionally, this can violate social

work ethics, including social justice, service, and dignity and worth of the person (Mapp & Rice, 2019). Furthermore, when students are not prepared for the differences and diversity in the communities where they are traveling to complete and participate in service learning work, their prejudices and stereotypes may get the best of them and harm members of the community; Stereotypes can be cemented and patterns of privilege and exclusion can be reinforced (Hartman et al, 2018). Understanding where prejudice comes from and how prejudice can harm a community, is important in undergoing service learning.

### *Understanding Prejudice and Oppression*

Oppression and privilege are often carried into other cultures and countries when students travel for service trips. In an address given by Illich (1968), he states “To hell with good intentions. ... You will not help anybody by your good intentions.” Illich (1986) goes on to affirm that he has deep faith in the good intentions of the U.S. volunteer, however, the U.S. volunteer cannot help imposing their tainted views of the “American Way of Life” onto those around them. This view launches an ideology for students to believe that they have something to give and therefore, can and should give it with those less fortunate. He also argues that there is no way for students to meet on a common ground with those they are serving, because they share no fundamental similarities, including language.

Often, service trips can create a “drive-by” feeling when entering host communities (Schroeder et al., 2009, as cited in Proulx, 2019). This is understood as students traveling to host communities, completing some level of work or participation during their stay, followed by them leaving without creating any lasting effects. Furthermore, feelings of oppression, power, and privilege can be imposed on these host communities when students are not properly prepared and debriefed for the actions/communities that they will be participating in (Break Away, 2015). In

order to understand prejudice in service-learning opportunities, a short study (Johnson, 2014) was conducted which focused on the upcoming popularity in mission trips, particularly among U.S. evangelicals, and the potential religious initiatives that could affect the participants' racial attitudes. Johnson (2014), used the contact hypothesis to study the ways in which intergroup contact can influence prejudice between the mission groups that are traveling for work and the communities that are being 'helped'. The contact hypothesis suggests that intergroup contact under appropriate conditions can effectively reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members (McKeown & Dixon, 2017). Key elements of the contact theory were examined to determine the effectiveness of this theory on mission trips, these key elements were equal status; common goals; institutional support; absence of competition; sustained contact; intimacy; and voluntary. The results from Johnson's (2014) examination determined that some components of the contact hypothesis were met during the mission trips, others were not, and certain element of short-term mission trips could potentially reinforce or increase students' perceptions and prejudice. The study determined that the participants of the trip had more favorable attitudes toward the community when they left, than when they arrived (Johnson, 2014). Overall, in this scenario the short-term trip was not long enough to create a "commitment in the student to take political or personal action improve the community's quality of life long-term" (Johnson, 2014). However, the trip did raise awareness for the students regarding poverty, corruption, and lack of opportunities. A short-term trip like this could also result in short term changes like students' attitude, personal spending, or religious commitment (Johnson, 2014).

While service learning has become an effective means for bridging classroom experiences and practical/real experiences for students, it is also important to address the issues of oppressions that are at play. Service trips in essence are meant to do good; they have good

intentions. Regardless, of the purpose, research has found that students are often resistant to acknowledging issues of oppression, such as racism and classism; an issue that has not received the attention it should (Espino & Lee, 2011). The research of Espino and Lee (2011) specifically examines how 63 undergraduate students respond to issues concerning privilege through an interview process. The students participated in a service-learning course that looked at the complexity of race, class, and ethnicity. The study found that some students resisted the opportunity to talk, discuss, understand, and confront different social inequalities, systems, and structures (Espino & Lee, 2011). While the programs and the service learning classes were specifically focused on the resistance building across racial, ethnic, and class identities, it was found that students' resisted systems and structures of inequalities. The students did not want to recognize their role in privilege systems. The authors noticed throughout the students interviews that were conducted, students were likely to have feelings of pity towards the underprivileged groups, defensiveness during class discussion about privilege, and distancing when being confronted about systems of oppression like race. Unfortunately, prejudice and oppression does not stop here with religious prejudice and race and class oppression.

Further research has gone on to address how students perceive economic inequality and service learning. Research and analysis have found that service learning reinforced rather than challenged the stereotypes of students on racism and economic inequality as they embraced their white privilege (Reed-Bouley & Kyle, 2015). Similarly, this research also found that white students were reinforced during their service work about their stereotypes regarding race, poverty, and white privilege. According to Reed-Bouley and Kyle (2015), white students in a service learning course socially distanced themselves from community partners who were racially, ethnically, diverse from them, and that the service learning experience in fact reinforces

their white stereotypes compared to other marginalized groups. Concluding that service learning can have both positive and negative effects on both students and the communities, Reed-Bouley and Kyle (2015), offer suggestions for how service learning can be structured to ensure no prejudice or stereotypes. In light of this research, one suggestion is that faculty establish and partner students with predominantly white, upper class communities to avoid any oppression that could be placed on marginalized or minority partners. While there is still a good chance that students will continue to experience their unchanged racial viewpoints, but at least they will not be in a community where their views could do harm. The second suggestion is that “faculty can teach racial identity development models, so that students and faculty can become more curious about their own racial identities and how this can impact their service-learning,” (Reed-Bouley & Kyle, 2015, p. 31). Unfortunately, this is not good enough. While it is not possible to completely ensure that there is no prejudice or oppression during service learning trips and experiences, there are ways that solutions to limit prejudice and oppression so that individuals in partnerships are not ‘hurt’ in the process.

These issues of oppressions, prejudice, privilege, and power aid to the perpetuating sense of the “helping narrative” where students have a sense that they are the saviors, helping those who need saving (Conran, 2011, as cited in Proulx, 2019).

While it is so necessary to understand the ways students can bring thoughts and feelings oppression and privilege into host communities, it is also important to understand how privilege can be imposed on students *by* their host communities.

### ***More Education for Service Learning***

Research has analyzed service learning trips and education and the relationship between the two; education is defined curriculum or reflection that is offered before and after the service

experience, allowing students to contemplate and reflect on service learning, the community they traveled to, and their personal role in that experience. Amizade (n.d.) urges that education should begin prior to the immersion experience in order to provide students with the means to make the most meaningful and educational experience. Whether a program rooted in a credit bearing course or not, program directors should be preparing their students for these trips. There should be some level of structured programming that teaches students about health and safety, critical reflection, and other social justice issues that may be prevalent in the host communities. This pre-trip education should provide students with opportunities to better understand global issues, socioeconomic status, political and environmental changes, including the ways that local communities are affected by certain policies put in place (Hartman et al, 2018). This is also the time to be teaching students about privilege, power, and more importantly, positionality. Positionality is based on one's identity, their race, gender, age, socioeconomic status, and so on. It describes power dynamics between individuals and explains why people act and respond to each other the way they do. Students should be prepared to be aware of and be responsive to their own and others' positionality when participating in service work around the world. Acknowledging and planning for the various of experiences that students will have based on their identities and positionalities will only lead to a more rich and educational learning opportunity (Hartman et al, 2018).

Furthermore, at the end of the service experience, program directors and trip leaders should push students to consider what or how addressed social justice issues are approached at in their local communities (Hartman et al, 2018). If a group of 12 students visit Houston, TX for a week to participate in disaster relief service, building and repairing houses, students should come home and question how their own communities would handle a disastrous situation.

The education aspect of service learning and global service learning trips is not exclusive to the experience itself. Students should be encouraged or required to participate in some level of education before and after their immersion experience. This education should focus on not only preparing the students for their experiences before they go, but also answering real question that they students might have when they return about how they can continue engagement with their own communities.

### *Learning Tools*

All levels of global service learning opportunities should provide students with a framework which links personal experiences, readings, and group activities through personal reflections and group discussions (Amizade, n.d.). This framework teaches students that every human life holds equal value with different morals, opinions, and perspectives that must be respected. Amizade (n.d.) has identified six unique learning tools that can help students achieve this framework.

**Service.** Students are expected and encouraged to travel to participate in host community's activities for the duration of their program. This participation will include service work collaborating with the host community and other partnered organizations. International service looks different for every community, but participation in this work opens a unique opportunity to understand the community and the community partners better.

**Intercultural Immersion.** Participants will actively engage in the community's daily life such as social gatherings, holidays, special events, speakers, and time spent with locals. Participants will hear from local community members on different aspects to their culture and life. Participants should actively engage in learning from their local community members by

thinking and preparing questions to further their knowledge. The program should include field trips to local sites that have significant cultural meaning and history.

**Readings.** Scholarly readings pulled from academia, social media, and cultural news will be used to provide foundation for student's knowledge with real life.

**Group/Individual Activities.** Participants should engage in activities pre-immersion, during immersion, and post-immersion that will challenge their learning opportunities through their daily experiences. These activities should encourage participants to reflect upon sparked moments during their immersion. These moments are learning opportunities and should be taken advantage of to maximize learning.

**Journal Writing.** Participants are strongly encouraged to take time throughout the day to thoughtfully reflect before, during, and after their immersion experience. Prompted questions can be given and used to encourage critical thinking, examination of your environments, and reflection of personal feelings. Journal writings should also engage some of theory being introduced in the readings with the physical practice that they participants are engaging in.

**Reflective Dialogue.** Participants should be engaging in reflection daily. Reflection is encouraged pre-immersion and post-immersion but is required during the immersion experience. Reflection should be individual as well as group reflection with other participants and community members. More importantly, participants are encouraged to actively view reflection as a value, rather than an activity. Reflection should be used throughout the day to critically review all moments and experiences. "Participants should create learning environments for each other during these discussions where diverse viewpoints, emotional learning, healthy conflict, and challenging dialogue can safely occur," (Amizade, n.d.).

Most research also suggests education as being a key suggestion for how to improve service learning experiences as it relates to prejudice and oppression. One study examined four types of service learning trips and describes the key differences between those trips, highlighting the different types of education and preparation that is characterized by the trip.

Garcia and Longo (2017), introduced four models of global service learning that are used and practiced at Providence College, these models are Co-Curricular International Service Trip, Short-Term International Service-Learning Course, Course Embedded Spring Break International Service Trip, and Curricular Embedded Pre-or Post-Course International Service Trip. Co-Curricular International Service Trip are characterized as short term, non-credit bearing international trips. These trips are offered during intersession breaks or summer breaks from Providence College and are focused on student leadership. Similarly, Short-Term International Service-Learning Course encompass the same things, but these trips take the additional step to incorporate academic curriculum in addition to the trip. These trips focus more on student learning rather than leadership. The next form of service learning trips, Course Embedded Spring Break International Service Trip, are embedded in a semester where the service learning is during a school break of that semester. This structure allows for pre-preparation and post reflection of the trip/course by immersing readings, guest speakers, and local immersion. This type of trip also focuses on the reflection of community engagement. Finally, Curricular Embedded Pre-or Post-Course International Service Trip take place before or after the semester of the course allowing for deep reflection. Garcia and Longo (2017) continue to offer a set of benefits of service-learning, including fostering storytelling across borders; cultivating students as partners; developing reciprocal community partnerships; and creating public work, visual, auditory or performing public artifacts. It is crucial to note the trips that focus on

curricula/education that is offered before and after the service learning experience, and that this education then allows the students to participate in deep reflection. During the trip, students should be converse in broad themes relating to their host community including: “personal values & ethics, service in a cross-cultural context, global citizenship, and communicating and activating the GSL experience post-culture immersion (Amizade, n.d.). This kind of reflection allows the student to contemplate, meditate, and reason with the experience they just participated in. As a result, this could reduce the level of harm that could happen within the community. In order to avoid this kind of outcome, social work educators need to center the focus of the service learning experience on the community rather than developing only those experiences of the students (Mapp & Rice, 2019).

Garcia and Longo (2017), continue to discuss civic practices and the importance of what is contributed to communities when students partake in these kinds of service learning trips. It emphasizes the fostering of storytelling, cultivating students as partners, developing reciprocal community partnerships, and creating public works: visual, auditory, and performing artifacts. These benefits are practices and honed through service learning trips, deep reflections, and education that is emphasized through these models of service learning trips. Mapp and Rice (2019) demand that service learning work is a rights-based experience that is focused on the needs of the community, rather than that of students.

Martin (2003) discusses how popular it is for professors and administration to want to bridge the gap between theory and practice for students to raise their awareness and help them understand more complex issues, traditionally doing this through service learning projects (Martin, 2003). These service learning projects can be conducted in multiple fashions such as volunteer work, internships, or community service activities (Martin, 2003). “Service learning

provides a means for articulating the relationship between academic material and its applications, which at times may be contrary to a students' initial understanding," (Martin, 2003, p. 416). This work argues that service learning implies gaining "the real-life experience" is just as important as the traditional classroom experience, and critical awareness can be accomplished through service learning. Martin (2002) argues that service learning can provide students with a venue for critical awareness, through the fashion of critical social analysis. Martin argues that the critical awareness is gained through the reflection of the events of service learning, among its many forms, through journal writing and conversation. By the end of these projects, students are typically required to write a formal policy paper relating on the advocacy of their service learning project, their current work, and their class topics that challenges the student to question the tension between theory and action (Martin, 2002). Through these projects, students gain a better understanding of the environments in which they live and experience, which will provide them with the knowledge and understanding of how to address and critically analyze systems and structures at large. Martin (2002), also address how critical social analysis and service learning methodologies were used to answer important questions surrounding race, inequality, and public policy. It was found that students who partook in an elective course about race, inequality, and public policy, while completing their service learning, saw inconsistencies within their service learning by looking at the relationship between theory and practice. This article looks at the inequalities and inconsistencies that were found by 10 students taking a race, inequality, and public policy course while completing service learning work.

### ***Merrimack College's SEND Program and the Four Pillars of SEND***

A current service experience program, the SEND Program at Merrimack College, which is embedded in the Grace J. Palmisano Center for Campus Ministry, works to increase the

effectiveness of service experiences as they impact both the students and the community who participate. Merrimack College, a private Catholic school in northeastern Massachusetts, is a part of the cohort of schools that finds and sees the value of service opportunities and provides such experiences for its students. “Service opportunities through the Grace J. Palmisano Center for Campus Ministry give Merrimack students the opportunity to embody key aspects of our Augustinian heritage, which emphasizes intellectual, spiritual and personal growth through community life and service to others” (Grace J. Palmisano Center for Campus Ministry, n.d.). These service programs are short-term, one weeklong domestic or international trips that allow students the opportunity to work towards justice connection and reflection on their individual journeys. While these trips are not all directly focused on service learning as the main goal by connecting the experience with course credit, they do offer students rich experiences that engage and hone skills they learned on campus and challenge them to grow their perspectives about themselves and many other domestic and global issues.

The SEND Program through Merrimack College offers a service experience program that is rooted in many of the morals and values, like reflection, that has been indicated in the literature. The SEND Program is engrained in the Augustinian tradition of Merrimack College and has the hope that through the service trips, students will be drawn closer to god and help them develop on their own personal and spiritual journeys through service to others (Grace J. Palmisano Center for Campus Ministry, n.d.; Augustinian Province of St. Thomas of Villanova, 2019a). The Augustinian Charism follows three essential elements: “The constant search for God by means of a deep interior life; the practical love of neighbor; and the constant pursuit of truth” (Augustinian Province of St. Thomas of Villanova, 2019a). As a result of combining the Augustinian teachings with service learning intent, the SEND Program focuses on four main

pillars; *service, solidarity, community-friendship, and reflection* (Grace J. Palmisano Center for Campus Ministry, n.d.).

**Service** focuses on giving back to others through action. The service can come in many forms, sitting and talking, dialogue, conversation, serving in a soup kitchen, or a food bank, helping rebuild a school after a disaster, and so on. The SEND Program believes that service is a lifestyle, and this kind of service experience is meant to inspire students to have a deeper commitment to serving others throughout life (Grace J. Palmisano Center for Campus Ministry, n.d.). **Solidarity** points to understand that despite our differences, humans are one. These service experiences can help students learn about humility while working in the various communities and recognizing that we have as much to learn from our community members as they have to learn from us. Students pack lightly and are cautioned to refrain from social media or technology as a way to fully immerse themselves in the experience that they are about to embark on.

**Community-friendship** focuses on the importance of creating stable and genuine relationships with the community members that are met, and the teams that we work with. Enjoying the company of others while learning with them and from them allows students to build sustainable relationships while embarking on these trips. Finally, **Reflection**, serves as the foundational pillar that embodies the values of this program. Reflection values knowing yourself and using experiences, like those offered through the SEND Program, to further one's knowledge of themselves and the world. "Campus ministry staff and student leaders facilitate frequent reflection experiences before, during and after trips. These experiences are meant to help participants in our programs discover new perspectives about themselves, personally and spiritually" (Grace J. Palmisano Center for Campus Ministry, n.d.).

In attempt to understand some of the best practices for these types of service experiences, professionals have conducted research in attempt to get some answers. In the same way that the SEND Program focuses on challenging students through the pillar of solidarity to accept and understand individuals in different communities despite their differences, Garcia and Longo (2017) suggest that there are significant benefits for students who travel abroad because they gain international experience and they are exposed to difference languages and diverse cultures. Moreover, like the community-friendship pillar, Garcia and Longo (2017) advocate that storytelling across borders, cultivating students as partners, developing reciprocal community partners are all ways that students have positive take-away's from these trips; just as creating stable and genuine relationships with community members is an important concept highlighted through the SEND Program at Merrimack College. Garcia and Longo (2017) also argue that short-term mission trips with reflection and curriculum before and after the trip are the best form of mission trips because they allow for the deepest reflection of students and give students a greater appreciation for the experience that they just participated in. Another researcher, Martin (2002) highlights the importance of critical awareness that can be gained through service experiences like the ones provided on the SEND Program. Martin (2002) focuses on the reflection via journal writing and conversation is the best avenue for gaining critical awareness skills, furthermore, resonating and abiding by the values put forth by the *reflection* pillar of the SEND Program.

These values are derived from that of the Augustinian values (Augustinian Province of St. Thomas of Villanova, 2019b), to wit:

Community is the axis around which Augustinian religious life turns: a community of brothers who live harmoniously together, united by a single soul and a single hear,

seeking God tougher and open to the service of the Church. This community is the fruit of charity and is expressed in friendship, which brings forth and nourishes loyalty, trust, sincerity and mutual understanding. Charity unites us in Christ, helping us to recognize the signs of God's love in the events and circumstances of life. Thus, united in charity, we share mutually the gifts given to us and to others. Our friendship in Christ not only favors the development of each one's personality, but it also increases freedom within the community itself, in which a healthy openness of mind fosters dialogue and enjoys a necessary autonomy with which to serve God better.

Humility and poverty are the foundation of our common life and spiritual life; and are so closely related that no one can be called a "poor man of God" as was Augustine, without being humble. By reason of poverty and humility we consider all of our possessions, both material and spiritual, as the possessions of all, for we do not hold them as personal property, but as given to us by God to be administered. We are all beggars before God. Therefore, we make use of the goods of the earth as tools on our way toward our heavenly homeland.

Much of what is outlined in the four pillars have been established in what is outlined in the values of the Augustinian tradition. The deeper meaning built within the Augustinian values is the moral to try to love better together through service (Nicole Benevenia, personal communication, October 8, 2019). It is important to understand that while the SEND Program is situated within the Campus Ministry of Merrimack College, directly influenced by the Augustinian order, it is not a condition of the program that students practice this faith. Nor is the faith heavily present during the service experiences as the partner communities and the stills all have their own, varying beliefs. However, the Augustinian tradition believes in service and doing

good with others, giving back to others, therefore this program and the Augustinian tradition support each other. Unlike some programs on other college campuses, the SEND Program does not have a curriculum or course credit associated with the service experiences.

Nicole Benevenia, Merrimack College Campus Minister for Service and Social Justice runs the SEND Program at Merrimack College. Being a contributor to the foundations displayed in the four pillars, she searches for community partners that promote environmental, social and ecological justice. This focus was not only determined by student interests for participating in service trips, but these trips also encourage humility and humbleness among the students who go. One of the short-term goals of Benevenia is that the student's hearts are broken in some sort of way; hoping that this kind of modesty, understanding, and appreciation for social injustice will contribute to students coming home with a more complex sense of the world. Benevenia hopes that their experiences domestically or internationally will make their view of the world more complicated than the ideas and biases that they had before leaving and will add to their growth spiritually, intellectually, and academically. For her, it is important that the service experience is the education that the student is gaining (Nicole Benevenia, personal communication, October 8, 2019).

When Benevenia is planning the trips that are offered through, she searches for organizations who believe in the same goals and values that the SEND Program is providing for students. She backs away from using the language that "we are serving people" and instead focuses on how the student and the site leaders will be served by the community instead. This thought process and consciousness of language is sought out by her community partners. Moreover, she looks for communities where community leaders are working with the students

and engaging in service, conversation, and reflection; ensuring that these partners have reciprocity and humility as well (Nicole Benevenia, personal communication, October 8, 2019).

Once the community partners are established, the trips/programs have been created, and the site leaders have been chosen, and the undergraduate students have been selected, Benevenia holds pre-trip meetings which enforces some rules, values, and guidelines for all of those participating to ensure that the students are learning from their experiences.

Understanding the process and decision making for the trips that are offered through the SEND Program is important in recognizing the space and social justice issues that the students are combating. The partnerships that have been established through the SEND Program demand a mutual and constructive relationship between Merrimack College and the Community Organization in order to avoid any harm that could be established while the students are abroad doing service. Both sides of the partnership need to be aware of these issues and promise to embrace the service experience as the education that is not only being given to the students, but to the community as well, for these experiences offer a great deal of learning and education to everyone involved (Nicole Benevenia, personal communication, October 8, 2019).

### ***Best Practices of the SEND Program***

The SEND Programs best practices coincide effortlessly with the best practices that are presented in the literature and the values of the Augustinian tradition. First of all, Benevenia urges eliminating technology use during the trips, by both the students and the advisors. This allows for students, trip leaders, and advisors to be in the moment, participating in not only the service but intercultural immersion (Amizade, n.d.). The service experience as a whole is the education that the student is receiving, therefore, stepping away from technology is crucial for

building relationships, engaging in the community and having a true experience by detoxing from all distractions (Nicole Benevenia, personal communication, August 6, 2019).

Second, following the attempt and work that Benevenia has done to establish relationships with communities who are looking for the same outcome as the SEND Program, Benevenia also expects that the students are aware of these outcomes and are respectful of the communities where they are a guest. Relating back to eliminating technology, Benevenia demands that all students are present and mindful of their actions and their surroundings, similar to their positionality (Hartman et al, 2018). She encourages them to think about how they would want an outsider to act in their own community and to use that framework to shape the way they communicate and interact while on their service trips.

Finally, the most important best practice that Benevenia has created for the SEND Program is the concept and action of reflection throughout the experience. At the beginning of every trip, students are given journals for which they can reflect in and capture all of their thoughts and feelings throughout the day. As the magnitude of literature has suggested, reflection and participation are essential to service experiences (Espino & Lee, 2011), Benevenia intends for reflection to be less of an act during a formal time of day, and more a value that is held by the students during the entire trip. While it is important for the designated reflection sessions that are scheduled in the mornings and the evenings of every day to occur, students should be participating in small reflections and conversations throughout the day so that they can process as they go and as they are experiencing (Nicole Benevenia, personal communication, October 8, 2019). The Student Leaders and the Advisors of the trip are asked to initiate the reflections throughout the day and help course the students as the day goes on. They are trained to actively listen to their students during reflection to help decode their feelings about the tasks at hand

(Alderman & Green, 2011). In the nightly reflections, they key to daily activities, students are encouraged to share from their journals and engage in small activities that elicit discussions around the service completed that day and the social environmental issues that were unpacked. This space where students are able to share and hear from one another creates an important learning environment throughout their trip.

### ***Evaluating Service Learning Programs***

Program evaluation is a tool for examining the effectiveness and efficiency of a program, moreover, to help the program continuously grow and improve. Program evaluation looks at the goals and outcomes of a given program and assesses whether these outcomes are being met: it allows the program to understand if the program is meeting the stated outcomes for its participants. Program evaluations of service learning, service experience, or alternative break programs not only ensures that the specific program outcomes are being met, but that the educational goals of these programs for the students are being reinforced.

Assessments of other service learning evaluations have used various methods. RMC Research Corporation (n.d.) define two common methods used for measuring change, before and after design and comparative design. In before and after design, the program is measured both before the program begins and again when the program is over. This allows researchers to measure if there was a change or any significant difference in the program participants once the program is over. A comparative design is similar to using a control group and an experimental group. In comparative design, two comparable groups are used having related experiences aside from the program. Using this method, one group experiences the program while the other does not. Once the program is over, this design compares the group experiencing the program with the other in search for variations (RMC Research Corporation, n.d.).

Performance-based assessment is another form for assessing service learning programs (Davis, Miller, & Corbett, 1998). It measures what the students can do or what knowledge they can apply to what they already know, measuring developmental progress of conceptual learning. It measures “task completion in a realistic context and is integrative, measuring many facets simultaneously” (Davis, Miller, & Corbett, 1998, p. 5). “Performance-based assessment allows teachers to understand the processes students use to learn and how they actively construct meaning through analysis, synthesis, and evaluation within real world situations,” (Davis, Miller, & Corbett, 1998, p. 5).

A third method measures the students change through questionnaires distributed at the end of the program. This method surveys program participants and obtains sums across all items (Bringle & Kremer, 1993).

The first step in beginning a program evaluation is to define the program objects and determine how they can be measured. The second step is to decide what assessment is best for the program based on how to measure the program objectives. Next, step three, select what research method design will be used: before and after, comparison, performance-based, etc. Fourth, the sources of information need to be selected. If information is going to be collected straight from the source, the groups of people need to be selected. If there is going to be a secondary level of information, those sources of information need to be determined. Fifth, decide what measurements of data are going to be used: quantitative, qualitative, or both. Finally, step six is to conduct the research for the evaluation (RMC Research Corporation, n.d.).

All methods are effective for assessing service learning programs. This program evaluation obtained its data by surveying alumni students who already participated in the SEND

Program. This was the most effective method that was determined while assessing students as a primary source. The data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

### **Methodology**

The SEND Program at Merrimack College works to increase the effectiveness of service experiences as they impact both the students and the community who participate. These service programs are short-term, one-week long domestic or international trips that allow students the opportunity to work towards justice, social connection, and reflection on their individual journeys. While these trips are not all directly focused on service learning, they do offer students rich experiences that engage and hone skills they learned on campus and challenge them to grow their own perspectives about themselves and many other domestic and global issues.

The SEND Program is rooted in four pillars or values that influence the goals and outcomes of the program. Mostly focused on student growth and development through the process of participating in one-week domestic or international service programs, the purpose of this Program Evaluation is to determine if these outcomes and goals are being met.

### ***Logic Model / Program Framework***

The SEND Program trips focus on social, environmental, and ecological justice. In the 2019-2020 school year, students are able to participate in one of nine different trips including Camden, NJ, focusing on urban poverty, social justice, and work with youth; Nazareth Farm, WV, focusing on Appalachian cultural immersion, intentional living, and environmental justice; Costa Rica, focusing on environmental justice and sustainability; San Diego, CA, focusing on immigration and the Mexico-US border and Chicana culture; Pine Ridge, SD, focusing on Oglala Lakota culture and history, and rural poverty; Asheville, NC, focusing on environmental

justice in urban contexts; Peru, focusing on working with children in orphanages/residential home settings, and cultural immersion; and Ecuador, focusing on cultural immersion; social justice in Catholic tradition.

*Table 1: SEND Program Logic Model*

Long Term Goal	The SEND program influences who the student become (their self-identity and career path) and how they view the world; increases their engagement in citizen action; create a more honest and complex sense of the world, expanding their current knowledge about social, economic, and politic policies and norms that influence how things are.		
Intermediate Goal	Through the system of traveling and service learning trips assisting areas of different needs, students will be more thoughtful, aware, and will critically examine social and ecological justice issues.		
Short Term Goals	<p>Education, Awareness and Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased knowledge of social and ecological issues in the real world</li> <li>• Increased educational opportunity to learn about self through activities off campus</li> <li>• Increased understanding of reflection in a meaningful way</li> </ul>	<p>Access to Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased access to social systems</li> <li>• Increased access to social organizations</li> </ul>	<p>Skill Development, Social Connection and Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased leadership skills by taking initiative</li> <li>• Increased teamwork skills</li> <li>• Increased emotional intelligence</li> <li>• Increased spiritual growth</li> </ul>

***Research Questions***

The four outcomes that will be focused on in this program evaluation are: 1) increased knowledge of social and ecological issues in the real world; 2) increased leadership skills by taking initiative; 3) increased teamwork skills; and 4) increased emotional intelligence. Based on the areas of concentration, the outcomes and research questions are as follows:

Outcome 1: Increased leadership skills by taking initiative.

- Primary question: Did student effectively increase their leadership skills?

- Secondary question: What types of leadership skills did students develop during their service experience?

Outcome 2: Increased teamwork skills.

- Primary question: Did students effectively increase their teamwork skills?

Outcome 3: Increased emotional intelligence.

- Primary question: Did students increase their emotional intelligence?

Outcome 4: Increased knowledge of social and ecological issues in the real world.

- Primary question: Did students increase their knowledge and awareness of social and ecological issues in the real world?
- Secondary question: How did they do it, or how did they recognize it?

### ***Participants***

Participants included alumni students, trip leaders, and trip advisors who have participated in SEND trips between the years of 2018 and 2020. These trips occurred in the Fall and Spring terms as well as during the winter and summer breaks.

### ***Materials***

One survey was created, distributed and analyzed to complete this Program Evaluation. The survey consisted of 23 total questions; six questions assessing participants involvement and role in the SEND Program and overall satisfaction; 14 questions evaluating how participants SEND experience influenced them, assessing outcomes based on the programs logic model; and five questions gathering demographic information of the participants.

### ***Procedure***

This program evaluation was only possible with the collaboration of Nicole Benevenia, the Campus Minister. Benevenia provided insight into the logistics of the SEND Program,



DATA						
Analyze data						

**Responsibilities Chart**

Name	Responsibilities
Jordan Mason – Evaluator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fashion a logic model for SEND program outcomes</li> <li>- Establish the design and tools for the evaluation</li> <li>- Create research questions</li> <li>- Create protocols for data collection</li> <li>- Identify groups for data collection</li> <li>- Collaborate with Program Partner to create survey</li> <li>- Establish interviews with those who RSVP</li> </ul>
Nicole Benevenia – Program Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collect contact information for survey groups/recruit participants</li> <li>- Identify individuals for interviews</li> <li>- Collaborate with Evaluator to create survey</li> <li>- Contact students, advisors, and community partners to administer survey</li> </ul>

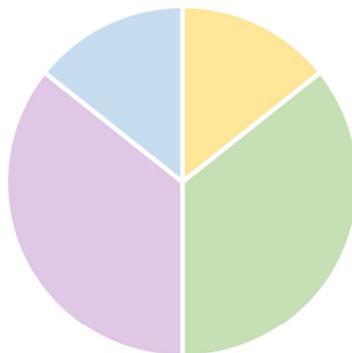
**Results**

The survey was opened for three weeks during the month of March 2020 (from March 4 to March 27). The survey was built in Google forms and was only sent to previous SEND participants who had valid emails (anyone Benevenia or the SEND Program still had contact information for.) A total of 14 SEND participants responded to the SEND survey.

All survey respondents (n=14) indicated that they were between the ages of 18 and 24, and 64% identified as female (n=9) and 36% identified as male (n=5). Respondents were asked to self-identify their sexual orientation, with 78% (n=11) stating they were straight (heterosexual), and one respondent each indicated they were lesbian, gay, and bisexual respectively. When asked about race, survey respondents indicated 86% (n=12) were white and one respondent each indicated they were Asian or Black / African American respectively.

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their roles and overall perceptions of the SEND trips. Respondents were asked to identify when their most recent SEND trip was indicating 14% (n=2) participated on a winter 2018 trip, 29% (n=4) participated on a spring 2018 trip, 43% (n=6) participated on a spring 2019 trip and 14% (n=2) participated on a summer 2019 trip. When asked “On your SEND trip, what was your role” respondents indicated 36% (n=5) were students and 64% (n=9) were trip leaders. When asked, “What was your primary intention in applying to SEND” respondents indicated 36% (n=5) they had participated in global service learning before and wanted to participate again, 36% (n=5) indicated they were interested in completing a service/mission trip, 14% (n=2) indicated global service learning was important to them so they applied, and 14% (n=2) indicated they were interested in travel and education.

*Figure 2. Students Reasoning for Applying to a SEND Trip.*



- I just want to travel!
- I was interested in travel and education.
- I was interested in completing a service/mission trip.
- I have participated in global service learning and wanted to participate again.
- Global service learning is important to me, therefore I applied to SEND.

Respondents indicated 43% (n=6) traveled internationally and 57% (n=8) traveled domestically. All survey respondents (n=14) indicated that they were very satisfied with their SEND trip. Finally, “On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means you would not recommend and 10

means you absolutely would recommend, how would you recommend the SEND program” 93% (n=13) rated at a 10 and 7% (n=1) rated at a nine.

The bulk of the survey assessed how respondents’ SEND experience influenced them. Respondents were given a set of topics and asked, “Please rate the extent to which you discussed the importance of these topics *during* your SEND trip.” They were given a rating scale of four items, discussed frequently (4), discussed occasionally (3), discussed rarely (2), and never discussed (1). The topics of culture (m=3.79, n=14) and privilege (m=3.71, n=14) were most frequently discussed. The topics of diversity (m=3.64, n=14) and power (m=3.64, n=14) were also frequently discussed followed by oppression (m=3.57, n=14). Savior complex (m=2.43, n=14) was the least frequently talked about.

The next set of questions used a scale of four items, strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). Respondents were asked “Since participating in SEND I have increase my leadership skills (i.e. taking initiative)” respondents indicated (m=3.9, n=14). When respondents were asked both if participating in SEND increased their teamwork skills and emotional intelligence, results indicated (m=3.8 and m=4, n=14) respectively. When asked since SEND, if they found that they want to be more aware of social and ecological issues in the world and if they increased their knowledge of social and ecological issues in the real world, respondents indicated (m=3.93 and m=3.79, n=14) respectively. Next, respondents were asked if participating in SEND challenged their beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes, results indicated m=3.79 (n=14).

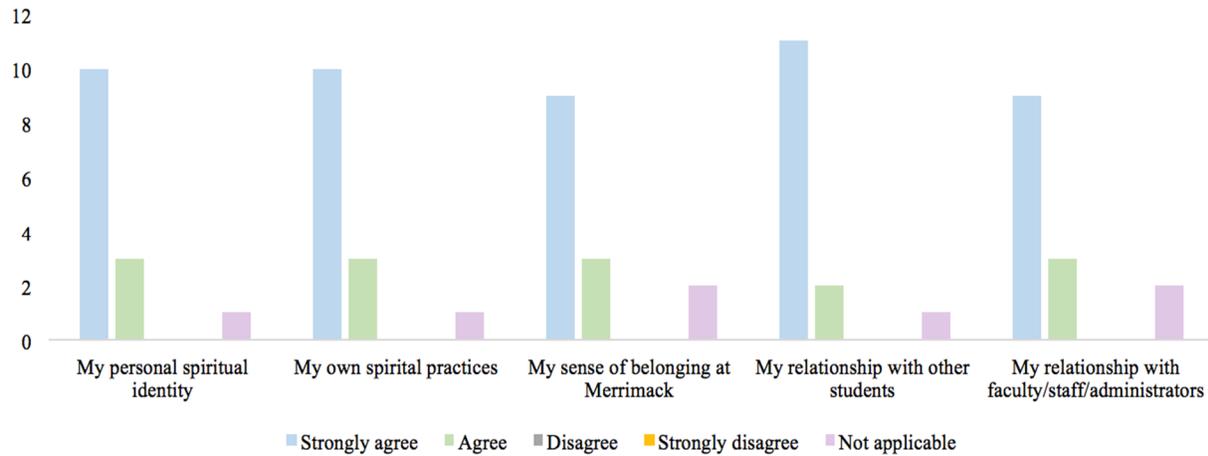
Respondents were given a set of topics and asked, “Please rate the extent to which participating in SEND challenged my awareness of the following topics.” They were given a rating scale of four items, discussed frequently (4), discussed occasionally (3), discussed rarely

(2), and never discussed (1). The topics of culture ( $m=3.79$ ,  $n=14$ ) and privilege ( $m=3.79$ ,  $n=14$ ) were most frequently discussed. The topics of oppression ( $m=3.71$ ,  $n=14$ ), power ( $m=3.64$ ,  $n=14$ ), and diversity ( $m=3.57$ ,  $n=14$ ) were discussed occasionally. Savior complex ( $m=2.89$ ,  $n=14$ ) was the least frequently talked about.

Next, students were given an open-ended question asking them to share how they did it, or how they recognized their awareness being challenged during their SEND trip. These open-ended responses were broken down into five different themes extracted from the responses. Five respondents noted how their conversations and discussions among their peers or community partners allowed them to open up, learn from another, and challenged what they had presumed. Three respondents noted how their nightly reflections allowed them to understand and break down their awareness was challenged. Three respondents shared the importance of talking and learning from community partners. Three respondents also mentioned the significance of culture and diversity that is presented on these SEND trips contributing to their awareness being challenged.

Respondents were given a final set of topics and asking is participating in SEND changed, deepened, or altered their understanding of the following topics. They were given a rating scale of five items, strongly agree (5), agree (4), disagree (3), strongly disagree (2) and not applicable (1). Respondents strongly agreed that their relationship with other students ( $m=4.57$ ,  $n=14$ ), their personal spiritual identity ( $m=4.5$ ,  $n=14$ ) and their own spiritual practices ( $m=4.5$ ,  $n=14$ ) were challenged, deepened, or altered as a result of a SEND trip. Respondents agreed that their sense of belonging at Merrimack ( $m=4.21$ ,  $n=14$ ) and their relationships with faculty/staff/administrators ( $m=4.21$ ,  $n=14$ ) were changed, deepened, or altered.

Figure 3: How SEND Deepened Understanding of Various Topics



Finally, respondents were asked if based on their experience, they felt like they could make a difference in their community. This question used a scale of four items, strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). All respondents (n=14) indicated that they strongly agree that they can make a difference in their community.

### Discussion

The goal of this project was to conduct an evaluation of Merrimack College’s SEND Program. To do this, four program outcomes were assessed: 1) increased knowledge of social and ecological issues in the real world; 2) increased leadership skills by taking initiative; 3) increased teamwork skills; and 4) increased emotional intelligence. Overall, based on the analysis of the survey, respondents generally indicated having a positive experience with the SEND Program and data suggests that they had significant moments of growth as a result.

Trips or programs similar to the SEND Program are valued for their ability to provide students with an experience unlike any other, this evaluation shows that the respondents who are participating in this program at Merrimack College see and feel the effective value that it has on

not only their education but their personal growth and development. Students participate in programs and on trips like SEND for many reasons, sometimes simply because they want to travel and have an international experience that will expose them to a new culture (Garcia & Longo, 2017). Interestingly, when respondents were asked why they wanted to participate in a SEND trip through Merrimack College, no respondent answered that they simply wanted to travel. All students indicated that they were either interested in education or interested in participating in a service or a mission trip.

The first outcome of the SEND Program's logic model is increased leadership skills by taking initiative. The research questions to assess the outcome were whether students effectively increased their leadership skills; and what types of leadership skills did students develop during their service experience. The survey explicitly assessed whether students felt that they increased their leadership skills by taking initiative as a result of participating in the SEND Program, and students indicated that they strongly agree ( $m=3.9$ ,  $n=14$ ). Many similar programs have been shown to effectively increase student's leadership skills (Garcia & Longo, 2017). The SEND Program takes particular interest in making sure that students are gaining leadership skills through their involvement in this program. The program has been designed to incorporate student leadership in every trip, starting with the pre-trip planning processes. Student leaders are selected by the Campus Minister for each trip specifically. From there, those students are actively involved in the interviewing process to select undergraduate students for each of the trips. Once the participants for each trip have been selected and confirmed, the trip leaders are involved in preparing pre-trip reflections, the itinerary, agenda and reflections during the trip, and leading post-trip reflections. The secondary question inquiring about what types of leadership skills did the student develop was not assessed. It was determined that definitions and greater explanation

of what different types of leadership there are would be necessary for the students to have a clear explanation was asked. That amount of definitions and explanation in a survey to answer one research question may be a turn off for the students as the survey would have been longer and more comprehensive. I did not want there to be a set of questions that would deter students from continuing with the survey, which was the fear of including this question.

Another outcome of the SEND Program, outlined in its logic model, is that students will increase their teamwork skills as a result of their SEND Trip. The primary question sought to determine if students effectively increase their teamwork skills as a result of SEND. In the survey, students were explicitly asked if they felt that they increased their teamwork skills (i.e. learning to collaborate, communicate, and reflect with their peers). Respondents indicated that they strongly agree that they believe they have increased their teamwork skills as a result of participating in the SEND Program. (m=3.9, n=14). Increased teamwork skills bring a new skillset to the students as they continue their academic journey's. These skills that they are learning together will likely influence other parts of their life and it illustrates how service-learning is good for applicable skills development.

The third outcome and research question sought to understand if students increased their emotional intelligence, students indicated that they strongly agree (m=3.8, n=14). Often, in service learning or global service learning programs, students are immersed in a new and diverse culture different from their own. This can be a very hard experience emotionally as students are breaking down their emotions based on what they are seeing, feeling, and experiencing in the moment. Many of these trips, including the SEND Program, incorporate the significant component of reflections. These reflections are used to create a space for students to feel comfortable enough with their peers to open up and share their thoughts, emotions, and

experiences from the day. The SEND Program requires that students participate in at least two large group meetings with all participants for every trip beforehand, and a few small group reflections where they meet directly with the participants of their trip. These reflections allow the students to get together and talk about what they are about the experience. Furthermore, the trip leaders come prepared with reflection questions about social justice issues that the students may face in the community that they are traveling to. During their SEND trips, each night students participate in a group reflection. Trip leaders come with a plan and outline of questions and activities that they will incorporate into the reflection that challenge the students to open up and think differently about their daily experience. This creates an open and trusting environment for students to share how they are feeling and ultimately, be able to increase their emotional intelligence. According to the survey results and the students open ended responses, they see and feel the value in their nightly reflections, one responded who indicated they were a group leader shared, “As a group leader I had the opportunity to take control of that conversation during group reflection and help to not only create a safe space for myself to be challenged but for others as well.”

Finally, the fourth outcome is an increased knowledge of social and ecological issues in the real world. Two research questions follow this outcome: First, did students increase their knowledge and awareness of social and ecological issues in the real world; and second, how did they do it, or how did they recognize it? Respondents indicated that they strongly agreed that they are more aware of social and ecological issues in the world ( $m = 3.93$ ,  $n = 14$ ) and that they increased their knowledge of social and ecological issues in the real world ( $m = 3.79$ ,  $n = 14$ ). The open-ended question that allowed respondents to share some about how the challenged their awareness or recognized that it had been challenged elicited some very

interesting responses. Many of the respondents shared about how important conversations and discussions were with their peers and community partners. Reflections were also identified as being important to create a safe and inviting space for the trip leaders, advisors, and students to share their experiences, assumptions, prejudices, stereotypes with one another. Respondents noted that reflection was found to be significant and valuable to them challenging their beliefs and learning as a result of this experience is a direct result of how reflection as a part of the learning process works when students are pairing learning with observation and experience (Jenkins & Clarke, 2017). This also suggests that students are on some level engaging in the four steps of observation and reflection. In addition, reflection is a pillar of the SEND Program, valued by Merrimack College and many other similar global service learning programs for providing students with a shared space to learn and grow.

Furthermore, the respondents noted how valuable the community partners were for opening up their eyes and providing individual insight into their lives and the challenges they face daily.

In the open response question asking how students recognized that they were their awareness of social and ecological issues in the real world, one student directly connected their SEND experience with the four pillars of the SEND Program, “The immersion and pillars of the program such as simplicity and solidarity fully allow a participant to become close or gain awareness of the lives that they serve and meet. The trip was educationally broadening and provoked further discussion and interest in social and global world issues.” The pillars of service, solidarity, community-friendship, and reflection are incorporated into the experiences that the students embark on. Furthermore, the pillars directly relate and influence the short-term

outcomes highlighted in the Logic Model. All of these pillars were noted as being valuable or significant to the students in their survey responses.

Overall, the survey results were very positive and representative of the program as it relates to the four SEND pillars. For example, respondents noted the importance of building relationships with and learning from GreenWorks and being environmentally friendly, which can clearly connect to the pillar of solidarity and community-friendship. Further, respondents also noted wanting to participate in SEND to complete a service/mission trip (36%, n=5) or because service learning was important to them (14%, n=2) which explicitly connects to service. In addition, in response to being asked how respondents recognized their awareness being challenged during their SEND trip, one respondent shared “I recognized that I was being challenged in many of these areas in the actual service work and talking with the native people of the area.” This quote lends to the fact that the service experience during these trips challenges them and is recognized as being important. This highlights two important factors. First, the SEND program’s logical framework and theory of change are being applied in the creation of specific service learning experiences and therefore reflected through service learning trip experiences. Second, this means that the intended benefits of designed service learning experiences are having the intended effects on students, therefore the SEND program is meeting its goals and mission.

Finally, this program evaluation did not explicitly assess whether students were making the spiritual connection that is embedded within this program’s pillars. While this evaluation created outcomes and research questions focused on skills and growth that the students may gain in result of this program, but the survey did assess whether participating in send changed, deepened, or altered their understanding of their personal spiritual identity (m=4.5, n=14), their

own spiritual practices (m=4.5, n=14), and their sense of belonging at Merrimack (m=4.21, n=14), their relationships with other students (m=4.57, n=14), and their relationships with faculty/staff/administrators (m=4.21, n=14). This suggests that students are thinking about, altering, or strengthening their views on their own spiritual identity, spiritual practices, etc.

### *Limitations*

The following limitations were encountered while conducting this research: time, resources, and the impact of COVID-19. Time was a major limitation that impacted this research as I only had four months to create a survey, work with Ms. Benevenia to create a list of SEND trip alumni, begin data collections, complete analysis and the final writing portions of this thesis. I tried to stay on schedule with the implementation timeline, but it was difficult due to everyday timing setbacks. Had there been more time for the completion of this thesis, the survey itself could have been more in-depth seeking deeper analysis of student's experiences participating in the SEND Program. Furthermore, more time would have allowed Ms. Benevenia and I to target not only SEND Program Alumni but target current students who were preparing to participate in the 2020 SEND trips as none of the survey respondents participated on a 2020 trip. This collaboration could have generated a greater survey response. Finally, due to time, I decided against conducting interviews with possible participants. I had discussed with Ms. Benevenia a few participants who would be good to conduct an interview with on their experiences in the SEND Program. With time limitations, this part of the evaluation was too much.

Although I collaborated with Ms. Benevenia who runs the SEND Program, my access to resources also presented as a limitation to this program evaluation. While her willingness to help, and coordinate contact information was pertinent to this project, some resources were limited like access to all alumni and current SEND participants. Ideally, with more time, all students,

faculty, and host communities/partners since Ms. Benevenia has been running the SEND Program would have been contacted to complete this survey. However, due to the limited access to all of these individual's contact information, the project had to be refocused to only those whose contact information was still valid.

Another limitation during the evaluation was consistent access to community partners. Ms. Benevenia was essential to constructing this evaluation and the data collection process. However, the timing of this project aligned with her coordination of the Spring SEND program coordination therefore her time was limited. Further, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the scheduling of spring SEND opportunities – particularly international trips – were becoming very complicated. This added extra levels of complication in trying to put out a survey to alumni and therefore limited our ability to conduct interviews and/or focus groups with prior SEND participants and possibly SEND community partners.

By the time the survey was completed and available for participant responses, it was the beginning of March 2020. At this point, the world and the country was beginning to face serious public health threats in regard to COVID-19. Some of the respondents of the survey could have been current students at Merrimack College while others could have been alumni of Merrimack College; in both scenarios, this survey was released March 4<sup>th</sup>, less than one week before spring break for Merrimack College and less than one week before Merrimack College and the state of Massachusetts began making significant changes in order to protect a greater public health. During this time, especially at Merrimack College, there were constant and continuous announcements being made regarding COVID-19, and ultimately the decision to close the campus. There was a surge of emails at this time and significant confusion around what was happening on a college, state, and country level. Due to COVID-19 people had to learn how to

social distance as it relates to travel, family situation, daily functioning, etc. Moreover, Ms. Benevenia had so much on her plate during this period as she had three SEND trips actively going during student's spring breaks; Merrimack students were in North Carolina, Texas, and South Dakota during this intense time that all levels of governments and officials were making up decisions on travel and public safety. She was focused on the wellbeing of these students as they were away during this planning time and ensuring that all students would make it home safe and healthy. Therefore, Ms. Benevenia had greater focus on the logistical nightmares with the SEND trips, rather than an alumni survey.

### ***Implications for Future Projects***

Future program evaluations should plan and allot more time to the preparation and creation of their survey as well as develop a comprehensive alumni list. Working with a community partner on program evaluations is a valuable experience but also has its own limitations and restrictions. Being aware of these restrictions and planning around them to ensure a successful project is critical. Expanding on the survey questions would also result in an advantage as you can assess participants' understanding on a deeper level.

Future program evaluations assessing programs that are rooted in faith and religion should assess whether that aspect of the program is reaching the students. Furthermore, it should assess whether students value the program being embedded within Campus Ministry.

Future projects should also consider working closely with the community partners. The community partners spend a week working with students and their leaders on some social environmental injustice. The community partners teach these groups everything there is about their community and the problem at hand, by the end of the week, they have seen the growth of

the group and have a good perspective on whether students are increasing their knowledge and skills as a result of these trips.

These trips are known for providing participants with new knowledge, insight, perspectives, and skills. Future projects should be assessing how these participants are engaging with their communities after they have completed their service experience.

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**Appendix A: SEND Survey**

**INTRODUCTION.** This survey is an investigation of the perceived benefits of the SEND Program on students. You were contacted because you were a participant in some for (student, trip leader, advisor, host community) for Merrimack College’s SEND Program. For students who have the ability to apply to the SEND Program in the future, your responses in this survey will not affect future SEND placement. This survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. This survey will be anonymous and confidential.

**Section 1:** First, we’d like to capture your thoughts on your most *recent* participation in SEND.

What year was your most recent trip?

- Winter 2018                       Spring 2018                       Summer 2018
- Winter 2019                       Spring 2019                       Summer 2019
- Winter 2020                       Other

On your SEND trip, what was your role?

- Student                       Trip Leader                       Trip Advisor                       Host Community

**Section 2:** Tell me more about where and why you traveled!

For students, trip leaders, trip advisors: What was your primary intention in applying to SEND?

- I just wanted to travel!
- I was interested in travel and education.
- I was interested in completing a service/mission trip.
- I have participated in global service learning and wanted to participate again.
- Global service learning is important to me, therefore I applied to SEND.
- Other (please specify):

Did you travel domestically or internationally?

- Domestically
- Internationally

**Section 3:** Next, we would like to understand how SEND might have influenced you.

Please rate the extent to which you discussed the importance of these topics *during* you participated on your SEND trip.

	Discussed frequently	Discussed occasionally	Discussed rarely	Never discussed
Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Diversity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Power	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Privilege	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Oppression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Savior complex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Since participating in SEND I have increase my leadership skills (i.e. taking initiative).

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Participating in SEND increased my teamwork skills (i.e. learning to collaborate, communicate, and reflect with my peers)?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Participating in SEND increase my emotional intelligence (i.e. understanding my emotions through peer discussion and reflection)?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Since SEND, do you find that you want to be more aware of social and ecological issues in the world?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Did you increase your knowledge of social and ecological issues in the real world?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Participating in SEND challenged my beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please rate the extent to which participating in SEND challenged my awareness of the following topics.

	Discussed frequently	Discussed occasionally	Discussed rarely	Never discussed
Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Diversity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Power	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Privilege	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Oppression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Savior complex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How did you do it, or how did you recognize it?

Open ended long answer.

Participating in SEND changed, deepened, or altered my understanding of...

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable
My personal spiritual identity	<input type="radio"/>				
My own spiritual practices	<input type="radio"/>				
My sense of belonging at Merrimack	<input type="radio"/>				
My relationship with other students	<input type="radio"/>				
My relationship with faculty/staff/administrators	<input type="radio"/>				

Overall, considering everything, how satisfied would you say you were with that SEND trip?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means you would not recommend and 10 means you absolutely would recommend, how would you recommend the SEND program?

- 1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10
- 

Based on my experience, I feel I could make a difference in my community.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

**Section 4:** Finally, tell me a little bit about yourself.

Age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

How do you define your gender? Check all that apply.

- Male
- Female
- Trans
- Non-binary
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

How do you define your sexual orientation? Check all that apply.

- Straight (Heterosexual)
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Asexual
- Lesbian
- Pansexual
- Queer
- Questioning or unsure
- Same-gender loving
- Prefer not to disclose
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Do you consider yourself as Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or of Spanish origin?

- Yes, Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Spanish origin
- No, not Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Spanish origin

What is your race?

- Black / African American
- Caucasian / White
- American Indian / Aleut / Eskimo / Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander
- Mixed Race

Thank you for your participation!