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Service Learning in the Digital Age: Understanding Nontraditional Students and Their Experiential Journey Through Electronic-Service Learning

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Service Learning in the Digital Age: Understanding Nontraditional Students and Their

Experiential Journey Through Electronic-Service Learning

A Dissertation in Education

with a Concentration in Curriculum Studies

by

Qianhui Tian Hub

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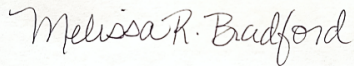
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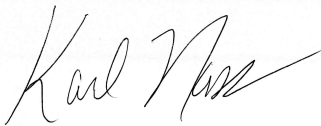
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Certification of Authorship

I certify that I am the sole author of this dissertation. Any assistance received in the preparation of this dissertation has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized, including the use of data, ideas and words, those quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited. I certify that I have prepared this dissertation according program guidelines as directed.

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Abstract

Service learning (SL) is an experiential learning pedagogy that merges real-life community service activities with structured reflection. Electronic-Service Learning (e-SL) is a blended pedagogy that combines online education and SL. The pandemic has significantly prompted the evolution of SL toward e-SL. In planning pedagogy initiatives, educators must not overlook the changing demographics of their student bodies. Within higher education in the U.S., 75% of students have at least one nontraditional student characteristic. Yet, the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional students on e-SL are critically underexplored. Thus, this dissertation examined the potential and value of developing e-SL with particular attention to nontraditional students' perspectives.

Guided by the theoretical framework of Freire's educational philosophy on critical pedagogy and problem-posing education, and the conceptual framework of Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning, this dissertation adopted narrative inquiry to capture the detailed stories of three nontraditional students. The key findings revealed: (1) prior volunteer activities and work experiences played a prominent role in shaping participants' interests, expectations, and behaviors in e-SL; (2) e-SL validated its value as an experiential learning pedagogy, where the phases of Reflective Observation and the Formation of Abstract Conceptualization were critical; (3) e-SL attracted nontraditional students given that it offers a balance between school and other responsibilities, but interpersonal outcomes and the sense of belonging to the institutional community were compromised. By uncovering nontraditional students' perceptions and experiences in e-SL, this dissertation provided timely insight for educators to advance e-SL practices in the digital age.

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Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Problem Statement and Rationale

Introduction

As a form of experiential learning, service learning (SL) is an integration of community-based service and structured reflections with academic content (Furco, 1996). SL pedagogy aims at providing a pragmatic, progressive learning experience while addressing human and community needs. Students who participate in SL are provided with practical opportunities to work with a community organization or agency and to deliberate further understanding of what they have learned through structured reflections (Jacoby, 2014). SL programs are increasingly incorporated into the curriculum in higher education and have been viewed as a widely respected academic pedagogy (Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2017). SL practices can be delivered in both credit-bearing courses and a co-curricular educational format (Jacoby, 2014). By incorporating students' community service experiences with critical reflection, when implemented effectively, SL expresses the capability to benefit students' growth and success, institutions' goals and missions, as well as host communities' needs and desires (Moely et al., 2008).

Traditional Service Learning

Service learning in this study is defined in alignment with Jacoby's (2014) definition, "Service Learning (SL) is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs, together with structured opportunities for reflection designed to achieve desired learning outcomes" (p.1). SL includes two parts: (1) service: community service; and (2) learning: reflection (if the SL is not course-based) or instruction (if the SL is a credit-based course). This definition is intentionally employed because it offers a broader umbrella, which corresponds to the target audiences of this research, who are SL course

designers and instructors, student affairs professionals, campus ministers, community partners, and student leaders.

Following the definition, this study focuses on academic SL and co-curricular SL, but not extra-curricular community service. Academic SL refers to SL that is a part of the formal academic curriculum (Clayton et al., 2013). That is, academic SL is a form of credit-based coursework which is closely monitored by a faculty member. Co-curricular SL is different from academic SL in that it is not a component of a specific course or discipline, but instead, it complements the regular curriculum and forms part of a coordinated approach to an all-around education (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). Co-curricular SL is a university-wide activity and reflects the group's mission and skills (Vos et al., 2018). Co-curricular SL is held by on-campus organizations and has moderate to intense staff involvement (Cooper, 2002).

Extra-curricular community service is the service activities that are primarily optional, out-of-classroom, not tied to the curriculum, and with little university faculty and staff involvement. Extra-curricular community service is a charity-based model volunteer activity that focuses on altruism (Marullo & Edwards, 2000). That is, extra-curricular community service emphasizes giving rather than learning, and it is not reciprocity. Most importantly, extra-curricular community service rarely incorporates a structured reflection on the experience (Eyler, 2002). Because of the lack of reciprocity and reflection, the critical elements of SL, extra-curricular community service are not considered as SL in this study. Additionally, Cooper (2002) made a comparison of traditional extra-curricular community service, co-curricular SL, and curricular SL in the aspects of duration, controlling agents, and focuses (see Table 1).

Cooper's (2002) study provided examples for academic SL, co-curricular SL, and extra-curricular community service respectively: (1) The for-credit SL courses that students are taking

are considered as academic SL; (2) The Alternative Spring Break a week-long service immersion experience is regarded as a co-curricular SL; (3) And service activity by Alpha Phi Omega, a national service fraternity to do charity service with no critical reflection is considered traditional extra-curricular community service.

Table 1: Cooper (2002, p.26) Types of Service Learning

Types of Service Learning	Duration	Controlling Agents	Focus
Traditional Community Service	Varies; typically a one- time experience	Student organization activity; little or no staff involvement	Altruism
Co-Curricular	Varies; can be ongoing or over several weeks	University-wide activity or program; moderate to intense staff involvement	Personal development; issue-based
Curricular	Varies: Typically over the course of one semester	Single class; typically closely monitored by a faculty member	Academic goals; subject matter

Despite the extent of connection to curriculum and the focus on personal development or academic goals, both academic SL and co-curricular SL incorporate the fundamental elements of SL — reflection and reciprocity. This study includes both academic SL and co-curriculum SL because this study focuses on the essence of SL which includes community service activities and structured reflection as well as reciprocity between service recipients and providers, rather than its connection to courses and disciplines.

With roots stretching back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, SL has long been regarded as a significant means of student civic engagement and an essential type of learning for

social justice. Credited as one of the founders and advocates of SL, John Dewey's educational theories of *learning by doing* (1938) and *learning by the critical reflection of experiences* (1958) provide solid theoretical support for SL pedagogy (Giles & Elyer, 1994). Additionally, Dewey (1916) believes that by engaging in service to the community and having this service incorporated into the academic curriculum, students would learn more effectively and become better citizens. Based on Dewey's (1938) experiential theory, David Kolb (1984) further developed the Cycle of Experiential Learning which claimed four essential aspects of experiential learning. The four aspects are concrete experience, reflective observation, formation of abstract concepts, and active experimentation. Through SL, students directly experience the roots of social issues (such as social stratification, unemployment, poverty, hunger, homelessness, educational inequality, race and racism, veterans' affairs, etc.), which leads students both to build relationships with communities and develop deep commitments to social justice (Rudolph, 2014).

In recent decades, the number of higher education institutions linking service to coursework has expanded substantially, intending to facilitate students' growth, fulfill institutional missions, and address community needs (Arellano & Jones, 2018). SL plays a critical role in higher education to increase students' academic success (Hébert & Hauf, 2015; Simonet, 2008), their overall satisfaction with their collegiate experience (Eyler et al., 2001), and their civic growth toward becoming responsible citizens (Richards & Levesque-Bristol, 2016). Moreover, SL is an essential approach for students to achieve moral, civic, and faith growth (Steinke et al., 2002). SL is regarded as one of the most effective strategies for colleges and universities to encourage the moral and civic values of students in a secular manner (Kozlowski

et al., 2014). Thus, it is important to develop SL in higher education to facilitate students' transition to well-rounded individuals and connect students to the larger community.

Electronic-Service Learning

During the pandemic, the majority of courses are delivered online, and SL has been no exception. Electronic-Service Learning is not a brand-new pedagogy that was born during the pandemic. In retrospect, the idea of Electronic-Service Learning was originally proposed in the 2010s, when online programs flourished (Sandy & Franco, 2014; Soria & Weiner, 2013). During the 2006-2007 academic years, distance education courses, including online or hybrid courses, were offered by 66% of higher education institutions in the U.S. (Allen & Seaman, 2007). Waldner et al. (2012) claimed that the growth of SL offerings online has lagged behind the growth of the online student population.

Electronic-Service Learning (e-SL) in this research refers to the SL wherein the service activity and/or the reflection occurs online (Waldner et al., 2012). That is, e-SL service activities and/or reflection sessions are completed, in whole or in part, using the internet at home, school, work computer, or other internet-connected devices, such as a smartphone or personal digital assistant. E-SL is also called virtual SL or online SL.

Accordingly, E-SL has four types: (1) service and e-learning: service on-site and learning online; (2) e-service and learning: service online and learning on-site; (3) partially e-SL: service and learning are both partially on-site and partially online; (4) extreme e-SL: service and learning are both fully on-line (Waldner et al., 2012). This dissertation explores nontraditional students' preferences and perceptions of extreme e-SL. Extreme e-SL was chosen out of the four types of e-SL for this dissertation study because it has been practiced during Covid and applies to students taking fully online education.

Nontraditional Students

Nontraditional students are a growing population in postsecondary education in the United States today (Remenick, 2019). Nontraditional students are different from their recent high school graduate counterparts in that they have relatively rich life experiences and heavy family responsibilities (Dill & Henley, 1998). They have distinctive perceptions of online education during Covid (Singh et al., 2021) and demonstrate different expectations and preferences of traditional on-site SL (Reed et al., 2015). However, nontraditional students' perceptions and experiences in e-SL have not been explored in higher education research.

To study e-SL, the definition of nontraditional students in this research aligns with the aspects that were raised by Rosenberg et al. (2011) in foundational SL research in terms of *age, enrollment patterns, employment situation, and family status*. Respectively, nontraditional students are undergraduates who fall into one or more of the four categories: (1) students 25 years and older; (2) part-time students; (3) full-time employed; (4) raising dependent children (Rosenberg et al., 2012). These four categories are referred to as the *characteristics* of nontraditional students in this study.

This research focuses on undergraduate students who have at least one of the aforementioned characteristics of nontraditional students. The scope of this research is four-year universities or colleges in the United States. To understand nontraditional students' perspectives on e-SL, it is vital to study a population of students from an institution where SL is central to its mission and has been practiced deeply. In this regard, a large private Catholic university in the midwestern United States is selected to collect data for the study.

With a brief introduction of SL, e-SL, and nontraditional students provided above, the remainder of this chapter delves into the problem statement, rationale, and research questions of

this research. The problem statement first presents an urgent need for exploring best practices for developing e-SL which is largely practiced during the pandemic. Second, the problem statement includes an overlooked population – nontraditional students – and the need to understand their perceptions of e-SL. The rationale section explains why exploring e-SL is needed and why I focus on nontraditional students. Next, the significance of exploring e-SL from nontraditional students' perspectives is stated. Then, the research questions are presented with the objective that guides the study. Finally, a conclusion is provided to summarize the main points of Chapter 1.

Problem Statement

Covid and Service Learning

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 has shifted the way education is delivered, and SL is no exception. While the order of social distancing and campus closure resulting from the pandemic poses challenges regarding accommodation and accessibility of SL practice in higher education institutions, SL professionals have actively responded to the higher education community engagement in times of crisis and have adjusted SL activities creatively.

Facing Covid, while the vast majority of courses are delivered over the internet, a larger number of SL programs have also been transformed into an online platform (if not canceled or postponed). However, SL as a form of experiential education emphasizes hands-on experiences (Furco, 1996; Howard, 2001; Jacoby, 2014) and immersion in situations (Butin, 2005; Pompa, 2005; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). John Dewey (1938) defined experiential education as "an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experiences and education" (p.64). Experiential learning requires students to engage in the first-hand discovery of knowledge by participating in and observing activities that happened in field-based settings outside the classroom (Holland & Spring, 2018).

Some desired learning outcomes of SL such as building interpersonal connections, building connections with the host community, and seeking a sense of belonging are difficult to achieve in front of digital devices. Nevertheless, the argument that online learning can facilitate, rather than inhibit, community-engaged pedagogies is supported by distance education scholars (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2012; Garca-Gutierrez et al., 2017; Gasper-Hulvat, 2018; Purcell, 2017). Given the fact that the practice and research of SL in the Covid world are still at an early stage, we have limited understanding as to whether conducting SL online can produce comparable learning outcomes as on-site SL, or if the transformation of the service format will shift the focus and emphasis of learning outcomes. Inadequate findings and conclusions have been established so far regarding the effectiveness of e-SL or the feasibility of developing alternative approaches to conduct SL during the pandemic and move forward.

Nontraditional Students and Service Learning

In planning pedagogy initiatives, university educators must consider the changing demographics of their student bodies. Nontraditional learners make up an increasing percentage, not only in fully online programs but of the total undergraduate student body generally. A study about demographic and enrollment characteristics shows that 75% of undergraduates had at least one nontraditional characteristic (Radford et al., 2015). In higher education, therefore, educational leaders should not plan programs without considering the features of nontraditional students.

A review of the SL literature revealed that there is a lack of information on implementing e-SL pedagogy with a close focus on the growing population of nontraditional undergraduate students. In this regard, this dissertation is dedicated to filling in the research gap and building

foundational research on contemporary SL development with a focus on the overlooked majority – nontraditional students.

Rationale: Significance of the Problem

Explore Best Practices for Electronic-Service Learning

By exploring participants' first-hand experience and genuine perspectives of their e-SL involvement, this study serves as timely research to (1) examine if e-SL demonstrates the elements of experiential learning, and (2) reveal the appropriate approaches to develop SL remotely and to inform critical pedagogical considerations for SL professionals to have e-SL options that accommodate learners' needs now and in the future.

Waldner et al. (2012) brought up the concept of e-SL and belief that "E-SL holds massive potential to transform both SL and online learning by freeing SL from geographical constraints and equipping online learning with a powerful and much-needed tool to promote engagement" (p.123). At the time, the purposes of e-SL were predominately to engage students who enrolled in fully online programs, among whom the majority are nontraditional students (Colorado & Eberle, 2012). Thus, to study e-SL it is imperative to pay close attention to nontraditional students as this population trend grows exponentially (MacDonald, 2018). Given the original call for developing e-SL for students in fully online programs, it is critical to recognize the composition of the online student population, which drew my attention to nontraditional students.

Understanding Nontraditional Students

In addition to exploring best practices for e-SL, this study also contributes to understanding nontraditional students in three ways: (1) the expectations and preferences of e-SL in particular associated with nontraditional students' personal stories and/or professional

experiences; (2) the lessons learned and takeaways of nontraditional students through e-SL; (3) the needs and concerns that nontraditional students have toward e-SL that have not been addressed by SL professionals in higher education. With this knowledge, SL professionals can better serve this population rather than using a universal strategy that may only apply to traditional college students.

Nontraditional students are selected to study in this dissertation for the following three reasons. First, students with nontraditional characteristics are becoming increasingly prevalent, so administrators and instructors must become proficient in working with this population (Ellis, 2019; Remenick, 2019). Among undergraduates in the U.S., 75% have at least one nontraditional characteristic (Radford et al., 2015). In higher education, therefore, educational leaders cannot plan programs without considering the features of nontraditional students.

Second, e-SL is a type of online education that has been proven to be nontraditional-student friendly because it is free from logistics, geographic constraints, and offers a flexible schedule (Dolch & Zawacki-Richter, 2018; Rabourn, 2018). However, e-SL is also a type of experiential learning, and little is known if nontraditional students hold the same affection for e-SL and whether nontraditional students have different perspectives.

Most importantly, studies about on-site SL show nontraditional students have different interests and struggles from their traditional counterparts (Reed et al., 2015), but little is known if their lived experience could alter their perceptions of e-SL. Nontraditional students are predominantly different from recent high school graduates in that they have considerable life and professional experiences (Miller & Lu, 2003; Van Doorn & Van Doorn, 2014). Lived experience can provide a rich resource for learning overall (Buglione, 2012), but experiential education, personal experience, and interactions in the society outside the school campus are vital in

shifting nontraditional students' expectations and perceptions (Largent, 2013; Rosenberg et al, 2011). Therefore, nowadays with the continuous blooming of online education and technology involvement, a better understanding of nontraditional students and appropriate e-SL strategies are urgently warranted.

This study promotes the dialogue between the fields of SL and online education, in addition to advancing the current state of knowledge on nontraditional learners' characteristics and success. In sum, this study serves as a timely exploration of the value of e-SL focusing on nontraditional students, which is inspired by pandemic adjustment but aims at reflecting on the experience and providing insights regarding contemporary strategies to advance SL development in higher education.

Research Questions

With an overarching goal of exploring the potential and value to develop e-SL and gaining a richer understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate students, the following research questions guide the study:

1. How do the lived experiences of nontraditional students shape their orientation towards e-SL?

2. How, if at all, do the e-SL experiences of nontraditional students demonstrate experiential learning elements?

3. What best practices do nontraditional students recommend for developing e-SL in higher education?

The first research question aims to explore how nontraditional students' personal stories and professional experience in life have shaped their expectations, satisfaction levels, preferences, and concerns toward e-SL. Answering this question provides a more thorough

understanding of nontraditional students' perceptions and understanding of e-SL that were shaped by their past experiences and personal background before they participated in e-SL.

The second question focuses on nontraditional students' reflections on their e-SL experience and takeaways. I compared participants' narratives to Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, the theoretical framework of the research, to examine if e-SL demonstrates experiential learning elements.

The third question aims to gain first-hand feedback and suggestions from nontraditional students. With the authentic voice of their needs and concerns, the results of this question can provide constructive suggestions for SL professionals to develop e-SL now and in the future.

Due to the nature of my research questions and objectives, a qualitative approach was adopted as it can provide me with the details of participants' opinions and experiences, as well as offer me the opportunity to explore the reason behind their thoughts and behaviors. Specifically, a narrative inquiry was employed as the research method with the primary goal of gaining a rich understanding of the unique stories of nontraditional students and their descriptions of the e-SL experience.

Positionality

Throughout my studies in post-secondary education, I have been involved with SL in different ways for a decade. Participating in SL has had a significant influence on me and it impacts my personal goals and professional development. My first SL activities forced me to step outside of my comfort zone and it shocked me when I witnessed the social issue of unequal educational opportunities, which inspired me to research education equity and introduce more of my peers to SL. After enrolling in my current university, the numerous involvements with planning and assessing SL affirmed my commitment to advocating social justice. I had the

opportunity to conduct the evaluation of both SL and e-SL, which motivated me to conduct meaningful research to advance SL. I am a beneficiary of an e-SL immersion trip to El Salvador because if it was not offered online, I wouldn't have been able to physically be there.

My experience shows that e-SL is promising as it opens a door to those who would not be able to join on-site SL. I am not a nontraditional student, so I have an unbiased and objective standing in exploring nontraditional students' experiences and perceptions. Based on my personal and research experience, the gap in the scholarship that I strive to fill with this dissertation is whether e-SL can produce comparable experiential learning outcomes as on-site SL, and how e-SL can be appropriately delivered to address the needs of nontraditional students.

Conclusion

In sum, exploring e-SL and gaining the lessons from pandemic practice is critical for the development of SL in higher education, while not overlooking the growing nontraditional student population. By gaining a deeper understanding of nontraditional students and their perceptions of e-SL, this study aims to reveal appropriate approaches to develop SL remotely and inform best practice strategies for faculty and SL professionals to accommodate SL according to the needs of the nontraditional population. Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning highlights the essential features of experiential learning, concrete experience, reflective observation, formation of abstract concepts, and active experimentation. SL includes (1) community service that addresses human and community needs, which can be regarded as a concrete experience; and (2) structured reflection that connects experience with academic contents. Beyond these two components, Kolb's framework provides a guideline to assess students' learning outcomes which is the aspect of the formation of abstract concepts and active experimentation. Thus, to explore whether e-SL can be considered a best practice of experiential

learning for nontraditional students, it is important to use Kolb's framework in the study. As a foundation framework of SL, Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning illustrates the essential aspects that experiential learning should be addressed and is in alignment with the structure of SL.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter Overview

This chapter is divided into three primary sections: (1) theoretical and conceptual framework, (2) literature review with four bodies of scholarships, and (3) research gaps. First, I begin by introducing the theoretical framework of Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy and the conceptual framework of David Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning. Then, I review the literature that engages four bodies of scholarship: (1) traditional on-site SL, (2) non-pandemic e-SL, (3) e-SL during the Covid-19 pandemic, and 4) nontraditional students and SL. Finally, I summarize this chapter with the limitations of the existing research and the significance of current research.

Theoretical Framework

The philosophical roots of SL can be found in the writings of Latin-American pedagogue Paulo Friere (1970) and American educator John Dewey (1938). Friere's (1970) critical pedagogy and the idea of problem-posing education provide a theoretical framework for this study. Dewey's (1966) experiential learning theory and his (1938) theoretical foundations of adult education led to Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning, which is employed as a conceptual framework for this study.

Guided by the framework of Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy and the idea of problem-posing education, this study examines whether e-SL is a best practice to demonstrate critical consciousness, learning from dialogue and critical inquiry, as well as how to present interests and experiences of nontraditional students shape their perceptions of e-SL.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) asserted the *banking concept of education* where students are regarded as containers to be filled by the teacher. He argued that traditional

education was oppressive and dehumanizing. Freire criticized the pedagogy that students are asked to memorize and repeat ideas, phrases, and formulas without understanding the meaning behind them. Instead, he emphasized critical pedagogy and developed the idea of problem-posing education.

Freire's educational philosophy on critical pedagogy and problem-posing education provided a solid foundation for developing SL, especially SL for non-traditional students. Specifically, Freire (1970) reminded educators to develop education for critical consciousness leading to social transformation, which is in alignment with the ultimate goal of critical SL. Additionally, he believed in a problem-posing pedagogy based on the learner's present interests and experiences, which pointed out a direction for SL for nontraditional students who have rich lived experiences and dedication to their interests. Freire (1973) pointed out that the aim of education is humanization and liberation, which can be achieved through dialogue, critical inquiry, and praxis. Freire (1970) argued that education was a process of empowerment where the teacher-learner relationship is reciprocal. He further stated that SL is a process of empowerment for students, faculty, and community members where the stakeholders work collaboratively to create better communities. SL demonstrates this idea by incorporating structured reflection which facilitates students learning from their dialogue and critical inquiry. At the same time, through dialogue teachers and students demonstrate the reciprocity of roles and learn from each other.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning, which is based on Dewey's experiential theory and other influential learning theories at the start of the 20 century to develop SL.

As Freire (1970) held that education is not a banking process where students are viewed as empty accounts that must be filled, Dewey (1938) was opposed to the idea that education is a process of accumulating knowledge.

Dewey introduced and advanced the experiential learning theory by claiming that learners learn by doing and learn from the reflection of the experience. According to Dewey (1938), education entailed six steps: encountering a problem, formulating the problem as a question is to be answered, gathering information to answer the posed question, developing a hypothesis, testing the hypothesis, and making warranted assertions. Dewey (1916) highlighted the critical role of experience in education and noted the limitation of formal education that the material covered in formal schooling may become isolated from the subject matter of real life.

Moreover, Dewey (1938) advocated a hands-on approach to learning, that is, students must interact with their environment in order to adapt and learn. In addition, Dewey argued that individuals do not learn from experience itself, rather, individuals must reflect on those experiences. Dewey (1916) stated, "no experience having a meaning is possible without some element of thought" (p. 369). Thus, Dewey offered a solid pedagogical theory for conducting SL, with the insistence on learning by doing through hands-on experience and the emphasis on structured reflection in building connections with academic content (Roberts & Edwards, 2015; You & Rud, 2010). In recent decades, the number of higher education institutions linking service to coursework has expanded, intending to help students grow to become better citizens by doing needed work in their communities (Arellano & Jones, 2018). The increase in SL can be seen in the growth of membership of Campus Compact. Campus Compact is a coalition of colleges and universities that are committed to fulfilling the public purposes of higher education by providing

SL programs. As recently as 2022, nearly 1,100 educational institutions, more than a third of all higher education providers in the U.S., are members (Campus Compact, 2022).

Dewey also contributed to the theoretical foundations of adult education. In the early 20th century, an explosion of educational theories challenged the standardized practices of that era. Dewey (1916) condemned the role learning of factual information. Rather, he urged that educators should develop approaches that encourage students to solve problems. According to Dewey (1938), learning is based on the learner's experience, and instruction should facilitate the immediate and personal application of knowledge. This concept provided a strong foundation for this study to explore appropriate SL approaches for nontraditional students who have a rich life and professional experience.

Based on Dewey's experiential theory and other adopted influential learning theories at the start of the 20 century (such as behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and the work of Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget) David Kolb (1984) claimed that "learning is a holistic process of creating knowledge through transforming experience" (p.41). Subsequently, Kolb (1984) condensed Dewey's six-step educational process by outlining the elements and sequences of learning into the model of the Cycle of Experiential Learning. Besides, Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning includes behavior, cognitive processes, as well as personal and environmental factors. Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning is illustrated in Figure 1 and employed as the conceptual framework of this study.
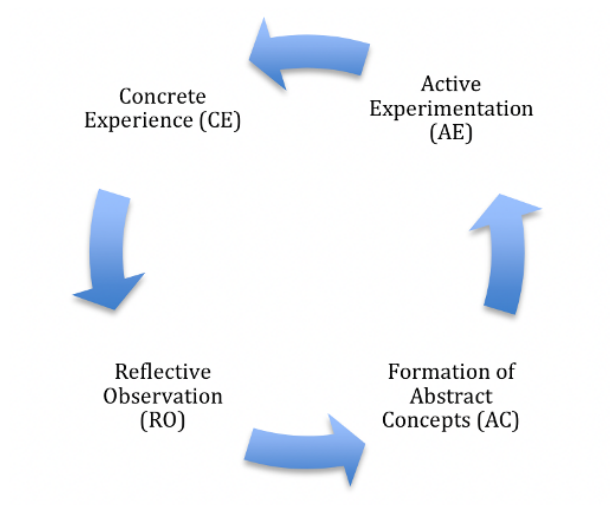
Figure 1: Kolb's (1984, p.21) Cycle of Experiential Learning

Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning includes four stages of learning, which are Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, formation of Abstract Concepts, and Active Experimentation. Kolb depicted learning as a never-ending process, where learners face the conflict between their expectations and experience. The conflict is split into the aforementioned four stages. These four stages are shown in a cycle that demonstrate that learning can start at any one of the stages, but the stages must be attended to in sequence (Kolb, 1984).

Kolb (1984) explained the four stages of the Experiential Learning Cycle as follows: the Concrete Experience stage refers to actively experiencing an activity where learners do, feel, and see things in a material or physical form. In the Reflective Observation state, learners reflect back on the concrete experience as they start thinking about what they experienced and what just happened. Abstract Conceptualization is a stage where based on reflection, learners either construct new ideas or adapt existing theories or concepts of what they observed. Following, in the Active Experimentation stage, learners put their new or renewed views on the world to test if the concepts learned match reality.

Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning fits the purpose of this study to explore nontraditional students' understanding and perceptions of e-SL. Specifically, to explore Research Question 1: *How do lived experiences of nontraditional students shape their orientation towards e-SL?* I considered the Concrete Experience as their personal stories and professional experience that made them who they are. Then, in the Reflective Observation stage, I aimed to explore how nontraditional students reflect on their lived experiences in relation to their expectations, preferences, and satisfaction with e-SL. Next, in the Abstract Concept stage, I focused on how their nontraditional characteristics contribute to or inhibit their understanding of social justice and social issues concepts. Lastly, I regarded the e-SL activity that they participated in as an Active Experimentation where nontraditional students take actions to test and confirm what they learned from life in this e-SL activity with their institution.

As this module shows, learning is in a cycle and never ends. To explore the Research Question: *How do nontraditional students describe their e-SL experience that demonstrates experiential learning elements?* I considered the e-SL activity as a Concrete Experience and delved into nontraditional students' descriptions to examine how, if at all, e-SL provides the opportunity for nontraditional students to experience the four stages of experiential learning.

Adopting the conceptual framework to address Research Question 3: *From nontraditional students' perspectives, what are suggested best practices for developing e-SL in higher education?* I organized participants' suggestions and feedback into the four stages of Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning to see at what stage nontraditional students need more facilitation and what SL professionals can do to advance e-SL development.

Literature Review

Four bodies of literature are included in this review. First, the landscape of traditional on-site SL is provided in the aspects of historical practices of SL in higher education, SL implementation and focuses in higher education today, the critiques and limitations of SL, as well as the desired learning outcomes from on-site SL. By providing the foundational practices and current approaches of SL, this section serves as a background and introduction to the dissertation research and states the importance of SL. Second, the following section of the literature review includes non-pandemic e-SL and pandemic-era-adjusted e-SL. For non-pandemic e-SL, the benefits, limitations, rationale, and focuses of e-SL are presented. For e-SL during the Covid-19 pandemic, the review first includes four case studies to demonstrate potential accommodations SL programs can make and explores e-SL during the pandemic from the perspectives of students, institutions, and community partners. Third, this review identifies the reasons that this dissertation is focused on nontraditional students as well as research gaps. Finally, this chapter ends by summarizing the limitations of the existing research.

The Landscape of On-Site Service Learning

To conduct research on e-SL, first, there must be knowledge of the foundational background of SL in general. In this section, the literature review includes: (1) the historical practice of SL in higher education, (2) SL implementations and focuses in higher education today, which demonstrate the important role SL plays, (3) critiques and limitations of SL, and (4) the desired learning outcomes of on-site SL.

Historical Practices of SL in Higher Education. SL in the U.S. has a long history. Higher education has included SL since President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act in 1862. In 1906, the University of Cincinnati founded the Cooperative Education Movement which

expanded students' academic learning beyond classrooms and laboratories on campus. Though the theoretical roots of SL run deep into the earliest days of the twentieth century with the support of John Dewey and Paulo Freire, SL grew out of the concerns and activism of the 1960s and early 1970s (Giles & Elyer, 1994). Based on the work of cognitive psychologists such as Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner, the prevalence of SL organizations increased in the 1970s and early 1980s. These psychologists argued that learning involves the creation of meaning and is highly individualized (Roso, 2019). In the 1980s, SL developed its grassroots level in higher education.

With the popularity of SL on college and university campuses, in the late 1980s and early 1990s higher education intended to distinguish SL from volunteer work (Deans, 1999). Saltmarsh (1996) points out that SL goes beyond offering students an unpaid job in the community. Rather, it integrates course objectives with community service work and reflection. In the last three decades, the number of institutions offering SL courses and programs has grown tremendously (Campus Compact, 2022). Founded by four presidents in 1985, Campus Compact, a national coalition of colleges and universities committed to the public purposes of higher education, has grown its members to more than 1,100 higher education institutions currently and has engaged more than 20 million students in SL up to 2022 (Campus Compact, 2022).

SL Implementation and Focuses in Higher Education Currently. Within higher education, SL demonstrates its intersectionality and importance in the aspects of education, psychology, and sociology. First, as a form of experiential learning, SL in the educational aspect connects classroom instruction and/or structured reflection with community service activities. It refers to a type of active learning that involves students in a wide range of practices, which often includes students voluntarily serving the marginalized population in the community, while also

advancing the goals of a given curriculum for the respect of human dignity and fighting for social justice (Gelmon et al., 2018). Community-based service activities are a combination of structured preparation and student reflection. The direct application of theoretical models is a feature that makes SL different from traditional classroom teaching (Taylor, 2014). The real-world application of classroom knowledge in a community setting provides students with a bridge to synthesize course material deeply and powerfully (Govekar, 2007).

In implementing SL, in addition to providing community-based service, another critical factor of SL is reflection. It is believed by a private Catholic university in the Midwestern United States that "service without reflection is just work – just another task" (Vincentian Service and Formation, 2022). With a safe place for discussion, reflection is a scheduled consideration for students to share their personal experiences and actively listen to the thoughts and concerns of their colleagues. Various forms of reflection have been applied in higher education, such as journals, blogs, presentations, and discussions (Hatcher et al., 2004). That is, the format of reflection is not limited to face-to-face discussion, which in turn makes it feasible and accessible to include reflection in e-SL.

The expectations and goals of SL programs in education include both developing an in-depth understanding of curricular content and enhancing a sense of civic responsibility through conducting various forms of community service (Smilie, 2019). SL in education offers a way of teaching and learning, and it is mutually beneficial to both students as participants and surrounding communities (Gelmon et al., 2018). Breaking away from traditional classroom learning, SL provides students a chance to connect the knowledge they learned with action. In the meanwhile, they are helping to improve the lives of others in the community (Bish & Lommel, 2016).

Second, as a type of civic learning for public goods, SL psychologically benefits students (Cate & Russ-Eft, 2018). The purpose of SL in psychology is to integrate service into a psychology course aiming at making students understand the knowledge-based in psychology, facilitating students to develop scientific inquiry and critical thinking, developing students' ethical and social responsibility in a real-life world, and helping with students' communication and professional development (Roberts & Edwards, 2015). By collaborating classroom knowledge and skills with community residents and organizations in community-based services, SL in psychology includes activities such as tutoring marginalized children, promoting social change, providing informational brochures, and conducting participatory community action research (You & Rud, 2010). In addition, SL is a compelling educational tool that facilitates undergraduate psychology students to improve their personal, scholarly, and professional outcomes through civic engagement (Kretchmar, 2001).

Third, SL in sociology focuses on the transfer of theoretical knowledge from academic settings to the community field, by providing opportunities to investigate social issues (Bish & Lommel, 2016). The purpose of SL in sociology is to apply sociological concepts and principles to service practice and strengthen students' personal understanding of sociological imagination (Arellano & Stephanie, 2018; Roso, 2019). Through experience gained in the community, SL in sociology relates participants to the selected sites and helps develop a greater understanding and appreciation for the human agency (Taylor & Kahlke, 2017). By applying classroom theory to practice, SL makes students recognize the significance of their own contribution to the community. In this way, it increases the sense of personal social belonging and the sense of social responsibility (Bish & Lommel, 2016). Moreover, SL in sociology provides students opportunities to interact with community stakeholders in identifying and clarifying a community

issue, as well as conducting a sustainable project to support them in dealing with the issues in their role as social advocates (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008). Thus, the importance of SL can be demonstrated in its intersectionality from the perspectives of education, psychology, and sociology.

In general, in U.S. higher education today, six major qualities have been emphasized: integrative, contextualized, strength-based, reflective, reciprocal, and lifelong (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008; Maddux & Donnett, 2015; Roberts & Edwards, 2015). Integrative refers to SL going beyond the idea of traditional classroom teaching and learning, rather, it integrates class learning objectives with students' genuine practice in community service (Maddux & Donnett, 2015). SL is also contextualized, as students access knowledge and expertise in the unpredictable and complex context of the real-world community (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008). Similarly, a strength-based approach is used in SL, that is, it emphasizes the capacity and expertise of each community, rather than what is absent (Roberts & Edwards, 2015). These six major qualities demonstrate the focus of SL in higher education and provide guidance in seeking best practices of e-SL in this study.

Moreover, SL is a reciprocal practice, it is mutually beneficial for students, faculty within the institution, and community members (Arellano & Jones, 2018; Clayton et al., 2013). Chupp & Joseph (2010) argued that to maximize SL impact, it is critical to intentionally aim for impact on students, on the academic institution, and on the community (see Figure 2).
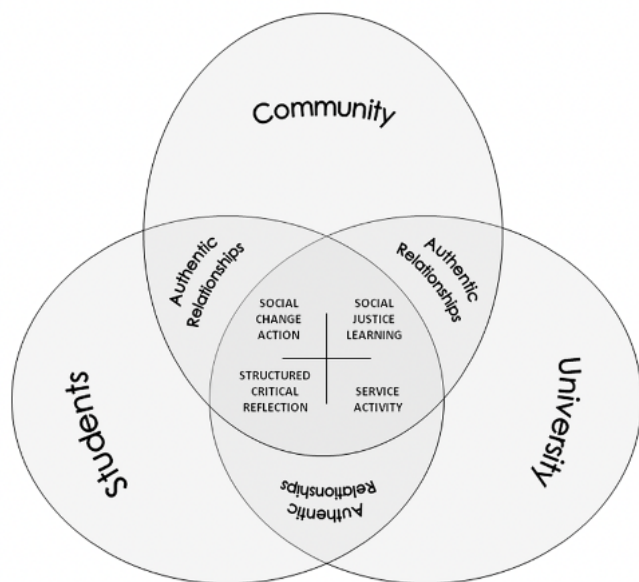
Figure 2: Maximizing service-learning impact (Chupp & Joseph, 2010, p.207)

Students invest time and intellectual capital to gain a deeper understanding of social issues; course instructors modify their teaching practice to incorporate students' field study, while community members receive the help they need and support the students' learning goals and institutional missions (Maddux & Donnett, 2015). Through SL, students build relationships, solve problems, and gain self-awareness. Thus, SL is more than a course but lifelong learning for continual personal growth (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008). For example, Fogle et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative exploration where they interviewed fourteen undergraduate students who participated in SL at an urban Catholic and Marianist university. This study found that: (1) participants deepened their understanding of faith-based service and the mission of their university; (2) through the social and cultural dynamics of navigating on and off-campus life, students built strong relationships with their peers and community members; and (3) by experiencing the roots of social justice, SL helped students confirm and reconsider their professional development.

Additionally, SL is also utilized by faculty in universities to advance their scholarship of teaching and learning, as well as to affect student learning (Arellano & Jones, 2018; Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2017). For example, Arellano and Jones (2018) conducted a qualitative instrumental case study where they interviewed seven faculty at a private research university, who had at least three years of experience with SL. The faculty as participants in this study suggested that SL provided them the opportunity to look at societal issues and current problems that interest them. Meanwhile, teaching SL enhances their teaching in various ways, especially making them more thoughtful in not only students' academic achievement but also moral and emotional growth. Thus, SL benefits both students' learning, faculty's teaching, and the teacher-student relationships.

Lastly, besides benefiting students and faculty as service providers, SL also benefits community partners and populations being served (Gan, 2018; Howell et al., 2021). An appropriate SL activity should keep a good balance in addressing students' needs, university goals, and community needs.

Critiques and Limitations of SL. While an increasing number of higher education institutions incorporate SL as a course for undergraduate students, careful attention should be taken to assess students' actions and outcomes (Cate & Russ-Eft, 2018). Some problems have been found in the practice of SL, such as the students have not interacted with the people they served, the arrangement of service sites not according to students' interests, and after-service reflection has not been practiced after each service (Maddux & Donnett, 2015). For example, an explanatory methods design with 142 participants used by Bamber and Hankin (2011) at a faith-based higher education institution revealed, in undergraduate students' SL courses, only twenty-five percent of students were able to develop a transformed view of the world and showed

changes in their social action. Therefore, regular assessment and evaluation should be conducted for SL in regard to determining students' expectations and learning outcomes.

Further, the evaluation and assessment of SL are also doubted by scholars. Taylor (2014) asserted that the majority of measured outcomes of SL were program evaluations and were self-reported. The evaluation tends to be influenced by the interest in program satisfaction, as a result, it pays less attention to measuring students' success. Similarly, Rudolph (2014) suggests the evaluation and assessment of SL inside one university are always conducted by the faculty or staff who work in that university, and there might be biases in data collection or data analysis. Also, community partners and universities may have different measures to determine if SL is successful. For example, the non-profit sector measures success by a tangible benefit that favors the organization, while the university sector measures success based on students' learning outcomes (Abravanel, 2003). Thus, reliable and transparent methods of evaluation for SL are needed.

In addition, the overrepresentation of certain identities over others is another concern of SL (Carter Andrews, 2009; Irwin & Foste, 2021; Jones & Abes, 2004). Baldwin and colleagues (2007) observed that SL participants in higher education are predominantly white, female, middle-class students, whereas the population being served are marginalized groups located in low-income communities of color. What's worse, Mitchell (2008) argued the racial, economic, and social gap between service providers and recipients may involve students in the community in a way that maintains inequality and reinforces already unjust social structures. While the demographic information has been revealed regarding on-site SL, there is a lack of research on whether participants' demographic backgrounds stay consistent with e-SL participants.

Three historical barriers to SL have been revealed: faculty members' resistance or flat-out refusal to engage in SL projects or programs, inadequate funding and a lack of institutional support, and concerns over the safety of students and the potential liability of the school (Kolenko et al., 1996). Additionally, from participants' perspectives, Rosing et al. (2010) disclosed the top three complaints from SL students, which include concern about their placement in the community, the university's choice of sites that may have been inappropriate, and the issues with time and scheduling.

Develop Critical SL to Overcome the Limitations of Traditional SL. In the early 21st century, with the increasing critiques of traditional SL for emphasizing charity rather than social change (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004), reinforcing social hierarchies and patronization (Forbes et al., 1999; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002), and neglecting SL pedagogy's influence and effectiveness (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002; Butin, 2006), the trends of SL development are moving toward the concept of *critical SL* (Mitchell, 2008). Mitchell (2007) argued that critical SL is different from traditional SL in that, rather than emphasizing students to spend a predetermined number of hours in service and reflection on the connection between service and the course, it is a pedagogy that links SL and social justice education. This pedagogy integrates meaningful service in the community with thoughtful introductions, analyses, and discussions of issues that import to an understanding of social justice.

Critical SL focuses on the root causes of social change on inequality by addressing the redistribution of power and the development of authentic relationships (Santiago-Ortiz, 2019; Tinkler et al., 2014). Ultimately, critical SL participants are encouraged to think critically and act creatively to achieve social change (Mitchell, 2007). Yoder (2009) asserted that when SL participants are able to find meaning in their work, then critical SL can be considered truly

effective. Nowadays, SL scholars and practitioners advocate for critical SL. Mthethwa-Sommers (2020) asserted that critical SL is a compelling teaching and learning method, in which community engagement is centered on understanding and transformation of power. Similarly, Dowel and Meidl (2018) revealed the intention of critical SL is to deconstruct and address systemic imbalances of power. They further clarified that though critical SL shares the common feature of traditional SL where reciprocity is valued, a distinguishing factor is that reciprocity is balanced amongst members of the community. Most recently, Badgett (2022) argued that it is critical SL that challenges systemic causes of inequity in sustained partnership with the community by facilitating reflection on the service providers' and recipients' relationship to structural oppression.

In order to deliver reciprocal community engagement, critical SL highly emphasizes the partnerships and collaborations between universities and communities (Mitchell, 2008; Tinkler et al., 2014). Hammersley (2012) argued community partner conceptualizations of the best practice approaches are the core of developing critical SL. In critical SL, the community defines some of the issues that are addressed in SL collaboration, while increasing students' awareness of the community issues (Mitchell, 2008). Bahng's (2015) case study showed in addition to facilitating social change and political advocacy, long-term relationships with community partners can also create reciprocal gains for all parties involved. Educators must pay attention to community partners' perspectives in order to meet the objectives of critical SL.

In short, to develop e-SL, educators must take the criticisms and concerns of traditional on-site SL in mind and enhance the development of critical SL.

Desired Learning Outcomes from On-Site SL. SL has been abundantly researched and is associated with positive outcomes for students (Werder & Strand, 2011). Learning outcomes

that have been discussed in existing literature include 1) personal and interpersonal outcomes, 2) civic and social outcomes, 3) relationships with the institution, and 4) further involvement or career development.

Students develop personal and interpersonal outcomes through participating in SL. Werder and Strand (2011) pointed out that SL helps students build self-efficacy by flourishing personal identity, spiritual growth, and moral development, demonstrating that students gained personal outcomes from their SL participation. Similarly, Caruso and colleagues (2006) reported that SL helps students encounter people from different racial and ethnic groups, which results in an increased understanding of one's privilege, personal efficacy, and self-esteem. In addition, teamwork and cooperation are largely incorporated in SL, which helped participants learn to build relationships with others (Giles & Eyler, 1994) and awakened personal values and identity development (Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012; Mann & DeAngelo, 2016).

Besides personal and interpersonal outcomes, scholars brought up social outcomes from SL, such as reducing stereotypes and greater intercultural understanding, improving social responsibility and citizenship skills, and enhancing awareness of social issues (Cate & Russ-Eft, 2018; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Nagashima (2020) in her review concluded that one of the most consistent findings on students' SL outcomes is the increasing social responsibility. That is, as a result of participating in SL, students are more inclined to believe that they are strongly connected to their community, to appreciate the importance of service, to endorse systems-based approaches to solving social issues, and to respect and value different cultures (Giles & Eyler, 1996; Mitchell, 2008).

In addition to learning outcomes regarding self and society, several studies stated that SL could create stronger relationships with peers, staff, and faculty (Jacoby, 2014), greater overall

satisfaction with college (Roberts & Edwards, 2015), and build a sense of belonging with the institution's community (D'Agostino, 2010; Jacoby, 2014). In traditional on-site SL studies, a promising connection has been found between SL participation and college students' retention (Bringle et al., 2010). Bringle et al. (2010) asserted that compared to non-SL students, students who completed an SL course had a higher intention to re-enroll at their campus. The significant contribution of SL to students' college experience and retention makes SL one of the most critical high-impact practices in higher education (Kuh, 2008).

Lastly, Salam and colleagues (2019) found that SL provides the opportunity for participants to make connections with professionals and community members which influence students' further involvement and career development. Likewise, Celio et al. (2011) stated that SL participants showed a commitment to future community service and SL even shifted students' career choices and lifestyles.

SL plays an important role in higher education, which can be demonstrated by the critical learning outcomes from the aspects of personal and interpersonal outcomes, civic and social outcomes, relationships with the institution, and further involvement or career development. These learning outcomes are based on traditional on-site SL, to explore the best practices of e-SL, this study focuses on addressing whether e-SL can also result in learning outcomes in these four aspects.

Best Practices of Service Learning. Universities, students, and communities served are the three major parties in SL. Therefore, best practices of SL require effort from all parties and demand authentic relationships between stakeholders (Chupp & Joseph, 2010; Jacoby, 2014). To contribute to the best practices of SL, SL professionals in the university should establish defined learning outcomes (Moely et al., 2008; Schwehm et al., 2017). For credit-based SL courses,

established learning goals appearing in syllabi could direct students to relate the service to the course content and objectives (Bandy, 2016). At the same time, the goal of SL is not merely for students. It is about building reciprocal relationships with communities (Hammersley, 2012). For this reason, universities as the connector between students and communities, should align learning objectives with community goals (Butin, 2010; Jacoby, 2014).

Additionally, to achieve learning objectives and community goals, adequate in-class time for both conducting service and completing structured reflection are essential (Gopal et al., 2021; Govekar & Rishi, 2007). Students in best practices of SL should receive instructions and guidance in connecting their experience to the content of the courses (Bradford, 2005). When conducting the service, students should be mindful of the needs and limitations of the populations and communities being served (Campbell et al., 2020). Student leadership is an important part of SL (Caruso et al., 2006). Thus, involving students in the planning process and selecting student leaders could be beneficial for SL. Lastly, best practices of SL require the collaboration of community partners (Chupp & Joseph, 2010). Community partners should identify their current needs and goals as well as keep timely communication with the university and students (Griffin et al., 2011).

In conclusion, by referring to SL in a historical context, exploring the value of SL in different disciplines, the limitations of SL in higher education, and identifying typical desired learning outcomes, this section provides an overview of the landscape and background information of traditional on-site SL. To explore the potential of the development of e-SL, we cannot ignore the foundational knowledge of traditional on-site SL. After reviewing the basis of SL, the following two sections examine the literature regarding non-pandemic e-SL and pandemic-era-adjustment of e-SL.

Non-Pandemic Virtual SL

The social distancing order and travel restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic have shifted the way education is delivered. In the U.S., campuses were closed in March 2020, along with the majority of coursework and student activities transformed into online platforms. SL educators have also continuously navigated alternative ways to respond o these shifting circumstances. The crisis of the pandemic has significantly promoted the practice of virtual SL, however, conducting SL remotely is not a brand-new pedagogy. While SL is known as an educational approach that combines community service with academic coursework or structured reflection (Jacoby, 2014), the term e-service-learning, or virtual service learning refers to a form of online education when the coursework, reflection session, and/or the service is conducted virtually (Waldner et al., 2012).

Advocators of e-SL believe that with no geographical constraints, e-SL favors global citizenship and intercultural dialogue, as well as promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education. However, scholars and practitioners who oppose virtual practice are hesitant to admit the value and effectiveness of e-SL. Facing the Covid-19 crisis and looking forward, it is critical to investigate the non-pandemic e-SL at this point, because it demonstrates the benefits of virtual learning settings, navigates the limitation of online learning, and offers the needs and direction for further development. To understand the emergence and practice of e-SL pre-pandemic, this section presents the benefits, limitations, rationale, and focuses of non-pandemic e-SL.

The Benefits of E-Service Learning. Prior to the breakout of the Covid-19 pandemic, the feasibility and benefits of incorporating online learning into community-engaged work were revealed. Distance education scholars proposed the argument that online learning can facilitate,

rather than inhibit, community-engaged pedagogies (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2012; Garca-Gutierrez et al., 2017; Gasper-Hulvat, 2018; Purcell, 2017). Engaging with literature regarding non-pandemic e-SL, this section articulates that e-SL not only grants its unique advantages, such as being free from geographical and logistical constraints (Garca-Gutierrez et al.,2017; Harris, 2017; Sandy & Franco, 2014) but also offers comparable benefits to on-site SL (McGorry, 2012; Schwehm et al., 2017; Wong & Lau, 2022). Respectively, these advantages of e-SL contribute to global citizenship, and intercultural dialogue, and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

  Promote Global Citizenship and Intercultural Dialogue. E-SL is free from place-based constraints, which connect individuals through the internet and subsequently favors international SL by eliminating traveling and logistical concerns. Several SL studies that reported students gained a sense of global awareness due to physically traveling to a different country (Annette, 2002; Drnach et al., 2016; Kohlbry, 2016). However, two case studies (Garca-Gutierrez, et al., 2017; Harris, 2017) that adopted e-SL before the pandemic also demonstrated that both service providers (student participants) and people being served have developed open and respectful views toward different cultures and gained deeper understanding of global citizenship. These two e-SL programs started with different aims but resulted in the same theme of global awareness as one of the student learning outcomes. Garca-Gutierrez et al.'s (2017) study included an e-SL program that aimed at promoting the Spanish language and cultural exchange while supporting students who have limited resources (scholarships and grants) to travel to the target-language countries. Differently, Harris' (2017) case study focused on utilizing computer-mediated communication to promote global digital networks while solving international problems. In spite of the focus on language exchange or technology advancement, participants in both studies

showed that collaboration and connection were built between students from two different countries, meanwhile, both parties developed a deeper understanding of the other culture and consider themselves global citizens. The learning results of students who developed intercultural dialogue and gained the awareness of global citizenship without physically stepping into a different country affirm the value and significance of e-SL.

Demonstrate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The liberation of SL from geographical constraints not only favors global citizenship and intercultural dialogue, but also promotes DEI in higher education. With the increasing diversity of the population and the awareness of social justice, the term DEI has been increasingly incorporated into the mission of higher education (Barnett, 2020). Back in 2012, Wilson et al. (2012) employed a study that used institutional websites to examine mission statements. They presented that among the 80 higher education institutions that they selected for the study, 75% referenced diversity in their mission statement. More recently, Barnett (2020) conducted a comprehensive review and stated that higher education is dedicated to increasing diversity, promoting equity, and enhancing inclusion. While there is no current literature that demonstrates the value of e-SL in promoting DEI, based on the accessible nature of e-SL, I suggest that e-SL substantially contributes to DEI in a way beyond the contribution of on-site SL.

While on-site SL focuses on serving the local community, e-SL promotes diversity given that it is conducted online, thus, providing more opportunity for both service participants and people served from different locations and backgrounds regarding race, gender, religion, nationality, socioeconomic status, language, (dis)ability, age, etc. (Guthrie & McCracken, 2010). For example, Purcell (2017) argued online learning simplifies SL by offering relatively accessible opportunities for populations that otherwise would have difficulties participating.

These populations may include but are not limited to adult students with family responsibilities, students with disabilities, students with time constraints, and commuter students (Purcell, 2017; Veyvoda & Van Cleave; 2020). Therefore, e-SL favors diversity by enrolling and engaging more student populations that were not able to participate in on-site SL.

Besides demonstrating diversity, e-SL promotes equity by serving isolated areas. E-SL offers equal access to service opportunities regardless of the institution's location in urban and rural areas and open access to students no matter whether they are on-campus or taking distance education. E-SL is free from place-based constraints, which primarily benefits institutions in rural areas where there are few community organizations and students find it hard to get access to public transportation (Jacoby, 2014). Additionally, e-SL substantially enhances remote learning, and students' involvement, and remedies the disconnected and unengaging issues of distance education (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2012).

Lastly, e-SL demonstrates inclusion by creating a sense of belonging to participants and making students feel safe and welcomed, especially when they are reflecting. Guthrie and McCracken (2014) researched an online SL course and argued that the use of technology in an e-SL platform makes reflection easier and more meaningful. This is because participants in the e-SL program reported strong learning from the open discussion (Guthrie & McCracken, 2014). Further, Guthrie and McCracken (2014) claimed when implemented in a technology-rich learning environment, active discussions and structured assignments are conducive to personal reflection and collaborative learning. Moreover, though some researchers believe communicating through digital devices would result in loss of interpersonal contact, Gasper-Hulvat (2018) claimed that e-SL provides a safe place where students stay in a comfortable environment as their choice to reflect on their experience with fewer distractions and consequently stimulates

students' critical thinking more authentically. Thus, e-SL creates an inclusive environment and is believed to support students' reflection.

In sum, by freeing from geographical and place-based constraints, e-SL promotes DEI by opening a door for participants from different backgrounds, offering open access to institutions regarding their location and equal access for a wider range of the population, as well as offering a comfortable environment based on students' choice to conduct authentic reflection.

Comparable Learning Outcomes of On-Site Service Learning. In addition to the exclusive benefits of virtual formats, SL that is conducted online shares comparable learning outcomes to on-site SL. Three studies published between 2012 and 2022 reported a comparison of learning outcomes for postsecondary students in on-site SL and e-SL (McGorry, 2012; Schwehm et al., 2017; Wong & Lau, 2022). All three studies asserted that in general, no significant difference was found regarding different formats of SL, but slightly distinguished learning outcomes were brought up by each research.

McGorry (2012) employed a case study to address a comparison of students' experience in traditional SL and e-SL. With seventy-five students enrolled in traditional courses and thirty in online courses, a 12-item survey was administered. The survey compared four aspects of students' learning outcomes: practical skills, interpersonal skills, citizenship, and personal responsibility. An analysis using t-tests concluded that there was no significant difference in outcomes between online and face-to-face models. Similarly, Wong and Lau (2022) adopted mixed-method research to explore the effectiveness of e-SL and made a comparison to students who participated in traditional SL. The quantitative results reported similar findings that there was no significant difference between the two modalities. However, the qualitative analysis found that e-SL appears to slightly outperform traditional SL based on students' descriptions of

their commitment and constant reflection. Earlier, Schwehm et al.'s (2017) mixed method

research compared 112 students' learning outcomes and concluded that students overall had

similar service experiences regardless of online or on-site delivery. However, their quantitative

analysis adopted a one-way ANOVA and revealed a statistically significant difference in the

learning outcome in the aspect of civic responsibility. Especially, on-site service students

achieved greater civic responsibility learning outcomes than their online peers.

Thus, similar learning outcomes show that e-SL and traditional on-site SL demonstrate

comparable value. However, the differences found in Schwehm et al.'s (2017) and Wong and

Lau (2022) suggested that e-SL and on-site SL can be adopted based on different purposes. As

Marcus and colleagues' (2020) systematic review of e-SL argued "different project of SL

requires different needs and not one size fits all" (p.10). In this way, it is critical to explore the

best practices of SL and e-SL to fit the needs of students, institutions, and community partners.

Limitations and Critiques of e-SL. Admittedly, e-SL presents limitations, and a group

of SL professionals doubts its value and effectiveness. The limitations and concerns mentioned

by existing literature include the following three aspects: (1) course planning and

communication, (2) the use of technology, and (3) experiential learning objectives.

First, one major concern of e-SL is course planning and communication. From the

perspectives of faculty and SL professionals, Jia et al. (2018) asserted the concerns and

challenges of implementing e-SL include communication difficulties with community partners, a

disconnect between classroom expectations and project requirements, and inadequate project

orientation and expectations. Likewise, Griffin et al. (2011) believed that to develop a successful

e-SL activity, it is essential for service providers to be flexible, think collaboratively and

creatively, as well as be prepared to address unexpected situations. Thus, to develop e-SL activities, effective communication and thorough planning should be emphasized.

Technology is undoubtedly a key component of e-SL. An inevitable limitation of e-SL is digital inequities, which include both digital access and digital efficacy (Williams et al., 2021). Marginalized students and students from low-income families would have difficulty gaining access to digital devices and high-speed internet or finding a safe space when participating in SL online (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). Additionally, taking part in an online education program such as e-SL may result in a heavy reliance on websites and digital tools as well (Hameed et al., 2008). Scholars believe the use of technology has the potential to result in unanticipated time and financial costs (Klein and Ware, 2003; Marc, 2002).

Moreover, technology involvement in e-SL brings both challenges and opportunities. While utilizing digital devices allows reason and expansion of some learning activities that were not able to be achieved in on-site SL (Marcus et al., 2020), SL in a virtual environment may cause discomfort with technology (Arellano & Jones, 2018). Smeltzer and colleagues (2020) argued that for various personal and academic reasons, students on Zoom are less likely to divulge concerns, express apprehensions, or boast successes compared to in-person sessions, which makes it challenging for group reflection in SL.

Last but not least, as a form of experiential education, SL emphasizes the hands-on, minds-on experience (Deans, 1999; Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008; Hildreth, 2012). Based on the theoretical roots of SL according to John Dewey, the in-person experience to step into the community and gain real-world experience is an essential part of SL (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Pacho, 2015; Rudolph, 2014). However, the virtual learning environment could not be regarded as the best way to promote human-to-human contact, which largely limits the opportunities for

team building, role-playing, brainstorming, and dialogue. In addition, SL is a pedagogy that connects students, universities, and communities (Jacoby, 2014; Taylor, 2014). While some types of SL, such as indirect SL, research-based service learning, and advocacy SL might be relatively feasible to transform into an online format, the direct SL that connects to marginalized populations may be hard to conduct virtually. In this way, e-SL presents a limitation in addressing the needs of community partners who demand hands-on support.

The Rationale and Focuses of e-Service Learning. After exploring the benefits and challenges of implementing e-SL, it is critical to delve into the predominant rationale and identity of the initial focuses of developing e-SL. While virtual SL has been largely prompted as an adjustment response to the pandemic, the origin calls for virtual SL can be retrospect to the time when online courses, online degrees, and distance learning programs became prosperous at the beginning of the 21st century. Allen and Seaman (2007) reported that during the 2006-2007 academic years, distance education courses, including online or hybrid courses, were offered by 66% of higher education institutions in the U.S. Further, Allen and Seaman (2010) found that "in 2010, 63% of all traditional schools agreed that online education was critical to their future class offering" (p.125). With the increasing growth rate of online course enrollment and a substantial number of students enrolled in online classes in U.S. higher education institutions, it is promising that online learning plays and will continue to play an essential role in higher education.

Similar to Allen and Seaman (2010), Soria and Weiner (2013) argued that due to the changes in the technological and pedagogical environment, it is essential to investigate approaches to incorporate traditional face-to-face learning techniques into distance learning. Pointedly, one study in 2012 presented that as the online student population has grown, the pace of growth of SL offerings has not kept pace (Waldner et al., 2012). Thus, in order to respond to

the development of online teaching and learning, as well as serve the needs of remote learners, it is critical to develop e-SL.

Waldner et al. (2012) believe that e-SL is "an ideal marriage" (p. 126) of online learning and SL, as it holds the potential to transform both endeavors while overcoming the limitations of both pedagogies. Three focuses of developing effective e-SL are pointed out in the literature: technology, communication, and course design. Students, community partners, and SL organizers can receive thorough training with the appropriate use of technology synchronously and asynchronously (Chen et al, 2011). Without face-to-face interaction, clear expectations and timely communication are critical for developing e-SL (Guthrie & McCracken, 2014). Moreover, course design should take both the learning objectives and community partners' needs into consideration (Jacoby, 2014). Admittedly, compared to on-site SL, the e-SL practice remains scarce in higher education. E-SL has not been largely practiced due to the need for in-person service from host communities (Bennion & McLauchlan, 2020), and the challenges in curriculum design, access to technology, and remote collaboration (Arellano & Jones, 2018).

Best Practices of e-SL. When implementing and evaluating online SL projects, four areas are critical and should be considered as best practices of e-SL: tools and technology, course design, communication strategies, and relationship building (Helms et al., 2015; Becker et al., 2020). Further, Guthrie and McCracken (2010) suggested that according to the specific service mission of each institution, educators may focus on one area more than the others.

For tools and technology, e-SL professionals can work to ensure communication between community partners and students, on top of making sure participants are trained and have access to use course-required tools (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015; Williams et al., 2021). For course design, the following aspects should be emphasized: reciprocity, serving community-identified

needs, working toward social justice, integrating service with course content, and reflection (Matheson & Petersen, 2020; Strait & Sauer, 2004). Additionally, when SL moved to an online environment, clear and frequent communication with all parties became essential to make e-SL successful (Chen et al., 2011; Harris, 2017). Jacoby (2014) claimed with any SL partnership, regardless of delivery mode, it is important to have a clear understanding of what everyone will contribute and what they are expecting from each other. Lastly, relationship building could not be overlooked in e-SL, as it is a core component of effective SL approaches (Jacoby, 2014). Becker et al. (2020) believed interpersonal skills can be achieved in e-SL by including relationship-building events, meetings, and/or assignments. In short, with a focus on the aspects of tools and technology, course design, communication strategies, and relationship building, the best practice of e-SL can be achieved.

E-SL During Covid-19 Pandemic

Though e-SL during Covid shares comparable advantages and challenges with e-SL before the pandemic, the time-sensitive nature of this crisis forced creative and innovative responses from SL professionals to balance the goal of student success, the mission, and the requirements of institutions, as well as the needs and capability of community partners. Social distancing orders and quarantine requirements made it impractical and unsafe to continue on-site service learning. While a large number of universities canceled and postponed their SL based on a conviction that SL is a hands-on experience where students build deep connections through immersion in situations, other institutions are earnestly seeking alternative ways to sustain their work and advance SL in a new era.

Highlights and Outcomes of Pandemic-Adjusted Service Learning. A leading adjustment to continue SL during Covid is to transform direct service into indirect service, advocacy-based service, and research- or project-based services. For example, an SL project at Buffalo State College adjusted its direct service of screening a child in person to analyze video proxy (Doody et al, 2020). At DePaul University, the annual Vincentian Service Day was also delivered virtually with activities such as facemask making, letter writing, technology help, and small donations (Tian & Noel, 2020). Moreover, a community-based social justice work, Lift as You Climb, at DePaul University shifted the focus of its work from directly serving marginalized youth to serving the teachers and counselors who support the target population (Tian et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing formed an SL program connecting nursing students with the elderly in hospitals through regular phone-based support (Gresh, et al, 2020).

Specifically, Doody et al. (2021) presented an SL project that was forced to be transformed into online activities during the Covid. This SL project includes undergraduate students majoring in psychology and speech-language pathology and graduates in special education. Participants in this project are required to complete developmental screenings as peer mentors to children within the communities surrounding their urban-engaged campus. Prior to Covid, the project required in-person planning and face-to-face interactions with children during the screening process. Facing Covid, while service activities with physical connection are not possible to conduct, participants in this project are offered an alternative to watching the unused training videos that former students created. The result showed that students still gained the opportunity to learn critical developmental screening skills. But the qualitative analyses

identified students missed flexibility, communication, and collaboration. In addition, this service offered little help to meet community needs.

Moreover, two community-based social justice projects at DePaul University gained positive outcomes and provided feasible alternatives to survive the virtual era. Tian and Noel (2020) presented a case study of the virtual Vincentian Service Day at DePaul. The Vincentian Service Day is an annual tradition at DePaul where hundreds of students, staff, faculty, and alumni gather together and conduct a one-day SL project. In 2020, various virtual service options were provided for participants to give back to the community. The activities include facemask making, letter writing, research help, video making, and a small donation. Qualitative analysis of students' feedback showed that e-SL is accessible and understandable, and it is possible to achieve cooperation and interaction virtually.

Separately, another SL project at the College of Education at DePaul presented a project named Lift as You Climb as one example of an alternative approach to the Catholic value of promoting human rights and the common good during the Covid (Tian et al., 2020). This project partnered with a local non-profit organization and a public school. Facing Covid, while it was difficult to connect with students in the school that they were serving, the research team shifted their focus and supported the teachers and counselors who serve their target population. In addition, the research team changed their focus of organizing service activities, to advocacy-based, research-based service learning. By reflecting on the challenges and success of pandemic-era-adjustment, the researchers highlight the importance of exploring alternative ways to continue to work in solidarity for social justice.

Additionally, the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing formed an SL program connecting nursing students with the elderly in hospitals. On-site service was conducted prior to Covid,

however, in response to the social distancing order, the project shifted to regular phone-based support (Gresh et al., 2020). By analyzing students' surveys, this study suggested that distance SL activities during Covid reduced social isolation and improved health equity. It is believed that the pandemic crisis promoted the university community to build their partnership regarding work collaboration and creatively address community needs and meet student learning objectives (Gresh et al., 2020).

In sum, the four case studies presented SL professionals' different efforts at the early stage of Covid by quickly shifting their program activities in order to continue SL during quarantine. These cases have all been interrupted by the outbreak of Covid, but they reported pandemic-adjusted endeavors in different ways, which include conducting asynchronous service, emphasizing advocate-based indirect service, and delivering synchronous service using digital devices.

Since Covid-19 remains to be an ongoing threat for more than two years, and hybrid learning mode tends to be considered a trend in the post-pandemic era, at this time, educators must reflect on their attempts and the lessons learned. As students, institutions, and communities are the three principal stakeholders of SL in higher education, the following sections present and analyze the lessons learned from the aspects of student participants, SL educators in higher education institutes, and host communities.

Students as Service Providers. In SL, student participants serve as the major body providing service to target communities. They are expected to learn about the cultures and lifestyles of people from different backgrounds, fulfill the duties to serve host communities, and participate in critical reflections regarding their SL experiences (Bandy, 2016; Butin, 2010; Thomson et al., 2011). In this section, two themes are addressed: 1) students' perceptions of e-

SL during Covid and 2) suggestions to work with students that have been brought up by literature.

Students' Perceptions of e-SL During Covid. The Covid-19 pandemic caused a rapid and often disjointed transition to e-SL. While limited research has been conducted to explore the effectiveness of e-SL during the pandemic, a handful of studies below present some perceptions of students who participated in e-SL (Doody et al, 2020; Grenier et al., 2020; Merkin, 2020). For instance, in the Doody et al. (2020) study, a collaborative SL project is formed to connect psychology and speech-language pathology undergraduate students and special education graduate students with young children by completing developmental screenings. While Covid shifted face-to-face service to video watching, participants believed virtual service brought convenience to them, but they missed out on experiencing it (Doody et al, 2020). Although virtual learning offers limited hands-on experience and physical connection, Grenier et al. (2020) suggested that online interaction facilitates communication and collaboration, and students are able to stay in solidarity to overcome challenges.

Compared to coordinating with community partners, it is more accessible to reach out to students and transform reflections into online platforms. This is because the trust and open communication between educators and students was already built and the existing relationship made it possible to promote service learning during the pandemic (Grenier et al, 2020). Similarly, Doody et al. (2020) stated that resilience, perseverance, and innovation are demonstrated between faculty and students due to a formed relationship. The formed relationship between faculty and students offers a strong connection which made it possible for faculty and students to work in solidarity during the Covid virtually. For example, Grenier et al. (2020) listed the efforts they made to transit into online learning, including continuing with community

builders and exploring alternatives to work in virtual scenarios together. The teamwork between faculty and students aroused innovation and showed resilience. While the Covid-19 pandemic prevents students from serving in the community, the awareness of social issues and community needs has not necessarily been impacted negatively. For example, the research conducted at UCLA with 103 students who participated in e-SL with older adults shows that at least 50% of students reported that Covid increased their awareness of the needs of older adults (Merkin, 2020).

Though several studies have been presented as examples to explore alternative ways to conduct SL during the pandemic (Grenier et al, 2020; Lin & Shek, 2021; Meija, 2020; Merkin, 2020), further research can be done to explore best practices that advance e-SL in the long run and meet the needs of different student populations.

Suggestions to Work with Students. Valuable suggestions were provided by SL practitioners regarding working with students during Covid and better serving students' needs and health. First, developing virtual SL needs to take students' mental and emotional well-being into consideration. For example, with a sample of 962 participants, Chan et al. (2022) revealed that Covid-19 restriction on interactions increases loneliness, stress, and anxiety levels among young adults. Additionally, a multi-tiered SL mentoring program was formed during Covid and employed multiple levels of mentoring, such as faculty-faculty, faculty-graduate student, graduate student-undergraduate student, and undergraduate student-undergraduate student, in order to support students' mental and emotional health (Grenier et al., 2020). The mentorship offered space and support for SL stakeholders to reflect and engage more deeply with solid connections (Grenier et al., 2020). Moreover, research focused on international students' accounts concluded that one of the positive effects of SL activities in the pandemic situation is

that it builds students' creativity and maintains participants' positive feelings even when connected with others over the internet (Nurfaidah et al, 2020).

Additionally, implementing student-led activities is another piece of advice to furnish SL during the pandemic. Leadership plays an important role in SL, as students have a platform to practice socially responsible leadership, servant leadership, and social entrepreneurship (Jacoby, 2014). When moving online, it is critical to keep student-led community-building activities with the goal of engaging all members to learn about and from one another (Grenier et al., 2020). In sum, as the primary service providers, it is essential to address students' needs and explore students' perceptions regarding conducting SL virtually.

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Institutions as Connectors. In SL, institutions play a critical role in connecting students with target communities, along with demonstrating the missions of the institutions. During Covid, SL would not be able to sustain itself without the endeavor of course instructors, student affairs professionals, and campus ministers (Grilo et al., 2020). SL organizers take the responsibility to sort out and communicate with community partners in order to initiate SL partnerships (Bringle et al., 2012). Additionally, it is the SL organizers who articulate the relationship between SL activities and academic objectives, as well as create project descriptions

that outline the process of student engagement (Howard, 2001). During Covid, while some institutions showed difficulties in connecting students and meeting community needs (Campbell et al., 2020), others believed that they were able to salvage their current SL practices and completed in alternative ways during Covid (Doody et al, 2020; Lin & Shek, 2021; Tian & Noel, 2020). While SL educators navigate delivering virtual placement with a sense of doubt, Meija (2020) offers a tentative sense of hope by advocating that community-engaged educators should go beyond the existing resources provided by their universities and emphasize community-building and societal transformation with their discipline's intellectual margins.

Community Needs Come First. In SL, the host communities orient service participants to the community needs and/or the goals of non-profit organizations, offer meaningful and valuable work to students regarding social issues, and provide a safe service environment (Jacoby, 2014). Beaman and Davidson (2020) proposed that in SL, the current and ongoing needs of the host communities should be regarded as the first and most important priority. Understanding and addressing the particular needs of the community is the key for SL to being effective (Jacoby, 2014). Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic impedes the way SL is delivered and it is extremely challenging to meet the needs of the host community. Much of social justice work relies on face-to-face contact and direct service and it is beyond the capability of community partners to deliver service virtually to marginalized populations. During the Covid-19 pandemic, e-SL increases students' awareness of social issues, while providing the opportunity to build relationships with each other; however, it is a challenge for them to step into each community and develop a deep connection with the population being served (Gray, 2020). For example, in the Gray (2020) study, an SL program is formed to partner pre-medical students with vulnerable patients. Before the pandemic, the service students provided weekly patient

visits and reporting sessions with medical providers. After the breakout of Covid, this project

adapted quickly and shifted from in-person visits to remote phone check-ins for patient safety.

The results showed that during the in-person visits, it was easy to spend a minimum of one hour

visiting with students and patients enjoying their conversations and interactions; however, when

it shifted to phone calls, it lasted about fifteen minutes with sometimes awkwardness and silence

over the phone.

While SL educators and facilitators are still exploring creative ways to serve communities

virtually, some suggestions are provided by literature. Suggestions include check-ins with the

host community and making space to hear partners' needs, making a timely revisit to previous

arrangements, reestablishing plans with collaboration, and embracing the uncertainty while

allowing for more flexibility in responding to the time of crisis (Grenier et al., 2020).

Values and Differences Between e-SL Before and After Covid Outbreak. To deepen

the understanding of SL and promote the future development of e-SL, it is important to review

the historical roots to deliver e-SL and essential to reflect on pandemic-adjusted e-SL. By

examining the literature on non-pandemic e-SL, it is revealed that the initial call to develop e-SL

is caused by the increasing population of online students. Additionally, studies showed that e-SL

not only results in comparable learning outcomes as onsite SL (McGorry, 2012; Schwehm et al.,

2017; Wong & Lau, 2022), but also demonstrates its unique advantage in promoting global

citizenship and intercultural dialogue, as well as boosting diversity, equity, and inclusion. One

major difference between non-pandemic e-SL and e-SL after the Covid outbreak is the target

population. That is, non-pandemic e-SL tried to incorporate students who are taking fulling

online education to be engaged in the SL, whereas e-SL after the Covid outbreak intended to

serve a broader student population regardless of whether they are taking distance education or

living on campus. In that sense, the common goal of e-SL before and after Covid is that they both try to open a way for students who otherwise would not be able to join SL. It is valuable to reflect on the case studies reporting SL interruption to be forced to shift online because these studies show the unexpected learning outcomes of e-SL as well as critiques of e-SL.

Another difference between e-SL before the pandemic and after the Covid outbreak is that e-SL after Covid emphasizes addressing community needs (Beaman & Davidson, 2020) and minimizing the limitation of online formats to enhance students' cultural awareness, leadership, and communication skills (Chan et al., 2020; Grenier et al., 2020). In sum, e-SL before the pandemic provided this study with the needs and historical reasons for the development of SL, and e-SL after the Covid outbreak informed this study by providing successful cases and important critiques that need to be addressed.

Nontraditional Students and Service Learning

Nontraditional students are selected to study in this dissertation for the following three reasons. First, students with nontraditional characteristics are becoming increasingly prevalent, so administrators and instructors must become proficient in working with this population (Ellis, 2019; Remenick, 2019). A study about demographic and enrollment characteristics shows that 75% of undergraduates in the U.S. had at least one nontraditional characteristic (Radford et al., 2015). The characteristics include: (1) students 25 years and older; (2) part-time students; (3) employed full-time; (4) raising dependent children (Rosenberg et al., 2012). Reed et al. (2015) pointed out that nontraditional students, especially adult students, have a unique experience with higher education. Typically, they identify themselves as workers or parents and have confidence in their abilities based on these roles (Reed et al., 2015). Similarly, Kasworm (2010) argued that adult students are aware that they are different from younger students and they are inclined to

believe their personal and professional experiences made them more mature and responsible, which results in their attitude to education being more serious. In higher education, because of the larger number of nontraditional students and the recognized differences between nontraditional students and their counterparts, educational leaders cannot plan programs without considering the features of nontraditional students.

Second, e-SL is a type of online education that has been proven to be nontraditional-student friendly because it is free from logistics, and geographic constraints, and offers a flexible schedule (Dolch & Zawacki-Richter, 2018; Rabourn, 2018). It is asserted that for in-person activities, nontraditional students are less likely to take part in campus activities than other students (Wyatt, 2011). However, little is known about whether nontraditional students hold the same affection for e-SL as for online education in general, and there is limited knowledge about whether the change in the modality of SL programs would result in different participation rates.

Most importantly, studies about on-site SL show nontraditional students have different interests and struggles from their traditional counterparts (Reed et al., 2015; Rosenberg et al., 2011; Smith, 2008) , and little is known about how their lived experience could shape their perceptions of e-SL. Nontraditional students are predominantly different from recent high school graduates in that they have considerable life and professional experiences (Miller & Lu, 2003; Van Doorn & Van Doorn, 2014). Compared to traditional college students, nontraditional students in SL are observed to be more self-directed, productivity-driven, and goal-orientated. For example, Stukas et al. (2006) pointed out that nontraditional students in SL are more committed to the service that benefits themselves and others. Also, Mackeracher (2004) claimed that nontraditional students favor learning from real-life situations and are eager to apply their knowledge to their working and personal lives. Likewise, Reed et al. (2015) argued that

nontraditional students appreciate the flexibility to choose their own service site based on their personal connections and professional qualifications.

Lived experience can provide a rich resource for learning overall (Buglione, 2012), but experiential education, personal experience, and interactions in the society outside the school campus are vital in shifting nontraditional students' expectations and perceptions (Largent, 2013; Rosenberg et al, 2012). Therefore, nowadays with the continuous blooming of online education and technology involvement, a better understanding of nontraditional students and appropriate e-SL strategies are urgently warranted.

Limitation of the Existing Research

In sum, the research on nontraditional students' experience and perceptions of e-SL in the post-Covid world remains under-researched. SL is a critical experiential learning pedagogy in that it supports student development, fulfills institutional missions, and addresses human and community needs. While studies showed on-site SL resulting in learning outcomes in the aspects of (1) personal and interpersonal outcomes, (2) civic and social outcomes, (3) relationships with the institution, and (4) further involvement or career development, little is known if e-SL can be regarded as one of the best practices for developing experiential learning.

E-SL as a type of online education fits the trends of educational development in the 21st century. While e-SL was not born during the pandemic, Covid has largely promoted the practice of e-SL and brought the values of e-SL to our attention. While three existing studies have reported a comparison regarding the learning outcomes of on-site SL versus e-SL (McGorry, 2012; Schwehm et al., 2017; Wong & Lau, 2022), method-wise none of the research employed in-depth interviews or narrative inquiry to explore the experience of nontraditional students. The qualitative data resources from those three studies include students' reflection journals, open-

ended surveys, and course evaluations. However, in Marcus et al.'s (2020) systematic review of

e-SL, they noted that Garca-Gutierrez et al. (2017) in their study for e-SL emphasized that "the

best way to access this learning experience would be a narrative method— that is, the students

themselves would tell us, through a semi-structured report, about their own experiences" (p.11).

Therefore, this study employs a narrative inquiry with in-depth interviews as authentic

dialogues with nontraditional students to explore their descriptions of their perceptions and

experience of e-SL. In this way, the study could contribute to understanding (1) prior to

participating in e-SL, how nontraditional students' lived experiences shaped their orientation

toward SL and e-SL; (2) after participating in e-SL, how do nontraditional students describe their

e-SL experience that demonstrated experiential learning elements that asserted by Kolb's (1984)

Cycle of Experiential Learning; and (3) what best-practices do nontraditional students suggest

for developing e-SL in higher education. With the answers to these three research questions, this

research could reveal the perspective of the overlooked majority, nontraditional students, and

provide insights for SL professionals to advance e-SL in the post-Covid world.

Chapter 3: Methods

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the methods for this study. This chapter first begins with the goals and research questions. Second, I introduce and describe qualitative research and the narrative inquiry method, including the rationale, strengths, and limitations of this methodological approach. Third, the research site and participants of this study are introduced. Fourth, the sampling frame and technique are discussed. Fifth, the instruments and procedures are presented. The procedures include the descriptions of recruitment, sample, data collection, and data analysis. Then, I address ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness. Finally, I conclude this chapter by summarizing the methodology and methods I adopted and addressing the limitations of existing literature identified at the end of Chapter 2.

Goals and Research Questions

With the overarching goals of exploring the potential and value of developing e-SL and gaining a richer understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate students, the following research questions guide the study:

1. How do the lived experiences of nontraditional students shape their orientation towards e-SL?

2. How, if at all, do the e-SL experiences of nontraditional students demonstrate experiential learning elements?

3. What best practices do nontraditional students recommend for developing e-SL in higher education?

The first research question focuses on nontraditional students' perspectives prior to participating in e-SL. It intends to explore how nontraditional students' personal stories and

professional experiences in life have shaped their expectations, satisfaction levels, preferences, and/or concerns toward e-SL. By addressing this research question, a more thorough understanding can be gained regarding nontraditional students' perceptions and understanding of e-SL and how it has been shaped by their past experiences and personal background before they participated in e-SL.

The second research question highlights nontraditional students' reflections on their e-SL experiences and takeaways. With this information, in the data analysis phase, I compared participants' stories to Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning, the conceptual framework of the present study, to examine whether e-SL demonstrates experiential learning elements.

The third question aims to gain genuine feedback and recommendations from nontraditional students regarding their needs and expectations for e-SL. With the authentic voice of their needs and concerns, the results of this question can provide constructive feedback for SL professionals to develop e-SL now and in the future.

Qualitative Research and Narrative Inquiry

Qualitative research is adopted in this study to address the research questions because it is an approach that seeks an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Creswell and Poth (2018) claimed qualitative research focuses on making sense of people's perceptions and understanding their experiences by collecting and analyzing non-numerical data.

The aim of qualitative research is not to measure specific variables but rather to understand the interpretive meaning people ascribe to phenomena and problems through their voices within the reflexivity of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because of the nature of my research questions and objectives, qualitative methods are regarded as an appropriate

approach to provide me with the details of participants' opinions and experiences, as well as to offer the opportunity to explore the reason behind their thoughts and behavior.

In qualitative research, a phenomenon is explored through the documented experiences of specific participants (Bowen, 2009). In this study, a qualitative approach provides insight and explanations from nontraditional student participants about their experiences and perceptions of e-SL. Due to the limited existing research on nontraditional students and their e-SL experiences, interviews may reveal additional models that are not available in the literature or attuned to the specific nontraditional students who are being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

With an overarching goal of gaining a rich understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of nontraditional students and exploring the potential and value to develop e-SL, a narrative inquiry is adopted for this study. I am particularly interested in how nontraditional students perceive the experiential learning elements through their lived experiences and e-SL experience. Narrative inquiry is used in this study to examine the participants' life stories and their perceptions of e-SL. Narrative inquiry is appropriate to use when researchers seek to reveal unique perspectives from the stories of individuals in order to gain a deeper understanding of a situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this way, narrative inquiry fits the aim of this study because it gives voice to the nontraditional student population whose perspectives on e-SL have not been thoroughly sought in the existing literature.

Narrative inquiry focuses on storytelling and the storyteller's experience (Bamberg, 2012; Chase, 2008). Clandinin (2006) asserted that storytelling is one of the oldest forms of communicative meaning-making, and despite its seemingly inconsequential nature, stories convey insight about their narrators. Human culture is deeply rooted in storytelling, and it facilitates memory sharing, event categorizing, and identity construction (Clandinin, 2006;

Bamberg, 2012). Bochner and Riggs (2014) believed people's knowledge, understanding, and lives are a co-constructed reality that builds on individual life stories to create a collaborative effort of story sharing. Storytelling is a way for people to express who they are and how they make sense of their place in the world, which is the premise of narrative inquiry (Trahar, 2009). Additionally, storytelling is subjective because the narrator is based on their own understanding of an event or experience and the way in which they wish to be understood (Bamberg, 2012). Thus, facilitating the process of storytelling is essential to this study because it allows the researcher to look through the storyteller's lens and play a role as both a critical observer and participant.

In addition, Caine et al. (2013) pointed out that in conducting narrative inquiry, it is critical for the researcher to allow participants to share the stories that are important to them, and at the same time, the researcher can find meaning in places that haven't been directly explored. In this study, by utilizing storytelling, I heard the stories of participants regarding their experience of e-SL and gained insight into struggles and favorable circumstances that shaped participants' expectations and hopes regarding e-SL.

Lyons and LaBoskey (2002) claimed that narrative inquiry is an approach for researchers to record the stories of individuals or small groups by revealing the lived experience or particular perspective of that individual. In this research, I intended to draw on the details of two groups of stories: (1) the experiences of nontraditional students outside campus that made them stand out from their traditional counterparts and (2) the e-SL experiences nontraditional students had with their institutions that shaped their perspectives. With the stories collected from participants' narratives, detailed perceptions and perspectives were gained, which contribute to making

meaning of nontraditional students' orientation towards e-SL as well as the value and learning outcomes they gained from e-SL.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) argued that narrative inquirers explore individuals' experiences in the world through social, cultural, and institutional narratives, in order to enrich and transform those experiences for themselves and others. Therefore, narrative inquiry fits the goal of this study by digging into nontraditional students' descriptions of their lived experiences and their e-SL experiences for the purpose of providing a holistic picture of nontraditional students' needs and advancing e-SL development.

Strengths of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry demonstrates three strengths in this study. First, it reveals in-depth detail of a situation or life experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This feature of narrative inquiry favors this study by providing stories and evidence to address the research questions regarding how the lived experiences of nontraditional students shaped their orientation toward e-SL. Second, narrative inquiry can concede significant issues not elsewhere recorded (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). E-SL is a relatively new practice but has been forced to be implemented because of Covid. Thus, it is critical to reveal nontraditional students' perspectives toward e-SL as it has not been thoroughly recorded in the literature. Third, the relationship and interaction between researchers and participants play an essential role in narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008). I consider this feature of narrative inquiry a strength because I intended to engage in dialogue during the interviews rather than acting as a bystander to investigate participants' experiences. Likewise, Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized that researchers cannot separate themselves from the process, since both interviewees and researchers in narrative inquiry are active participants in the meaning-making process through storytelling.

In sum, the strengths of the narrative in this study include that it provides in-depth details, offers information that has not been recorded, and allows for interaction between researchers and participants. The strengths, therefore, are exceedingly beneficial for this study and outweigh the perceived limitations.

Limitations of Narrative Inquiry

Admittedly, employing narrative inquiry in this research study has two major limitations. First, narrative inquiry is often recorded as a biography or life history, which includes an effective and realistic representation of the participant's life experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Narrative inquiry highly relies on self-reported stories and depends on participants' memory (Creswell, 2012). In addition, Clandinin (2006) pointed out that narrative inquiry is a relationship-based methodology. It may demand the researcher to deeply engage with the topic and thoroughly understand the participants' life experiences. Though I've been engaged with SL and e-SL in different ways, I do not personally know the prospective participants, which may interfere with our conversation and their storytelling.

Second, the narrative inquiry method demands a good relationship between the researcher and the participants and heavy dependence on the memory and narrative skills of the participants. Therefore, I adopted triangulation of the information, such as asking the question in different ways to promote conversation, and sharing the transcriptions with participants while also inviting them to provide any clarification and additional information.

Research Site and Participants

Site Selection

To understand nontraditional students' experiences in e-SL, it is vital to study a population of students from an institution where SL is central to its mission and has been

practiced intensely. Therefore, a large private Catholic university in the Midwestern U.S. was selected to collect data for this dissertation study. SL has been featured in the mission statement of this university as a distinguishing mark. Students, faculty, and staff are imbued with a dedication to serving others and advocating social justice through SL and e-SL. Additionally, this institution serves a large number of nontraditional students and seeks to transform lives through engaged lifelong learning.

Within this institution, the research site selected for this study consisted of credit-based e-SL courses offered by the SL research center within the university. Credit-based e-SL courses were chosen because they are formal academic SL and are set up to meet the goals and requirements of Experiential Learning. Compared to various SL and community engagement activities, students enrolled in credit-based courses tend to have comparable experience, motivation, and expectations (Bandy, 2016). In the selected university, the credit-based courses are taught by faculty across different colleges throughout the university. Undergraduate students in all colleges can take academic SL courses as one option to fill their Experiential Learning requirements at the university. In addition to credit-based courses, other Experiential Learning options at the university include study abroad, domestic study, internship, and individual or group research projects.

The academic SL courses are offered in four different forms: direct service, project-based service, community-based research, as well as advocacy and solidarity. Both before and after the outbreak of Covid, the SL research center has offered academic SL courses online. This institution has been chosen as the research site because it has a long history and rich practices of offering SL and has been actively exploring ways to develop e-SL.

Recruitment

To recruit participants, I gained access with the support of dissertation committee members who connected me to the university faculty. Email invitations were sent to faculty who taught e-SL courses in the 2022 Fall quarter and 2023 Winter quarter. In the email, I sought their help to advertise my study to their students who were previously or currently enrolled in e-SL courses in the last five years, from 2018 to 2023, with an explanation of the overview and purpose of my research.

In the selected university, ten credit-based e-SL courses were offered in the 2022 Fall quarter and 2023 Winter quarter respectively. As discussed with my dissertation committee member, we excluded long-term e-SL courses under the Department of Nursing, because these courses were longer than one quarter and students might have distinctive experiences than other e-SL courses. There were faculty members who taught e-SL courses in both aforementioned quarters and there were faculty members who taught more than one e-SL course in the same quarter. Thus, after excluding the Department of Nursing, ten distinctive individual faculty were contacted by email, and three faculty responded and agreed to recruit their students by sending a Student Recruitment Email (Appendix A) on my behalf.

The student recruitment email included the overview and purpose of the research study, time commitment, and a short Participant Recruitment Survey (Appendix B) for interested students to complete. Students' demographic information, educational history, and SL participation history were collected in the Participant Recruitment Survey for the purpose of selecting eligible participants and for me to customize my interview questions accordingly to facilitate the dialogue between the participants and me.

I screened all fourteen students who showed their interest in joining the study as participants by completing the Participant Recruitment Survey and seven students were eligible to join this study as participants. The inclusion criteria are (1) undergraduate students or undergraduate alumni; (2) currently in an e-SL activity, or completed one or more e-SL activities in the past five years, 2018 - 2023, and (3) demonstrate at least one of the following nontraditional student characteristics when they participate in e-SL between 2018 and 2023: (a) ages 25 years and older; (b) part-time student; (c) full-time employed; (d) raising dependent children.

All seven eligible students were contacted by email. Four students confirmed their interest to join and three completed interviews. Given that the primary purpose of narrative studies is to explore individual participants' rich and thick stories of their life experiences, rather than seek a common perception (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the sample size of three participants could be considered ideal for this narrative. In this way, I was able to present each nontraditional student's voice in-depth and feature the unique stories of each participant with their e-SL experiences. After notifying three students that they were selected to participate in the study, an official Informed Consent (Appendix C) was sent to students. The three participants signed informed consent forms before they participated in the interview.

Participants

Three students from a large private Catholic university in the Midwestern U.S. joined this research as participants. Pseudonyms, Eleanor, Lucy, and Joe, are used throughout the dissertation to maintain confidentiality. The three participants were very ideal for this study, first because they recently completed e-SL within one year or were enrolled in an e-SL course at the time of the interview, meaning their memories were still fresh. Second, the three participants

demonstrated diverse demographic backgrounds in gender and race. In this way, I could gain

distinctive stories from a diverse group of people. Third, all three participants had both on-site

community service engagement experience and credit-based e-SL experience, which

demonstrates their deep involvement with SL and could generate richer reflections.

The table below will describe specific information regarding the participants in this

study.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participant Pseudonyms	Employment Status	Age Group (in years)	Enrollment Status	Have Dependent Children	Gender	Race and Ethnicity
Eleanor	Full-time worker	19 - 24	Full-time student	No	Female	Caucasian
Lucy	Full-time worker	25 - 35	Full-time student	No	Female	African American
Joe	Full-time worker	19 - 24	Full-time student	No	Male	Caucasian

Sampling Frame and Sampling

The sample frame of this study was non-probability, purposive sampling. In purposive

sampling, researchers rely on their judgment to select members of the population to participate in

studies (Etikan et al, 2016). Creswell and Poth (2018) argued that purposive sampling is the

most often used in narrative inquiry studies as it provides the research with participants that fit

the purpose, problem, and objective of the study.

This study was comprised of three nontraditional undergraduate students who meet the

aforementioned criteria. All participants were full-time undergraduate students and full-time

workers off-campus at the time of the study. One of the participants was over 25 years old. This sampling frame was appropriate for my study because it allowed me to find my participants accurately with different demographic characteristics in race and gender that can contribute unique stories and distinctive perspectives on e-SL.

Convenience sampling was adopted as the sampling technique for this study. Participants were selected according to their availability and willingness to participate. Convenience sampling is most appropriate for the study because this sampling method does not require a random selection of participants based on any set of criteria, for example, demographic factors (Sedgwick, 2013). Given that this research focused on individual experience and rich stories, it was not necessary for my participants to be evenly in any set of criteria. Instead, convenience sampling made it possible to select people who are happy and willing to become part of the research.

A predominant advantage of convenience sampling was the time-saving and cost-effective feature. It allowed the researcher to collect data quickly because the sampling of a population works best for the researcher's time and location. Convenience sampling favors initial research when the research seeks nuanced thoughts, beliefs, and values of the target population (Sedgwick, 2013). This feature of convenience sampling fitted my study as nontraditional students' perspectives in e-SL remain under-researched, and I seek to listen to different voices from students' stories. Other advantages of convenience sampling include fewer rules to follow, low cost to conduct the research, and a readily available sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All these advantages of convenience sampling favored my research to be done in an effective way to provide timely findings during the midst of Covid and not interfere with the rigors of narrative inquiry.

Nevertheless, convenience sampling presents two major limitations. First, participants who decide to participate in the research study may have a stronger interest in the topic than those who ignored the invitation (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). This is a limitation of convenience sampling but not necessarily a weakness of the study because I collected detailed stories of individual experiences of participants who were passionate about the topic. Therefore, they contributed more detailed and in-depth storytelling than those who chose not to participate in the study. Second, participants who had strong positive experiences and who had intense negative experiences may present bias when they provide their stories (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). However, as the narrative inquiry was used as the method for this research, I focused more on the individual experience and their unique stories, in addition to the common essence of the experiences, but did not intend to generalize the findings to the larger population. Thus, although this may be a bias of convenience sampling, it is not a critical weakness of this study.

Instrumentation

One-on-one semi-structured Zoom interviews were employed as major instrumentation in this study to seek an understanding and make meaning of the processes that connect people, situations, and events based on descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Zoom was considered the best way to conduct the interviews because it is free from location constraints. The participants were nontraditional students who participated in e-SL via Zoom, thus, Zoom is a convenient and familiar platform for them. Also, data collection for this study was conducted while the world was still in the lingering midst of Covid. Therefore, Zoom was a safe and accessible way to conduct interviews. The semi-structured interview was adopted because it allowed data in the form of stories, vignettes, and experiences in rich detail. It also

provided greater flexibility and room for dialogue between the researcher and the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2014). Individual interviews were between 40 and 70 minutes and were video recorded, transcribed, and de-identified prior to analysis.

The pre-prepared interview protocol is presented in Appendix D and was revised and/or customized according to the conversation of each interview. In the interview, I collected narratives of how nontraditional students perceived and described e-SL in chronological order: before they join e-SL, after their e-SL participation, and their current perspective. I seek raw experiences that can describe and illustrate. I clarified e-SL and the definition of nontraditional students to the participant before the interview started. I intended to understand how nontraditional students received the experiential learning outcomes from e-SL and if their nontraditional stories shaped their perceptions of e-SL.

Additionally, a Participant Recruitment Survey was sent to students when I recruited participants to collect their demographic information and their SL participation history. A copy of the survey is in Appendix B. The survey provided the background information of the participants, which made me able to prepare the interview questions according to their background and past history.

Other data sources include site artifacts and documents, such as university websites, e-SL course descriptions, and course syllabi. Reviewing the artifacts informed me of the background context of e-SL practice and the learning objectives.

Procedures

Data Collection

The theoretical framework from Freire provides a direction for data collection and data analysis. To collect data, the interview protocol centered on how e-SL participants described

their hands-on experience, how their experience demonstrated their interest and expectations, and whether nontraditional students' lived experience shapes their behavior in the e-SL courses. In addition, I drew on whether the virtual format inhibited, facilitated, or shifted the accommodation of critical reflection. To analyze data, I organized participants' narratives into individual themes and organized them under each research question.

Data collection for this study includes three steps. First, I reviewed site artifacts and documents, such as university websites, e-SL course descriptions, and course syllabi to learn about the background context and to inform my interview questions. University websites and e-SL course descriptions had open public access. I gained access to syllabi by emailing faculty members who taught the e-SL course that my participants took. The site artifacts and documents provided me with the context and background of participants' experiences and it was helpful for me to engage in the conversations during the interview.

Second, students who were interested in my research filled out the Participant Recruitment Survey where their demographic information and their SL participation history were collected. I selected participants based on their survey answers to see if they met my inclusion criteria. The chosen participants went through the Informed Consent process.

Third, data were primarily collected from interviews conducted using the Zoom platform. Three participants joined one-on-one interviews with me. The interview ranged between 40 and 70 minutes. The interview questions were open-ended and semi-structured. The questions centered on four categories: (1) participants' personal background and stories, (2) nontraditional characteristics and e-SL, (3) e-SL learning outcomes, and (4) perceptions of SL and e-SL.

Data Analysis

After data collection, the interview conversations that took place between the participants and me were transcribed from the recording into a text format. As described in the previous section, the interviews were conducted via Zoom, thus, I first downloaded the transcripts from Zoom. Then, I checked the accuracy and made edits based on the interview recordings. Within narrative inquiry, to analyze research conversations, mutual understanding and trust are essential to delivering authentic reflections (Caine et al., 2013). A co-created transcription was needed and this effort required additional involvement by the participants (Eftimie & Stan, 2018). Thus, copies of the transcribed text edited by me were sent to each of the participants in order to seek additions, changes, or deletions to clarify the points they made. After receiving responses from each participant, I made changes and edits accordingly. Finally, after incorporating all changes suggested by the participants, the final text was constituted as the main data source for this study.

For qualitative data analysis of the interview transcripts, I used Cycle Coding (Saldaña, 2013) and Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A six-step process was adopted: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Specifically, to develop inductive codes, I used First Cycle Coding (Saldaña, 2013) to read and examine the data thoroughly and identify my first impressions while taking notes. I also employed Second Cycle Coding (Saldaña, 2013) concurrently to step back and look at my notes to categorize and collapse my codes to understand the patterns. The patterns were around the frequency and sequence of each participant's stories. Additionally, drawing on the existing literature and guided by Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning, I developed deductive codes according to the four aspects of experiential learning (i.e., Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Formation of Abstract Concepts, and

Active Experimentation). During the process, I continued to memo on emerging themes,

organize them, and finalize the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Transcriptions were anonymous and no identifiable information was included. During the

interview, I avoided leading questions or including personal bias. Cultural, religious, gender, and

other differences were respected. All the data and materials were stored on a password-protected

computer in an encrypted folder. I reported multiple perspectives from participants, and contrary

findings were reported honestly.

After the data was analyzed and findings were identified, copies of the draft findings

were reported to participants to avoid misunderstandings. Pseudonyms were used to present

findings and I kept the identities of participants confidential.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Transferability, confirmability, credibility, transparency, and honesty were secured in this

study. First, since the scope of this research was nontraditional undergraduate students in a four-

year postsecondary institution in the United States, I sought to employ the transferability of the

findings. A detailed description was used to demonstrate that the study's findings may be

applicable to other institutions, contexts, circumstances, and situations.

Besides, while I was a participant in the e-SL before, in order to avoid bias and achieve

confirmability, an audit trail was provided to ensure that my bias did not interfere with the

interpretation of participants' responses. The audit trail noted every step of data analysis in order

to provide a rationale for decision-making. In addition, the findings were also reviewed by

participants to confirm their perceptions.

Third, in order to attain credibility, triangulation was used in this study to affirm the findings were true and accurate. Multiple methods will be used in investigations, such as interviews, surveys, and member checks. Moreover, the data collected from the participants were compared with existing literature and other open documents on other universities' websites.

Fourth, to ensure transparency and honesty, the research methods of data collection and data analysis were documented step by step in detail. The rationale for each step was stated. The results were reported and disseminated in this dissertation openly, clearly, and comprehensively.

Summary Statement of the Methodology

Based on the nature of my research questions and objectives, a qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study because it could provide me with the details of participants' opinions and experiences, as well as offer me the opportunity to explore the reason behind their thoughts and behavior. Narrative inquiry was employed as the research method for this study with the preeminent goal of gaining a rich understanding of the unique stories of nontraditional students and their descriptions of the e-SL experience.

In this study, the strengths of narrative inquiry outweigh its perceived limitations. Its strengths included providing in-depth details, offering fresh stories that have not been recorded, and allowing opportunities for intense interaction between researchers and participants. The limitations included the demand for a good relationship between the researcher and the participants and heavy dependence on the memory and narrative skills of the participants. The limitations could be addressed by reviewing the demographic information and e-SL participant history provided by the Participant Recruitment Survey before conducting the interviews and by triangulating the data during and after the interviews. The research sites were credit-based e-SL courses at a large private Catholic university in the Midwestern U.S.

As mentioned at the end of Chapter 2, e-SL remains under-researched, and there is limited information regarding nontraditional students' perspectives. This study aims to address the research gap. Though three existing studies have compared the learning outcomes of onsite SL and e-SL (McGorry, 2012; Schwehm et al., 2017; Wong & Lau, 2022), none of these research studies collected qualitative data from in-depth interviews. Thus, adopting narrative inquiry to explore nontraditional students' experiences and perspectives of e-SL is needed as it can contribute to revealing the vivid stories of nontraditional students and provide a historical picture of their needs and perceptions.

Chapter 4: Findings

The overarching goal of this narrative inquiry study is to explore the value of developing e-SL and to gain a richer understanding of nontraditional undergraduate students' perceptions of e-SL. Three participants were interviewed for this study. The narrative stories they shared provided deep insight and great clarity into how lived experiences have shaped their orientation towards e-SL as well as how they understood and made meanings of their e-SL experience. Besides taking e-SL courses, all participants had onsite in-person service experience, thus each participant offered their perceptions and preferences of different modalities of SL as well.

The interviews were conducted virtually over Zoom and lasted between 40 and 70 minutes. Interviews were one-on-one between each participant and me and separate from each other. Before the interviews, I collected information on their educational backgrounds and SL experience in a recruitment survey. Based on their answers, in addition to confirming that they are eligible to participate in this study, I was able to structure the interviews intentionally to build rapport with each participant. Each participant and I did not know each other before the study and we met for the first time in the Zoom interviews. To my surprise, each participant was very genuine and willing to open up to me in terms of sharing their life stories and describing their service experience in great detail. As a researcher, before I conducted the interviews, I considered myself to have a certain level of knowledge of the e-SL and nontraditional students' scholarship, but the interviews revealed vivid experiences and some unexpected life stories that I would not be able to see or read elsewhere. I found true joy in dialogue with my participants and they commented that this interview was thought-provoking and gave them a good place to unpack and reflect on their experiences.

This chapter first begins with a participant overview where the demographic information, service learning experience, and e-SL courses they took are introduced. Second, three research questions are addressed respectively with individual emergent themes from each participant's stories. The three research questions are: (1) *How do the lived experiences of nontraditional students shape their orientation towards e-SL?* (2) *How, if at all, do the e-SL experiences of nontraditional students demonstrate experiential learning elements?* And (3) *What best practices do nontraditional students recommend for developing e-SL in higher education?* The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings along with my reflections on conducting this research.

Participant Overview

Three students from a large private Catholic university in the Midwestern U.S. participated in the research study. Pseudonyms, Eleanor, Lucy, and Joe, are used to maintain anonymity. All participants were full-time undergraduate students and full-time workers off-campus at the time of the study. They are all over the age of 19 and have been students at the university for at least three years. All participants have taken credit-based e-SL courses and been part of in-person onsite community service or volunteer activities.

Eleanor

Eleanor is a Caucasian female in the age group of 19-25 years old. She is a full-time worker and a fifth-year full-time student at the university. She is considered a nontraditional student because she is a full-time worker. Eleanor is from Ukraine originally and moved to the U.S. in 2009. She has lived in the suburbs of Chicago with her family since. Eleanor is double majoring in Music Education and Vocal Performance and double minoring in Psychology and Community Service Studies. As a Community Service Studies minor, Eleanor has taken six credit-based service-learning courses, among which three were delivered online due to Covid. At

the time of the study, Eleanor was not taking an experiential learning or service learning course but she was participating in online service learning activities through the Community Service Studies program and virtual volunteering.

Eleanor heard about the opportunity to join this study as a participant from an email invitation sent by her former professor on my behalf. It immediately attracted Eleanor's attention and interested her in joining because she has encountered limited research on virtual service learning. Additionally, as a big fan of service, she had been looking for virtual opportunities and found fewer opportunities as the pandemic faded. She was excited to know that someone is aware of this and she would love to contribute her experience and perceptions. When asked about what drew her to participate in this study, Eleanor stated:

> I thought it was really interesting because I haven't heard a whole lot of people talk about the importance of having these virtual opportunities, and virtual service learning. Because I had been looking for these an opportunity to do that since coming out of Covid, but a lot of things went back in person. So for me, it was hard to stay involved, and I really had to, I guess, look to find an online opportunity, which was kind of disheartening a little bit. What if you want to stay involved, you want to keep volunteering, and keep part of organizations? But yeah, so I thought the opportunity to be a participant in this study was interesting. I'm like, oh, like someone's aware of this!

Eleanor is a great storyteller with rich service-learning experience, both in-person and online, both with school and in her personal life. The perspectives and experiences she provided were well-articulated, thoughtful, and well-reasoned.

Lucy

Lucy is a 26-year-old African American female. She is Nigerian and came to the U.S. when she was seven. She grew up on the south side of Chicago. Lucy is a full-time worker and eighth-year student at the university. She is a Health Science major, and she works with adults who have developmental disabilities. Lucy is considered a nontraditional student in this study because she has a full-time job and her age is above 25. Lucy took a credit-based e-SL course on the topic of Spirituality and Homelessness approximately one year ago. The stories Lucy shared in the interview, some are delightful, others are poignant, plotting a path of emotional journeys.

Lucy was very genuine and vulnerable to share with me that she developed depression and anxiety around her sophomore year which held her back from attending school. The mental health issues challenged her ability to finish school and concentrate in class. She would start off really well during the semester and then lose motivation. At the same time, Lucy admitted that her situation at home was really difficult, and it was an abusive environment. She has a strict father and the way her father talks was not very supportive. Lucy shared with me an example of the type of household she was in:

> …so there was this one particular night we were all sitting down. At first, we were all joking and stuff. And then, all of a sudden, the topic of my schooling came up. It was like all fun engaged, and then he was like "That's why you can't concentrate in school? You're blaming this and that on you not finishing school?" He called me like a deadbeat, or in some other stuff, some other names, too. And I was like really taking it back at the time. And then I went downstairs crying, and then I told my mom this is part of the situation I have to deal with. Because everyone that was around, my little sister and my mom, were kind of shocked that the conversation took a turn.

Despite Lucy herself going through a hard time with school and mental health, she is a very considerate, warmhearted, and religious individual. She has four years of community service experience helping people who experience homelessness and she treats her clients at work with developmental disabilities as friends and family.

> In my place at work, a lot of the people are in my facility, and even though their families put them in our program, they rarely have people come to visit them. That's why we serve as family and friends to these clients. I eat Thanksgiving dinner with them. I eat Christmas dinner with them. I celebrate birthdays with them. Things that some of these families do not care about.

It was very clear to me that Lucy has a very big heart and finds great enjoyment in working and helping other people, which serves as one of the reasons that drew Lucy to participate in this research.

> I remember taking a Spirituality and Wellness class, and I really enjoyed that class. I got an email from my professor that said there was an opportunity to participate in the study. I was like I might as well share my experience and see if it sort of helps somebody else get that degree.

Having Lucy's stories, experiences, and perspectives on e-SL and service learning, in general, is tremendously helpful for me personally to get my degree. In the meanwhile, Lucy's perception definitely can contribute to the scholarship and practice of e-SL at the university and beyond. I found great enjoyment in the interview with Lucy as the conversations naturally flowed with ease and I could tell that Lucy put great effort in sharing her experiences with me to provide the best examples and stories. I sincerely appreciate Lucy's authentic stories and valuable insight.

Joe

Joe is a Caucasian male in the age group of 19-25 years old and he grew up in southern Illinois. He is a senior student majoring in Political Science with a concentration in international politics. Joe has been admitted to a master's degree at the same university he is currently attending. Joe works full-time off campus for a security company doing events to pay for college. In addition, Joe works for his family business on weekends. Joe is considered a nontraditional student because he has a full-time job. Work and school are the two major parts of Joe's everyday life.

Joe identifies himself as an upstanding citizen, a competitive individual, and a charitable individual in life. He believes in "being respectful, giving it 110%, and not wasting the time I have on this earth." Joe has a very positive attitude and I consider him an overachiever.

Throughout high school, I wanted to get the best grades and try my hardest. I would always be on top of math homework just because I would go to after-school math. One time I got a 98 on one test, and when the teacher told me what I got wrong, I actually got a little upset, because I knew exactly what I got wrong, and I knew I could fix it easily. I probably forgot a symbol within the problem I got wrong. So I went after school. I took the whole test, and I got the 100 just because I knew I could do it so it's not the point of, I mean, I guess just trying to get the extra A or what. It's just because I knew that I could do it so I mean, why not take that chance? I mean it's no problem. If you know you could do better, you should step forward and do it no better how incremental of a positive change it may be.

As far as I can tell, Joe is a responsible person and works effectively. Joe was the first participant in my study who scheduled his interview and he smoothly completed every step.

From our communication, Joe responded to emails promptly and in a very professional manner. He joined in this research because he was intrigued, curious to see what could be going on, and up for the challenge. Joe answered each interview question to the point and genuinely.

Lived Experiences and Orientation Towards e-SL

With the overarching goals of exploring the value of developing e-SL and gaining a richer understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate students, the first research question in this study is: how do the lived experiences of nontraditional students shape their orientation toward e-SL? In narrative inquiry, participants share detailed stories that build a unique relationship and add depth to the data obtained (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The function of narrative inquiry is to explore the uniqueness of each participant's story, rather than seek commonalities or differences from one another. Thus, in this section, the narratives are structured under the stories of each participant, and findings are organized based on individual emerged themes.

The Story of Eleanor

Independent Childhood. Coming from Ukraine to the U.S. as a child, the biggest culture shock Eleanor had was recognizing how independent she was and how much she was capable of in terms of taking care of herself. As Eleanor reflected back, compared to the U.S., children's supervision was not highly valued in Ukraine, and children's safety was not given much priority. Growing up, Eleanor's mom was working and she didn't have a father in the picture. As a result, she was on her own often as a kid and had to take care of herself.

I kinda had to do that, you know, like cooking for myself and going to school by myself, making sure I'm up on time. As early as like 6 years old, I had to walk myself to school.

My mom did the best she could. Obviously, it's like totally not her thing. If I want to eat,

I have to figure it out, or if I have to do something for school, then just figure it out.

Moving to a predominantly upper-middle-class area in the northern suburbs of Chicago, Eleanor

quickly realized that the people there were living a completely different life. She felt like an

adult compared to the kids the same age as her and she got agitated and annoyed.

It was just very different. And the kids just felt so sheltered like they didn't know how to

do anything. They couldn't cook for themselves, and I was like you're 7 years old, I can't

believe you can't like to cook yourself a meal. You guys are so helpless, you guys can't

do anything. You don't know how to do this stuff. That's so ridiculous. It was so weird,

I'm like, why did I feel like my situation was normal and they were just kids? So it's just

really interesting.

Eleanor believed that she did not have a standard upbringing. This childhood culture shock

provided a connection to the new immigrant children she served later on in service-learning

projects and made it easier for her to understand kids growing up in poverty who had to take care

of themselves from a young age. As Eleanor reflected, when she conducted community service at

the university to tutor immigrant children, she could empathize with their struggles and

frustrations.

I did some tutoring for math and English, majority of the kids know little to no English.

So it was really interesting, I need to navigate how do I deliver a math concept to a child

that I don't even speak the same language as them. But then, I was able to obviously have

that empathy of I also moved to the States, and to know English, and like my parents

didn't know English. You know how much I would have appreciated someone sitting

down with me and like we're not getting up from this table until I know that you know

what you're doing and until I've helped you. Okay, I don't want you walking out of here going home and crying and feeling like I'm gonna fail my math-like test tomorrow because I don't speak English. That's so sad. That's so unfair for a kid to struggle.

Eleanor's upbringing and journey made her understand the children she served, and serving children with similar immigrant backgrounds as her in turn made Eleanor grateful for her own family and appreciative of her pathway.

…acknowledging my own privilege was so important. I'm from Ukraine and I had nothing. I came from nothing. But my mom married her boyfriend that brought us to the U.S., who had a wealthier family. And put me in a good school, even though I had to navigate all those issues on my own, as far as not having anyone to help me with homework, or like not having anyone to like book a doctor's appointment for me, not because they didn't want to, not because they didn't care, but because they just didn't speak English.

Eleanor's upbringing shaped how she interacted with the people who served in SL, and the things she observed facilitated her reflection on her own life experiences.

All About Service. The importance of service in Eleanor's life cannot be overstated. Growing up, she had numerous service experiences with school and with family. Eleanor considered providing service as what kept her off the streets and gave her positivity.

I feel like I don't really know how I would have filled up my time had I not been serving, and had I not been in church. All the time just coming out of Ukraine and being used to just being out really up to no good as a kid, just because like not really had much adult supervision than coming to the U.S. I feel like doing service probably helped a lot, and they kept me involved in the community, and in like a positive manner.

After moving to the U.S. with her family, Eleanor had been serving in the worship ministry and youth ministry in the Ukrainian community church and then an American church. After enrolling in college, she continued volunteering with the university at a soup kitchen.

All those concrete service experiences drove Eleanor to apply for the Community Service Scholarship because she is "totally all about service". The Community Service Scholarship kept Eleanor involved in the community by having 30 hours of community service. She highly appreciated the scholarship, which led her to minor in Community Service Studies. Eleanor enjoyed SL courses and internships because she enjoyed working within organizations and making hands-on contributions.

> Honestly, I'm very grateful that I got that opportunity because it's just a lot of internship experience as well like it is volunteering. But you are playing a role within the organization. And it's just really great, being able to, I guess, have like hands-on contribution.

Eleanor also participated in in-person service tutoring immigrant children in an after-school program and assisting with an art program. Then after Covid hit, Eleanor did virtual service in an English tutoring program where she had conversations with people online. She also served in an online mentorship program as well as another virtual registry to send out emails and give people information. Additionally, she engaged with refugees who were trying to navigate and acclimate to the culture. All those rich service experiences Eleanor had shaped her hopes and expectations for service learning by providing her with a solid understanding of doing service and stimulating her curiosity to explore more. Throughout her life, Eleanor engaged in various forms of service, but her hope for SL courses was to reveal what the learning part of service learning can offer her and explore the difference in her mindset that the courses can make.

Before I took any classes I really had no idea what it was going to be about. Because I've been volunteering essentially my whole life, what are we actually going to be like learning? How is this like learning? How am I going to take 6 community service classes, and like, how am I going to learn something different, and all of them? I had no idea how my mindset was going to be transformed through taking all these classes and like engaging in the community.

The Story of Lucy

Reconciliation with Culture Background. In her everyday life, Lucy considered her culture a big part of her identity. Coming from Nigeria when she was seven and living on the south side of Chicago, Lucy had a hard time as an immigrant child. Lucy reflected that there were times she was bullied because she was not from the same country. As a result, Lucy tried to disassociate from her culture in order to fit into the community and school.

So there was a time in my life when I tried to disassociate from my culture in an attempt of trying to fit in. If you didn't grow up here, a lot of people don't remember there was a time, even living amongst other African Americans, it was difficult for immigrants. They'd make fun of me for the way I dressed, and things like that, so it made me not want to be Nigerian for a little bit.

However, as she grew older, she understood the importance of her own culture and tried to immerse herself in the culture.

As I grew up, I listen to music. I watch movies. I associate with other Nigerians and stuff like that. So that's a big part of my everyday life. I eat Nigerian food every day for that sake. I like watching foreign movies, and it is part of the big culture in Nigeria. So that's a big part of my life.

Besides her own culture, Lucy appreciated cultural diversity and enjoyed learning different

foreign languages and exploring the history of other cultures. Lucy has been learning Chinese for

four years and her favorite part about learning Chinese is learning about a new culture.

> Before I learn Chinese, I guess you can say I was ignorant of some aspects of the culture.
> I grew up on the south side of Chicago. So when I met a lot of people, and I would tell
> them that oh, I'm learning Chinese, they'd say a lot of ignorant things about like. I'm so
> serious. I'm just being completely realistic. They'd say a lot of like ignorant things, but
> I'm like that's not what they're saying, or they'll make up words saying that this is what
> they're saying. I'm like No. There's a lot of rich history behind the culture. So it was
> interesting to learn about the history, and I love the enjoy the music stuff like that.

> Being an immigrant from a different culture gave her an open mind and shaped her

behavior in interacting with people. She cares for the people she encountered in service, is eager

to explore the social issues she learned in the SL course, and is willing to share her story with

other people who are experiencing the same struggles that she had overcome.

> I meet a lot of younger students that I'm sharing classes with. I didn't like seeing people
> being discriminated against, or feeling like they're less than what they are, just because of
> the particular circumstances they find themselves in. So there was this student that I met
> last year. We had a class together, and she's from Thailand or one of the South Asian
> countries. She was telling me how she was finding it difficult. She didn't grow up here.
> So she was finding it very difficult to make friends, and she was kind of finding it
> difficult to stay motivated. And then I kind of told her my history growing up in America,
> and not everybody will like you for who you are, and just because of where you come

from, or maybe just as simple as your accent because it's happened to me. So I was able

to help her see there are people that are gonna like you. We became friends after that.

Lucy's personal experience and her reconciliation with her cultural background shaped the way

she interacted with people and made her vulnerable to help people encountering similar

struggles.

Service for the Marginalized. The credit-based e-SL course Lucy took was around the

topic of spirituality and homelessness. Prior to taking the course at the university, throughout

high school, Lucy had various experiences in service of the marginalized population and the

elderly all around Chicago. While serving in the soup kitchen, Lucy not only showed up but also

genuinely cared about people experiencing homelessness and regularly checked in with them.

> So every Saturday morning, all through, like high school, and a little bit after, I'd go to
>
> the soup kitchen on Cottage grove, I think it's off 63 or 64. It's a free kitchen where you
>
> serve them breakfast, and they're able to eat as much as they want, and being there I was
>
> able to talk to several people and see what situation they were in that may lead them to be
>
> homeless.

Lucy had explored the reason people go through homelessness and she was touched to hear

about different situations people are experiencing. She also quickly recognized that there were

some misconceptions and misjudgments that her peers might have toward people experiencing

homelessness.

> A lot of the time there were like a lot of misconceptions, especially among students, our
>
> age, especially in Chicago, they would think you do drugs, and you end up on the street.
>
> But a lot of it wasn't that type of situation. A lot of people were in the military. So people
>
> had medical debts that caused them. So I was really moved by that.

Service experience and past encounters with people experiencing homelessness was the main reason that Lucy decided to take the credit-based e-SL course at the university. This course was a requirement for experiential learning, but the university offered other options on different topics. Lucy chose to take this course because of the topic of spirituality and homelessness. Lucy believes she has a very deep passion for homeless rights, which pushed her to take this class, and she expected to learn more about this social issue in and beyond the Chicago area.

Another reason why Lucy decided to take the e-SL course is that she resonates with the topic of spirituality. One of the most salient identities of Lucy in her everyday life is that she is a religious individual.

> … I'm also a religious individual as well. I'm a Christian. That's part of the drive that's keeping me going in school because I know there's like God is a big part of my life. So that's what's helping me deal with all my issues.

In short, having concrete service experience with people experiencing homelessness, being passionate for homeless rights, and having a salient identity as a religious individual are the essential reasons that drew Lucy to take part in the e-SL course, and shaped her exception to explore more beyond what she personally sees and does.

Besides talking with the marginalized population, Lucy also spent her time working with the elderly in Chicago. Lucy realized that the elderly struggle with loneliness and lack company from their family and friends. She was willing to be their company and visit with them, spending important holidays with them, and letting them know she was there for them.

> Another asset that I worked on was like working with the elderly as well. In a lot of the elderly homes in Chicago, a lot of their families don't come and see them. So around big holidays like Valentine's Day, Christmas, and stuff, I would go over there, and sit down.

We do arts and crafts with them. Just talk to them and stuff just to build a little bit of

encouragement.

Lucy found great enjoyment in working with people in need and found a sense of fulfillment in

helping other people.

Work with People with Mental Disabilities. In addition to service experience, Lucy is a

full-time worker and she works with adults who have developmental disabilities. Her clients

have different developmental disabilities, and Lucy helps them navigate day-to-day life and

helps them with behavior in order for them to integrate into the community as normally as

possible. Because of her work, the e-SL on homelessness resonated with her and she constantly

related class knowledge to her client's situation.

I work full-time with people with developmental disabilities. So in that class in the movie

that we watched, we see some individuals that became homeless because of mental

illness issues. Seeing that made me like sort of sad, because not a lot of individuals, not a

lot of families know that there are options for those people that are not mentally okay to

have free housing and free aid from the State. A lot of these families end up being

abandoned after getting put in like our or even my program.

Lucy genuinely cares about her clients and her work motivated her to take the e-SL courses for

the purpose of exploring the ways can she do more to enrich the lives of her clients.

The Story of Joe

At the time we did the interview, Joe was currently taking a credit-based e-SL course

Spirituality and Homelessness. The interview we conducted was in week 10 of the winter quarter

and the week before the final week. Narrative inquiry highly depends on the memory and

storytelling skills of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Joe was my first interviewee, he

answered my questions concisely and to the point, thus the story of Joe reads shorter compared to the other two participants, but unique perspectives are presented.

Teacher-Student Relationship. Teacher-student relationship plays an important role in Joe's e-SL course preference. The major reason he chose this e-SL course over the other options, was because he knew the professor and he appreciated the professor who taught the course.

> … yeah, it was a required course among other options. But then I also had the professor in another class. So I already know this class is going to be very good, and interesting, and I was going to have fun. So I mean simply it was that. I did a service immersion trip with him to set up a garden.

Joe enjoyed building relationships with professors and he mentioned one of the things he likes most about in-person learning over online is "being able to shake the Professor's hands before and after class and to have outside conversations with them."

Explore the Social Issue. Before taking this e-SL course, Joe didn't recall himself having many interactions with people experiencing homelessness before. Joe reflected on his impression and thoughts:

> I saw them on the streets. They don't need money sometimes. Maybe I had conversations with them. Try to make them feel noticed to make them feel seen. I mean, a lot of people ignore them. It's another breed of human, essentially.

With little knowledge of the topic of the social issue and few interactions with the people experiencing homelessness, Joe's hopes and expectations were to learn something new and to know different perspectives. As Joe reflected, he believed the e-SL course met his goals and expectations, made him think deeper about the social issue, and provided him the opportunity to explore the potential causes behind it.

I am always open to learning something new about homelessness. I mean just to see different effects. Yes, so many people go through this. Just drug addiction or disabilities that they can't control throughout their lives that they were given when they were born. I learned about financial situations, you can't control the parental life that you're brought up in, and you can't control what influences it. I learned that single-parent households may be an issue that's really connected to homelessness and that we should talk about it more.

Confront Challenges. Before taking the e-SL course, Joe had experience in participating in community service where he worked at the front desk of a hospital. On the one hand, Joe appreciated that in-person service opportunity because he believed face-to-face communication made it possible for him to build a deep connection and have meaningful conversations with the people he served.

Within my actual volunteer experience in person, I mean, it took it to a whole other level of actually doing the service. Just get the deeper connection you can get with somebody, and you can actually have a more meaningful conversation.

On the other hand, the in-person experience made Joe recognize that there might be some potential challenges for other people. Joe believed meeting new people in a new environment in person might cause uncomfortable feelings for some people.

I mean, other people respond differently. But I guess, when people are in the moment when they're supposed to help somebody, I mean, maybe some people would be a little nervous, or just for any other task in life people are just not ready for the challenge.

However, Joe believed in himself, he was always ready for the challenges and eager to explore what would happen to him.

But I mean for me I just like to take things all in and just see what happens. New people new experiences. Just go all in, because you never know what you might learn or who you might need. what you might experience, that you'll probably remember for the rest of your life.

Thus, prior in-person community service experience made Joe perceive the highlights and challenges that SL might have. Though he was aware having an e-SL course could be a different experience, and the topic might be new to him, he was never afraid to take on new challenges.

Summary

In conclusion, life events, and concrete volunteer and work experience in the past played a prominent role in shaping nontraditional students' interests and expectations and teacher-student relationships matter in e-SL. Eleanor's immigrant culture shock made her develop the empathy toward new immigrant children she served in tutoring. The abundant service activities Eleanor joined throughout her life provided her with a solid understanding of doing service and stimulated her curiosity to explore more in terms of learning. Lucy's childhood trauma as an immigrant made her desire to help people and truly care about individuals in need. Her rich service experience in serving the marginalized population, accompanying the elderly, and working with people with mental disabilities, gave her the motivation to take the e-SL course and explore more in order to better enrich the lives she served. Additionally, the teacher-student relationship played an important role in leading Joe to select the Spirituality and Homelessness e-SL course. With little knowledge of the topic, Joe was open to learning new things and he was satisfied that his expectations for the course had been met.

Experiential Learning Elements in e-SL

The conceptual framework of this study adopted Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning. Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning includes four stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Formation of Abstract Concepts, and Active Experimentation. As mentioned in Chapter 2, during the *Concrete Experience* stage, learners experience things physically or materially by doing, feeling, and seeing things. The *Reflective Observation* stage involves learners reflecting back on the experience as they begin to consider what they have just experienced. In the *Formation of Abstract Conceptualization* stage, learners either develop new ideas based on reflection or adapt existing ideas or concepts based on what they observe. Finally, in the *Active Experimentation* stage, learners test their new or renewed understandings of the world with their new or renewed perspectives. The four stages are in a cycle that shows that learning can begin at any stage, but the stages must be worked through sequentially (Kolb, 1984). Kolb claimed that the Cycle of Experiential Learning can be started at any stage; thus, the findings are organized beginning with the Concrete Experience phase represented by the e-SL course.

The second research question in this study is based on Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning, which is how, if at all, the e-SL experiences of nontraditional students demonstrate experiential learning elements. In this section, findings are organized under each participant's experience: Eleanor's Cycle of Experiential Learning, Lucy's Cycle of Experiential Learning, and Joe's Cycle of Experiential Learning respectively.

Eleanor's Cycle of Experiential Learning

Concrete Experience. As a Community Service Studies minor and as a Community Service Scholarship recipient, Eleanor has taken six credit-based service-learning courses between 2019-2021. The courses were around the topics of community psychology, nonprofit management, psychology and social justice, critical community engagement, and community internships. Among these six courses, three were online courses: Community Psychology, Nonprofit Management, and Community Internship.

As Eleanor reflected back, each of the courses she took had a different focus, but they all tied in together and Eleanor was able to apply everything that she learned across the class and paint a whole picture.

I took like 6 different classes for CSS. I mean, every single one of them like focused on different things. But at the end of the day, the common theme that I'd say tied them all together was asset-based community development. What was really great for me is being able to take all these classes and time together. I was able to relay my knowledge from one class to the other, and it all ties together, really nicely.

Specifically, in the in-person Critical Community Engagement class, Eleanor was first introduced to the concept of asset-based community development, and she was able to directly apply it to the service activity with a college community education project. Then, in the online Psychology and Social Justice class, she learned the psychology behind the asset-based community development model and made a psychological application. After that, in the online Nonprofit Management class, Eleanor completed virtual service with a mentorship project and she also designed a nonprofit organization using the asset-based community development model.

When she was in the virtual Community Internship, Eleanor was amazed that everything was tied in and built on each other perfectly.

> So it was cool the way that I was able to apply everything that I was learning across the classes. And it all just painted a big picture. It wasn't just random knowledge that like oh, this class focuses on that as they go into specifics for certain topic areas or whatever. But overall, the overarching theme I learned was just how can you take what is present in the communities like taking the assets.

The most memorable hands-on e-SL experience Eleanor had was the Community Internship course where she completed a 100-hour service online. In that virtual service, Eleanor helped develop a nonprofit organization. Eleanor credited this service with providing her with a different picture than other services, such as mentoring or tutoring. Eleanor was amazed to learn the behind the scene operation and management.

> So it was a farm-to-table non-profit. It's technically like a restaurant, but we got to engage in a way that we wouldn't have like through the other stuff. I essentially planned out their daily operations. And outlined the way that they were gonna have their hiring structure, like recruiting volunteers. Most of my service experience before has been like being in a position of some sort of mentorship role, or tutoring. But with the e-SL service project, I had to look at how is a nonprofit structured. And I had to take that knowledge and then apply it to essentially help a nonprofit to start. I'd say that was probably the most different thing that I feel has really been applicable to things that I'm doing right now, like even for work.

Eleanor applauded the intertwined nature of the e-SL course. She acknowledged that the concepts learned in class can be directly applied to the service and even to her work, and in turn,

the hands-on practices contributed to building her ability to develop a deeper understanding of book knowledge.

      Reflective Observation. After taking the e-SL courses, Eleanor recognized her awareness of social issues had been growing, she was introduced to the community beyond her everyday life, and she appreciated the intertwined components between service and learning that she can directly apply knowledge learned in the classroom to hands-on experiential learning placement in the community.

      At this point in my first couple of SL classes, I didn't really have a strong background in social justice issues. I wasn't super aware of everything that was going on. Obviously, I'd hear things on the news, or I'd read things about things, but living in a predominantly upper-middle-class area, and going to church where everyone has struggled with the same things. But I didn't really experience a lot of other minority groups are experiencing.

Eleanor's reflective observation was around her personal growth in the way she noticed her awareness of social issues has grown. With an open mind, she developed a deeper understanding of the struggles of people from diverse backgrounds and realized the complexity of the real world.

      I feel like, after having taken the classes I felt so much more informed on the world - what goes on, and just how complex everything is. I learned how a lot of the social justice issues that are so prevalent today are really systemic, how everything is just reinforced by the system, and how there are people in power like the status quo, the way that you know.

E-SL courses brought Eleanor out of her local community and provided her with a picture of the

dark side that caused the social issues. Though Eleanor had been involved in conducting service

all her life, the communities and churches she served were mostly her own community.

After engaging in various services in different communities with the e-SL courses,

Eleanor became aware of how her thinking had changed and the social issues she saw in reality

beyond her local community broke her heart.

> I really just got so sad like, seeing how all of these people in power really benefit from so
>
> many people suffering. I feel like that's probably my biggest takeaway. I really felt that
>
> like heartbreak. Whereas before, I wouldn't see it as much. Just because when I'd be
>
> volunteering a lot of people would like to be living in a similar neighborhood as me. And
>
> they go to a school like mine and have access to the same things that I did.

The various social issues and diverse communities e-SL presented not only made Eleanor

develop empathy toward the individuals who were suffering and disadvantaged but also made

Eleanor associate what she learned with her immigrant background from Ukraine. She admitted

that she came to acknowledge her own privilege.

> …but then completely removing myself from that, and taking myself back to when I was
>
> a child on the streets of Ukraine. And having that was like a reminder that I was taken out
>
> of that, but so many people weren't. So many people like we're actually brought up in that
>
> their entire time they were not given those opportunities. They didn't get to escape
>
> poverty. They didn't get to get a head start on life and go to college. They didn't get to do
>
> any of these things like they didn't get to learn all the things that I'm learning about, and
>
> like they don't get to go pursue their dreams. They don't get to go get the job that they
>
> want or that they are qualified for. So it's just learning about all these things and even

acknowledging my own privilege. Especially considering everything that's going on there now. We were very lucky to have gotten out of that before things got really scary.

In addition, Eleanor also appreciated the model of SL where she can apply the knowledge she learned in class directly to community engagement, which in turn builds for her further discussions in class: "It was really interesting to see and like going into my experiential learning placement and then going into a class, and having that knowledge be directly intertwined". Moreover, in e-SL, she had been exposed not only to a community very different from her own but she also realized social issues that are happening right around us.

> This is not something that's happening somewhere else. This is happening here. This is happening at my university, and this is happening in my community. And then, in service learning, I get like the experience was really great because we didn't just get to learn about it. We got to like, Go out there and like, do something. It's kind of going into the classes, and taking away so much about life.

As a nontraditional student who works full time, while double majoring and double minoring being a full-time student, Eleanor was grateful that even though Covid resulted in every class being moved online, there were still virtual service opportunities to keep her engaged.

> I feel like being able to stay plugged in and being able to continue to be involved in service learning online was very important, because I'm working full time. The flexibility with schedules made me able to work full time and provide for myself, and the people that I care about while also staying in school, while also being able to complete my service learning requirements virtually on my own time.

Eleanor admitted the significance of the flexibility of the online option that made it possible for her to stay in the Community Service Scholarship program and fill the service hours: "I just feel like if I had to maintain that in-person requirement like I just don't think I would have been able to stay in the program."

   Formation of Abstract Conceptualization. As a Community Service Studies minor, after taking six SL courses, the primary concept and theory Eleanor learned and constructed was the asset-based community development model. She learned the concept in different courses, emphasizing social justice and psychology respectively, and she eventually got to apply it in designing a nonprofit organization. Based on her concrete practice and reflection, Eleanor developed her understanding of the asset-based community model and a new perspective on the role of service providers:

> What are the talents of the community members? What can people offer to one another, and then use that, and bring that together to build a community where everyone essentially is mutually benefiting from each other's assets? And then explore what's missing? What can we bring in from the outside? So essentially, you are empowering the individuals of the community to act on their own behalf to build the community as opposed to just waiting for a Savior to come in and take care of it.

The new concept Eleanor learned made her realize the existing issues in the way nonprofit organizations and service providers act. She considered that it is essential to listen to the community's needs and hear the voices of the people being served first, and then support people in need correspondingly.

> That was also a big thing in how a lot of nonprofit organizations that like come into communities have good intentions. They want to help people in the community, but they

just kind of take over, and they don't actually ask the community members what they

need, or how they want to be helped. They just come in, and they like we know all about

what you need. We know what to do. I think they were called White Coats, essentially

like people that would do that.

Being able to understand and apply the asset-based community model was the major takeaway

for Eleanor from e-SL courses in terms of constructing new ideas and adapting theories and

concepts of what she observed.

Active Experimentation. With the asset-based community model concept in mind, when

Eleanor applied it to the service activities, she intentionally avoided making decisions and

judgments based on her own thoughts, but listened to community needs and developed a new

mindset to consider herself as a partner to the people being served.

So one of the bigger things that we focused on in the Critical Community Engagement

service activity was how can we avoid being these people like the White Coats. When we

came in at our service sites, that is we were the people coming in from the outside, we

tried not to be like oh, I know how to help you. I'm here to work. I'm here to do this and

that. No. Instead, I knew I'm here to partner with you, and I'm here to support you, tell me

what you need and tell me how I can essentially partner with you in that.

When asked if Eleanor was planning to have future involvement in online SL, she responded

with a solid yes. She was passionate to engage in service and appreciated the flexibility of the

online modality.

Yeah, for sure, I definitely think so. I think e-SL is more accessible that way and takes

away the commute time. I'd say it's not exactly the same as obviously being face-to-face

and being there at the organization. But I would say that it's still pretty fulfilling. And then you're still helping out and doing something really important.

In sum, in Eleanor's Cycle of Experiential Learning, her Concrete Experience was built up with six SL courses which included three e-SL courses, and a virtual hands-on service to help start a nonprofit organization. In the virtual courses, Eleanor tutored and mentored immigrant children to fulfill the service component of the course and designed a nonprofit organization to address the hands-on element of the course project. She believed all the courses built on each other nicely for her to gain a comprehensive understanding of SL. Taking courses at the beginning of her degree program prepared her for the courses she would take later. In spite of the distinct focuses of the courses, Eleanor was able to find connections among them.

In the Reflective Observation phase, Eleanor developed an awareness of social issues, she opened her eyes to understanding the struggles of minority groups. Serving immigrant children made her acknowledge her own privilege. She also appreciated the SL model where service and learning are intertwined, and in the class, she not only learned concepts but learned about life. In the Formation of Abstract Conceptualization phase, the leading concept Eleanor learned is the asset-based community model, and she recognized the importance of listening to the needs of the community. In the Active Experimentation stage, Eleanor intentionally avoided making decisions and judgments based on her own thoughts but listened to community needs and developed a new mindset to consider herself as a partner to the people she served.

Lucy's Cycle of Experiential Learning

Concrete Experience. It has been approximately one year since Lucy completed the e-SL course Spirituality and Homelessness, Lucy stated that she still remembers this course vividly because the course content moved her and she felt a strong personal connection to it. Lucy

believed her previous service experience in the soup kitchen was the key for her to build a

different level of compassion for this e-SL course.

> I feel like if I didn't have that experience working in the soup kitchen, I wouldn't have
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> connected more with the class. If you go back and ask some of the students. There are
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> some classes I do not remember at the university. I passed them, but I don't remember,
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> but I do remember the topics that we spoke about while we were discussing the different
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> topics that we were in class, and that's because I had that level of connection.

In the e-SL courses, Lucy did a lot of reading and had in-class discussions about spirituality and

wellness. In class, students watched movies on different topics related to people experiencing

homelessness. In addition, the professor invited guest speakers with knowledge about

homelessness in Chicago to join Zoom, and students had an opportunity to interview the guests.

> Because it was like it was under experiential learning aspect, we did interview some
>
> people in the class. They talked in class, so I was just thinking it would just give me a
>
> better insight into the situation here in Chicago. I've done papers on situations like
>
> California, and stuff like that on Skid Row. Things like that. But I just wanted to see what
>
> exactly is the situation in Chicago regarding homelessness and stuff like that.

Lucy appreciated the Zoom interaction with guest speakers. Her previous research on

homelessness in California also helped her comprehend the topic. Lucy believed the interviews

with guest speakers were essential for her to learn on a deeper level about the homeless situation

in Chicago, and helped her build her knowledge on how to help homeless individuals.

> As Lucy reflected back, the most impressive part about the course was a movie about an

abusive relationship. When watching the movie, Lucy immediately built a connection to her own

experience as she considered herself to have grown up in an abusive environment. She regarded the course as a confirmation of her belief and mission to help people in need.

> I still remember the movie about the individual that was in an abusive relationship, and she had a disability. But the person that she had her kid with would leave her, and stuff like that, but she eventually learned how to take care of herself. She had to combat homelessness and stuff. That type of stuff I'm able to remember because I did have that previous experience. I feel like this class that I took solidified my convention, and want to continue to help people who are disadvantaged in society.

In short, Lucy's concrete experience in the credit-based e-SL course included completing the readings, engaging in class discussions, watching movies, and interviewing guest speakers. What was most memorable to her was a movie about an abusive relationship; however, she learned the most from the class Zoom interviews with guest speakers.

Reflective Observation. As a full-time worker for people with developmental disabilities, Lucy constantly intersected classroom knowledge with what she observed at work. She sincerely felt sad for people who were not aware of supportive institutions, places like her work, that can help people in need.

> So just being in this class. I see some of the situations that some people that are having mental disabilities phase, and they feel like they have to face them alone. And they have to go out there by themselves without family care, or even like a friend that's gonna point them in the right direction. It sort of saddens me because they don't know some of the options that they have. So when I was in that class. I was like looking at that in a sort of relating that to my everyday life at work.

The realization Lucy gained in the e-SL class further directed her action in spreading information to people in need who were unaware of the supportive services available to them.

In addition to learning there are people who need help, through the e-SL course, Lucy also learned that there are people willing to help those in need. Lucy is determined to continue being one of them. She believes there is always more she can do to help the marginalized population.

> … there are still good people out here. There are people that are willing to help others that are in need, and I as a working part of society, should put more effort into trying, I try a lot too, but there are always ways that I can improve the way that I help individuals. So this class taught me there's always more that I can do, and if I am able to do it, I should do it.

Lucy was able to reflect back on the concrete experiences she had in the e-SL class and make a strong connection to her everyday life. Beyond that, what Lucy learned in the course formed and confirmed her belief to help people in need.

Formation of Abstract Conceptualization. Based on the reflection, Lucy developed the idea of looking outside of oneself. Lucy believes one should do the best that one can, put it into action, develop an open mindset, and look beyond their immediate surroundings.

> My take my huge takeaway is to look outside of yourself. I always look at my situation like I'm going through a lot. But my situation can always get better. There are some people that are always probably in a more tumultuous situation than I am. And if there's anything that I can do to help people in need, I should do it.

In addition to looking outside, Lucy also believed people should dispose of the *me mindset* and be kindhearted and benevolent.

As humans, we shouldn't be so selfish and just thinking me me me. It's when that me

mindset comes around that we have situations going on in places like California and Skid

Row, where people don't want to allow the government to build homeless houses,

because the rich want to keep the community so clean, not even clean just them just the

rich. A lot of people have this very selfish mindset just thinking of themselves. But this

class has taught me to look outside of myself. Try to help people.

The concepts Lucy developed in looking beyond one's self and disposing of the *me mindset* are

not only beliefs that she kept in her heart but also serve as guidelines to direct Lucy's action after

taking the e-SL course.

Active Experimentation. Lucy actively applied what she learned and her reflections

from the e-SL course to her work and to her everyday life. She has always regarded her clients at

work as friends and family and celebrated important holidays with them. But after taking the

course she desired to do more. In addition to her professional responsibilities, she actively

explored ways to enrich the lives of her clients and make them feel like she cares about them

beyond the work sphere.

So after that class, one specific thing is after this class I was just thinking more about

what I can do more to enrich the lives of my client, and they've never visited my home,

and they've never like met my family. So my family was having a gathering. I'm like, you

know what, let me tell the company that I would like to invite these guys over to my

house with me and stuff like that. So I was able to bring them over. They interacted with

some of my friends, and some of my family, so they were able to like enjoy time out.

They really enjoyed themselves. They played. It was very nice to see.

In addition to going above and beyond in serving her clients, Lucy also took action to keep hygiene products in her car so that she can give a hand to people experiencing homelessness on the street.

> Because I did learn in the class that, even though I know having a conversation with a disadvantaged individual, one of the main things that I took from that class is just having some materials in my car. Whenever I see a homeless person. So I have like many toothbrushes and toothpaste in my car. So if there are some homeless individuals that I see on the regular that they do know me, and I give them money, I give them food sometimes, so just simple things like that I do help.

One of the struggles of people in need that Lucy noticed in class was that they were not aware that there are supportive agencies that exist to provide help for them. Thus, Lucy took her time to do the research and promptly spread the information to people experiencing homelessness on the street.

> And because of that class, I did research to look at soup kitchens that were close to me. So whenever I saw somebody I let them know there are soup kitchens open on Sunday, just go here. They're this close to us. Or the food pantry, because there are some food pantries that offer food that you don't have to cook as well. So I was able to direct some individuals there.

> In sum, in Lucy's Cycle of Experiential Learning, the salient Concrete Experiences were interviews with guest speakers to learn more deeply about homelessness in Chicago, and the movie about an abusive relationship that confirmed Lucy's mission to help people in need. The Reflective Observations included noticing the marginalized population lack of information about where to seek help, while at the same time, recognizing that there are many benevolent

individuals and charity organizations in the world. Based on the concrete experiences and reflective observation, the Abstract Conceptualization Lucy formed looks beyond oneself and disposes of the *me mindset*. Lucy passionately took action to apply what she learned in the Active Experimentation phase, she invited her clients to her family gathering, carried hygiene products in her car on a daily basis, as well as thoughtfully conducted research on the local soup kitchen and actively shared the information to people in need.

Joe's Cycle of Experiential Learning

Concrete Experience. In the e-SL course Joe took, the topic was homelessness. In that class, Joe did research on an international federal housing program to help people experiencing homelessness in Brazil. Joe researched these conditions and learned about the local issues and gained a perspective on people's struggles in different parts of the world. As Joe reflected back, he found the research project meaningful.

> I also researched a pro-homeless housing program to help the homeless in Brazil, just to show me a different perspective. The housing was called the My House My Life program. So it was essential to build millions of homes for people in Brazil that we're making probably like $2,500 a month or less. We were being prioritized for this type of help, and they talked about how the past administration of Balsonaro wasn't complete. They got neglected the program, now that the President Lula has come back to reshape it and help out the people of Brazil and some more. So I just thought it was that it was really interesting.

In addition to conducting research and gaining international perspectives, in the e-SL course, Joe also learned from guest lectures from different organizations. He was amazed to know that there are numerous programs and spaces to support people experiencing homelessness.

The guest lectures from different organizations made me realize that there are a lot of

spaces and organizations that help out homeless people. They gave me their contact

information, and we gave people the opportunity to be able to volunteer for them as well.

So I thought that was very nice.

Joe appreciated the opportunity to interview guest speakers as well because the direct

conversation helped him think deeper about the social issue and enabled him to contemplate the

underlying causes of homelessness.

The interviews that I've had was impressive. I talked with a lot of guest speakers in the

class and they showed how like a single-parent household, I still think, can affect how a

child is brought up. And how that's like, maybe an issue that's really connected to

homelessness, that we should talk about more.

In short, the major concrete experiences for Joe in the e-SL course were conducting

research on an international federal housing program (Brazil's Affordable Housing Program

"MY HOME, MY LIFE" Returns, 2023) to gain a perspective on local issues, interacting with

guest lectures to explore potential causes for homelessness, and hearing first-hand information to

gain awareness of organizations that support people in need.

Reflective Observation. Before taking the e-SL courses, Joe considered that people

might have misunderstandings and misjudgments toward the homeless population. As Joe

reflected back, taking the course substantiated and reaffirmed the perspective that he had, and

made him aware that there are organizations that elevate marginalized voices and offer

individuals opportunities to earn an income with dignity.

The stereotypes that are out there, like homeless people are lazy, they don't work, and

they don't help themselves in any way. Just stuff like looking for handouts. Just those

wrong stereotypes. And I learned they had this program called Streetwise, where homeless people would actually work and sell papers to make a living to have to get shelter. It is different from what people might think.

In addition to clearing the misunderstanding and stereotypes of people experiencing homelessness, Joe further reflected that the e-SL course shaped his own values and morals of not judging people. Because the struggles of each individual are unknown to others, it is hard to imagine the experiences that people go through.

Just not to judge people, like not judging a book by its cover. You don't know what people are going through. The way that you perceive them. It's probably completely wrong most of the time. So I mean just take everything with a grain of salt and try to treat people the way you want to be treated. That's my main takeaway.

In sum, in the Reflective Observation phase, Joe reflected that the e-SL course validated and reinforced his perspectives that people could have misconceptions and stereotypes toward people experiencing homelessness. Since taking this e-SL course, Joe deeply recognized the value of not judging people and he has been actively implementing that with regard to how he sees people in the real world.

Formation of Abstract Conceptualization. Through reflective observation, Joe's perspectives on the misunderstanding of people experiencing homelessness got reaffirmed. In exploring the reasons people are placed in a homeless situation, Joe was stunned to learn the concept of the single-parent household statistic and shocked by its connection to homelessness.

The biggest takeaway like I said, was that when I learned the concept of the single-parent household statistic, and how I mean, I thought I talked to the professor on the last meeting that we had the presentation. I mean, I just talked to him about how I should do

further research on that outside of my studies just to see if I want to do anything with

that. Take it to a further step, just to try to get a more constructive opinion on how to go

about thinking about that issue.

Joe mentioned in different places in the interview that the connection between single-parent

households and homelessness is a topic that he would like to further research.

The thing that stuck with me the most is just what I came away with wanting to learn

more about how single-parent households connect to homelessness and ways in which we

can help to fix that, how to incentivize families to stay together.

In short, the connection between single-parent households and homelessness was the most salient

concept that Joe learned in this e-SL course. It was deeply stuck with him and he is determined

to do more research on this topic as a way to alleviate the cause of the social issue.

Active Experimentation. In addition to planning to conduct further research on the

connection between single-parent households and homelessness, Joe also believed e-SL shaped

his behaviors in everyday life. Joe adopted the no-judgment mindset and interacted with people

experiencing homelessness sympathetically.

So when I see somebody on the street begging, I would not automatically assume

anything about them in a good or bad light. I'll just it's just such a neutral stance of like I

understand where you're coming from. I mean based on what I've learned from the class.

And I'll just try to give them a little help and say I hope everything is going good, no

matter what your situation is, essentially. So I am just more with more sympathetic stands

for sure.

In sum, in Joe's Experiential Learning Circle, his Concrete Experiences in the credit-based e-SL

course include conducting research on an international organization, interviewing guest lectures

to explore potential causes, and hearing first-hand information about supportive agencies. Based on those concrete experiences, in the Reflective Observation phase, Joe confirmed his perspectives regarding stereotypes of people experiencing homelessness and developed a non-judgmental mindset of people. The most impressive concept that Joe learned in the Formation of Abstract Conceptualization phase, is the connection between single-parent households and homelessness. He mentioned more than once in the interview that he is passionate about conducting further research, while also mitigating the cause. Finally, in the Active Experimentation phase, through his adaption of the no-judgment mindset, Joe interacted sympathetically with people experiencing homelessness.

Best Practices of E-SL

After revealing participants' stories that describe how lived experiences shaped their orientation toward e-SL, and uncovering the experiential learning elements presented in each participant's Cycle of Experiential Learning, this section explores my third research question: *what best practices do nontraditional students recommend for developing e-SL in higher education?*

Using narrative inquiry, this section introduces the perceptions and perspectives of best e-SL practices suggested by each participant. The following themes are presented in this chapter: recognition of nontraditional student identity, the connection between nontraditional student identity and e-SL, collaboration and relationship building, revealing the value of e-SL, uncovering the importance of online modality, concerns on online modality, and critiques and recommendation for e-SL.

This section focuses on presenting the findings from each participant's perspective. A comprehensive discussion of the best practices of e-SL for nontraditional students in higher

education is provided in the next chapter, and implications for practitioners are further discussed by incorporating existing literature.

Eleanor's Best e-SL Practices

Recognition of Nontraditional Student Identity. Eleanor is considered a nontraditional student because she has a full-time job. On top of the full-time job, Eleanor is a full-time student who has double majors and double minors and the Community Service Scholarship that requires her to fill service hours.

Eleanor suggested that she had heard about the phase of nontraditional students before joining my study. Although she was not aware of different criteria for being a nontraditional student, she considered nontraditional students to be those who have a full life going on beyond attending school.

> I think it essentially means, like students that are not like oh I'm gonna go to college, and I'm gonna study and just focus on my school and graduate and go get a job, that's like a traditional student. I'm assuming nontraditional is like there's a life that's happening outside of that.

Though Eleanor tried not to place the nontraditional student label on herself, she cannot help but notice that her daily life and journey are different from her peers.

> I feel like sometimes I try not to read into it too much. But sometimes I can't help. But notice that my journey is just different in some ways. I have full-time engagements outside of school, while I'm also in school full-time.

Because of her packed schedule and multiple commitments in life, the online modality of service learning opens a door for her to remain engaged in service. Throughout the interview, Eleanor

mentioned in multiple conversations that if there were no online options to conduct service learning, she would not have been able to maintain service with the university's program.

Nontraditional Student Identity and e-SL. In addition to the preference for the flexibility and accessibility brought up by the online modality, Eleanor realized that being a nontraditional student and working full-time shined a light on the way she absorbed and comprehended e-SL. She believed her engagement in the real-life world beyond the university campus gave her a place to connect her learning in e-SL. Additionally, Eleanor valued her work experience which allowed her to interact with people from different backgrounds, and that experience further contributed to her behavior, action, and ability to empathize with the population serviced in e-SL.

> I think a traditional student wouldn't be able to like relate to the people they're serving as much. Because most of the people that we're serving are different from the people we associate with through school. I have been in the workforce and being able to apply my experience. Okay, you can sympathize with somebody, but until you really experience what it's like to be in their shoes, it's really hard to be empathetic. Because empathy, I'd say it's driven by action. There's an action component. So yeah, like I feel like I just wouldn't have been able to relate as much had I not been also working full time.

Eleanor believed that her full-time worker identity contributed to absorbing e-SL courses, and the work in real life also provided her with the space to apply what she learned.

Collaboration and Relationship Building. In the e-SL courses, Eleanor recalled that she believed she had built relationships with her peers, her professors, and community partners. Eleanor believed that e-SL provided her the opportunity to work collaboratively with her classmates through both service and group projects outside of class time.

Despite being online for the Community Internship class, specifically, we met twice a

week, virtually for 2 hours with the Professor, we met the founder of the nonprofit as

well. Because we're working with him directly to develop all their processes. And then

we were split up into teams, so we would meet with them outside of class, too.

Though the modality of the SL course was online, in Eleanor's class, she had the opportunity to

learn and collaborate synchronously with her class and community partners. Outside the class,

group projects keep her connected with her peers and build relationships.

Reveal the Value of e-SL. Though Eleanor had abundant experiences in onsite service

and in-person SL, the e-SL courses she took brought her new perspectives on understanding SL.

Through online service activities, she gained knowledge of the management and operations

behind the scene, which had not been noticed and appreciated when Eleanor only experienced in-

person service.

I guess before I couldn't really see how online service learning would be impactful. I feel

like virtual, like components of it were probably just like feels less personal, but

depending on the work. I feel like I realized that someone has to do the back-end stuff

and someone has to do things like the emailing, and someone has to get that information

out there. I feel like it just made me more aware of how much actually needs to be done

in the back end in order for things in person to happen. For things to go well in person,

someone has to be in the background doing all that other work.

In addition to uncovering the back-end operation of SL, for her personal growth, e-SL courses

made her realize that online learning requires self-discipline and she considered she had

successfully maintained accountability for her actions.

In online service learning, I have to hold myself accountable, and I have to stay
structured and self-disciplined. Because when you go in person. It's like you're there and
doing what you have to be doing. But with online service learning, it's just like taking a
class, obviously, you have to kind of be on top of your own work and meet those
deadlines. And yeah, I'd say it made me more disciplined.

In short, one of the values of e-SL provided to Eleanor was to be able to learn the management
and operation of running a SL activity, such as communication with different parties and
logistical issues behind the scenes, which was not noticed in onsite service experiences.
However, she developed self-discipline and was responsible for completing the e-SL courses.

Uncover the Importance of Online Modality. Eleanor acknowledged the importance of
having undergraduate students in four-year institutions enroll in e-SL courses. Eleanor believed
that the e-SL courses gave her a new perspective on how service learning could be implemented,
which was different than her imagination. Additionally, e-SL offered a unique experience that in-
person service could not provide.

I think everyone should definitely experience online service learning. Just looking at my
own experiences before I had done that, I had a very different perspective of what I guess
community work looks like. A lot of like face-to-face service is like greeting people at
the door and setting the standard for personal interactions and things like that. But with
the online service learning component, I learned that there's like so much more to be
done. And that it's not just happy-go-lucky and you go hang out and you go help people.
And it's like the amount of work that needs to be done at your desk. It's really important
and someone has to do it.

Beyond the importance of e-SL for all undergraduate students, Eleanor reflected on her situation and asserted that the online modality could be a plus for nontraditional students who had multiple life commitments and a busy schedule.

> I think it's very important. I mean the realistic time commitment helps nontraditional students stay involved in the community and keeps them engaged. It would be very disappointing for someone to not be able to participate in that just because like they have other responsibilities, especially for someone who has a kid. They don't have the time literally. Obviously, me working full time, how in the world is someone able to maintain that same level of commitment but having to be in-person?

In sum, Eleanor believed the online modality adds to the importance of service learning. It could present new perspectives of service learning to undergraduate students, and the flexibility and accessibility of e-SL make it realistic for nontraditional students to keep engaged.

Critiques and Recommendations for e-SL. As much as Eleanor appreciated what she learned from e-SL, along with the meaningful experience, she provided little critique of e-SL. However, it did occur to her that communication could be a possible problem.

> I mean in my experience I haven't had anything negative really. I guess a potential problem that could happen is just with communication. It's really important to stay on top of that because when you're in person you can always just ask someone directly. If you need help, or for what's going on, or to stay in the loop. But if you're virtual and like say you're the only person at an organization, I feel like it can be easy to like forget about that one person. And then if something's going on, but they're completely out of the loop, then it's just difficult for them to find out through other means.

In addition to discussing communication as a potential issue in e-SL, Eleanor offered a recommendation for developing e-SL that offered more options and opportunities. She personally noticed that as Covid faded, it became hard for her to identify and locate virtual opportunities to stay engaged. She would love to participate in in-person service, but she was discouraged by the long commute time.

> I guess probably just have maybe more opportunities to do online service learning. Because now that we are back in person, there aren't a lot of ways that people can get involved virtually. For in-person service, the commute time for me is super bad like. When I was volunteering, it'd be about 45 min, and sometimes with rush hour, it could be like up to like an hour. I know that some people would have to drive for an hour hour and a half. Or like some people didn't have a car, and just like by train, it would just take them that long. So I'd say that that was probably something that I know people were struggling with, and like myself, too, just because, even being a full-time student, and then like having to work. It was just really exhausting. I was like beginning to burn out.

In sum, Eleanor recognized her nontraditional student identity because she has a full-time job and is enrolled in school full-time. She noticed that her journey is different in some ways compared to her peers who are traditional students. The full-time working experience contributed to Eleanor's e-SL in terms of preparing her to absorb and comprehend e-SL, as well as providing her a place to connect classroom knowledge to real life. In Eleanor's experience, though the e-SL courses were delivered online, she was still able to collaborate with her classmates and build relationships with peers, professors, and community partners.

Eleanor revealed the value of e-SL which provided her with the knowledge of management and operations behind the scenes and helped her become a self-disciplined

individual. She uncovered the importance of online modality to all undergraduate students and acknowledged that it is the online option that made her own service learning realistic. She believed nontraditional students could appreciate the accessibility of e-SL. As much as she gained from e-SL, Eleanor did not have serious concerns about online service learning. The only potential problem she brought up would be communication between different parties. A recommendation Eleanor offered is to have more e-SL opportunities for her and other nontraditional students to be able to stay connected to service given that in-person service with long commute times was exhausting.

Lucy's Best e-SL Practices

Recognition of Nontraditional Student Identity. Lucy was selected as a participant in this study because she works full-time and she is older than 25. Lucy was an 8th-year undergraduate student, and learned she was a nontraditional student after reflecting on the fact that she was enrolled in the undergraduate program longer than her peers. Lucy researched time to degree and was informed by her counselor that she is considered a nontraditional student.

> I first heard about nontraditional students when I was like looking towards research on how long - when you're in school for so long, you sort of start doing a lot of - because there's that guilt that weighs down on you like I'm spending so much time in school. I talked to counselors, and they introduced the term *nontraditional students* to me and told me that I can be considered a nontraditional student, because I spent more than 4 years trying to gain my degree. That's the not traditional track to me.

Another major difference in how Lucy distinguished herself from other college students is that she paid for school all by herself.

All through college, I was working full-time to help pay for my schooling. So some

people don't do that. The fact that I'm depending on myself to pay for school. That's a big

thing. But to be honest, I don't like to compare myself to others, because I don't know the

situation that people live in.

In short, Lucy considered herself a nontraditional student because she has been enrolled in the

undergraduate program longer than four years and she works full-time to pay for her own

schooling.

Nontraditional Student Identity and e-SL. As discussed and quoted in Lucy's

Experiential Learning Circle in the section above, Lucy's job had a significant influence on her

focus and understanding of the e-SL course. Lucy's role and work with adults who have

developmental disabilities helped them integrate into the community as normally as possible.

Based on her working experience where she worked with adults with developmental

disabilities who have or soon could be homeless, she considered herself absorbed in this e-SL

course on a deeper level. She felt sad to know through the class that a large number of

individuals with developmental disabilities were not aware that support agencies, similar to the

agency where she works, exist. As a result, to put what she learned into action, she conducted

research on the supportive agencies and actively shared the information with people who

experience homelessness on the street. The e-SL course also inspired Lucy to support her clients

in more meaningful and empathetic ways. For example, she went above and beyond and invited

her clients to her family gathering where she built genuine friendships with them.

The fact that Lucy was able to have a strong Experiential Learning Circle was inseparable

from the nontraditional student identity that she works full-time with adults with developmental

disabilities. Her work background provided her with a solid foundation for understanding people in need. And after class, she applied what she learned to better serve her clients.

Reveal the Value of e-SL. Lucy claimed that e-SL is important to all undergraduate students in college. Based on Lucy's personal encounter, she had observed students who were unaware of social issues and centered only on their immediate surroundings. In this way, Lucy believed that e-SL could push students beyond their comfort zone and open their minds to interact with society at large.

> I think it's very important to have all students participate in service learning. Because when back, when I still lived on campus, I encountered so many different people. I was in a sorority for a little bit, and sort of see the mindset that a lot of these girls have. And it's kind of unfortunate. It's very selfish. They don't really know about disadvantaged groups or minority groups. They're very selfish. And it was kind of disheartening to see. So I feel like with service learning classes. It takes them out of their bubble a little bit. It will take people out of their personal bubbles and out of their comfort zone to see things that they most likely have not been exposed to, unfortunately. And it will get them to see what some individuals are facing in the real world. The goal may be to open their eyes, try to help more in day-to-day life, and take it along with them throughout their lives, so that they don't feel like they need to focus as much on themselves. Focus on yourself, but still, help people along the way.

In Lucy's view, e-SL could expose students to an aspect of the world they may not have experienced personally through life, and this also applies to nontraditional students who have a certain level of real-world connection.

We're humans at the end of the day, and we do have the privilege to attend a university such as this or any like type of schooling. This is another way to enhance our learning as well, to build or to learn new things, or to learn about people outside of themselves. We have a type of privilege, but there are still people that are worse off than we are as well, even though we're nontraditional students, we're still students at the same time. So we're learning just like everybody else.

In sum, Lucy highlighted the value of e-SL as pushing students outside their comfort zones and enhancing both traditional and nontraditional students' learning by exposing them to different aspects of the world.

Uncover the Importance of Online Modality. Lucy believed the e-SL course she took met her expectation. She appreciated that guest speakers were invited to Zoom with them and the interaction with people in real-time made e-SL impactful. Most importantly, it appeared that Lucy's learning of the topic had not been hindered by the modality being online.

It did meet my expectation. I think it's because of the Covid situation that they haven't been able to do the in-person experience. They made an effort to include individuals to come over to Zoom to talk to us. So I do remember that. I don't think it took away from my learning experience on the topic. If they're having an in-person meeting that should be stated at the beginning of the online course, saying like we're meeting on this day so that they make themselves available to go for that in-person experience and stuff like that. But having it online does not take it away from what I should learn. And I learned a lot from it being online.

In addition to recognizing that the online modality did not hamper her learning of the topic, as a nontraditional student, very similar to Eleanor, Lucy recognized the convenience that online education brought students with abundant life responsibilities.

> So, I do advocate for online service learning because of people that are in situations like mine that find it difficult to commute, or if their schedules are pretty tight with maybe having children or something where they have to be somewhere at a certain time.

Lucy valued the flexibility and accessibility of e-SL, and she believes online learning is nontraditional-student friendly.

Critiques and Recommendations for e-SL. The online learning environment is a big attraction for Lucy and she claimed that she found the ideal of online service learning appealing. A recommendation she had for e-SL is to incorporate some in-person components in the service part, such as a one-day field trip, as opposed to being fully online.

> I'm a big fan of online learning, actually. But the only thing I will say for like online service learning is maybe that one class where we do get to meet in person to make that effort to have a designated time where we do get together to have an in-person experience in meeting different types of people.

Indeed, Lucy greatly appreciated the opportunity to interview guest speakers through Zoom in the e-SL course that she took.

> Even if you can't have any in-person service, I like what they're currently doing with having people give interviews, and take the opportunity to come on Zoom to talk about the experience. That's also something that I found that was like really enjoyable. Other than that I really enjoyed the class, and I think the professor did a really good job in trying to integrate as much with the circumstances that people were dealing with.

It was Lucy's belief that synchronous courses could provide greater benefits for students than asynchronous classes since students are able to interact with each other and receive feedback in real time.

> I enjoyed the Zoom type. Because you're seeing the people in real time. The interviews were done via Zoom, and you had to meet these people that shared their experiences. If you're doing it at your own pace, you're not seeing talking to these people. We were able to like ask questions at the end of their little discussion, so that added to the class. I don't think a just like having the students do it at their own pace would be very beneficial for this type of learning.

In short, Lucy was a big fan of online learning, but for e-SL, she would appreciate a bit of in-person experience in doing service and getting together with her classmates. If e-SL had to be done fully online, for the circumstance of the pandemic, she believed that students could benefit from synchronous courses with real-time interaction.

In conclusion, due to her long stay in the undergraduate program for eight years and working full-time off campus, Lucy considered herself a nontraditional student. Lucy's work with adults who have developmental disabilities significantly shaped her expectations, focuses, and applications of the e-SL courses. Lucy believes e-SL is valuable for all undergraduate students to provide them an opportunity to step out of their comfort zone, raise the awareness of disadvantaged groups or minority groups, as well as open students' eyes to the world that they most likely have not been exposed to. As a big fan of online learning, Lucy highly valued the convenience e-SL brought to nontraditional students. She believed the online modality did not take away from her experience on the topic. However, if possible she did appreciate a field trip

or one day of service to meet the population they discussed in class. For a fully online e-SL, she considered that students could benefit more from synchronous courses with real-time interaction.

Joe's Best e-SL Practices

Recognition of Nontraditional Student Identity. Joe was selected to participate in this study given his identity as a nontraditional student. He works full-time while also pursuing his bachelor's degree full time. Talking about the term nontraditional student, Joe believed he never heard the phrase and does not know the meaning of nontraditional student. After explaining the definition of the term, Joe reflected that he hardly ever thought his work hours made him different from other college students.

> I thought of myself working full time. I thought most people did that, or get to do it in some capacity at least. Just to pay for college, to begin with. But yeah, compared to other students, I guess they got it slightly easier in some areas and vice versa for me. It just depends on how much people want to focus on their studies as opposed to their current work outside school. Everybody has their stresses. People have their volunteering obligations, and scholarship obligations, so they can have it just as hard or easy as me.

Joe considered it hard to say if working full-time necessarily made his life harder compared to college students who do not, but he recognized that working full-time provided him with real experience beyond the university campus which essentially made him more comfortable in communicating with people in service learning.

> Working full-time gave me a more realistic perspective on the outside world. I mean my job. I guess I kind of talk to a lot of people. Maybe it would just help to be in the classroom as well to try to be more comfortable when I communicate with people on Zoom.

Joe admitted that although he prefers in-person courses, he appreciates the flexibility and accessibility of online service-learning options.

> Taking online classes while working full time helped me a lot just because of my time schedule. I could really just schedule work around the school so much easier than I ever thought I could.

Reveal the Value of e-SL. In addition to admitting the flexibility of e-SL, Joe acknowledged that e-SL is important for all undergraduate students. He considered the current requirement at his university for undergraduate students to take at least one experiential learning course reasonable. It was Joe's belief that e-SL could encourage students to develop empathetic feelings and recognize the importance of giving back to society.

> Yeah, everybody should take online service learning. It requires just one class. Yeah, I think that absolutely should be the case. Everybody should. Just part of your life to give back to society. I mean, if you gotta be selfish and be selfish for others. So yeah, that's It's a good class to show you that for sure.

Besides developing the recognition of giving back to society, similarly to Lucy, Joe asserted that the value of e-SL is to push students outside their comfort zones by exposing them to a side of society they would never otherwise see. Joe further added that it applies to both traditional students and nontraditional students in college.

> Just to get out of your comfort zone into something that you normally wouldn't do. Just something a lot of people don't normally do. It is important for traditional students and nontraditional students for sure. Yeah, just the same. I don't see a difference between the two.

In short, Joe believed an e-SL course can be considered a good class to show students the value

of giving back to society and having an open mind. He believed e-SL can force students to step

out of their comfort zones and have an experience beyond what students do in their daily life.

Concerns on Online Modality. In discussing the modality of service learning, Joe

straightforwardly stated his first choice would be the in-person option and he valued the human

interaction in service learning.

> Everything I prefer more in person, to be honest with you. That's the best option for me. I
>
> mean, that's how you really get to know people. I think I'm not really a fan of this online
>
> stuff, but I mean it's something that we've had to get used to because of Covid and it's just
>
> the new part of technological evolution.

Specifically, Joe pointed out that he didn't consider building a relationship or connection with

his classmates.

> When you just see somebody on a screen, you don't have that same connection or that
>
> same worry about like presenting yourself in a much more serious manner. I mean if
>
> you're face to face, it's much more. It's just a completely different environment that you
>
> just have to have face-to-face, I think, to begin with.

Though Joe was willing to take the lead and start conversations, the Zoom breakout rooms were

frustrating when people muted themselves and turned their cameras off.

> I don't think I became more in touch with my classmates within the class. I mean, yeah in
>
> person is always the best for that. Most people had their cameras off when we went to
>
> different Zoom Meetings, the smaller ones where we would just have separate group
>
> discussions. Nobody would talk. I would have to speak up, so we can sort of start the

conversation. So we'll just be just turning off the screen and muting the whole time for the next 5 min.

Another critique Joe had toward online learning was that professors tend to lower the expectation compared to an in-person class. He believed the online learning environment has forced teachers to simplify the curriculum. As an overachiever who was always up for the challenges, Joe didn't appreciate that.

If I have my choice, I'd have every class in person. I think online learning has forced teachers to move the curriculum into an easier environment. I mean, they say that a lot of teachers use the excuse of this is Covid and people are going through a lot. Even though it's after 3 years, and everything is really calmed down, but they still say assignments will be easier. They like to formulate them to be much easier. I remember in the beginning I had to write a 10-page paper in one of my English classes. She was like, oh, we'll just write a 4-page paper instead. We'll cut the sources to half because I know you guys are going through a lot. This is what we're supposed to do.

In addition, Joe claimed from students' college experience perspective, if the entire college experience was spent via Zoom, then they would be losing a valuable and familiar experience.

I mean a lot of people give too much leeway. I mean, I think people don't - they just completely lose the ability to communicate in an online environment. They could just have their camera off, might mute the whole 4 years, and just go by for college like nothing ever happens. I mean, I don't think that's a way to experience life. There's less some sort of college experience and just leave like nothing ever happened.

As a student who started college at the beginning of Covid, Joe highly valued the experience of in-person courses, and SL courses are no exception: "I liked criticizing online learning. I didn't really like it from the beginning. It just seems sort of unnatural to me."

In sum, Joe considered the in-person option would always be his first choice. Joe believed online courses limited the ability of students to build connections with each other and the Zoom environment could take away the physical campus experience in their college life. He also believed both professors and students should not consider courses to be easier when the modality shifts online.

Critiques for e-SL. Before taking the e-SL course, Joe participated in 100 hours of community service in a hospital. As Joe reflected back, the in-person service experience and the e-SL course had completely different focuses. Joe believed e-SL courses emphasize learning a concept, whereas in-person service makes a more impressive experience. In the in-person service, Joe was able to have more meaningful conversations and help people in a more practical way.

> So I worked at the hospital front desk. It was completely different. I mean, this online
>
> class was more about learning a concept and guest lectures about people's experiences.
>
> But within my actual volunteer experience in person, I mean, it took it to a whole other
>
> level of actually doing the service for sure. Where one time a blind person came in, and
>
> they needed to be escorted to their one of their rooms where another family member was
>
> in. And I had to help him took him up to the elevator and everything like that, so that was
>
> a much more deeper experience that I enjoy doing, helping out people. Just get the deeper
>
> connection you can get with somebody, and you can actually have a more meaningful

conversation. Just did the body language is reflected and just pronounced much more in a person, and environment as well, which I think also makes a big difference.

Joe enjoyed his in-person service because there were more interpersonal connections involved. Joe found it meaningful to help people out in a practical way and develop deeper connections with the people served.

In sum, while working full-time, on the one hand, Joe had not considered himself a nontraditional student. On the other hand, he admitted that being a full-time worker made him more comfortable communicating with people in service learning. He revealed the value of e-SL, as a form of SL, allowed students to step out of their comfort zones and gave people an opportunity to give back to society. However, Joe criticized the online modality. Joe believed the online modality limited the level to which people connect with each other. Additionally, he did not appreciate professors shifting the curriculum into an easier environment while delivering a course online. Joe enjoyed doing in-person service because it allowed him to build interpersonal connections and help people in a practical way.

Chapter Summary

The narratives of three participants' life stories, service learning involvement, and e-SL course experiences revealed their orientation towards e-SL. Their life experiences, work situation, and prior service experience shaped their focuses and expectations in e-SL. Each participant experienced their e-SL course differently and formed their unique Experiential Leaning Cycles. The best practices for e-SL were described genuinely by each participant and were incredibly valuable to the field of service learning.

In each of the narratives, I learned important lessons and gained a keen understanding of how nontraditional students make meaning from their lived experiences and e-SL courses. As I

analyzed the narratives under each participant's story, I was able to discover the unique characteristics that stand out; in addition to a transparent understanding of each of their journeys. Chapter five further discusses three key findings of the study: (1) Prior volunteer activities and concrete work experiences played a prominent role in shaping nontraditional students' interests, expectations, and behaviors in e-SL; (2) E-SL validated its value as an experiential learning pedagogy, where the phases of Reflective Observation and the Formation of Abstract Conceptualization were critical in shaping students' view of the world and their view of themselves; (3) E-SL attracted nontraditional students by balancing school with other responsibilities, but interpersonal outcomes and the sense of belonging to the institutional community were compromised in e-SL. Additionally, Chapter five identifies implications for practice, presents the significance of findings, offers recommendations for future research, as well as acknowledges the limitations.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

With the overarching goal of exploring the value of e-SL and gaining a richer understanding of nontraditional undergraduate students' experience of perceptions of e-SL, a narrative inquiry was conducted to present three participants' unique e-SL journeys. Through the process of identifying my research interest, reviewing existing scholarship, designing the study process, conducting interviews to collect participants' stories, and analyzing how each participant makes sense of their e-SL experience, the entire experience has profoundly impacted my thinking and left me in sincere gratitude. I was delighted to hear some of the participants' stories supported the findings from the literature, I was excited to explore the potential explanations when participants' experiences were in contrast to existing claims, and I was thrilled to uncover new perspectives from participants' narratives to contribute to the scholarship and practice of e-SL.

Narrative inquiry, according to Elbaz-Luwisch (2010), involves a collaborative process between the researcher and participants, and participant stories are best shared in a comfortable environment created through relationship building. Ultimately, the researcher is responsible for elevating the perspectives of each participant by assembling a story that encompasses all viewpoints (Bochner & Riggs, 2014). In spite of the fact that I met each participant for the first time during the interview and only one round of interviews was conducted for the purpose of this research, I am profoundly grateful for their willingness to vulnerably reveal their personal stories and generously unpack their experiences. While this qualitative narrative inquiry study in no way represents the experiences of all nontraditional students, it is my hope that SL scholars and practitioners recognize the needs and expectations of this increasing population. I believe this

study can set a new stage for much-needed conversations on developing e-SL for nontraditional students in postsecondary education.

Starting with a summary of the study, the concluding chapter first delineates the predominant findings as related to existing literature to illustrate nontraditional students' e-SL experiences and perceptions. The connections between each key finding and the theoretical framework of Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy are provided. Next, implications for practice and the significance of the findings are discussed. Finally, the limitations of the study are explored and recommendations for potential further research are offered to conclude the study.

Summary of the Study

The outbreak of the Covid in March 2020 forced the majority of courses to be delivered online, including SL courses. As a form of experiential education, SL highly values hands-on experiences (Furco, 1996; Howard, 2001; Jacoby, 2014) and immersion in situations (Butin, 2005; Pompa, 2005; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). Concerns were raised by SL practitioners regarding if students can achieve the desired learning outcomes in front of digital devices. As a form of online education, SL potentially serves the nontraditional student population who favors online learning (Dolch & Zawacki-Richter, 2018; Rabourn, 2018). However, it remains under-researched as to whether nontraditional students hold the same affection for e-SL. In addition, little is known about the degree to which nontraditional students have different perspectives on the pros and cons of SL modalities.

Thus, to address the research gaps, with the overarching goals of exploring the value of developing e-SL and gaining a richer understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate students, a narrative inquiry approach was conducted to address the following research questions: (1) How do the lived experiences of nontraditional students shape

their orientation towards e-SL? (2) How, if at all, do the e-SL experiences of nontraditional students demonstrate experiential learning elements? And (3) What best practices do nontraditional students recommend for developing e-SL in higher education?

In response to the first research question, I uncovered that life events, concrete volunteer activities, and work experience in the past played a prominent role in shaping nontraditional students' interests, expectations, and behaviors. To address the second research question, I found that each participant's e-SL experience fulfilled the Cycle of Experiential Learning. The Cycle of Experiential Learning demonstrated how each participant went through the phases of concrete experience, reflective observation, the formation of abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. By fulfilling the Cycle of Experiential Learning, the three participants' stories indicated that e-SL validated its value as an experiential learning pedagogy. For the third research question, I present the best e-SL practices provided by each participant. Specifically, to uncover the best practices, the aspects presented include: recognition of nontraditional student identity, the connection between nontraditional student identity and e-SL, collaboration and relationship building, the value of e-SL, the importance of online modality, preeminent concerns on online modality, and critiques and recommendation for e-SL.

As stated in Chapter 1, this research focuses on both academic SL and co-curricular SL because they both demonstrate the fundamental elements of SL: reflection and reciprocity. While academic SL incorporates a deeper connection to the curriculum and targets more academic goals, both types of service activities contribute to all-around education and can be regarded as experiential learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). This research intentionally selected participants taking academic SL courses only, because students taking SL courses tend to have comparable experiences in terms of the length of the learning process. Whereas students who participate in

co-curricular SL activities could have various experiences, from single-time one-day service to weekly service that lasts for years. In this way, participants from SL courses were selected for this study in order to explore their unique stories resulting from comparable experiences. Due to the nature of the research questions that focus on students' lived stories, e-SL experiences, as well as their takeaways and recommendations, it is my belief that both academic SL educators and co-curricular SL professionals could be benefited from the results of this study.

Based on the results of each research question, three key findings from all three participants' stories and perspectives emerged and are discussed in further detail in the following section.

Discussion of Findings

Although the participants identified themselves in diverse ways, including their lived experiences and absorption of e-SL elements, each of the key findings reflects salient experiences and perceptions of the three participants as nontraditional students in e-SL. In this section, four prevailing findings are described and discussed in detail in accordance with existing literature and through the theoretical lens of Freire's educational philosophy on critical pedagogy and problem-posing education.

The three predominant findings of this study are: (1) Prior volunteer activities and concrete work experiences played a prominent role in shaping nontraditional students' interests, expectations, and behaviors in e-SL; (2) E-SL validated its value as an experiential learning pedagogy and the phases of Reflective Observation and the Formation of Abstract Conceptualization were critical to shaping students' view of the world and their view of themselves.; (3) E-SL attracted nontraditional students given that it offers balance between

school and other responsibilities, but interpersonal outcomes and the sense of belonging to the institutional community were compromised in e-SL.

Prior Experience and e-SL Orientations

The predominant finding of the first research question, *how do the lived experiences of nontraditional students shape their orientation toward e-SL*, is that life events, concrete volunteer activities, and work experience in the past played a prominent role in directing participants' interests, setting the expectations, and shaping their behaviors. Through the lens of the theoretical framework, Freire's (1970) educational philosophy on critical pedagogy and problem-posing education, showed that e-SL effectively coincided with Freire's problem-posing pedagogy where education was based on the learner's present interests and experiences.

Prior Volunteer Activities and Authentic Work Experience Directed Participants' Interests and Set Their Expectations of e-SL. A study by Stukas et al. (2006) found that nontraditional students in SL are more likely to be dedicated to service that benefits themselves and others. Mackeracher (2004) also reported that nontraditional students prefer to learn from real-life situations and are eager to apply their knowledge in their work and personal lives. The narratives collected in this study not only provide evidence for the existing statements of nontraditional students' motivations and expectations of e-SL but also add new perspectives to existing knowledge.

Eleanor believed before she took any SL and e-SL courses that her life was already all about service. The abundant service activities Eleanor joined throughout her life provided her with a solid understanding of doing service, which in turn stimulated her curiosity to further explore the meaning of *learning* in service learning. Her expectation for SL and e-SL was to reveal what the learning part of service learning can offer her and to experience the difference in

her mindset the courses can make. As Miller and Lu (2003) argued, nontraditional students in SL are observed to be more self-directed, productivity-driven, and goal-orientated. With these particular goals, Eleanor developed her understanding of the asset-based community model through e-SL and formed a new perspective on the role of service providers. She further actively applied the concepts and mindset into practice by listening to community needs and considering herself as a partner to the people being served.

Lucy's story also fully demonstrated the point that nontraditional students are more interested in service when they can see a beneficial outcome. And they are passionate about applying the knowledge learned to their work and personal lives. Lucy decided to take the credit-based e-SL course on the topic of homelessness mainly because of her authentic service experience, past encounters with people experiencing homelessness, and her work experience with people having developmental health issues. She had a very deep passion for homeless rights and expected to learn more about this social issue in and beyond the Midwest area. After the course, Lucy actively went above and beyond to apply the knowledge learned from class in serving clients at work, as well as supporting people experiencing homelessness in the community.

In contrast to Eleanor and Lucy, Joe had no abundant experience with the topic in the e-SL course. Due to his lack of knowledge of the topic and the fact that he had little interaction with homeless people, Joe hoped and expected to learn something new and understand different perspectives on the issue. With the expectation of opening up to learn everything new in mind, Joe adopted the no-judgment mindset from the e-SL course and applied it in his personal life by interacting sympathetically with people experiencing homelessness.

The three participants' narratives aligned with the literature: nontraditional students are self-directed, productivity-driven, and goal-orientated in e-SL. All three participants have actively applied what they learned to their personal lives. However, the extent to which they applied their work can be linked with the nature of their work and whether their current work is aligned with their career goals. Lucy applied most of what she learned to her work because she was determined to work in the realm of health science. Although Eleanor and Joe also worked full-time, they indicated that their current work was not directly related to their majors and they work full-time for the purpose of paying for their tuition.

In addition to adding evidence to the existing literature, the current research contributed to a new perspective that the expectations and interests of nontraditional students are built on their prior experience and knowledge of the specific topic in the e-SL course. Additionally, the extent to which they applied the takeaways from e-SL courses to their work could depend on if their current full-time work demonstrates their career ambition.

Real-Life Work Experience and Life Events Shaped Nontraditional Students' Behaviors in e-SL. According to Kasworm (2010), nontraditional students recognize the differences between them and their younger counterparts, and they believe their personal and professional experiences have enabled them to be more mature and responsible. Similarly, Reed et al.'s (2005) study of nontraditional students in on-site SL claimed nontraditional students identify themselves as workers and have confidence in their abilities based on their roles in life as workers and/or parents. The narratives on the behavior of all three participants in this study indicated that their work experience in the real world made them confident in communicating with different parties in e-SL and comfortable dealing with unforeseeable challenges.

Joe's narrative indicated that working full-time provided him with real-world experience beyond the school campus, which enabled him to communicate more effectively with people during service learning. In e-SL, he spontaneously took the lead in engaging his peers in Zoom discussions and was comfortable interviewing guest speakers from different organizations.

Lucy's story demonstrated working for adults having developmental disabilities provided her with a solid background, which made her able to absorb the e-SL topic of homelessness on a deeper level. For example, Lucy recognized from her work that without the help and support from her organization, some of her clients could end up experiencing homelessness. Therefore, when she learned in class that one of the reasons that caused homelessness was lack of information regarding existing support organizations, she would echo it immediately. Additionally, after she learned in class that marginalized populations were eager for social-emotional support, Lucy actively took action to apply this knowledge and concept to her clients by inviting them to family gatherings. As for the life events, Lucy's struggles in school while dealing with an abusive family environment encouraged her to accumulate new knowledge regarding the causes of social issues and the needs of underserved populations, and use this knowledge from the e-SL course to support individuals in need. Additionally, her childhood trauma as an immigrant encouraged her to help her classmates who face similar issues.

Similarly, as a result of Eleanor's immigrant culture shock, she developed the ability to empathize with new immigrants. This personal connection allowed Eleanor to deepen her understanding of the needs of the people she served. In addition, Eleanor's reflection on the value of e-SL revealed that through e-SL courses, she realized that online learning requires self-discipline, and she thought she had been successful in maintaining accountability.

The stories and experiences of the three participants provided vivid portrayals of evidence to add to existing literature that are in alignment with the findings on in-person SL. Moreover, the personal and professional experiences of nontraditional students prepared them to be mature and responsible individuals in e-SL who are able to facilitate their growth in an online environment.

In sum, prior volunteer activities and authentic work experience directed participants' interests and set their expectations of e-SL. Three participants' narratives supported the point in the existing literature that nontraditional students in SL are dedicated to service that benefits themselves and others and they are eager to apply their knowledge in their work and personal lives. A new perspective offered by this study is that depending on the nature of their current work and their career plan, the extent to which they applied e-SL learning outcomes to their work varies. Additionally, real-life work experience and life events shaped participants' behaviors in e-SL. In alignment with the literature, as evidenced by the narratives of all three participants in this study, their work experience provided them with the confidence to communicate with other parties in e-SL, while also feeling comfortable handling unforeseen events.

E-SL and View of the World

To address the second research question, *how, if at all, do the e-SL experiences of nontraditional students demonstrate experiential learning elements*, the narratives from participants reveal that each participant's e-SL experience fulfilled the Cycle of Experiential Learning. The Cycle of Experiential Learning demonstrated how each participant went through the phases of concrete experience, reflective observation, the formation of abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. By fulfilling the Cycle of Experiential Learning,

the three participants' stories indicated that e-SL validated its value as an experiential learning pedagogy, and shaped students' view of the world in terms of awareness of social issues and their view of themselves regarding personal growth.

Among the four phases in the Cycle of Experiential Learning, during the conversation and dialogue in the interview, all three participants emphasized and described in great detail the Reflection Observation phase and Formation of Abstract Concepts phase. When asked about the preliminary takeaways from the e-SL course, all participants indicated that they gained a deeper knowledge of the concept of the social issues discussed in the e-SL course. The awareness of the social issues in turn facilitated their personal growth.

Eleanor's reflection demonstrated that her awareness of social issues had been growing, she was introduced to the community beyond her everyday life, and she appreciated the intertwined components between service and learning. With an open mind, she developed a deeper understanding of the struggles of people from diverse backgrounds and realized the complexity of the real world. After engaging in various services in different communities with the e-SL courses, Eleanor became aware of how her thinking had changed and the social issues she saw in reality beyond her local community made her acknowledge her own privilege. She was grateful for e-SL to keep her engaged and she commented on the value of e-SL as "It's kind of going into the classes, and taking away so much about life."

Lucy's narratives indicated that she recognized the issue that people in need were not aware of supportive institutions. At the same time, she learned that there are people out there who are willing to help those in need. Lucy's reflection demonstrated that the concepts and observations she learned in the course formed and confirmed her belief to help people in need.

Lucy's personal growth could be embodied in her formation of the idea of looking outside of oneself and the belief in disposing of the me mindset.

Joe's stories revealed that he learned the importance of giving back to society from the e-SL course. He believed that e-SL supported students in stepping out of their comfort zones and participating in activities beyond their immediate social life. Through e-SL, Joe acknowledged and dismissed his misunderstandings and misjudgments toward the homeless population and developed a non-judgmental mindset.

Three participants' stories all can be used to fulfill the Cycle of Experiential Learning, however, the differences in the participants' processes regarding e-SL and their experiences are recognizable. For Eleanor, she believed her life was all about service which can be demonstrated by her abundance of service experience before and during her studies at the university. With this experience, Eleanor was able to comprehend and learn the management and development of SL while she was a participant. Lucy and Joe focused less on the service provider's perspective but talked intensively about the course's content: homelessness. Lucy's work and community service experience made her able to build a quick connection with people experiencing homelessness, whereas Joe, with little knowledge of the population, was able to open his mind and gain different perspectives from the course.

In sum, although the e-SL experience of three participants in this study fulfilled all four phases of the Cycle of Experiential Learning, the analysis indicated that participants emphasized more on the phases of Reflective Observation and the Formation of Abstract Conceptualization.

The Drawbacks and Highlights of e-SL

To address the third research question, *what best practices do nontraditional students recommend for developing e-SL in higher education*, I introduced and described the best e-SL

practices suggested by the participants in Chapter 4. The notable theme that emerged from the participants' narratives highlighted e-SL's flexibility and accessibility, which attracts nontraditional students; however, the limitation is that interpersonal outcomes and belonging to the institutional community are compromised.

Highlights of e-SL. Literature revealed the highlights of e-SL included freeing students from geographical and place-based constraints (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2012), and opening a door for participants who otherwise won't be able to join SL, such as adult students with family responsibilities, students with disabilities, students with time constraints, and commuter students (Purcell, 2017; Veyvoda & Van Cleave; 2020). All participants in this study appreciated the flexibility of e-SL and Eleanor acknowledged that she would not otherwise be able to participate in SL.

E-SL as a type of online education has been disclosed to be nontraditional-student friendly because it is free from logistics, and geographic constraints, and offers a flexible schedule (Dolch & Zawacki-Richter, 2018; Rabourn, 2018). All three participants in this study admitted the convenience e-SL brought them in terms of flexibility and accessibility. Joe stated, while working full-time, that the option of online classes was very helpful and it made his scheduling much easier than he initially thought. Lucy believed Zoom interaction with people in real-time made e-SL impactful and she emphasized that taking SL online did not take away from her learning experience on the topic.

Existing literature asserted that for in-person activities, nontraditional students are less likely to take part in campus activities than other students (Wyatt, 2011). This is supported by Eleanor's claim that the online option to conduct service and take e-SL courses was what kept

her in the Community Service Scholarship, because with her packed schedule and multiple life commitments, she wouldn't be able to fulfill the service hours in person.

Eleanor further mentioned two valuable highlights of e-SL that had not been largely talked about in existing literature. First, e-SL exposed her to the operation and management of SL and made her gain a better understanding of how SL works. Eleanor's reflection suggested, through online service activities, she gained knowledge of the management and operations behind the scene, which had not been noticed and appreciated when she only had the experience of conducting in-person service. Additionally, with regard to personal growth, Eleanor shared that e-SL courses made her realize that online learning requires self-discipline, which helped her successfully maintain accountability for her actions by completing the e-SL courses.

In addition, existing literature reported that e-SL offered open access to institutions regarding their location (Jacoby, 2014). Two studies provided evidence that students in e-SL could develop open and respectful views toward different cultures and gain the awareness of global issues without physically stepping into a different country (Garca-Gutierrez, et al., 2017; Harris, 2017). In the e-SL course, Joe was able to conduct research on a Brazilian federal housing program (Brazil's Affordable Housing Program "MY HOME, MY LIFE" Returns, 2023), which revealed local, social issues that highlight the gains of global awareness in e-SL opportunities. Through conducting research online, Joe learned the causes of homelessness issues in Brazil, and gained a perspective on people's struggles globally. In this way, through e-SL, Joe gained awareness of social issues in other parts of the world without physically stepping into a different country.

Further, one of the highlights of e-SL for nontraditional students is its low-cost nature. Beam (2020) suggests that nontraditional students are working professionals with family

obligations, which results in their food insecurity and financial uncertainty. In the interviews, all three participants stated that they work full-time in order to pay tuition on their own, which indicated their financial burden. Online education has been regarded as a low-cost teaching and learning environment (King, 2001). Therefore, e-SL as a form of online education could be considered as a best practice to attract and support nontraditional students with financial concerns.

Drawbacks of e-SL. The existing literature suggested e-SL offered a comfortable environment based on students' choice to conduct authentic reflection (Guthrie & McCracken, 2014). However, this was not the case in Joe's experience. Joe reported that when they had breakout Zoom sessions for small group discussions, students tended to turn off their cameras and remained silent for five minutes. Possible alternative explanations could be that since Joe is a senior in college, the majority of his peer's college life was impacted by Covid. Thus, Joe held the preconceived belief that everything is better in person. Lucy, on the other hand, claimed that because she was dealing with anxiety and depression, she was more comfortable in the online environment and she considered herself a big fan of online learning. Thus, a new perspective this study adds to the literature is whether e-SL can offer a comfortable environment for authentic reflection could depend on students' personalities and their lived experiences.

While three existing studies have reported a comparison regarding the learning outcomes of on-site SL versus e-SL (McGorry, 2012; Schwehm et al., 2017; Wong & Lau, 2022), a major concern of e-SL was that some desired learning outcomes of SL such as building interpersonal connections, building connections with the host community, and seeking a sense of belonging are difficult to achieve in front of digital devices (Butin, 2005; Pompa, 2005; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). Eleanor's story indicated that although delivered online, the components of

synchronous lecture and discussion, along with group projects after class, allowed her to build relationships and develop collaboration with her peers. Lucy and Joe highly applauded the opportunity to interview guest speakers via Zoom. Although e-SL is an online education, interpersonal growth and building connections with the host community can be achieved creatively. However, I have to admit that none of the participants believed the e-SL courses they took developed their sense of belonging to the university or the community. Thus, the belonging of the institutions was compromised in e-SL from the narratives of the three participants in this study.

In conclusion, the narratives of the three participants confirmed the highlights of e-SL in terms of being free from logistics, geographic constraints, and offering a flexible schedule, while also including populations who otherwise would not be able to participate in SL. Additionally, the participant narratives also underscore e-SL's promotion of international dialogue and global awareness. The new perspective this study added to the literature is that e-SL provided students with a comprehensive understanding of how SL is organized and managed behind the scene. And e-SL facilitates personal growth in becoming more responsible and self-disciplined individuals. In addition, this study provided evidence that reflection, interpersonal growth, and belonging to the institution could be compromised in e-SL. However, the affection and satisfaction of e-SL can be built on students' preconceived opinions on online education and shaped by their lived experiences.

Connection to Theoretical Framework

The findings demonstrate the value of e-SL through the lens of Freire's educational philosophy on critical pedagogy. The first key finding suggests prior volunteer activities and concrete work experiences played a prominent role in shaping nontraditional students' interests,

expectations, and behaviors in e-SL. This finding provides support for e-SL to be considered as a problem-posing pedagogy. Freire (1970) claimed that a problem-posing pedagogy should be based on the learner's present interests and experiences. In this way, three participants' stories provided evidence that e-SL could provide students with the opportunity to apply their lived experiences and pursue their dedication to their interests.

Freire (1970) reminds educators to develop education for critical consciousness leading to social transformation. Specifically, Freire (1973) argued that the aim of education is humanization and liberation, which can be achieved through dialogue, critical inquiry, and praxis. The second key finding suggests that e-SL confirmed its value as an experiential learning pedagogy. Especially, through the phases of Reflective Observation and the Formation of Abstract Conceptualization, e-SL shaped students' view of the world and their view of themselves. Students' narratives and reflections could be considered practicing dialogue and critical inquiry for which Freire insists. Participant narratives of their experiences in e-SL align and support Freire's critical pedagogy, specifically that students renewed and expanded their views of the world through reflection. Additionally, participants learned and experienced new concepts for personal growth in e-SL that provided them with refreshed views of themselves.

The third key finding shows the flexibility and accessibility of e-SL to attract and retain nontraditional students, but interpersonal outcomes and the sense of belonging to the institutional community are compromised. This finding demonstrates that students could critically reflect on their gains, while also strengthening their passion to share their needs. In this way, it shows that e-SL does not represent or reinforce the banking concept of education that Freire (1970) condemned. Freire (1970) argued that education was a process of empowerment where the teacher-learner relationship is reciprocal. In e-SL, students were by no means considered

containers to be filled by their teachers. Rather, students actively explored the meaning behind their education practices; in addition to SL educators learning from students' experiences and perspectives.

Implications for Practice

While achieving the goal of exploring the value of developing e-SL and gaining a richer understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate students, the data and findings in this study demonstrate: (1) life events, concrete volunteer activities, and work experience in the past played a prominent role in directing participants' interests, setting expectations, and shaping their behaviors; (2) e-SL validated its value as an experiential learning pedagogy, specifically, among the four phases of the Cycle of Experiential Learning, participants emphasized more on the phases of Reflective Observation and the Formation of Abstract Conceptualization. As a result, e-SL shaped students' view of the world in terms of awareness of social issues and their view of themselves in terms of personal growth; (3) nontraditional students appreciate the opportunity of online modality, but interpersonal outcomes and sense of belonging are compromised in e-SL.

By incorporating the key findings of this study and existing literature, three recommendations for practice are offered: (1) employing interactive instruction and collaborative assignments in e-SL in order to mitigate the limited learning outcomes in interpersonal growth and a sense of belonging to the institutional community; (2) providing an array of e-SL options to attract and maintain nontraditional students, and marketing materials that highlight these options prominently; (3) making good use of the online modality to develop international partnerships and promote intercultural dialogue; (4) flexibly adopting different types of e-SL based on the learning objectives of various types of SL.

Intentionally Employ Interactive Instruction and Collaborative Assignments

Based on the literature review, learning outcomes of traditional onsite SL include personal outcomes (Werder & Strand, 2011), interpersonal outcomes (Mann & DeAngelo, 2016), civic and social outcomes (Cate & Russ-Eft, 2018; Eyler & Giles, 1999), relationships with the institutions (D'Agostino, 2010; Jacoby, 2014; Roberts & Edwards, 2015), and further involvement or career development (Celio et al., 2011).

Rich narratives and vivid stories of the three participants in this study indicates that they achieved personal outcomes, civic and social outcomes, and further involvement. However, the interpersonal outcomes and relationships with the institutions had not been largely fulfilled in the e-SL courses for which the three participants were enrolled. For interpersonal outcomes, Werder and Strand (2010) claimed that SL could help students develop leadership and communication skills through cooperation and teamwork. Additionally, for relationships with the institutions, several studies stated that SL could create stronger relationships with peers, staff, and faculty (Jacoby, 2014), greater overall satisfaction with college (Roberts & Edwards, 2015), and build a sense of belonging with the institution's community (D'Agostino, 2010; Jacoby, 2014).

Participants Joe and Lucy highly applauded the interaction and opportunity to interview guest speakers through Zoom, but they did not believe they developed close relationships with their classmates nor gained a sense of belonging to the university because of the e-SL course. Eleanor stated that she enjoyed group work outside the class where they had a choice to complete group work online or in person. Thus, interactive instruction and collaborative assignments are valuable in SL especially when the courses are delivered online.

Ideas of interactive instruction in e-SL might include but are not limited to question-and-answer sessions, debates, peer mentoring, online quizzes, and the use of audio, visuals, and

video. Strategies for collaborative assignments may include online team gaming, in-class collaborative challenge and planning, group discussions and reflections, and after-class group projects for midterms and finals. Current existing popular online tools include Kahoot, Mentimeter, and Slack for online synchronous quizzing and short survey, Adobe Spark Page for writing and media literacy, Adobe Spark Video for video essays, Flipgrid for asynchronous group videos, Liveworksheets or online quizzing, and Edpuzzle for online video quizzing. More online tools can be explored by instructors and discussed with students for the purpose of each course. The intentional use of interactive instruction and collaborative assignments in e-SL could enhance students' learning outcomes and make the e-SL more valuable (Kelly, 2013; Matheson & Petersen, 2020) .

Provide Various e-SL options and Highlight them in Marketing

Reed et al. (2015) argued that nontraditional students appreciate the flexibility to choose their own service site based on their personal connections and professional qualifications. Participant Eleanor claimed that she had been actively looking for e-SL opportunities but as Covid faded, a lot of the SL went back in person. She found herself discouraged when conducting research and was disheartened. The findings of this study demonstrated participants in e-SL had fulfilled their Cycle of Experiential Learning, which indicated that e-SL has value as effective experiential learning.

Additionally, instead of leaving students to do their own research on the e-SL opportunities, it would be beneficial if the options can be noticeably highlighted in marketing materials and the words can be shared with populations who might favor online learning. This may be able to make e-SL opportunities more visible. Research asserted e-SL could open a door for participants who otherwise won't be able to join SL, such as adult students with family

responsibilities, students with disabilities, students with time constraints, and commuter students (Purcell, 2017; Veyvoda & Van Cleave; 2020). Therefore, various e-SL options should be provided in order to attract and maintain these populations.

Develop International Partnerships and Promote Intercultural Dialogue

Literature suggested that e-SL is free from place-based constraints, which connects individuals through the internet and subsequently favors international SL engagement by eliminating traveling and logistical concerns. In Joe's e-SL courses, he had the opportunity to conduct research on a federal housing program in Brazil (Brazil's Affordable Housing Program "MY HOME, MY LIFE" Returns, 2023). He learned about the Brazilian local social issues and gained global awareness. Studies reported global citizenship and intercultural dialogue can be achieved through e-SL (Garca-Gutierrez et al., 2017; Harris, 2017). For this reason, I suggest e-SL educators make good use of the convenience brought by the internet to build connections beyond the local area and involve more international conversations.

Flexibly Adopt Different Types of e-SL

Based on Waldner et al.'s (2012) definition of e-SL, e-SL refers to SL wherein the service activity and/or the reflection occurs online. Thus, there are four types of e-SL: (1) service and e-learning: service on-site and learning online; (2) e-service and learning: service online and learning on-site; (3) partially e-SL: service and learning are both partially on-site and partially online; (4) extreme e-SL: service and learning are both fully on-line (Waldner et al., 2012). Extreme e-SL is chosen out of the four types of e-SL for this dissertation study because it has been practiced during Covid and applies to students taking fully online education.

However, participant Lucy suggested that if there would be a one-day in-person service added to her e-SL, she believed it could make her e-SL experience more powerful. Through the

in-person service day, students could step into the community they learned about and directly interact with the population. This suggestion would make the extreme e-SL become service and e-learning, where the service is on-site and the learning is online.

Additionally, four different types of SL: Direct Service, Indirect Service, Advocacy-Based Service, and Research-Based Service are reported in the literature (Strait & Nordyke, 2015). In Direct Service, students directly interact with the populations being served, either in person or online. In Indirect Service, students facilitate nonprofit organizations and community partners. In Advocacy-Based Service, students use their voices to raise awareness. And in Research-Based Service, students gather facts and collect information to report their findings. Different types of SL have distinctive goals and objectives. They might serve different communities: locally, nationally, or globally. Therefore, when transferring different types of SL online, I suggest that e-SL educators be flexible in adopting different types of e-SL based on the learning objectives and feasible activities of various types of SL.

Significance of the Study

Covid necessitated a swift and dramatic shift in the implementation and development of SL practices and brought much attention to online learning. With the exploration of nontraditional students' perceptions and experiences of e-SL during and beyond the pandemic, this study provides insight to higher education stakeholders (service-learning course instructors, student affairs professionals, campus ministers, student leaders, and student participants) in terms of delivering high effectiveness SL practice while attracting and maintaining the nontraditional student population.

With an overarching goal of exploring the potential and value of developing e-SL and gaining a richer understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of nontraditional

undergraduate students, this narrative inquiry presented in detail three participants' life stories and e-SL experiences.

First, this study revealed that lived experience shaped nontraditional students' orientation in e-SL. Specifically, prior volunteer activities and authentic work experience directed participants' interests and set their expectations of e-SL. Additionally, real-life work experience and life events shaped nontraditional students' behaviors in e-SL. With the stories of my participants, this study provided e-SL educators with rich evidence of three nontraditional students' intentions, expectations, and their behaviors in e-SL.

Second, with rich narratives and detailed stories, this study presented, in-depth, how each participant's e-SL experience fulfilled the Cycle of Experiential Learning. By fulfilling the Cycle of Experiential Learning, the three participants' stories indicated that e-SL validated its value as an experiential learning pedagogy. Moreover, a new perspective from this study is that among the four phases of the Cycle of Experiential Learning, through e-SL, the three participants learned more thoroughly through the phases of Reflective Observation and Formation of Abstract Concepts.

In addition, the results indicated e-SL shaped students' view of the world in terms of awareness of social issues and their view of themselves in terms of personal growth. New perspectives on the highlights of e-SL offered by this study include the activities in e-SL that provided students the opportunities to be exposed to the management and implementation of SL behind the scene. Additionally, online learning helped students' personal growth in self-discipline and responsibility. Thus, by recognizing the value and effectiveness of e-SL as an experiential learning pedagogy, this study provides solid evidence for advocating the advancement of e-SL in the post-Covid world.

Third, by investigating the best e-SL practices each participant offered, this study deepens the understanding of the viewpoints from existing literature that nontraditional students appreciate the opportunity of online modality, but interpersonal outcomes and belonging to the institutions' community are compromised. A new perspective from this study is that the affectation of e-SL may be based on students' preconceived opinions of online education. Similarly, whether e-SL can offer a comfortable environment for authentic reflection could depend on students' personalities and their lived experiences. While existing literature argues that nontraditional students are eager to apply what they learned in e-SL to their work environment, this study adds a new claim that the extent to which they applied it to their work could depend on whether their current full-time work demonstrates their career ambition. By clarifying the best practices in students' eyes, this study not only provides evidence to support existing literature, but also adds new perspectives to contribute to building the scholarship of e-SL in higher education.

Although this qualitative narrative inquiry research is not intended to represent all nontraditional students' experiences, it is my hope that scholars and practitioners of SL consider the needs and expectations of the increasing nontraditional student population. I believe this study promotes the dialogue between the fields of SL and online education, in addition to advancing the current state of knowledge on nontraditional learners' characteristics and success. In sum, this study will serve as a timely exploration of the value of e-SL focusing on nontraditional students, which is inspired by pandemic adjustment but aims at reflecting on the experiences and providing insights regarding contemporary strategies to advance SL development in higher education.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study was that it focuses on only one Catholic institution which is in an urban setting in one state. The reasons to choose this institution as my research site were because SL is central to its mission, e-SL has been practiced intensely before, during, and after Covid, and this institution serves a large number of nontraditional students and seeks to transform their lives through lifelong learning. However, since universities in urban settings have a greater ability to access non-profit organizations and community partners, at the same time social issues, such as poverty, housing insecurity, and educational equity, are different from other states. Thus, this research might not be applicable to institutions in rural settings with distinctive local social issues.

The second limitation of this study was participant diversity in terms of representing different characteristics of nontraditional students. In this research, nontraditional students were defined as undergraduates who fall into one or more of the four categories: (1) students 25 years and older; (2) part-time students; (3) full-time employed; (4) raising dependent children. This definition was adopted from the study of Rosenberg et al. (2011), which is foundational SL research with a focus on nontraditional students. In this research, there was more demographic diversity in terms of ethnicity and gender, however, the three participants only covered two of the categories of nontraditional characteristics. All three participants were full-time employed and one of them was aged older than 25. It would have been beneficial to this study to have narratives from students raising dependent children and/or being part-time students. The setting for this study was a four-year institution, therefore having three participants who were full-time students and had no dependent children was not coincidental. The study would have been stronger if the recruitment of participants had been more targeted and intentional.

Recommendations for Further Research

This narrative inquiry study aimed to explore the value of e-SL and gain a richer understanding of nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences of perceptions of e-SL. Existing research has been conducted on SL, online education, and nontraditional students respectively in both qualitative and quantitative approaches; however, gaps still remain. Through conducting this research, it became apparent that literature describing nontraditional students' perspectives on e-SL is extremely limited. To overcome the aforementioned limitations of the current study and to advance the development of e-SL for nontraditional students, three recommendations for future research are provided.

Additional research could overcome the first limitation of this study, that is, only one Catholic institution in an urban setting was selected as the research site. Further research could explore the experiences and perspectives of students from different institutions. Additionally, more research on institutions located in multiple regions with distinctive social issues could have broader implications for practice. In this way, the research could not only shed light on a comprehensive understanding of different regions but could also assess the extent to which conducting SL online can overcome geographic constraints and reduce inequity among different areas.

Further areas for research could be extended to demonstrate different characteristics of nontraditional students. This would address the second limitation of this research that all three participants were employed full-time and only one of them was older than 25, which did not cover all the characteristics of nontraditional students. With narratives and stories of students' different lived experiences, further research would provide additional perspectives beyond this study.

Third, method-wise, the narrative inquiry approach was appropriate to address my research questions and achieve the research goals. Unique stories and in-depth details were presented from the very small sample. However, the limitation of narrative inquiry made the results of this research unable to generalize to the broader population. Thus, further research could open up mixed-method research or add a quantitative approach to the current study. Using surveys and questionnaires to gather more information on statistical data can be considered a valuable way to advance and ascertain the veracity of this narrative inquiry.

Additionally, using narrative inquiry to explore further detailed stories of participants, a follow-up interview, and a longitude approach would be beneficial. For my current study, the theme of religion and spirituality in shaping participants' e-SL experience had not been emphasized in addressing the research questions. However, as I was analyzing data and presenting results, it was notable that religion played an important role in Eleanor's and Lucy's life and schooling. When asked what are some other identities that participants felt very important to them in their everyday life, Lucy mentioned "I'm a religious individual. I'm a Christian. That's part of the drive that's keeping me going in school because I know God is there. That's what's helping me deal with all my issues." Similarly, Eleanor mentioned during the interview that her service with family in both American and Ukraine churches was a big part of her life. At the time of the interview, I was not able to identify the theme of religion. Moreover, I was unable to ask follow-up questions to examine the how and why. Therefore, to further explore unanticipated and novel themes, employing a follow-up interview in narrative inquiry research could be helpful to reveal more details and elicit deeper stories of participants.

Lastly, SL implementation of Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy and its impact on political consciousness could be explored in depth in further research. Freire (1970) argued the goal of

critical consciousness is to gain an in-depth understanding of the world. In this way, social and political contradictions can be perceived and exposed. SL can facilitate the development of political consciousness in that it involves a shift from skill-set practice and reflexivity to civic values and critical citizenship (Britt, 2012). Civic values and critical citizenship students gained from SL can further motivate them to learn and work on social and political issues which aim at social justice activism. Ribeiro and colleagues (2022) revealed that students can be engaged in their institutional and political environments through SL, thereby limiting social inequalities and conflicts. Therefore, it would be meaningful to explore how, if at all, SL and e-SL can shape students' perception and behavior in the policy process to make a change in society.

Conclusion

The overarching goal of this study was to explore the potential and value of developing e-SL and gain a richer understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate students. Narrative inquiry demonstrates the strengths of revealing in-depth detail of a situation or life experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and revealing significant issues not elsewhere recorded (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). With the intention of generating a detailed narrative for each individual respondent, a small sample was targeted for this study.

Through the theoretical framework of Freire's educational philosophy on critical pedagogy and problem-posing education and the conceptual framework of Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning, the key findings revealed: (1) life events, concrete volunteer activities, and work experience in the past played a prominent role in shaping nontraditional students' interests and expectations; (2) e-SL validated its value as an experiential learning pedagogy, where the phases of Reflective Observation and the Formation of Abstract Conceptualization were critical in shaping students' view of the world and their view of themselves; (3) e-SL

attracted nontraditional students by balancing school with other responsibilities, but interpersonal outcomes and the sense of belonging to the institutional community were compromised in e-SL.

I have been actively engaged in SL throughout my life. In addition to participating in various community services and immersion trips both in-person and online, I've worked to coordinate community service engagement and conduct assessments on the students' post-SL surveys. My own lived experience and professional work motivated me to further explore the value of SL and especially e-SL during the Covid era. Through the process of conducting this dissertation research, I learned so much from my participants, and I was able to learn about myself. I found myself fulfilling the Cycle of Experiential Learning while completing this dissertation. In the Concrete Experience phase, I designed the research, recruited participants, and conducted the interviews. In the Reflective Observation, I absorbed and analyzed the narrative data and made sense of the participants' stories. In the Formation of Abstract Concepts, I presented the findings and formed themes in the discussion. In the Active Experimentation, I connected back to the literature, identified the contribution of this study, and am determined to conduct future research to advance e-SL practices.

It is my hope that my research can add value to scholarship and practice in terms of why e-SL should be offered and advanced and the importance of why nontraditional students should be supported. This research demonstrated that life events, concrete volunteer activities, and work experience in the past played a prominent role in shaping nontraditional students' interests and expectations for e-SL, and that e-SL has value as an experiential learning pedagogy and has the capacity to shed a light on both students' view of the world and their view of themselves.

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Appendix A
Student Recruitment Email

Hi student,

My name is Qianhui Hub and I am a doctoral student in Curriculum Studies at the College of Education at DePaul. I am currently conducting a dissertation research study on the impact and value of online service learning on nontraditional students. As you are taking/have completed an online service-learning course, your experience and perspectives would be incredibly powerful and impactful.

I'm reaching out as I'm looking for four to six participants that I could interview. The time commitment would consist of 15 minutes for filling out a short recruitment survey and a one-hour one-on-one Zoom interview with me. To show my appreciation for having you join my research as a participant, upon the completion of the interview, the compensation for your time and insight is a **$50 Amazon gift card**.

Your voices and input would be beneficial for online service-learning courses at DePaul as well as for service-learning development in general.

You are eligible to join the research as a participant if you are (1) a current undergraduate student at DePaul University; (2) currently in an online service-learning/experiential learning course, or completed one or more service-learning/experiential learning courses in the recent five years, 2018 - 2023, and (3) demonstrate at least one of the following nontraditional student characteristics while taking the online service-learning course(s): a) age 25 years and older; b) part-time student; c) work full-time hours; OR d) raise dependent children.

This would be completely voluntary, you can choose to be in the study or not and you can withdraw at any time. This research is being conducted to fulfill the requirements of my Ph.D. degree through DePaul University and is being conducted in accordance with DePaul University's Institutional Review Board (IRB-2022-868).

If you are interested in joining my research, please fill out the recruitment survey.

If you would like more information—please let me know! Email me at qtian3@depaul.edu. I would deeply appreciate your contribution.

I hope you all have a wonderful quarter!

Thank you,
Qianhui Hub

Appendix B
Participant Recruitment Survey

Survey Title: Recruitment Survey: Online Service-Learning

Survey Introduction Message:
Thank you so much for your interest in joining my dissertation research on online service-learning (IRB-2022-868). This is a pre-screening recruitment survey to collect your service-learning/experiential learning experience and your educational information.

Your answers to this survey will help me to select the eligible participants for my study. I will contact you within a week after you submit this survey to let you know the next steps. Please feel free to contact me at qtian3@depaul.edu if you have any questions. I sincerely appreciate your time and contribution to my research.

Survey Questions:
1. Are you currently a DePaul undergraduate student?
   - Yes
   - No

2. Have you completed an online service-learning/experiential learning course? If yes, what is the course name? In which quarter did you take the course?

3. Are you currently taking an online service-learning/experiential learning course? If yes, what is the course name?

4. Have you ever participated in on-site service-learning, where both service and learning happened in person?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Maybe

5. What is your major and minor (if any)?

6. What is your enrollment pattern?
   - Full-time student
   - Part-time student
   - Other _____

7. What is your employment situation? (Please select all that apply.)
   - Full-time student and not employed

- Student worker on campus
- Part-time worker off campus
- Full-time worker off campus
- Other

8. How many hours do you/did you work per week while taking the online service-learning/experiential learning courses?
- 0 - 14
- 15 - 24
- 25 - 35
- more than 35 hours
- Not sure
- Other _____

9. What is your age (in years)?
- 0 - 18
- 19 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 and above

10. Do you have any dependent children?
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say
- Other _____

11. Any comments or questions?

12. Your name and email address for me to contact you.

End of Survey Message:
Thank you so much for your time filling out this survey. By clicking the Submit button below, you are showing your willingness to join a one-hour interview with me. I will contact you within a week after you submit this survey and let you know the next steps. Please feel free to contact me at qtian3@depaul.edu if you have any questions.

Appendix C
Informed Consent

ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

[Developing Service-Learning in the Digital Age: Understanding Nontraditional Students and their Experiential Learning Outcomes of Electronic-Service Learning]

Principal Investigator: Qianhui Hub, Graduate Student

Institution: DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.

Department, School, College: Department of Leadership, Language, and Curriculum, College of Education

Faculty Advisor: Thomas Noel, PhD, Department of Leadership, Language, and Curriculum, College of Education

Key Information:
What is the purpose of this research?
The purpose of this research is to explore the potential and value to develop e-Service-Learning (e-SL) and to gain a richer understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate students. I am intending to enroll four to six participants.

This study is being conducted by Qianhui Hub (Principal Investigator), a graduate student at DePaul University's College of Education as a dissertation research project in pursuit of her doctoral degree. This research is being supervised by her faculty advisor, Thomas Noel, PhD.

Why are you being asked to be in the research?
You are invited to participate in this study because you are (1) current undergraduate students at DePaul University; (2) currently in an online service-learning/experiential learning course, or completed one or more service-learning/experiential learning courses in the recent five years, 2018 - 2023, and (3) demonstrate at least one of the following nontraditional student characteristics while taking the online service-learning course(s): 1) age 25 years and older; 2) part-time student; 3) work full-time hours; OR 4) raise dependent children.

You must be age 18 or older to be in this study. This study is not approved for the enrollment of people under the age of 18.

What is involved in being in the research study?

If you agree to be in this study, involvement includes

(1)   A prescreen Recruitment Survey. Your answers to this survey helped me to select the eligible participants for my study. You have already filled out this survey at the time you are reading this Informed Consent.

(2)   A 60-minute one-on-one interview will be conducted via Zoom. The interview included questions regarding your nontraditional student background and your experience of participating in online service-learning. The interview will be video-recorded and transcribed into written notes later in order to get an accurate record of what you said.

(3)   Optional 30 minutes for revising and editing the transcription and replying.

(4)   Optional 30 minutes for revising and editing the draft of my results and findings.

Are there any risks involved in participating in this study?

There is the possibility that you may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed (or sad or angry) about answering certain questions. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to. You have the right to stop participation and/or recording at any time during the interview.

Are there any benefits to participating in this study?

You may be benefited from personal reflection as you are sharing your narratives and counternarratives.

From your experience and perceptions, I hope that what we learn would be beneficial for online service-learning courses at DePaul as well as for service-learning development in general, with a close focus on nontraditional students.

How much time will this take?

(1) 15 minutes for the prescreen Recruitment Survey, (2) 60 minutes for the interview, (3) optional 30 minutes for revising and editing the transcription and replying, and (4) optional 30 minutes for revising and editing the draft of my results and findings.

Other Important Information about Research Participation

Is there any kind of payment, reimbursement or credit for being in this study?

To show my appreciation for having you join my research as a participant, upon the completion of the interview, the compensation for your time and insight is a $50 Amazon gift card. The electronic gift cards will be sent to you via email after the interview completion.

Are there any costs to me for being in the research?

The interviews will be conducted via Zoom and no transportation costs will be related to this research. There is no cost to you for being in the research.

Can you decide not to participate?

Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose not to participate. There will be no negative consequences, penalties, or loss of benefits if you decide not to participate or change your mind later and withdraw from the research after you begin participating.

You may withdraw from the research at any time.

Your decision whether or not to participate in the research will have no impact upon your grades or standing at DePaul University.

Who will see my study information and how will the confidentiality of the information collected for the research be protected?
The video recording will be destroyed immediately after the transcriptions have been created by me and confirmed by you. The research transcriptions and notes will be kept and stored securely. The transcriptions and notes will be kept for two years from the date it is collected.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When I write about the study or publish a paper to share the research with other researchers, I will write about the combined information I have gathered. I will not include your name or any information that will directly identify you. Some people might review or copy my records that may identify you in order to make sure we are following the required rules, laws, and regulations. For example, the DePaul University Institutional Review Board, may review your information. If they look at our records, they will keep your information confidential.

To prevent others from accessing our records or identifying you should they gain access to our records, we have put some protections in place. These protections include using a code (a fake name, a study ID number, etc.) for you and other people in the study and keeping the records in a safe and secure place (using a password-protected computer, encrypting our records, etc.).

I will remove the direct identifiers, like name or record number, from your information and replace them with a pseudonym that cannot be linked back to you. This means I have de-identified your information. I will not use the information collected for this study for any future research of our own or share your information with other researchers.

You should know that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if you report information about a child being abused or neglected or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

Please be aware that disclosing experiences with sexual or relationship violence during the course of research does not constitute a formal report to the University and will not begin the

process of DePaul providing a response. If you are seeking to report an incident of sexual or relationship violence to DePaul, you should contact Public Safety (Lincoln Park: 773-325-7777; Loop: 312-362-8400) or the Dean of Students and Title IX Coordinator (Lincoln Park: 773-325-7290; Loop: 312-362-8066 or titleixcoordinator@depaul.edu). Individuals seeking to speak confidentially about issues related to sexual and relationship violence should contact a Survivor Support Advocate in the Office of Health Promotion & Wellness for information and resources (773-325-7129 or hpw@depaul.edu). More information is available at http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/hpw/shvp.html. Individuals are encouraged to take advantage of these services and to seek help around sexual and relationship violence for themselves as well as their peers who may be in need of support.

If you do disclose an experience with sexual or relationship violence, we will also provide you with a resource sheet containing this information at the end of the study.

Who should be contacted for more information about the research?
Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study or you want to get additional information or provide input about this research, you can contact the researcher: Qianhui Hub, qtian3@depaul.edu, 773-943-0599.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the DePaul Institutional Review Board (IRB-2022-868). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Jessica Bloom, DePaul University's Director of Research Compliance, in the Office of Research Services at 312-362-6168 or by email at Jbloom8@depaul.edu.

You may also contact DePaul's Office of Research Services if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You will be given an e-copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent from the Subject:

I have read the above information. I have had all my questions and concerns answered. By signing below, I indicate my consent to be in the research.

By completing the interview you are indicating your agreement to be in the research.

Signature:_____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

<u>Spoken Transcript to Initiate Interview:</u>
Thank you for talking with me today. This conversation is being recorded for research
purposes. This interview will take 60-90 minutes.

Every precaution will be taken to ensure the data will be secure. Names will be
recorded and stored under aliases and recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by only me, as
the sole and primary researcher. Additionally, all electronic documents that store this
information will be password protected. Do you have any questions? Do you consent to this
recording? The recording will begin now.

That said, I'm interested in learning about your experience and perceptions of Electronic-Service
Learning (e-SL). Specifically, my interest is your detailed stories in 1) how your own lived
experiences and background have influenced your e-SL participation. 2) what are the learning
outcomes you could identify from your e-SL experience? And 3) what are some suggestions you
have for developing e-SL in higher education?

There are no wrong answers, I value your opinion, and my role is to uncover insights both good
and bad. Half-thoughts/practical thoughts/ thoughts you still formulating are welcome.

The interview questions are open-ended and I want you to share with me only what
you are comfortable sharing. This interview is being video-recorded for research purposes. If you
would like the recording to stop at any point, please let me know. Do you have any questions
before we start?

Introduction
1. Re-introduce me and the purpose of the study: share my own SL and e-SL experiences
   and why I am interested in non-traditional students.
2. Introduce the definition of SL, e-SL, and non-traditional students being used in this study.
3. Review the structure of this interview: 1) personal background, 2) Your non-traditional
   characteristics and e-SL, 3) E-SL experience and learning outcomes, 4) SL and e-SL, and
   5) Other & Questions Based on Students' Survey Responses.

Background
1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
   a. Age
   b. Education and/or career
   c. hobbies

2. What drew you to participate in this study?

3. Tell me a little about your upbringing.

4. How would you identify yourself as a non-traditional student?
      I will pay attention to the following aspects:
      - Age
      - Enrollment patterns
      - Employed situation
      - Family status
5. What do you think most differentiates you from traditional college students? Why?

6. Besides, non-traditional college student identity, which other identities do you feel are most salient in your everyday life?

7. Can you tell me a story about how your identity/identities influence(s) the way you see and are seen in the world and interact with people?

8. Is there anything else you'd like me to know about you, your background, and your identity?

E-SL experience and learning outcomes
9. Please describe your experience in e-SL.
      a. What was its purpose? What are the social issues this e-SL focused on?
      b. What was your reason for participating?
      c. What service activities did you do?

10. What were your hopes, expectations, and goals before you participated in the e-SL?

11. In what way did your e-SL experience align with your expectations? In what ways did it not? Please explain.

12. Can you tell me a story about how your non-traditional student identity [played a role in/ impacted] your e-SL experience?
13. In your opinion, did your non-traditional characteristics influence your **choice** of e-SL? Why and how?
14. In your opinion, did your non-traditional characteristics influence your **experience** of e-SL? Why and how?

15. As you reflect back, what are some outstanding takeaways you have from your e-SL experience? Why?

        Are there additional stories/ examples you would like to share?

        I will pay attention to the following aspects: [how about in terms of (your personal life)…]

-      Personal outcomes
-      Civic and social outcomes
-      Relationship with the institution
-      Future involvement

16. How, if at all, has your e-Sl experience impacted your view of the world?
17. How, if at all, has your e-Sl experience impacted your view of yourself?

18. How, if at all, has your e-Sl experience impacted your behaviors? If so, can you tell me a story.

19. In your opinion, is it important for students (in four-year universities), in general, to participate in e-SL? Why or why not?
20. In your opinion, is it important for nontraditional students to participate in e-SL? Why or why not?

21. What are your concerns or critiques about e-SL?
22. What recommendations do you have, if at all, for developing e-SL in higher education?

SL and E-SL (if the participant has SL experience in addition to e-SL)

23. What are some of your experiences in traditional on-site SL? Please provide me with as many details as possible. What emotion did you have and why?
24. What do you like most about on-site SL? [what do you appreciate most about] Can you tell me a story of on-site SL experience that was meaningful to you?
    - Are there additional things you would like to share about on-site SL?
25. What is one thing you are most critical about on-site SL?
    - Are there additional concerns you would like to share?