

Institutionalizing Service-Learning at UCP: Reflections through International Standards

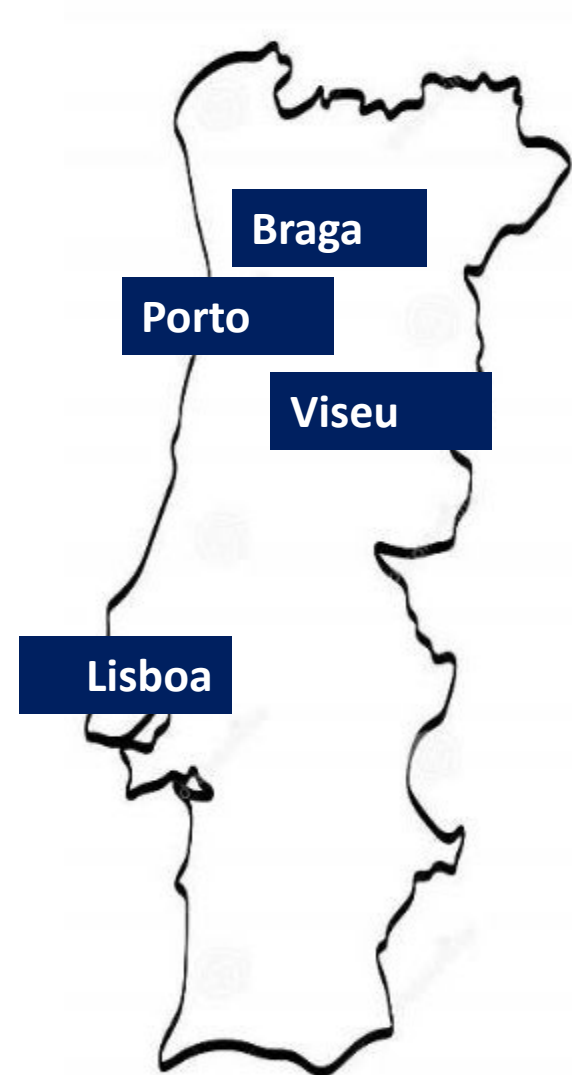


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4 campuses



UCP's COMMITMENT

To be a transforming University at the Service of the Common Good

"University Social Responsibility extends the two traditional missions of the university into a third mission that focuses on the connection with the surrounding community in the joint quest for solutions to the problems of individuals and societies."



UCP's COMMITMENT

To be a transforming University at the Service of the Common Good

Social Responsibility and Sustainability:
main drivers of the Strategic Development
Plan



Service Learning - a Strategic Initiative of the *Quality Plan* (2021-2025)

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN 21-25



until 2025, provide at least two subjects (undergraduate) or one subject (master's) per degree in the service-learning model

CAPs Project - Catholic University and Service-Learning: Innovation and Social Responsibility (2020-2024)

Overall goal

To implement and disseminate the SL methodology in UCP and in other HEIs in Portugal, promoting pedagogical innovation and social responsibility



CApS Project main activities

Activity 1. To create a project coordination and planning team

Activity 2. To design, implement and evaluate SL projects

Activity 3. To institutionalize SL in the UCP

Activity 4. Carry out research on SL

Activity 5. Disseminate SL to other Higher Education Institutions



SERVICE LEARNING

Historical Evolution of SL at UCP

2020

Beginning of CAPS
Project, funded by
Porticus



SERVICE LEARNING



2021

Integration in
UNISERVITATE



2022

Honourable Mention,
Uniservitate Award,
“Empower to Protect” Project



Historical Evolution of SL at UCP

2023

Laura Rubio Award for Service-Learning Projects, “Students’ Perceptions of Competences Developed and Changes in Life Purpose after SL experiences”, paper presented in Barcelona, Spain

Uniservitate Small Research Grants:

1. CApS Community
2. Interdisciplinary Service-Learning: An (im)possible agenda?

Integration in
TRANSFORM FOR
EUROPE (T4EU)



Historical Evolution of SL at UCP

2024

1st Prize, Uniservitate Award,
“Ser Cuida(l)doso” Project

2025

Uniservitate Small Research
Grants:

1. Developing and Validating a Self-Determination Theory-Informed Scale for Intrinsic/Extrinsic Civic Motivation to Support Instructional Design in Service-Learning

UCP Pedagogical Innovation
Award, “Learning with
purpose - applying academic
skills to real challenges in the
social sector” Project



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CITATION

Educating for the sustainable development goals through service-learning: University students' perspectives about the competences developed

Luísa Mota Ribeiro^{1*†}, Francisca Miranda^{1†}, Carmo Themudo², Helena Gonçalves³, Robert G. Bringle⁴, Pilar Aramburuzabala⁶

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Article

Purpose in Life in Higher Education: Is there a role for Service-Learning?

Abstract: The current study analyzed university students' purpose in life in the context of service-learning (SL) courses developed in a university in Portugal. One hundred and twelve graduation and master students, from different areas, involved in 15 SL courses (82 female, 73.2%; age ranging from 18 to 51, $M = 23$, $SD = 6.51$) participated in this study. Questionnaires included an open-ended question about students' purpose in life. Four closed-ended questions were included to understand student's perceptions of change in their purpose in life arising from the SL courses and other perceptions about their SL course. Qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis with NVivo. Results indicated that students' purpose in life ranged from social related goals, such as helping or caring for others, to personal related goals, including personal growth and well-being. Most of the students (71.4%) reported that their purpose in life changed moderately or a lot after participating in a SL course. Findings are discussed in the light of the literature, identifying implications for the development of SL courses in higher education, considering the contribution of this pedagogic methodology to the definition and reconfiguration of young people's purpose in life.

Keywords: service-learning; higher education; purpose in life; university students; students' perceptions

Description of a participatory diagnostic process of the institutionalization of service-learning

Abstract

To advance the institutionalization of service-learning (SL) in Catholic universities, the launch of the UNISERVITATE program was carried out in 2020. The objective of this article is to describe how a participatory process for diagnosing the institutionalization of SL is approached from the Furco rubric at St. Mary's university, Universidade Católica de Portugal and Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. This process has been led by the region's hub, the University of Deusto. To this end, an evaluation of the degree of institutionalization of the SL has been carried out through a tool that identifies where the universities are in the institutionalization process. As a result, the tool, the strengths and weaknesses identified in the institutions, and the action plans derived from them are presented. Finally, the need to undertake research on what the institutionalization of SL implies as well as the importance of development of students in hi



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Effects of service-learning as opposed to traditional teaching-learning contexts: a pilot study with three different courses

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CRC-W - Católica Research Centre for Psychological, Family and Social Wellbeing, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Lisbon, Portugal

Introduction: Service-Learning (SL) is an innovative teaching-learning proposal with an increasingly wide application in higher education. Previous studies show its potential to generate positive personal, academic, social and citizenship

8 semesters of operation (2021-2024)

Nr. of SL experiences	124
Nr. of curricular units/courses	147
Nr. of extracurricular units	24
Nr. of transdisciplinary projects	9
Nr. of students involved	2 495
Nr. of teachers involved	62
Nr. of partners involved	176
of which foreigners	28
Nr. of recipients involved	46 361

Furco's Self-Assessment Rubric (2003)



Furco, A. (2011). Rúbrica de autoevaluación para la institucionalización del aprendizaje-servicio en la educación superior (Revisión 2003). *Revista Internacional sobre Investigación en Educación Global y para el desarrollo*, 0.

European Guidelines (2021)

Ribeiro, A., Aramburuzabala, P., & Paz-Lourido, B. (2021). *Guidelines for the Institutionalization of service-learning in European higher education*. European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education.

Furco's Rubric (2003)

5 Key Dimensions

- I. Philosophy and Mission of Service Learning
- II. Faculty support for and involvement in Service-Learning
- III. Student support for and involvement in Service-Learning
- IV. Community Participation and Partnerships
- V. Institutional support for Service-Learning

European Guidelines (2021)

10 Key Guidelines

- I. INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT
- II. FUNDS ALLOCATION & FINANCIAL STRATEGIES
- III. COORDINATION UNIT/SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE
- IV. REWARDS AND RECOGNITION OF STUDENTS & TEACHERS
- V. TEACHING PLANNING
- VI. TEACHING PRINCIPLES
- VII. SERVICE-LEARNING RESEARCH
- VIII. INSTITUTIONAL ADVERTISING AND SUPPORT
- IX. STUDENT SOCIAL JUSTICE LEARNINGS
- X. PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNITY

Furco's Rubric (2003)

Dimension 1

PHILOSOPHY AND MISSION OF SL

Furco's Rubric (2003)

Dimension 1: Philosophy and Mission of SL

	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
Definition of SL		✓	
Strategic Planning			✓
Alignment with Institutional Mission			✓
Alignment with Educational Reform Efforts		✓	
Overall assessment Dimension 1		✓	

Furco's Rubric (2003)

Dimension 2

**FACULTY SUPPORT FOR AND
INVOLVEMENT IN SL**

Furco's Rubric (2003)

Dimension 2: Faculty Support for and Involvement in SL

	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
Faculty Awareness	✓		
Faculty Involvement & Support		✓	
Faculty Leadership		✓	
Faculty Incentives & Rewards	✓		
Overall assessment Dimension 2	✓		

Furco's Rubric (2003)

Dimension 3

**STUDENT SUPPORT FOR AND
INVOLVEMENT IN SL**

Furco's Rubric (2003)

Dimension 3: Student Support for and Involvement in SL

	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
Student Awareness		✓	
Student Opportunities		✓	
Student Leadership	✓		
Student Incentives & Rewards		✓	
Overall assessment Dimension 3		✓	

Furco's Rubric (2003)

Dimension 4

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Furco's Rubric (2003)

Dimension 4: Community Participation and Partnerships

	STAGE I	STAGE II	STAGE III
Community Partner Awareness			
Mutual Understanding			
Community Partner Voice & Leadership			
Overall assessment Dimension 4			

Furco's Rubric (2003)

Dimension 5

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR SL

Furco's Rubric (2003)

Dimension 5: Institutional Support for SL

	STAGE I	STAGE II	STAGE III
Coordinating Entity			✓
Policy-Making Entity			✓
Staffing		✓	
Funding		✓	
Administrative Support		✓	
Department Support		✓	
Evaluation & Assessment			✓
Overall assessment Dimension 5		✓	

2023



2025



Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Philosophy and Mission of the service-learning	Philosophy and Mission of the service-learning 	Philosophy and Mission of the service-learning 
Faculty support for and involvement in Service-Learning 	Faculty support for and involvement in Service-Learning 	Faculty support for and involvement in Service-Learning
Student support for and involvement in Service-Learning 	Student support for and involvement in Service-Learning 	Student support for and involvement in Service-Learning
Community Participation and Partnership  	Community Participation and Partnership	Community Participation and Partnership
Institutional support for Service-Learning	Institutional support for Service-Learning 	Institutional support for Service-Learning 

Furco's Rubric (2003) **5 Key Dimensions**

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- II. Faculty support for and involvement in Service-Learning
- III. Student support for and involvement in Service-Learning
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European Guidelines (2021) **10 Key Guidelines**

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- II. FUNDS ALLOCATION & FINANCIAL STRATEGIES
- III. COORDINATION UNIT/SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE
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- VIII. INSTITUTIONAL ADVERTISING AND SUPPORT
- IX. STUDENT SOCIAL JUSTICE LEARNINGS
- X. PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNITY

Guideline 1: Institutional Involvement

Guidelines	Achievement
1. Write institutional mission statements focused on citizenship and social responsibility.	✓
2. Define clearly short and long-term service-learning institutionalization goals.	✓
3. Include the pedagogical approach of service-learning in strategic documents at different levels of university organization.	✓
4. Ensure that service-learning is embedded across departments and throughout different levels of an institution's pronouncements, policies, and practices.	+ / -
5. Facilitate opportunities for the university community to self-organize, promote and develop service-learning in conditions of equity and participation.	+ / -
6. Set administrative policies to promote positive institutional side-effects at the university, the local community and society.	+ / -

Guideline 2: Funds Allocation & Financial Strategies

Guidelines	Achievement
1. Allocate regular, primarily internal, financial strategies to design, implement, manage and evaluate service-learning programs, which could be supplemented and expanded by external funding if needed.	
2. Foster equality by ensuring that low-income individual students can access service-learning projects.	
3. Adopt administrative procedures to foster transparency and fairness in the management of the service-learning budget.	
4. Raise funds from external organizations.	
5. Consider the costs of continuing training for all agents involved, the mapping of service-learning and dissemination processes through in-person and online strategies.	
6. Establish a system for measuring the social return on investment.	

Guideline 3: Coordination Unit/Support Infrastructure

Guidelines	Achievement
1. Establish an office or a coordinating unit across the institution and within schools/faculties/academic centers, with specific staff responsible for service-learning affairs related to the students, teachers and community entities, and for other administrative issues.	
2. Set up an advisory board of multiple stakeholders to ensure collaborative strategic planning, goal-setting and mutual benefit for all stakeholders.	
3. Incorporate the voice of the students and external partners in the design of strategies related to service-learning at its different planning levels.	
4. Encourage and facilitate the assessment and research of student learning outcomes, community partner's outcomes, and the self-assessment of teachers.	
5. Promote and support training opportunities, pedagogical aids, resources and connections to the community, as well as access to other international entities related to service-learning.	
6. Recognize the management and coordination actions of those involved in the different committees, commissions and processes.	

Guideline 4: Rewards and Recognition of Students & Teachers

Guidelines	Achievement
1. Provide faculty and students with different forms of incentives for participating in service-learning projects.	
2. Recognize students' service-learning work with credits, and with a certificate or other form of recognition (besides credits).	
3. Incorporate recognition into the faculty evaluation, tenure, and promotion processes.	
4. Facilitate permanent training fostering faculty knowledge and confidence in service-learning activities.	
5. Increase permanent faculty opportunities for joining national and international service-learning groups or outreach projects.	
6. Design incentives for the different stakeholders to participate in service-learning projects.	

Guideline 5: Teaching Planning

Guidelines	Achievement
1. Embed service-learning over time as an experiential didactical methodology across all institutional and educational levels, and degree courses.	
2. Integrate service-learning across disciplines, support interdisciplinary work.	
3. Encourage, support and facilitate participation of students in conditions of equal opportunities to act as advocates and ambassadors for service-learning institutionalization, making them aware of opportunities and providing ways to play a leadership role.	
4. Promote research on institutional local contexts and socio-cultural practices in order to promote reflection and critical analysis in accordance with real conditions.	
5. Implement social and situated learning, including external partners in the design and evaluation of the projects.	
6. Promote service-learning projects mediated by learning and communication technologies, including the particular design characteristics of e-SL.	

Guideline 6: Teaching Principles

Guidelines	Achievement
1. Promote and facilitate service-learning as a central teaching method.	
2. Enable curricula to promote an active role for students in the identification of community needs for their service.	
3. Include emotional and cognitive competencies, co-curricular learnings, and transversal competencies.	
4. Promote interdisciplinary service-learning projects.	
5. Develop online and international service-learning projects.	
6. Impregnate service-learning with the ethical principles and values of social justice and education, including the gender perspective and social inclusion.	

Guideline 7: Service-Learning Research

Guidelines	Achievement
1. Develop and conduct a collaborative or participatory research agenda built on a partnership with the community which should stay focused on all stakeholders.	
2. Provide training on service-learning research and making research resources accessible.	
3. Develop mechanisms for promoting and rewarding engaged research.	
4. Disseminate service-learning projects and research targeting groups of interest/stakeholders.	

Guideline 8: Institutional Advertising and Support

Guidelines	Achievement
1. Manage a service-learning web section and an online platform to facilitate the cooperative work between community needs and expertise from all stakeholders, as well as to enable the submission of candidatures/proposals of students and/or teachers.	
2. Create or develop in conditions of continuous update a database or a catalogue with past/running/future projects or courses.	
3. Advertise service-learning courses throughout the institution.	
4. Support the visibility of students' participation in service-learning projects of all students regardless of their age, class, culture and race.	
5. Promote the dissemination of Service-Learning throughout the university community, as well as to representative entities, policy makers and administration sectors in Higher education.	
6. Promote the participation of social partners, third sector entities and others, in public events related to service-learning.	

Guideline 9: Student Social Justice Learnings

Guidelines	Achievement
1. Promote students' input in the design, implementation and/or evaluation of service-learning projects.	
2. Provide students with practical social exercises of participating in policy making processes.	
3. Engage students in activities involving taking responsibilities, community service, dialogue with peers and reflection.	
4. Connect to movements in favor of social justice and democratic social change.	
5. Incorporate consistent critical reflection sustaining longitudinal relationships and addressing structural inequalities.	

Guideline 10: Partnerships with the Community

Guidelines	Achievement
1. Develop sustainable and reciprocal partnerships between higher education institutions and civil society organizations through the implementation of service-learning programs.	
2. Mobilize appropriate community agency representatives serving as advocates and ambassadors for institutionalizing service-learning.	
3. Observe the principles of coexistence and respect diversity in those involved in service-learning.	
4. Work with the community in the design, implementation and evaluation of service-learning projects.	
5. Ensure the inclusion of the diversity of perspectives.	
6. Establish strategies for the celebration of the learning, the service and the partnership that make service-learning projects possible.	
7. Relate service-learning projects with the Sustainable Development Goals.	

European Guidelines (2021)

Global picture of SL institutionalization in UCP

Guidelines	Achievement
1. Institutional Involvement	 /  
2. Funds Allocation & Financial Strategies	 / 
3. Coordination Unit/Support Infrastructure	 /  
4. Rewards and Recognition of Students & Teachers	 / 
5. Teaching Planning	 / 
6. Teaching Principles	 / 
7. Service-Learning Research	 / 
8. Institutional Advertising and Support	 / 
9. Student Social Justice Learnings	 /  
10. Partnership with the Community	 /  

Curricular Integration

	UCP Total	SL Projects	% of SL Experiences
Campuses	4 (Braga; Lisboa; Porto; Viseu)	4 (Braga; Lisboa; Porto; Viseu)	100%
Academic units (4 campuses)	22 (Braga – 2; Lisboa – 11; Porto – 7; Viseu – 2)	12 (Braga -1; Lisboa - 4; Porto - 5; Viseu – 2)	54,55%
Programs (4 campuses)	107 (40 bachelor's degrees; 67 master's degrees)	24 (17 bachelor's degrees; 7 master's degrees)	22,43%

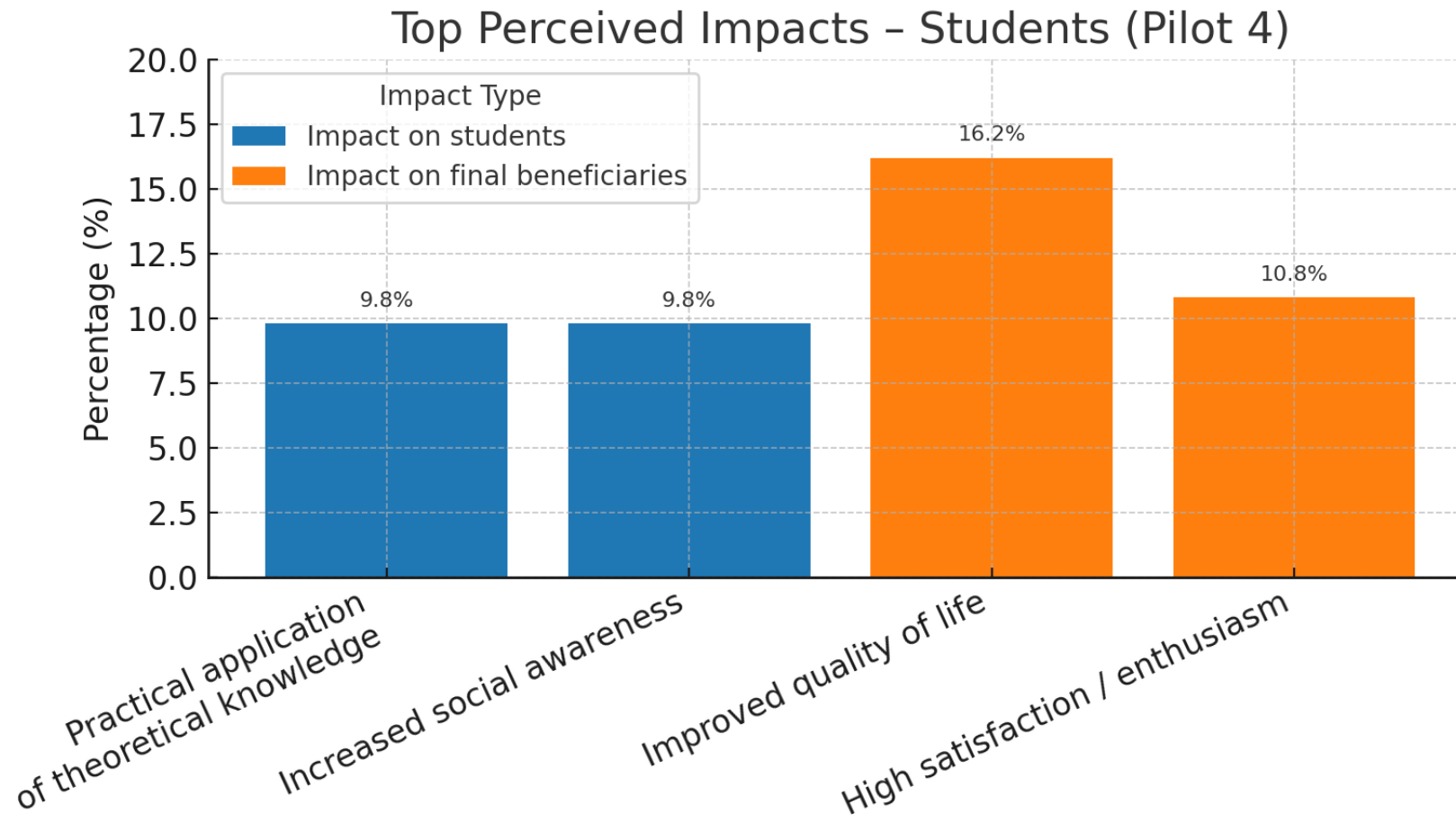
8 semesters of operation

	Nr. of SL Projects	Nr. of implementations	% of SL Experiences
	2	8	12,90%
	1	7	5,65%
	3	6	14,52%
	2	5	8,06%
	5	4	16,13%
	5	3	12,10%
	5	2	8,06%
	28	1	22,58%
Total	51	124	100%

SL Perceived Impact by the faculty members (N = 23)

Pilots	Students	Teachers	Community
Pilot 1	<i>"Students develop soft skills that can be used throughout the course"</i>	<i>"As far as students and teachers are concerned, the impact is similar: a new way of teaching and learning"</i>	<i>"For the beneficiaries, the activities developed allow to meet some of the organization's urgent needs"</i>
Pilot 2	<i>"Students - Recognition and appreciation of the work of institutions supporting the elderly"</i>	<i>"The SL project was exciting for me as a teacher and required a very strong presence in monitoring the students"</i>	<i>"Partner entities - Embracing new challenges, promoting unprecedented dynamics ; Final beneficiaries - Elderly very isolated in the face of the pandemic context, there was a very significant interaction"</i>

SL Perceived Impact by the students (N = 58)

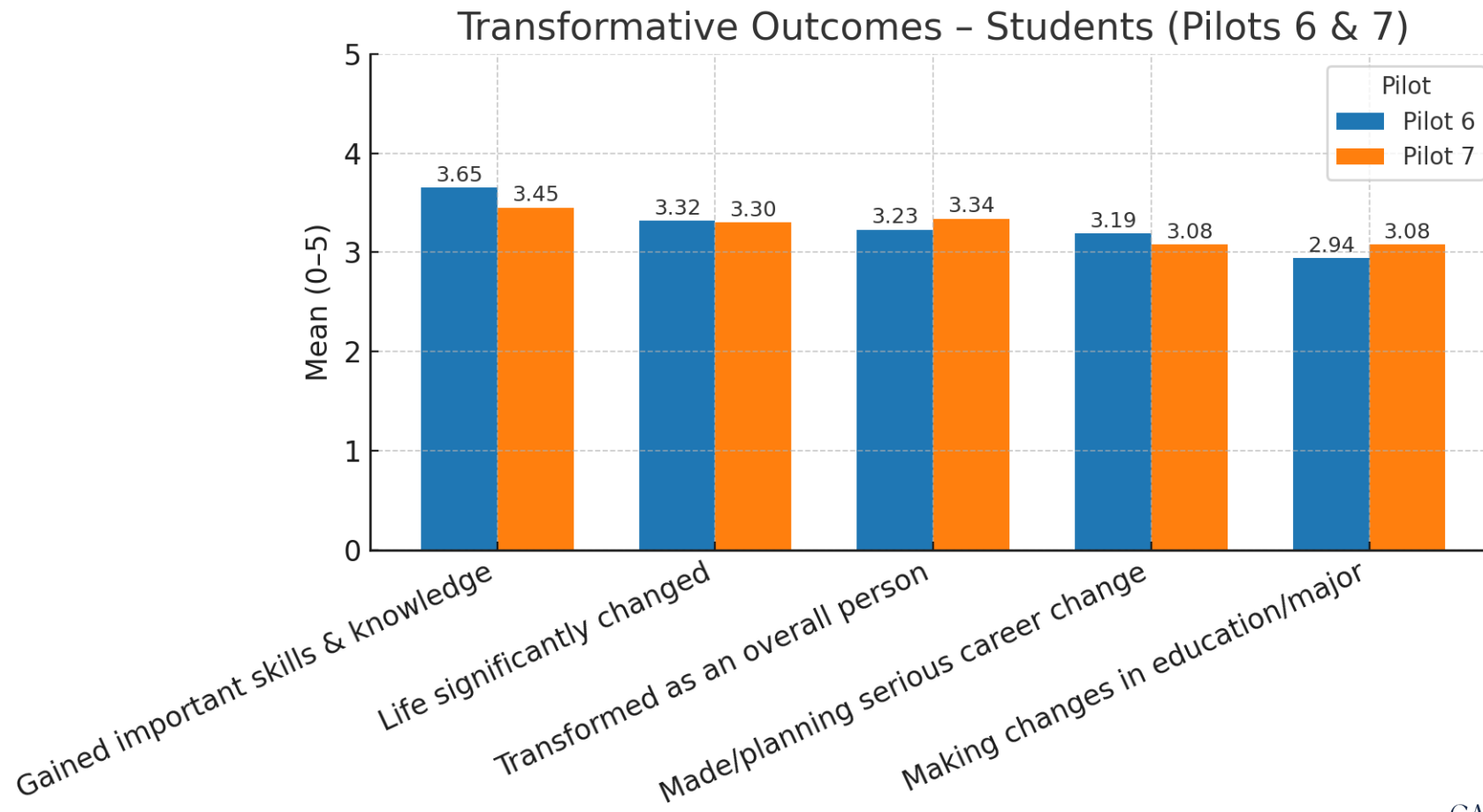


“Contact with the community provided a sense of usefulness and personal growth.”

“I have made or plan to make a serious career change because of my Service-Learning experiences.”

“Need for more direct contact time with the beneficiaries.”

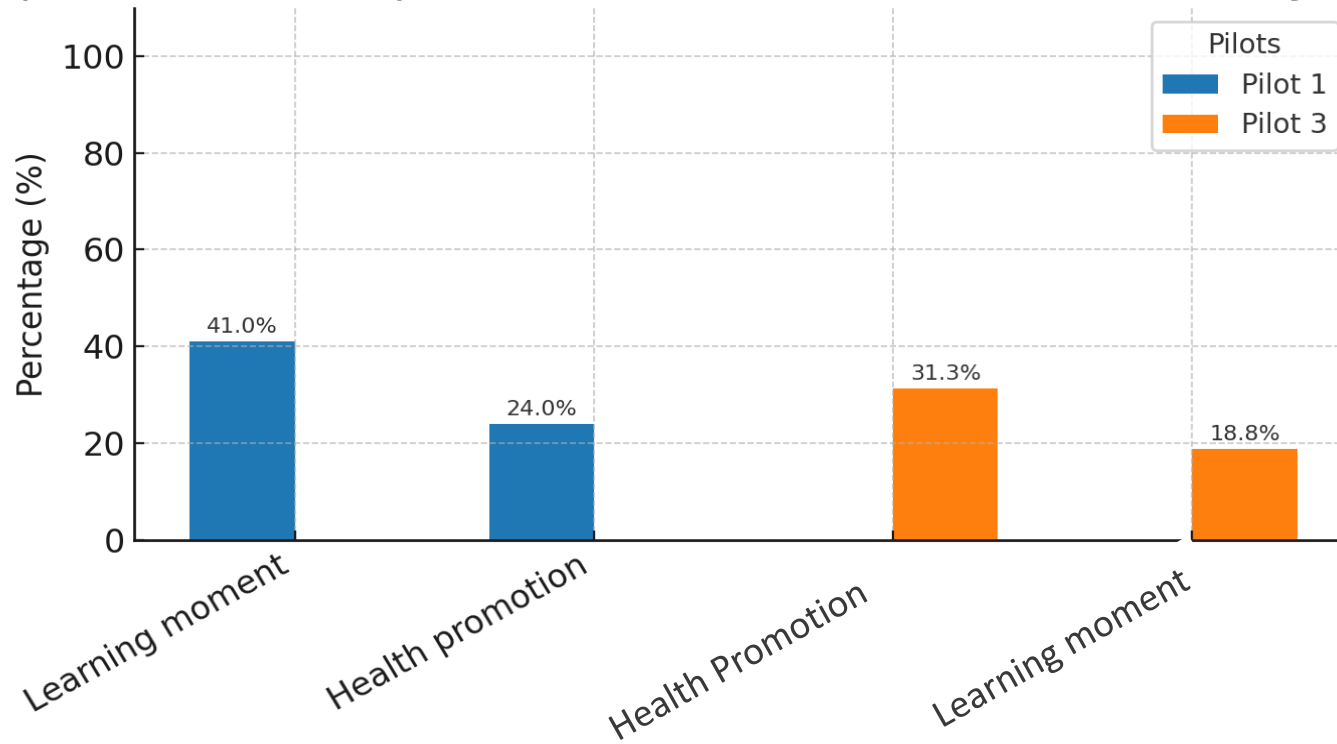
Students Transformative Outcomes ($N = 111$)



“I have gained very important skills and knowledge through this experience I otherwise would not have learned.”

SL Perceived Impact by the Community Partners (N = 32)

Top 2 Perceived Impacts on Final Beneficiaries – Community Partners



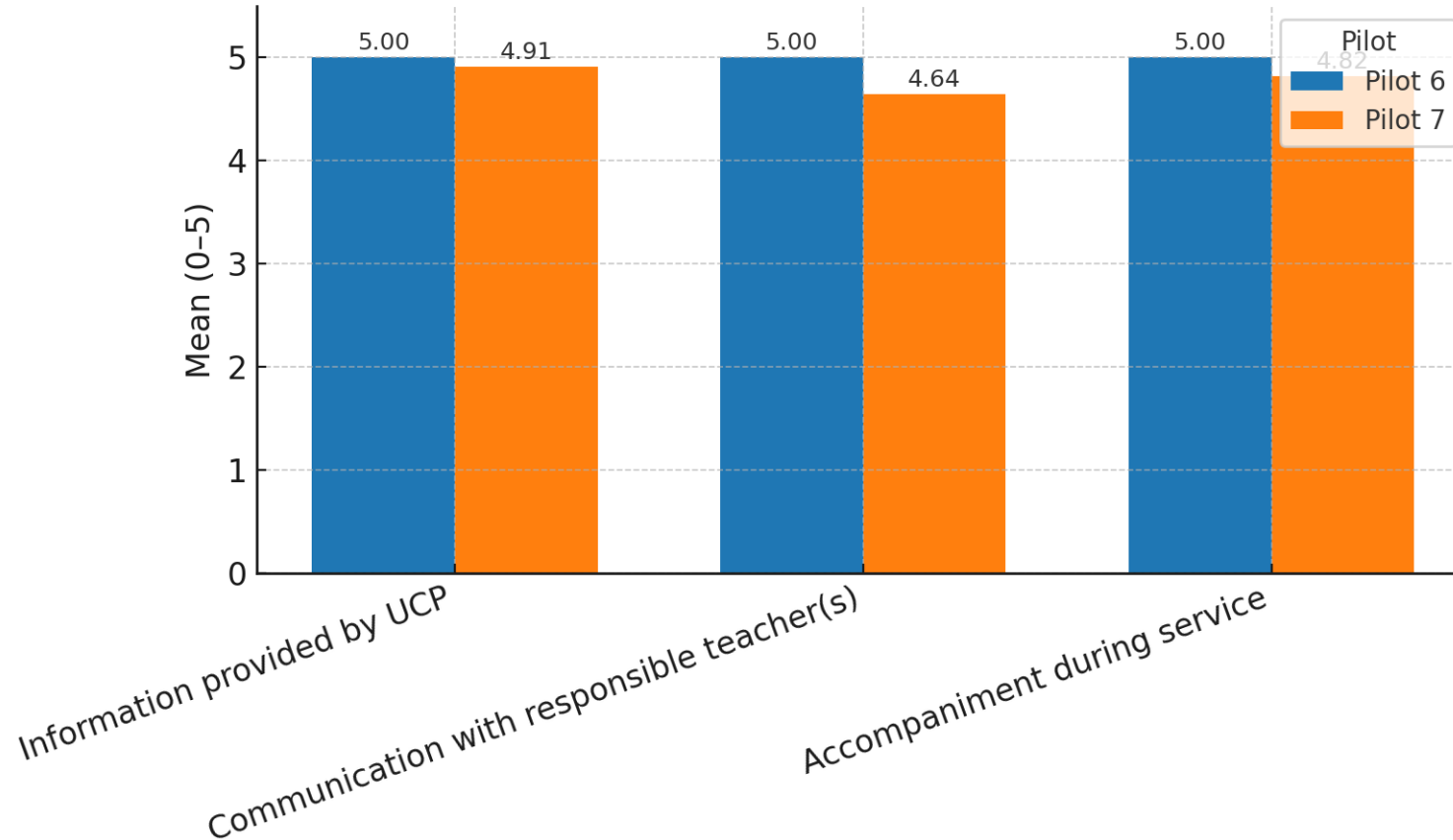
“The students brought new ideas and enthusiasm to our organization.”

“More time in the field is needed to build close relationships.”

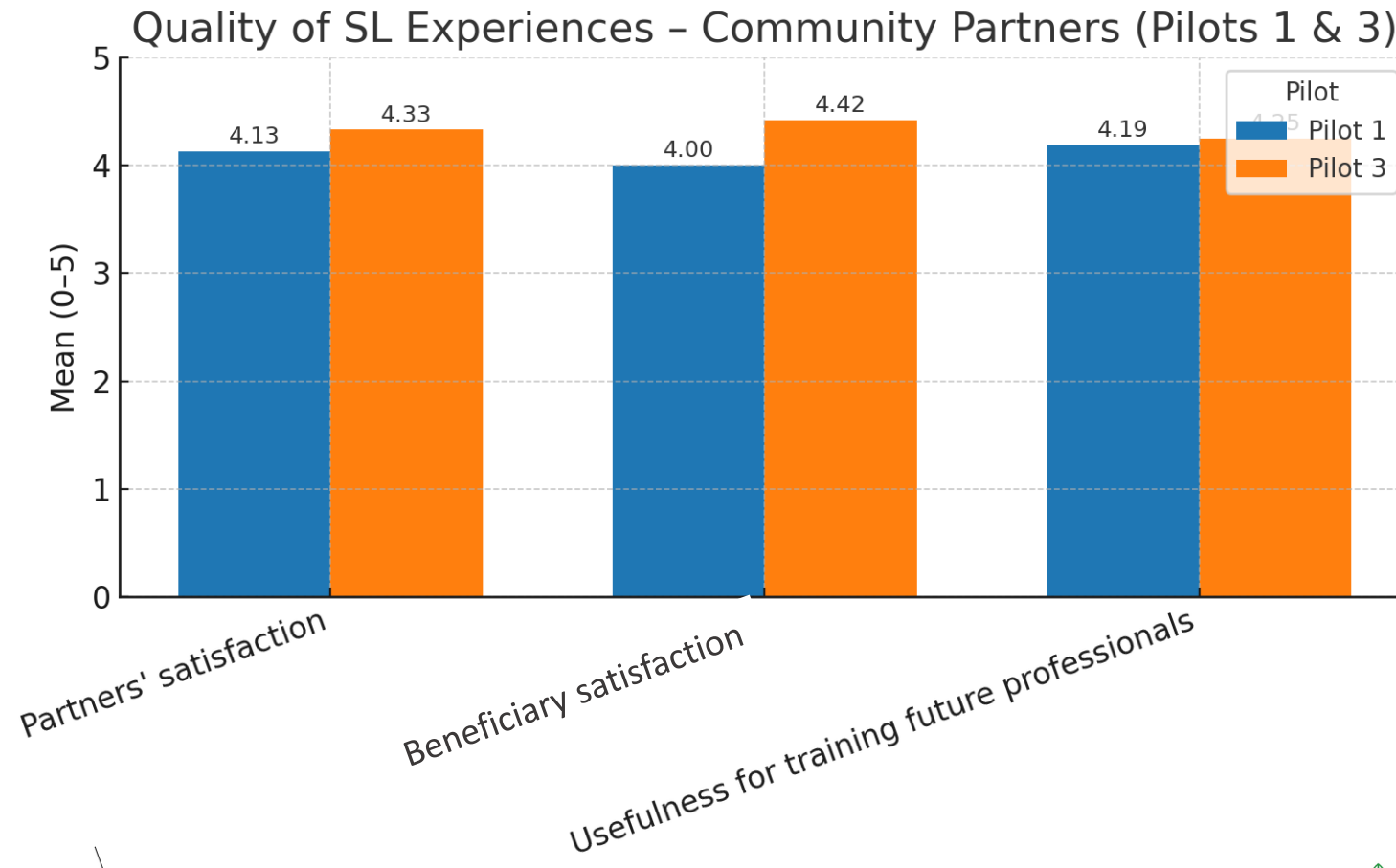
“Need for more specific training to deal with certain realities.”

Institutional Support perceived by the Community partners (N = 13)

Institutional Support Mechanisms – Community Partners (Pilots 6 & 7)



Quality of SL Experiences ($N = 28$)



Final Reflections

Results highlight the significant progress made by UCP in institutionalizing Service-Learning as a strategic, pedagogical, and civic commitment. The findings reveal a trajectory marked by meaningful achievements – such as the integration of SL across diverse academic programs, the engagement of a broad range of stakeholders, and increasing international recognition – while also exposing persistent challenges. These include the need to further enhance the quality and consistency of SL experiences, ensure systematic recognition and support for faculty, recruit and train new teachers, and secure the long-term sustainability of the methodology within institutional structures.

Final Reflections

UCP's SL strategy shows alignment with global standards, but several dimensions are still in progress.

Together, these models serve as essential tools for guiding strategic planning, fostering reflective practice, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of SL within higher education institutions.

Final Reflections

The lessons learned throughout this journey underscore the value of a multi-level, evidence-based approach to institutionalization – one that is grounded in both global frameworks and local realities. UCP's experience demonstrates that embedding SL in higher education requires not only strategic alignment and operational infrastructure, but also a deep cultural shift that embraces co-creation with communities, interdisciplinary collaboration, and a commitment to social transformation. As such, this case offers valuable insights for other institutions seeking to advance SL as a core dimension of their mission and identity.

“My overall evaluation is that CApS at UCP is a clear success. It successfully implemented an innovative pedagogy that contributes in powerful and unique ways to the educational experiences of UCP students, it provided instructors with professional development opportunities, and it contributed to the community in meaningful ways.”

Bringle (2023)

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Thanks for your attention

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