ENTHUSIASTS, BACKUP PLANNERS, AND PROFESSIONALS: HOW COLLEGE STUDENTS APPROACH PARTICIPATION IN SERVICE PROGRAMS AFTER GRADUATION

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ABSTRACT

Alanna Gillis: Enthusiasts, Backup Planners, and Professionals: How College Students Approach
Participation in Service Programs after Graduation
(Under the direction of Laura Lopez-Sanders)

How do college students who aspire to participate in service programs, such as Peace
Corps or Teach for America, approach such participation? Previous research focuses on service
programs as civic engagement while largely ignoring the transition to adulthood life course
context. Using 30 in-depth interviews with juniors and seniors, I find three approaches:
Enthusiasts prioritize participation as temporary and fulfilling work prior to careers. Backup
Planners prefer beginning careers or graduate school but consider service programs good backup
plans. Professionals view service programs as easy ways to enter their careers. While the
students differ in their ability and willingness to pursue careers after graduation, all see service
programs as a means to try something new, live somewhere different, and pursue personal
growth before settling down into adult roles. However, class-based differences in ability to
participate in these programs may have implications for graduate school, future careers, and
being adrift post-college.

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INTRODUCTION

> To our seniors, you are almost done with your undergraduate work. I think this is the most beautiful time of year in Research Heights[1] and hope you will take time to enjoy our campus and your friends here as you prepare to take the next steps in your journey, whether you enter the job market, further your education or embark on public service.
> -Chancellor Smith of Research Heights University (RHU), in an email to the RHU campus community

Chancellor Smith summarizes the three major pathways that college students can take after they graduate from college: they can enter the job market, they can pursue more education, or they can "embark on public service," which I take to mean participating in a service program. This study shows that these three options seem clear to many of the students, faculty, and administrators at an elite campus like RHU—a highly selective public research university and the setting of this study. However, scholars have largely devoted their attention to service programs as a form of civic engagement, as if it were simply a higher-commitment form of volunteering, rather than a distinct pathway with which to leave college after graduation and possibly a temporary replacement for seeking work or education. Given that the majority of participants in service programs in the US do so immediately after college graduation, and the vast majority seem to do so within a few years of college graduation (McAdam and Brandt 2009), the study of this participation needs to expand beyond investigations of civic engagement. Instead, it needs to be placed in the broader context of the delayed transition to adulthood to

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[1] Note that the name of the town, university, and all people used in this study have been changed to protect confidentiality. The Peace Corps, Teach for America, AmeriCorps, City Year, and Fulbright ETA have all retained their true names. All other service program organization names have been changed, as interest/participation in these other programs by RHU students is much smaller and using the real name could reveal the identity of the participant(s).

understand the participation more fully in the young adults' life course. It also needs to be understood relative to recent changes in elite higher education such that these colleges increasingly promote identity development and decreasingly emphasize professional-occupational programs or other direct career development (Arum and Roksa 2014; Brint, Riddle, Turk-Bicakci, and Levy 2005; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). Finally, it needs to be understood as an example of young adults taking time to explore after graduation in order to assess if this exploration period helps or hurts the trajectories of these college graduates—and the role that social class background plays in the determining whether the exploration hurts or helps.

By analyzing how college students who aspire to participate in service programs speak about such programs, we can better understand how they approach their participation during this period immediately after graduation. Service programs generally delay the timing of reaching the adulthood marker of career because they are short-term programs (though my research shows this is not the case for a small subset of young adults who actually use the programs to enter their careers). By studying how students interpret their own participation we can also understand their subjective interpretations of such a delay (Eliason, Mortimer, Vuolo 2015)—e.g., whether this is a conscious or intentional decision to delay career pursuit and whether they feel ready to be adults. Finally, many scholars seem concerned about the trend of delayed career seeking post-college, especially for young adults from less privileged backgrounds (Arum and Roksa 2014). Understanding how students talk about service programs relative to their career aspirations helps us understand whether service programs are an example of young adults wasting time or if they view them as a positive and strategic move—and if this might vary based on social class background of the college graduate. This answer can contribute to the growing literature finding that college graduates from higher social class backgrounds can afford to be adrift for a few

years after college and still end up in middle to upper middle class trajectories while those from less privileged backgrounds are often hurt by this exploration time (Settersten and Ray 2010).

Using in-depth interviews with college juniors and seniors aspiring to participate in a service program, I answer the following research question: how do college students aspiring to participate in a service program after graduation explain and understand their possible future participation? In answering this question, I will also address the following: how is their aspiration linked to career ideas? What do these aspirations tell us about the exploratory period after college graduation? How do young adults subjectively interpret their delayed pursuit of the adulthood marker of career? Are these aspirations examples of college students being adrift or do they seem to have strategic advantages for young adults and do these advantages vary by social class background? And, how do service programs connect to graduate school aspirations—might they possibly be a new pathway for some young adults to transition from college to graduate school? I review the literature on the delayed transition to adulthood, changes in elite higher education, and the literature on service programs. I also explain the four primary theoretical frameworks scholars have previously used to understand service program participation before reviewing my methods and findings that challenge these previous frameworks; describing the three approaches I found students use; and tying these findings back to literature on life course, education, and inequality.

Transition to Adulthood Changes

Scholars studying the transition to adulthood generally focus on five major transitions: their completing education, leaving parents' houses, beginning careers, getting married, and having children (Neugarten, Moore, and Lowe 1965; Shanahan et al. 2005; Osgood et al 2005;

Settersten and Ray 2010). Each of these can be seen as markers of adulthood, such that life course scholars can analyze the timing by which young adults reach each marker, as well as their subjective interpretations of feeling like an adult or feeling ready for each marker (Eliason, Mortimer, Vuolo 2015). Once these five steps have been completed, then traditionally the person is seen as having fully transitioned to adult status. However, scholars have also widely acknowledged that these traditional markers of the transition to adulthood need to be complicated, as the transition has been delayed (Settersten and Ray 2010), has been made more subjective (Shanahan et al. 2005), occurs on a variety of different pathways (Osgood et al. 2005; Eliason, Mortimer, Vuolo 2015), and greatly varies by social class background (Shanahan 2000; Osgood et al. 2005; Schoeni and Ross 2005).

This delay in the transition to adulthood is most evident from the delay in marriage. The median age of first marriage in 2010 was 26.7 for women and 28.7 for men and even higher among college graduates being 28.4 for women and 29.9 for men (Payne 2012). This delay creates an opportunity in the early and mid-20's for young adults to try out new jobs and opportunities before hopefully settling into a middle class career, a step most young adults now see as necessary before marriage (Settersten and Ray 2010)—assuming they can remain childfree (Oesterle, Hawkins, Hill, and Bailey 2010; Cherlin, Ribar, and Yasutake 2016). The ability to use the twenties as a time for exploration is often dependent on continued parental support and social class background. For instance, Schoeni and Ross (2005) find that between the ages of 18 and 34, children who come from families in the top fourth of family income receive three times more money from their families during the transition to adulthood than children in the bottom fourth. Hamilton (2013: 91) asserts that "disparities in the ability to fund a young-adult life

stage" (as opposed to immediate full financial adult responsibilities) might be one of the major mechanisms for reproducing class inequalities in today's society.

Careers, like marriage, have been delayed so that college educated young adults can try out different opportunities and types of jobs before hopefully settling into a career. They seek jobs that are personally meaningful and fit with their identities, hoping to eventually find the perfect career for them (Arnett 2004; Settersten and Ray 2010). On average, young adults in their early twenties switch jobs once a year (Settersten and Ray 2010). However, even looking only at college graduates, this instability in jobs is generally only strategic for young adults from privileged families. "Job-shopping" allows them to try increasingly better fitting and paying jobs, or ones that have great strategic advantages for future applications, rather than the "job-hopping" young adults from less privileged families participate in (Settersten and Ray 2010: 53). The job-hopping, by contrast, is often still motivated by the cultural shift in seeking fulfilling work. However, college graduates from less privileged families are generally less successful in finding meaningful jobs both temporarily in their early to mid-twenties and in using these varied jobs strategically to seek enjoyable and well-paid careers later (Settersten and Ray 2010).

Therefore, this slower path toward a career, as opposed to immediately after college graduation, has expanded what is strategic and necessary for professional careers. For instance, there has been a rise in internships both during and after college, and internships during college positively affect likelihood of employment immediately after graduation (Pascarella, Terenzini, Feldman 2005). These internships, though, often have little to no stipends available, so are often a strategic advantage accessible only to students whose parents support them financially (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). Likewise, a graduate degree is increasingly necessary for the higher paying careers many college students seek (Arum and Roksa 2014). Increased

participation in internships, graduate school, service programs, and other more temporary jobs both helps students desiring to fulfill this cultural shift toward pursuit of varied and personally fulfilling opportunities during their twenties and gains strategic advantage in a changed job market where only having a bachelor's degree and part-time work experience is not enough—at least for those who can afford to seek these opportunities (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Arum and Roksa 2014).

Considering the economic recession exacerbated this problem of few good career opportunities immediately after college graduation (Settersten and Ray 2010), more young adults may be forced to consider nontraditional strategic means of advancing their careers. This shift will likely lead to growing inequality among college graduates from different social class backgrounds. College graduates who are unable to seek these strategically advantageous temporary jobs or graduate school will be less likely to successfully transition into well-paid and/or fulfilling careers than their peers whose social class backgrounds allow them to more easily. Arum and Roksa (2014) find in their study of approximately 1000 young adults two years after their college graduation—including 80 in-depth interviews with a subset of these students who were drawn from twenty-five four-year universities—that most young adults two years after graduation still do not know what they want to do with their careers long-term and are in jobs that do not use their degrees or skills developed during college. Young adults who "have resources that allow them to be adrift for a while, before they 'find themselves' to lead more directed and purposeful lives" are "less cause for concern" (17) than students without access to these family resources. In other words, students from families with resources can afford to be "adrift" for a few years—i.e., not be in direct pursuit of career—and still have promising post-college trajectories once they eventually settle on a career path after exploring options. However,

young adults from working class or even lower middle class families will be hurt by this time

adrift because they must settle for jobs that can pay the bills right now, and thus are unlikely to

end up in professional careers in part due to massive student loan debt that they must struggle to

pay back after graduation—if they make it to graduation at all (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013;

Dwyer, McCloud, and Hodson 2012). They must prioritize paying off this debt and other

personal or family bills when selecting jobs or graduate programs after college (Rothstein and

Rouse 2011). Thus, due to changing cultural norms about marriage and jobs during the twenties

and due to changing structural conditions requiring more than a college degree to enter more

meaningful and higher-paid careers, there has been a rise in job-shopping in the twenties, for

those who can afford it (Settersten and Ray 2010). This job-shopping involves using temporary

jobs strategically and for personal fulfillment before settling down into careers, though it also

increases inequality between college graduates from different social class backgrounds.

Changes in Elite Higher Education

Elite higher education has undergone shifts in the past few decades so that there is an

increased focus on personal development of students and an emphasis on liberal arts over direct

professional development. College students increasingly spend time in college engaging in

identity development rather than intellectual development (Clydesdale 2007; Arum and Roksa

2011; Arum and Roksa 2014; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). They do so through being

primarily involved in socially-oriented rather than academically-oriented activities (Armstrong

and Hamilton 2013; Arum and Roksa 2011; Clydesdale 2007). This focus on personal

development, however, is not simply a cultural shift for young adults. Colleges, especially

selective ones, have been moving toward a "student service model" whereby colleges themselves

are increasingly focused on the personal growth of students alongside their academic development (Arum and Roksa 2014: 9). The focus on personal development begins in the admissions process for selective colleges (Stevens 2007) and persists through the college experience. The student service model results in increasing emphasis placed on student activities, organizations, sports, and dormitories to facilitate self-exploration and socializing with peers (Arum and Roksa 2014; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). This institutional social priority comes at a price, such that the academic and professional development of students is underemphasized (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Arum and Roksa 2011).

At the same time, more selective colleges are turning further away from the "occupational-professional degrees" that less selective colleges are increasingly emphasizing (Brint, Riddle, Turk-Bicakci, Levy 2005: 173). In other words, less selective colleges are putting more resources into the development of programs that train students directly for careers like education, nursing, or business. Meanwhile, more selective colleges are moving farther from these career-oriented approaches so that their college experiences are further removed from direct career development or transitions. Likewise, studies have found that students who attend these more selective colleges struggle to know how to transition to the labor market after graduation, unless they have specific mentors or helpful friends and family (Settersten and Ray 2010); resources are often lacking for students in career development at these institutions, especially along the mobility pathway for students from working class or lower middle class backgrounds (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013).

The combination of the cultural shift of treating college as a time to explore identity and the underdevelopment of resources for career development has led to many college graduates not knowing what they want to do professionally in the short and long-term. Settersten and Ray

(2010) argue that successfully transitioning out of college on a good path (i.e., trajectory toward a middle or upper middle class profession) generally requires continued active parenting to help the young adult navigate this transition; for those students with uninvolved parents—or parents who do not have the necessary connections or knowledge to actively mentor them—the role of mentors, counselors, and professors in college is crucial. While some students certainly form these connections in college, it is often the students already on the professional pathway from upper middle class families who are well-versed in networking; students from lower class backgrounds find the mobility pathway underdeveloped relative to their needs (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). Therefore, graduates from selective colleges still often leave without concrete long-term career plans, as they often feel unprepared to make career decisions (Settersten and Ray 2010; Arum and Roksa 2014).

While colleges do focus intensely on self-development, students often do not learn how to tie this identity formation to career development. As explained above, it is often not until after college when some young adults link their new identities to career possibilities through trying out jobs—a process college graduates from more privileged families are generally far more successful at than their less privileged peers. Therefore, the changes in elite higher education many create an irony for students from working class or lower middle class backgrounds: they worked hard enough in high school to be admitted to a selective college, which is shown to increase wages over the life course (Hout 2012), but because these universities are so focused on identity development instead of professional development, poorer students may be hurt by attending these universities (Hamilton and Armstrong 2012). They may be less likely to find high paying or strategically advantageous jobs after graduation unless they have mentors who can guide them in making these strategic decision and aid in career aspiration formation.

Service Programs

Previous research on service programs has primarily focused on whether there are long-term civic engagement benefits after participating in a government-run program such as Teach for America (TFA) (McAdam and Brandt 2009) or AmeriCorps (Finlay, Flanagan, and Wray-Lake 2011).[2] However, many elite colleges may be promoting a broader view of participation in service programs by linking them to career development and short-term work opportunities after college graduation. For instance, Southern Arts College,[3] a liberal arts college in the southeast, posted on their Facebook page:

> Making an Impact through Post Graduate Service
> - Do you value service?
> - Hoping to gain greater clarity about your career interests?
> - Seeking a short-term work experience that is professional & meaningful?
>
> Consider taking a "Year of Service" after graduation!
>
> Come hear from Southern Arts alum, Ali Boyd '11, as she shares her post graduate service experience working at the U.S.-Mexico border as a volunteer with the Border Servant Corps, an AmeriCorps affiliated program and how it has impacted her personal career path!

Likewise, RHU posted on its Facebook page: "Great news! RHU climbs to No. 14 among Peace Corps' volunteer-producing colleges and universities! #RHU."[4] Southern Arts is hosting events encouraging its students to consider "taking a year of service" after graduation, and RHU is clearly boasting that so many of its students join the Peace Corps after graduation. Some colleges are using career services and social media resources to encourage their students to participate in these programs.

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[2] Previous research has also focused on the effects of the service program on the population being served such as TFA's effect on education (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, and Heilig 2005; Heilig and Jez 2014).

[3] While no research was conducted at this university, I have changed the name of this university to also be consistent with the use of pseudonyms.

[4] Note, while RHU is in the 15 top Peace Corps producing universities, they are not number 14. This change has been made to protect the confidentiality of the university.

Therefore, as seen in the introductory quote by RHU's chancellor and Southern Arts's Facebook post, it is not just particular service programs that are being encouraged, but this pathway as a whole that Southern Arts calls a "year of service" and RHU's chancellor calls "embark on public service." Thus, studies that only look at participation in individual programs—such as the Peace Corps (Starr 1994; Colmen 1966; Searles 1997) or TFA (McAdam and Brandt 2009) or participation in certain sectors of volunteering/service such as international development (Sherraden, Lough, and McBride 2008)—are missing the trend[5] in recent graduates' aspirations to participate in these many varied service programs (Zakaria 2015) that collectively form a new pathway to transition out of college. While not all people who participate in these programs do so immediately after they graduate from college, a sizable number do (McAdam and Brandt 2009).[6] In 2006, more than eleven percent of first-year college students said it was "essential" or "very important" that they "participat[e] in an organization like the Peace Corps or AmeriCorps/VISTA" after graduation (Higher Education Research Institute 2007: 3), and this number could possibly be higher if student had been primed to also think about non-governmental service programs.

This advertisement by colleges promoting participation in service programs broadly, including non-governmental programs, is not reflected in the literature. Likewise, the focus by colleges on using service programs for career exploration and development, instead of only an opportunity to develop good civic behaviors, is also underdeveloped. Thus, while scholars are

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[5] There is not systematic evidence for a rise in the overall trend across programs because there is no nationwide survey that has collected this data over time. However, increases in individual programs hint to a growing trend, especially since the economic recession in 2008. For instance, in 2014 Teach for America more than doubled the number of applications it received relative to 2008, receiving more than 50,000 (Zakaria 2015).

[6] While it is impossible to know overall statistics about participation rates broadly because no one has studied service programs collectively before, two thirds of Teach for America participants do so immediately after college and it seems likely that the majority do in other programs as well (Teach for America 2016b).

interested in understanding whether government-run service programs promote better citizens (McAdam and Brandt 2009; Finlay, Flanagan, and Wray-Lake 2011), they are missing how young adults themselves may interpret their participation in such programs. This participation may be related to themes colleges promote about service programs such as career exploration, to themes scholars have studied such as a commitment to service (McAdam and Brandt 2009), or to other themes not yet addressed. This participation also needs to be linked to the changes in the transition to adulthood and the increasing emphasis placed on identity development during college instead of explicit career development.

To reflect this broader investigation of service program aspirations for young adults, I define a service program as full-time program focused in some way on helping or serving a social need or community. The program must be undertaken instead of entering the labor market in a traditional way or graduate/professional school and is undertaken for a specific length of time. Therefore, unlike volunteering that could be once a month or whenever the volunteer wants to go, a service program is the major commitment that the young adult has during that year or two of her/his life: the participant generally will work at least forty hours a week and is expected to relocate to their placement site which she/he may or may not have been able to request. Also unlike volunteering which is generally unpaid, a service program may require fundraising, provide room and board, provide a stipend, or pay a wage/salary. If it is a position, like teaching, that could normally be considered a job, particularly if it has the same salary, it can be differentiated by being part of a program that specifically has characteristics like providing housing, advertising that it will develop "future leaders" rather than "future teachers," or in some way designates the assignment as part of a temporary program or not a normal job. A position labelled as an "internship" may potentially be included as participating in a service program if it

meets the other criteria. Service programs include well-known government programs like Peace Corps, Teach for America, and AmeriCorps, but also include programs run by local, national, or international non-profits that can be secular or religious.

Previous Service Program Frameworks

Given the interest in service programs in colleges and the public sphere more broadly (considering most participants are part of government run and funded programs), the theoretical framework to understand service program participation is relatively underdeveloped. Scholars seem to have four basic approaches to explain service program aspirations or participation. First, they use the *backup plan* argument. Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) best express this backup plan argument in explaining why a woman in their study, Leah, participated in AmeriCorps after graduation. They argue that she underachieved in college, entering on the professional pathway but exiting without a promising trajectory. However, after participating in AmeriCorps for a year, she was accepted to a well-ranked social work graduate program so that she was back on track for an upper middle class trajectory. They imply that Leah's participation in AmeriCorps was a backup plan, as if she would have preferred to immediately attend the social work program, but she was forced to put off that plan until she had supplemented her resume by participating in AmeriCorps (though they do not provide evidence from Leah that she interpreted her own participation this way). They also note this option is generally only available to young adults from upper middle class families because others cannot afford to participate in them. Overall, the backup plan framework asserts that service programs are backup plans for college students who underachieved in college and need to participate in them in order to improve their

post-college career and social class trajectories. However, this backup plan may only be available for students from upper middle class backgrounds.

Second, scholars have used the *gap year* argument. The gap year concept typically describes post-high school experiences before college. For instance, Jeffrey Arnett (2004: 164) defines a gap year as "taking a year or two after high school to mature and have other experiences before entering tertiary education." Gap years can include a variety of activities such as working a job, doing volunteer service, or travelling (Jones 2004; O'Reilly 2006). Despite the prevalence of gap years in countries like Britain, Germany, Australia, and Israel, it is still relatively rare in the United States for a post-high school student to participate in a gap year before college (Arnett 2004; Settersten and Ray 2010). However, both Arnett (2004) and Settersten and Ray (2010) argue that gap years could solve the problem of so many American students entering college without a clear plan for study or career. Arnett extends this gap year framework to the post-college context to explain recent college graduates' participation in programs like AmeriCorps, TFA, and the Peace Corps: these programs serve as a "gap year, or at least a few gap months, once they graduate from college, before they enter a long-term job" (166). He argues that this time post-college is the time for them to do "unusual educational and work possibilities," as well as having the "freedom" to relocate somewhere new (10). Therefore, the gap year framework argues that service programs serve to buffer the transition from college to the young adult's next step—either a career or graduate school—by allowing them an opportunity for personal development, career testing, or trying an unusual job. The gap year framework argues that young adults use service programs to form more concrete career aspirations and feel more prepared to take their next step in life. They may also form a

connection between college and graduate school, allowing a short break along this educational pathway.

Third, scholars have used the *civic citizens* argument. In McAdam and Brandt's (2009: 950) longitudinal study of the civic behaviors of TFA applicants later in life, they argue that their study had an "obvious selection bias" because "the vast majority of applicants already share a serious commitment to service and civic life." The evidence they provide of this commitment is that most did volunteer or activist work in college (McAdam and Brandt; Youniss 2009). Likewise, Youniss (2009: 973) argues TFA applicants "show interest in solving social issues." Therefore, unlike the backup plan and gap year argument, the civic citizens argument states that the students who aspire to participate in a service program do so because of their intense commitment to social issues. Unlike the majority of young adults who are not civically engaged in meaningful ways (Youniss 2009; Smith 2011; Oesterle, Kirkpatrick, and Motimer 2004), students who aspire to participate in service programs are young adults who are already deeply committed to civic engagement and will be civically engaged throughout young adulthood and beyond, even if they do not participate in a service program (McAdam and Brandt 2009). Due to this commitment to civic engagement, students aspire to participate in service programs as a way to act out their commitment to social issues.

Finally, scholars have used the *adrift* argument. Many scholars are concerned with young adults making "successful transitions to adulthood" after college graduation (Arum and Roksa 2014: 22; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). These successful transitions generally entail either attaining a job that uses the college degree or enrolling in graduate school—and thus viewed as on track toward their career. Employment activities that are not related to long-term careers, or at least using the college degree, are generally viewed as unsuccessful transitions, a move that

Arum and Roksa (2014) label "adrift." Thus, while they do not explicitly mention service programs in their study, it seems reasonable that the adrift framework would include service program participation as adrift. These programs are short-term and therefore students have not gained traditional employment in long-term careers if they are participating in service programs. While participation in a service program for a student from any class background signals being adrift, less privileged students may be more likely to experience negative consequences as a result this state of being adrift after graduation. Overall, the adrift framework argues that young adults who are not working in long-term careers after college—or towards those careers in graduate or professional school—are adrift, and thus students who participate in service programs after college graduation should be seen as adrift.

DATA, METHODS, AND ANALYTIC STRATEGY

I conducted thirty in-depth semi-structured interviews with undergraduate juniors and seniors at RHU who had service program aspirations. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and forty minutes, though they varied from one hour and five minutes to two hours and thirty-eight minutes. Immediately following each interview, almost always within twenty-four hours, I wrote a memo about the interview. These memos included topics specific to each interview, including anything that stood out about the person's experiences at RHU, the types of programs and post-grad options she/he considered, and her/his long-term career ideas. These writings aided me in generating preliminary analysis while I was still collecting data (Lofland et al. 2006; Charmaz 2014). I also used these post-interview memos to identify and develop themes emerging in the analysis (Lofland et al. 2006). These topics included themes that were emerging across multiple interviews, questions that would have been helpful to ask in retrospect, and puzzles that I had. I used this information both to generate analysis while still in the data collection phase as well as to influence future interviews, including asking questions that I had not previously thought to ask (Charmaz 2014).

Data collection occurred from March 2015 through April 2016.[7] All data collection occurred in line with IRB protocols. Before each interview, I had the interviewee sign two written consent forms: the first consenting to participate in this interview and the second to store

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[7] The most ideal time to conduct interviews was in the spring semester because the seniors were about to graduate and were having to very seriously consider their post-grad plans. Most had already submitted applications and were in the process of interviewing or hearing back from their different options. The spring semester was also ideal to talk to juniors because they were starting to accept the reality that they would become seniors next year and so they were trying to decide the various pathways they might pursue after graduation more seriously, including beginning to seek resources about their potential aspirations. Therefore, I conducted 27 of the 30 interviews in the spring semesters of 2015 and 2016.

her/his contact information so that I can contact her/him for a follow-up interview. Regarding the interviews for this study, I explained that everything said will remain confidential, that I will change their name, and that they have the choice to not answer any questions or to end the interview at any time. I also asked permission to digitally record the interview. Regarding the follow up interview, I had them write down their emails, phone numbers, and permanent addresses. I stored this sensitive data in a separate locked location away from the rest of my data. After I transferred the digital recordings from my recorder to my password-protected computer, I deleted the audio file from the recorder. When I transcribed the interviews, I used the pseudonym for the participant so that their identifying information was kept in a separate location from their responses.

As I argue above, knowledge about service program aspirations is underdeveloped and therefore I used a mostly inductive approach. I began with a general interview guide informed by the research discussed above, common discussions of these programs in the media, and informal research I had previously conducted.[8] I knew that I should focus on pre-college experiences, college experiences, and aspirations for immediate and long-term post-graduation plans. However, I also allowed the interview guide to change and adapt to emergent themes (Charmaz 2014). For instance, I began this project calling the programs "volunteer programs" but within the first five interviews students consistently challenged this terminology. In response, I added a question to the interview guide specifically asking about the terminology. Through this discussion I eventually settled on calling them "service programs" as it best captured what the majority of students articulated about the meaning of those terms and the meaning of these programs in their lives. I also followed Mario Small's (2009) approach to seek "saturation"

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[8] I conducted a pilot version of this study at a different university while I was an undergraduate, interviewing five students with service program aspirations.

whereby I continued interviewing students until I was no longer learning new information (25). I made adjustments to the semi-structured interview guide as I hit saturation on certain topics. For instance, as I progressed I decreased time spent discussing involvement in high school activities and organizations and used this additional time in the interview to pursue the new topics or themes that emerged from previous interviews. However, all interviews contained the same core topics of pre-college experiences, experiences in college, plans or aspirations for after graduation, and long-term career plans. For a copy of my interview guide see the appendix.

Interviews were the most appropriate method for this project because I wanted to explain how college students understand their own participation in service programs. While previous scholars have put forward four arguments with which to understand service programs, by and large they have not been based on the perspectives of the participants. In-depth interviews are the most effective method to analyze accounts of motivations, interpret meaning, and attempt to find common understandings or frameworks from the participants themselves.

Research Context

For this study, I interviewed juniors and seniors at a university I call Research Heights University. RHU is a highly selective, four-year, residential, public research university in the southeast. It was selected because it had high rates of participation in popular programs such as Peace Corps and Teach for America and thus presumably had high rates of aspirations for and participation in service programs overall. I set my study in a college that had relatively high participation rates to facilitate finding enough students to participate in the study and ideally have more variety of types of participants from different social class or racial/ethnic backgrounds to be able to speak to the role that family background has on their interpretation.

In order to provide further institutional context, I also conducted three interviews with key informants at RHU. First, I interviewed the RHU Peace Corps Recruiter. He is a graduate student at RHU but has an office in Career Services and hosts a number of meetings and events on campus to encourage RHU students to participate in the Peace Corps. Second, I informally interviewed the director of the social justice student activities center on campus, a full-time administration position. Third, I informally interviewed a staff member in Career Services who oversees the Peace Corps and TFA recruiters as well as advises students for other jobs, focusing on nonprofit and service jobs. These interviews are not counted in my total interview number of thirty.

Based on information during the interviews with these three informants and the thirty students, RHU has four main mechanisms to promote participation in service programs. First, as mentioned above, recruiters for the Peace Corps and for Teach for America have offices in Career Services. These recruiters are given space in university buildings to hold informational sessions as well as being invited into classrooms by professors to advertise the programs. Many students I interviewed said they talked to the recruiters (or their supervisor in Career Services) and/or attended these informational sessions by choice or because their professors invited the recruiters. Second, other service program organizations also attend the career fairs that RHU hosts. Several other students mentioned learning about programs like City Year at these career fairs. Third, professors, advisors, program mentors, and teaching assistants promote these programs based on personal experiences in the classroom or in one on one mentoring sessions with students. Fourth, campus organizations advertise or encourage their students to participate in these programs after graduation either formally (generally programs connected to the parent

organization the student organization is a part of) or informally through student networks in these organizations.

Overall, there are a number of resources on campus to connect students to traditional post-graduation plans of graduate school or other labor market outcomes. As mentioned above, RHU hosts career fairs and has an extensive Career Services office. Several mentoring programs exist for groups of students such as transfer students, minority students, academically underperforming students, and students highly committed to service—and these four programs were represented by students in this study. Students who participated in these programs tended to speak highly of them, saying they aided their ability to navigate college and discuss post-graduation options. However, students who were not part of these targeted mentoring programs often expressed that they felt advisors were unhelpful. By and large, these students relied on their friendship networks and family recommendations to navigate their transition out of college—much like a typical job search (Granovetter 1973) rather than using the college's resources. At most, a few students mentioned a single meeting with a professor, advisor, teaching assistant, or other campus faculty or staff to discuss other post-graduation options, but students either felt the person was unhelpful or that they would be wasting that person's time to follow up with any additional meetings. Therefore, while some institutional mechanisms do exist to help students transition to graduate school or the labor market, students in this study did not express that they felt sufficient support if they were not part of a specific mentoring program. They largely felt it was their job to collect the relevant information themselves through internet searches or conversations with friends and family. Even when asked if they considered meeting with Career Services or other resources to get advice, most dismissed this idea because they did not know

what they wanted to do for their career or because their career ideas were not in highly

traditional fields like business that they assumed Career Services was focused on.

Recruiting Strategy

I interviewed juniors and seniors at RHU who fell into one of three categories: (1) has

been accepted to and decided to participate in a service program (N=10), (2) is considering

whether she/he wants to participate in a service program after graduation (N=17), or (3) very

strongly considered participating in a service program after graduation but ultimately decided not

to or was unable to participate in the program (at least started the application) (N=3). Each of

these groups gives me different potential to learn more about service program aspirations in

order to reveal more perspectives about the topic. The first group is clearly helpful because they

are the students who have definitely decided to transition out of college via a service program.

Therefore, I am able to analyze what they think future participation will mean for them.

The second group is helpful because their discussion of post-graduation possibilities is

not centered exclusively on a particular program like the first group. Instead, their accounts

allowed me to look at service program aspirations more generally. For instance, Sarah, an upper

class senior who does not know what she wants to do immediately after graduation, says that she

is interested in a "Peace-Corps-like program." She is articulating that she would like to use the

service program pathway to transition out of college even though she is not certain which

program she would like to participate in. This group reiterates the importance of having a broad

view of service programs instead of simply focusing on an individual program like scholars have

done in the past (i.e. McAdam and Brandt 2009; Starr 1994). For these same reasons, I include

juniors in the study instead of only seniors, as they tend to have less specific post-graduation

plans. They will also have less retrospective bias about the other things they are considering post-graduation, because other opportunities are still being actively considered. Finally, the third group is helpful because I can hear the narratives of students who held service program aspirations, but who ultimately were pulled or pushed away from actual participation including reasons such as good job offers, graduate school acceptance, rejection from the service program they applied to, or realizing the financial infeasibility.

This logic of selecting juniors and seniors prior to their transition out of college follows previous studies in this area. Scholars often study young people immediately prior to their transition of interest (in my case the transition out of college) rather than relying on retroactive accounts of participants after the transition is complete. Therefore, it is similar to the approach taken by McAdam and Brandt's (2009) study using TFA applications and Clydesdale's (2007) study observing and interviewing students in high school before following their transition during the first year of college.

While my sample is made up of students, my sampling frame was determined based on their possible participation in a service program. Thus, while I am not studying the programs themselves, the student's inclusion in the study was dependent on what type of program they were considering. In order to not make pre-determined assumptions about what types of programs should make a student eligible for my study, I interviewed any student who self-selected into the study. This self-selection was generally based on a brief description like the following—taken from an email recruitment I used many times, such as when I was following up based on snowball referrals to friends of my study participants:

> I am doing my Master's research on college students who might want to do a volunteer or service program after they graduate college instead of immediately getting a job or going to graduate or professional school. I am looking to interview juniors or seniors who are considering doing programs like this. Volunteer/Service programs include the well-known programs like Peace Corps, Teach for America, and AmeriCorps, but also include

programs run by local, national, or international non-profits. Likewise, religious programs, such as Jesuit Volunteer Corps or an extended mission trip, would also count. If this sounds like something you are thinking about doing, even if you're not sure that you will, and you might be willing to be interviewed, please email me so that I can contact you with more information.

The sample is confined to RHU students for this study. Because previous literature indicated that pathways throughout colleges vary based on the institution (i.e. Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Arum and Roksa 2014; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005) it seemed likely that the service program pathways and interpretations may vary by university. For instance, RHU provides institutional space and legitimacy by allowing Peace Corps and Teach for America offices in Career Services and many service programs space during career fairs, so that students can use these resources to develop their aspirations. Therefore, by not interviewing students from a variety of universities, I am able to "control" for these institutional factors that vary between colleges, like Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) did in their study of the pathways of women who started college in the same dorm. I can focus on the interpretations students give for their aspirations, rather than focusing on this institutional variation.

In order to recruit students to participate in the study, I used three approaches: snowball sampling, listserv recruitment, and recruitment during classes. The primary approach I used was a referral-based recruitment method (Lofland et al. 2006; Weiss 1994). I used contacts I already had with undergraduate students at RHU in order to find the first few students to interview. After that, at the end of each interview I asked the student if she/he knew of any other students who were thinking about participating in a service program. As stated above, most interviews explicitly contained a section asking the respondent's opinion on what types of programs should be included in the study and what these types of programs should be called. Therefore, because of this discussion, the students tended to have a good idea of who they thought would qualify for the study and were typically successful in thinking of a few possible students. In order to address

the potential bias introduced by sampling within the same network, my recruiting strategy purposely drew from some groups that did not overlap, as they belonged to different extracurricular activities and organizations on campus. Because I already had contacts with undergraduate students in several different friendship networks, I was able to start the snowball process in multiple different positions to address this potential bias.

However, to facilitate access to more networks, I also two other sampling strategies. I sent emails to several academic listservs on campus that would likely have students interested in participating in service programs after graduation. I also recruited students during classes that contained juniors and seniors from a variety of majors. While the classes I recruited in were typically sociology courses because of my connection to a number of RHU sociology professors, I did not recruit in courses that were required for the sociology major. Instead, I focused on courses where students from other disciplines make up the vast majority of the class. I made these decisions to avoid over-representing sociology majors in the study, as I thought that college major would likely play a role in students getting on the service program pathway. Because I have only five sociology majors in the study, three of whom are double majors, I was successful in this goal—considering sociology specifically, and social science majors and humanities in general, are much more likely to participate in these types of programs (i.e. Teach for America 2016a). As seen in table 2 in the appendix, which lists all the participants, I have a wide variety of majors represented, including social sciences, humanities, STEM, and professional. Because I suspected that college major might play a role in service program aspirations—due to social science and humanities students being less likely to have concrete career plans by graduation (Arum and Roksa 2014)—I knew this diversity in major could be important.

Clearly, the recruiting strategy I used did not generate a random sample of college students at RHU who are aspiring to participate in a service program. As Small (2009) argues, the benefits of compiling a random and representative sample would not have outweighed the limitations of doing so. My strategy involves several important advantages. For example, it allowed me to establish good rapport by building off my connections with student who referred me to the next.[9] Building rapport with the participants was crucial so that the students felt less guarded and were willing to be more honest with me—producing valid and rich data. On multiple occasions, students stated that they were glad I was "changing [their] name" because they would not want their parents or others knowing some information they disclosed to me. Considering many discussed highly emotional topics such as severe family struggles, mental illness, or socially undesirable answers (such as explaining previous volunteering as primarily to help their resumé), establishing good rapport was essential. My recruiting strategy also aided in recruiting participants, which was especially crucial given that I did not know how to define a service program at the beginning of this project, nor had I decided on a term yet so it could be difficult to describe the project to students. Therefore, relying on my interviewees to aid in recruitment, after they already understood the study better through the process of being

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[9] I also established rapport due to my similarities with the students I interviewed. For example, I participated in a service program after college. Students often asked me before the interview began why I was researching this topic. When I explained that I and many of my friends participated in service programs after college, students were often very interested in this, visibly relaxed, and smiled. Given the negative reactions many students described their parents having about their service program aspirations, I imagine that my participation in such a program allowed the student to feel more comfortable opening up about this aspiration because they assumed I would support their aspiration. I also am close in age to many of the people I interviewed, generally being about three years older, so I both looked and talked like their friends, allowing them to feel more comfortable with me. This similarity and personal experience was a strength in establishing rapport and conducting analysis because I could understand the arguments the students were making on a personal level. I also knew questions to ask students despite the limited literature on this topic, thus allowing my personal experience to positively impact study design. However, this closeness to the subjects is also a limitation. I constantly had to ask myself if I was making assumptions about meanings and interpretations based on my personal understandings rather than statements made by the students. I wrote memos to analytically consider my position as well as had in-depth conversations throughout the analysis stages with mentors who helped me assess my personal bias.

interviewed, made recruitment feasible for a study that at the outset could be difficult to describe to potential participants. Additionally, I have the benefit of interviewing friends from the same network. Because participation in other types of volunteering and social activism often travels in networks (Musick and Wilson 2008), interviewing multiple friends in the same network allowed me to understand the processes at work better. Overall, following Small's (2009) goal of saturation through sequential interviewing was much more appropriate than the goal of finding a representative sample (see also Lofland et al. 2006; Weiss 1994; Charmaz 2014).

However, this nonrandom sample does provide a limitation—not all findings can be generalized. For instance, although the Professionals are very rare in my sample, only 2 of 30 students, I cannot assume that Professionals are rare among all college students who aspire to participate in a service program. The proportion size of these categories cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, given that I used strategies to ensure variability in my sample by starting my referrals in many different networks and by interviewing both juniors and seniors at different stages of their decision making process, the findings should be analytically generalizable (Small 2009). While I cannot know the size of each of the three categories I analytically derived, I can generalize that there are three approaches students use when considering service program participation: Enthusiasts, Backup Planners, and Professionals. These three approaches can be tested in future research for their prevalence. Therefore, the goal of this research—to understand approaches students use for service program aspirations—should be generalizable.

Analytic Strategy

My analytic strategy contains several steps, some occurring simultaneously with data collection (Lofland et al. 2006; Charmaz 2014). First, immediately after the interviewee left, I

wrote down anything that stood out to me that would not be captured by the recorder, such as body language, tone of the interviewee, and anything said before or after the recording device was on (Lofland et al. 2006). Then, as explained above, within twenty-four hours of conducting the interview, I freewrote anything that stood out to me about the interview, particularly consistencies and inconsistencies in comparison to previous interviews conducted. I also used this time to evaluate whether there were any topics about which I had reached saturation, or any topics that I feel I still did not understand enough, so that I could make changes to the interview guide for the next interview (Charmaz 2014). While conducting interviews, I also occasionally freewrote or did structured brainstorming activities to analyze themes or findings across the sample. Next, as soon as possible, I transcribed each interview. As I transcribed, I sometimes paused to make notes of themes that stood out to me. After I transcribed each interview, I reread the entire transcript to ensure accuracy as well as reading with a specific eye toward writing about anything interesting, important, or confusing from the interview so that I could start to understand each account and possible connections across interviews.

After I completed the data collection, initial analysis, and transcription stages, I systematically coded the interview transcripts line by line using open coding. These open codes included emergent themes that arose out of my reading and analysis across multiple transcripts, such as "bouncing around between opportunities" and "turning point." I used Atlas.ti to code the interviews. While coding, I wrote analytic memos on themes that begin emerging from the data so that I could start generating hypotheses to see if they held true across the sample (Charmaz 2014). After coding each interview, I wrote anything that seemed important and relevant to the individual's pathway to service program aspirations. After the first eight interviews were coded using this open coding process, I analyzed the memos I had written so far, including the

individual pathways, noting commonalities among them to generate an initial theoretical pathway. I then reviewed all memos, pathways, and codes to create a systematic coding scheme and codebook so that I could code the next twenty-two interviews in a more systematic way to test my theory. I wrote more memos and made revisions to the theoretical pathway as I completed the coding process, including still writing out each individual's pathway. This systematic coding and analysis process resulted in describing each of the thirty individuals' pathways. I then used these pathways to analyze the different approaches students used to explain their service program aspirations, based on the coding already completed.

Description of the Sample

For a listing of all thirty participants in the sample, see the appendix which includes a table listing all participants' pseudonyms, college major(s), gender, race/ethnicity, social class background, service program approach, current GPA, service program name (pseudonyms for some), long-term career aspiration(s), and reported likelihood of attending graduate or professional school. In this sample, 70% are women. The self-identified racial/ethnic composition is 70% white and 17% black. Additionally, one student is Hispanic, one is multiethnic (identifying as half white and "half Arab"), one identifies as Middle Eastern, and another identifies as "other" though she says people generally consider her South Asian. While these categories do not exactly align with the federal regulations about racial/ethnic classification that RHU uses, comparing this distribution to the distribution at RHU, there are some differences (from their "Office of Institutional Research & Assessment" for Fall 2015). The undergraduate population of RHU is approximately 64% white, 8% black, 12% Asian, 8% Hispanic, and about 8% other or unknown. Therefore, my sample over-represents white students somewhat and very

disproportionally over-represents black students. Asian and Hispanics students are almost entirely missing from my sample, and students in "other" are slightly under represented.

There is more diversity by social class background than I had expected. I had assumed that almost all students would come from upper middle or upper class families, because previous literature indicated that students from less privileged backgrounds would not find these programs financially feasible after graduation (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). However, 50% were from upper middle or upper class families, 27% were from lower middle class families, and 23% were from working class or poor families. [10] This is roughly equivalent to the fact that approximately 20% of RHU undergraduate students are first-generation college students. Three of the students in my sample transferred to RHU from a community college, one transferred from a prestigious arts college, and one transferred from a state university in the Northeast. Twenty-seven of the 30 students have worked a job before (excluding internships).

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[10] I follow a similar method to Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) and Hamilton (2014) in classifying the social class background of the college students. I identify each student's social class background based on their parents' education level and occupation, but also allowing secondary factors such as student employment during college and student loan debt/financial aid need to influence my placement in a social class.

FINDINGS

College students want to participate in a variety of service programs after they graduate for a variety of reasons, but their narratives reveal three approaches that they use to explain these service program aspirations. The *Enthusiasts* describe their service program aspiration as a culmination of their experiences and identity formation in college. For these students participating in a service program is their number one priority after they graduate. *Backup Planners* prefer either to be entering the labor market or further education, but for a variety of reasons conclude that participating in a service program is a good backup option in case their higher-priority aspiration does not work out. Finally, the *Professionals* do not see their participation in a service program as a short-term opportunity post-college, but aspire to use a service program as a step to enter their chosen professional career. These approaches, including the overlap between the approaches, are summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Approaches to Service Program Aspirations.

Differences	*Enthusiasts (N=20)*	*Backup Planners (N=8)*	*Professionals (N=2)*
	-intentionally delay career -extend college-like experiences -fear of getting "stuck" in career -hope to form concrete career plans; not yet equipped and/or desiring to make career decisions	-may be forced to delay career pursuit—service program is alternative plan -priority for service program is strategic usefulness -viewed as filling time well	-use as entry to career
Overlap	*Enthusiasts & Backup Planners*	*Backup Planners & Professionals*	*Enthusiasts & Professionals*
	-strategically useful for career or graduate school -help with academic burnout before more education -time-limit aids in transition to graduate school	-ready to start careers	-based on identity construction in college -service program is top priority
Similarities	*All*		
	-use this time to not fully "settle down" yet -use for personal growth -doing something meaningful (personally and civically) -enjoy geographic flexibility of placements		

Enthusiasts

The Enthusiasts passionately talk about participating in a service program after they graduate because they can follow their interests. If they are accepted to the service program(s) they applied for and can figure out the finances necessary for participation, then they say they definitely will participate. For instance, Emily, a white, upper class student, firmly stated, "Peace Corps is definitely number one." Though she has looked at backup options in case she is not accepted to the Peace Corps, such as seeking out internship possibilities at "environmental firms" in Latin America and Spain, she hopes to be accepted to the Peace Corps. In the Peace Corps she plans to apply for an "environmental program that is focusing on agricultures in community, so it basically is the promotion of sustainable agriculture, which is something I can definitely get behind!" This passion was formed during an organic farming program in college when "I came away wanting to continue doing [sustainable agriculture] for the rest of my life." Likewise, Jackson, a "half white, half Arab," upper middle class student, prioritizes participating in a service program after graduation. Even though he has already accepted a job offer in the "financial services advisory," he has also applied to teach English with the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant program because he wants to be a "cultural ambassador" in the Middle East. His employer said "I can push it back a year" and defer his job if he is accepted to Fulbright.

Primarily the students explain their enthusiasm as an extension of the passions they developed in college. Enthusiasts spent their time in college actively pursuing their interests in both academic and non-academic contexts. Over time these interests rose to the level of "passions," the word most students used to describe their interest in topics like "social justice issues," "other cultures," and Christianity. For instance, Melanie, a previously homeless student,

explained how she ended up choosing her major at RHU after she transferred from a community college saying, "I did it based on what interests me instead of what jobs it produces. And I don't know if that's maybe the smart thing, but that's what I wanted to do." She chose a Global Studies major because "I liked culture" and it had a "bunch of greatness throughout" its courses. Her discussion of following identity development over professional goals in choosing a major reflects the goals elite colleges promote, as discussed above. She also joined several student organizations that focused on service and activism to try out different interests, but eventually, in her words, "stuck with some things that I really feel in my core, and that's education." She quit some organizations that she did not see as fitting with her core identity as a person passionate about education. After doing several "brainstorming activities" by herself, looking for "big themes" at the intersection of her "skills" and "interests," she concluded that TFA or the AmeriCorps Advising Program would best allow her to pursue her interest in education, culture, and service.

As Enthusiasts prioritized their pursuit of passions in college, these passions became an important part of the identity they constructed at college. For instance, John, a white, upper middle class man, described "all growing up I was involved in going to church and stuff," but it was not until college when being a Christian became an active component of his identity. He was not even sure if he wanted to join a religious organization before he happened to go to an event because of the "free food." Through his participation in a campus ministry group, the importance he gave to his identity as a Christian grew. He came to realize that the "Christian faith is evangelistic" and so it became important for him to enact this evangelism in his personal life. He used opportunities among friends, hallmates, coworkers, and others to "share what I believe," he told me, and he spent two summers in evangelism programs through his campus ministry group.

He described how this identity formation with his campus ministry group influenced his post-grad plans: "I've been involved with [Christian organization] for four years and … I've got a lot out of it and I definitely want other students to have the same experience. And so that's kind of how I decided that I wanted to work for them, [the campus ministry organization], after graduation. I'm doing it for at least one year now." Like John, all Enthusiasts said they hoped to use their time in a service program as a means to continue the kinds of experiences they had in college—such as study abroad, internships at non-profits, or summer-long mission trips with their college religious organizations.

However, Enthusiasts are glad that these service programs are outside academia. Melanie explained, "that's why I'm taking the time, it's time off, but it's actually *time on*. It's time *in the world* and actually putting your skills to work and then seeing, oh, I'm not really good at this. I need to fix this… I mean, I can't just sit in a classroom the whole time and then say, 'Oh, this is how everything works.' I'm actually going to try it." Therefore, her post-grad service program plan is a direct extension of the passions and identity she built in college, but is a "time on" out in the world to see how these passions might relate to her future graduate school and career aspirations and to more directly help people. Enthusiasts aspire for experiences that are more "hands on" than their lives in school or brief summer work/program experiences have allowed. This time "in the world" also facilitates travelling, a goal itself labelled a "passion" by many Enthusiasts; because service program placements are almost never in the same place the student grew up or went to college, participation in a service program allows the recent college graduate a way to travel and live somewhere new with logistical help from the organization to facilitate this process (especially for international placements) for a short-term new cultural experience.

While Melanie and John had their service program aspirations emerge from their college experiences, other Enthusiasts intentionally designed their college experiences around their service program aspirations. For instance, Greg—a white poor/working class man interested in becoming a professor or museum curator—had been considering participating in the Peace Corps since high school, an aspiration that grew during college. After speaking to the Peace Corps recruiter on campus about what he could do "for them to say yes" to his application, the recruiter "suggested a number of things like teaching experience," and so "I got involved in an organization… working with community members" who wanted to learn English. Likewise, Emma admitted that part of the reason she participated in a program in college that allowed her to tutor refugees was for "my resumé for the Peace Corps, because they want to see volunteer, service hours" in those areas. Therefore, while all Enthusiasts use service programs to extend their passion-based identities constructed in college (generally in both academic and non-academic experiences), some Enthusiasts cultivated their college experiences in order to facilitate the pursuit of service program aspirations post-college.

The narratives of Enthusiasts often reveal other themes related to their service program aspirations as well, such as feeling overwhelmed by the idea of committing to a career path, not wanting to feel like they were "settling down" yet, and wanting to turn this time of being unsettled into something unique and meaningful (personally and civically). First, because most Enthusiasts, like Melanie, chose their majors because of being interested in the subject area rather than because it led to a specific career, they do not have an obvious next step after college. Virtually all students in the study knew that they would go to college immediately after high school, and so college graduation marks the first time that they must make a decision about what comes next, a decision not all feel well-equipped to make. Christina, a white upper middle class

woman, described the effect that the stress of making this decision had on her senior year, saying "I have gotten a little bit burned out this year just because there's so much going on and trying to figure out next year" on top of all of her academic and leadership obligations. She eventually realized it would be both easy and meaningful to do something with her campus ministry organization from college. She found a service program through that organization that allows her to combine her Christian faith with her passion for "personal training" and this option became her priority—she is pursuing a program that is personally fulling while "helping people."

Second, some students do not *want* to choose their long-term careers yet, instead following their passions to a service program and hoping that their participation will reveal to them what they should do next. Sofia, a working-class student from an immigrant family, does not want to plan out her future after TFA: "I've just been so fed up with people just always having this need of, like, you have to know every single step of your life... I'm kind of at a point where I'm like, I don't care what I'm doing next. I just want to focus on what I'm going to do right now. And hopefully do the best that I can." She argues that she will be doing critically important work for the community through TFA, which she sees as her immediate focus.

Steven, a Global Studies major, also does not know what comes next for him after his two-year religious service program, something that has been a great source of tension with his working-class family who frequently ask him, "Why are you not starting a career?" He says they think the service program "wasn't a direct dividend from my investment into college from their eyes." However, Steven bought into the belief, strongly promoted at RHU, that college is a time for pursuing one's passions, such as "taking classes that I was actually interested in and not that I just wanted to force myself down a career path." Now at the end of his senior year he is comfortable with waiting to see where the service program takes him: "I have no clue, but this is

what I, I enjoy it, I'm going to do it, I'll see what doors are open at the end of it." Hope, a white lower middle class woman, stated, "I don't exactly know what I want to do after college. I figured [the Peace Corps] might give me a chance to figure out who I am" and what she wants to do next. These Enthusiasts do not necessarily want to plan their future careers, instead purposely remaining flexible so that they can allow the service programs to influence their future careers, possibly leading them in unexpected directions. In other words, they are being purposely adrift, but doing so in a way they view as strategic to find the perfect career (Settersten and Ray 2010).

Third, some Enthusiasts have vague ideas about future graduate school and career plans, though they do not believe that they are concrete enough to pursue them. Instead, they hope that participating in a service program can provide clarity for them without becoming committed to a career too soon, and ending up "stuck." For instance, Tiffany, a white lower middle class woman, said, "I do want to go back to grad school, but I think I want a little bit more time and experience to know what I want to go to grad school for." Likewise, Riley, a white upper middle class woman, explains that she hopes for one of two things to happen from participating in a service program: "Either a job would come out of that, and I would just do that job and be able to progress from that job [for] my career or whatever, or I would find something to go to graduate school for." She said she knows she is interested in "animals, wildlife, environment, apex predators, like things like that," but it is not "really a specific focus … so I'm hoping out of my time doing this I either figure out no, I don't want to be doing this, or yes, I do want to be doing this." She summarized her approach: "So I hope not only to get research and experience and once in a lifetime opportunities travel wise, but actually have a more concrete idea of what I want to do in my career in my professional life." Therefore, she views her service program as an important step in moving toward a career, though not yet beginning it.

The fact that service programs are a specific time obligation helps students feel that they can more easily use this time to explore different opportunities. Melanie said she liked pursuing a "terminal program" because "when you're going into something terminal like that, you offer two years of your time, of your service, of work, but then you can also regroup after that time and say, was this the right choice for me?" These terminal programs reduce the pressure to try out different jobs without having to quit jobs repeatedly if they do not enjoy them or want a new experience. For instance, Tiffany eventually wants to work on the "large scale" side of social problems, through research or legislation. But she wants some "hands on experience" in direct service first (many students echo this idea, that they feel ethically compelled to have direct experience with social problems before they begin careers in research or policy trying to solve the problems). She fears that if she sought a job with a non-profit—instead of participating in a service program—"I would worry that they would want me to stick around forever." AmeriCorps is "more of an exploration type of thing," so she would feel freer to go to graduate school after a year and would not be forced to "commit to one place or field so soon."

A fourth common theme that emerged was many Enthusiasts explain that immediately after college graduation is the right time to have a "different" or "meaningful experience," before they take on more adult responsibilities, such as a career and family. Hope explained that "things get messy when you start a career, and it feels like you can't really get out of that. So before I start a career, if I want to do the Peace Corps, that's the time to do it." Similarly, Shabana, a lower middle class woman whose parents emigrated from Africa, said, "I want to do this before I settle down… before real responsibilities come in to play… like getting married," or before she goes to graduate school and starts her career. Though they like the idea of taking time to explore, they do often "fear" not eventually making the leap to graduate school or beginning their career.

Tiffany explains, "I don't want to get in that rut that a lot of people describe where they just end up working and they just keep working and never go back to grad school." However, service programs solve this problem by having a set end date so that young adults have a naturally built in time to move on from this exploration stage to begin graduate school or their careers.

Fifth, while strategic purposes of the service programs do not generally dominate the narratives of Enthusiasts, as they do for Backup Planners (see next section), they nevertheless do sometimes mention that they believe that they will gain skills and experiences that will help them become more successful in future graduate school and professional job applications. For instance, Greg plans to get his PhD in archeology and has been told by his undergrad mentor, "no language no future." His Peace Corps placement in the area of the world he hopes to do research in the future will allow him to begin learning a relatively rare language, which should boost his chances of getting into graduate school and accessing research opportunities. Sofia said while she eventually plans to become a researcher and will likely go to graduate school for sociology, she is burned out on school: "I just feel tired of school." She hopes that taking time to pursue her passion with TFA will "get that flame going again" so that she will "get back to the point where I want to learn more." Even Jackson's corporate business job viewed his service program as providing him with valuable "job experience," a contributing factor in his employer being willing to defer his start date by a year if he is accepted for Fulbright.

Overall, Enthusiasts are not only passionate about using service programs to pursue direct experience with social problems they have tied to their identities. They also prioritize the pursuit of service programs following graduation primarily for personal growth and secondarily for strategic reasons. They believe that service programs are a convenient way to pursue their passions for social justice, religion, or travelling in college-like experiences, but in an out-of-the-

classroom setting. They are also strategically using them to develop and pursue future careers. They do not yet feel ready or prepared to commit to a long-term career, so instead they use service programs to figure out and build toward such a commitment. Therefore, service programs can prevent them from feeling adrift and lost after they graduate college. Even those Enthusiasts who have more concrete career plans still see strategic benefit in a service program post-college. They can develop skills and experiences that might aid their applications. Service programs allow them to experience a unique hands-on program they will enjoy and feel they are making a difference in before they feel like they must settle down into less exciting careers that may not involve travelling or solving social problems. They clearly reflect Settersten and Ray's (2010) concept of "job-shopping" during the early to mid-20's before settling into careers.

Backup Planners

Unlike Enthusiasts, Backup Planners do not say that service programs are their number one priority. These students say they would prefer to be either entering the labor market with a more traditional job—one without a set time limit and more directly related to their long-term career goals—or complete their education. However, for a variety of reasons students realize that these aspirations may not pan out, and so for strategic purposes they consider service programs acceptable backup plans. Reasons for needing a backup plan include fearing rejection by their top priority plan, not holding the qualifications for jobs they would prefer, wanting to be close to their significant other but their preferred job or graduate school not being ideally located, being burned out on school, or not having any "direction" for their future careers. For instance, Michelle was nervous that with her 3.3 GPA she might not be accepted to any of the five graduate programs she applied for in Occupational Therapy. She applied to City Year, a service

program, so that "I can use it as a backup if I don't get into OT school." Her placement was in New York City as she requested, which she liked because her boyfriend, Justin, had a job offer there. Justin, a business major, also applied to TFA as a backup plan, in order to try to be near Michelle. Despite having a job offer from the communications corporation he interned for after his junior year, he applied to TFA indicating preferences near graduate schools she applied to, so that he could have "geographic flexibility" and they would not have to be "long distance." Ultimately neither decided to participate in their backup service programs: Michelle was accepted to graduate schools, but none near Justin's TFA possibilities, and so both are pursuing their long-term career paths immediately after college and will be long-distance dating for her two year graduate program.

Other strategic reasons for using a service program as a backup plan included "taking a break" from school. Most students in the study have not had a semester or year off from school since they started kindergarten and many like the idea of getting a chance to do something "different" before starting graduate or medical school. Corey, a white lower middle class man, explained that while he definitely plans to apply to and attend medical school in a few years, "I didn't want to go straight into school again. That seemed like too much to me… this year I've kind of felt a little less motivated about my schoolwork outside of a couple classes" and so he thinks that "taking a break" before he goes to medical school would be advantageous. He also said he did not have enough time during college to study for the MCAT due to the wide variety of organizations he was deeply committed to. By pursuing a backup option to medical school, he could spend the rest of his college time focusing on those college passions and his senior year classes, before taking the MCAT and working on medical school applications after graduation. While he feels pulled toward a medical hospital's "data technician" job he has applied for, which

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would allow him to get research experience to supplement his resumé, he also applied to two service programs as backup plans. One, France Tutoring Program, is tempting to him, as he did not get the chance to study abroad in a French-speaking country despite being a French double major. While he knows that the medical hospital program is "more geared toward my future interests," he said that "if there were no financial constraints at all, I'd do the French thing, without a doubt." However, because it only provides a small stipend he is not yet sure what he will do. Corey provides an example of a student considering using a service program as a means to take a break from school while doing something fun and civically helpful, even though he recognizes it is not as connected to his long-term career plans as other post-grad options. However, this is also a strategic decision on Corey's part; like Sofia the Enthusiast, he is still able to use this time to reignite his passion for school so that he might be more successful in medical school. If he is right, then this service program could ensure better long-term success than going to medical school right after graduation.

Another strategic reason students explained for using service programs as a backup plan is because they are not yet qualified for the jobs they want to have. For instance, Erica, a lower middle class white woman, began her nonprofit job search "really focusing my efforts on long-term stuff or organizations that I could have progressed in" but realized that almost all positions she was interested in required "two or three years of experience, which I don't have. Full-time experience. I have part-time experience." She decided to pursue a service program through an international nonprofit that would, among other good qualities like allowing her to live in Latin America, give her a year of full-time experience. While she would have preferred to immediately begin a long-term career position, she is strategically using a service program to add experience to her resumé so that she may become qualified for the long-term career she hopes to pursue.

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These students are in a sense using service programs to avoid being adrift when the viability of their first preference was called into question. For instance, Michelle knew that "I just needed something to do after graduation" if she was not accepted to OT school. Because "I don't have an option to go back home" after graduation due to a difficult family history, she knew she needed a well-formed backup plan that would allow her to make money to support herself while she worked on applications again. Her mom passed away from cancer when she was in middle school, and her dad's alcoholism and bankruptcy caused her stepmom to leave him and move to a different state while Michelle was in college; her dad got a one-bedroom apartment which "I took personally" as a signal she could no longer stay with him over breaks or after graduation. Shaniqua, a lower middle class black woman, also talked about using service programs in order to make sure she did *something* after graduation: "I think the main point was it'll give me two and a half years to decide what I want to do and I can actually focus on applying to grad school … because I was trying to do that last semester, and I just crashed and burned." Shaniqua had been going back and forth during her senior year about whether to apply to graduate school or the Peace Corps after graduation, but she ultimately did not feel prepared to fill out the grad school applications. Instead, she turned her focus to applying for a travel scholarship for the summer after graduation and then the Peace Corps after that—though for reasons discussed below, she ultimately did not submit this application, either.

However, backup planners are quick to defend their choice to use service programs as a backup plan as being better than being adrift or wasting a year or two of their lives, something they fear will happen if they do not have a service program as a backup. For instance, I classified Sarah, an upper class white woman, as a backup planner because she felt so lost about what to do after graduation: "Right now after college kind of looks like a black hole to me." She was not

alone in saying that she carefully planned the perfect college experience—which to her meant a yearlong study abroad program in Italy—but failed to make plans for after college graduation. When she returned to the US for her senior year, she realized that that there was "no more swaddling comfort of knowing where I was going to be post-college," yet she admits that she has still put post-college plans "on the backburner." She added, "Honestly my research [on programs or jobs] has been pretty limited." She regrets that she is so unfocused about her post-grad plans, but "a lot of my friends are doing service projects" after they graduate, so she has come to believe that participating in a "project like the Peace Corps" might prevent her from being adrift. She admits, "I don't feel like I'm ready for a career. So this seems like a productive way to have kind of a gap. It's not so scary. There's an end date. I'm not committed to it for the rest of my life." And it can "act as a buffer between now and the real world, and be a productive use of time." While most of the students I interviewed were not as direct or clear about these ideas as Sarah, this idea of using the time "productively" and as a chance to "help" solve social problems in the meantime, before pursuing their longer-term plans, is a theme that resonated throughout many interviews for Backup Planners. For instance, Mathilde explained, "Well, if I don't get into grad school or anything like that, why not use that time to do something beneficial [for others and myself] like Peace Corps?"

Like the Enthusiasts mentioned, Backup Planners emphasize consistently that not only can a service program fill the gap in time before they can do their preferred post-grad option, it can also possibly be a "resume builder" in order to have more competitive applications for future application cycles. Like Greg the Enthusiast who planned to use his time with the Peace Corps to supplement his applications to Archeology PhD programs, Sarah also believes that having a service program on her resume will enhance future applications: "From what I've heard, I think

right now if I were to go to grad school or do anything right now, I'm not that competitive of a candidate. But I think having something like the Peace Corps... on a resumé is huge. I think it proves that you are adaptable, are a team player, are proactive and self-sufficient." Therefore, Backup Planners aspire to use service programs strategically as something that will enhance their resumes in the future, given that they could not pursue their preferred career goals now, but secondarily for personal growth to ensure that they are doing something meaningful post-grad— a reversal from the Enthusiasts. Considering they often see the alternative as going back to their parents' house (if that is an option) and possibly conducting an incredibly long and fruitless job-search period or ending up in a less fulfilling job (such as working in a restaurant or store like some did during summer breaks or during the school year), they are glad to have the service program alternative to prevent them from feeling adrift. Unlike the Enthusiasts, the Backup Planners do not want to delay the timing of the adulthood marker of career or completed education, but they may need to and view participation in a service program as the best alternative.

Professionals

Finally, Professionals are different from the other two groups because they do not view their service program as a short-term program, but instead as the beginning of a well-planned out career. Justin, a backup planner, thought of TFA as a "sort of service as opposed to a … job" because "education is not what I want to do for my whole life." He is clearly not pursuing his long-term career goals through TFA. However, he recognizes that other students may not use TFA from an Enthusiast or Backup Planner approach. He explained "from the standpoint of someone going to go into education, then it's really just a different entry into the teaching

profession." Indeed, he perfectly sums up the difference between Professionals and Enthusiasts/Backup Planners. Professionals use service programs in order to begin their long-term careers.

Professionals explain their preference for a service program as the means to enter their chosen career field for several reasons. First, they generally form these career aspirations later in college than is typical for other students wanting to enter that career. In the case of the two Professionals in this study, both realized that they wanted to be teachers once they were already juniors, after connecting it to the deep passion for racial justice that both developed during college. Robert stated, he "feel in love with [education]" but "once I discovered my passion was education… it was too late for me to apply for the School of Education here." He "then found out about Teach for America" and said "this is the perfect avenue for me to get into teaching." TFA has a large presence on RHU's campus and both learned that they could use TFA to enter the teaching profession. Jayla explained, "TFA has such a huge presence on RHU's campus that it's kind of hard to get through RHU without hearing about TFA." Therefore, Professionals are similar to Erica's, a Backup Planner, approach of using her nonprofit service program as the first step of her career. However, Erica only participated in a service program because she could not get a traditional nonprofit job, while the Professionals actively choose to enter the career through a service program.

Second, the use of a service program rather than a more traditional way to enter the career can allow them to pursue their passion developed in college, because service programs typically have rhetoric of solving social problems more than jobs. For instance, both Jayla and Robert were enthusiastic about the TFA rhetoric that joining TFA would allow them to "positively impact schools that need it the most" and would allow them to work to close the

"education gap." While an individual teacher may be motivated in her career to be a teacher because of racial injustice, Jayla and Robert said TFA explicitly includes discussions of race and social class in its programming, so that the training they would receive would be targeted toward that goal. Likewise, they would be placed in schools perceived to have the greatest need, thus allowing them an opportunity to be hands on in trying to solve these school-related problems. Therefore, participating in TFA allows them to act on the identity they constructed during college as a person who cares deeply about racial justice, a theme that both emphasized throughout their interviews.

Third, Professionals feel lost and unsure about how to enter these professions through traditional means. Jayla explained, "I wasn't sure how to go about" applying for teaching jobs on her own, an uncertainty Robert shared about "regular avenues of teaching." They knew they were not qualified for teaching jobs at public schools, considering they did not major in education or take many education classes during college, and therefore did not know the best way to immediately jump into the classroom teaching post-college. However, "TFA just was really appealing" because "I had *noooo* idea what I was doing, [and] it was really nice to have something that had a little structure for me so that as someone who hasn't always been interested in teaching, I know exactly what I need to do." It was easy: they simply needed to submit their applications to TFA and if they were accepted they would be placed in a location, grade level, and subject. They did not need to research lateral entry policies, submit applications with individual school districts or schools, or figure out the other necessities of entering the profession in the traditional way. It removed the "uncertainty" Jayla felt. Therefore, they could use TFA to become certified in this placement state—and possibly receive their Master's in Education— without having to do much research on their own (TFA walks them through every step). For

instance, Robert applied as a junior; by the second semester of his senior year he had already taken the PRAXIS exam necessary to become certified, as well as other steps that made him ready to become a teacher in his Midwestern placement state. Therefore, the program fills the gap that students perceive about RHU's underdeveloped career services and development tools. Because neither had mentors to walk them through this process, TFA can mentor them through the process of becoming a teacher without requiring much individual research.

Fourth, service programs provide much less control over geographic placement. This would probably seem like a drawback to most teachers, but these students like being pushed out of their "comfort zone" by having limited control over their placement location, grade level, and subject matter. For instance, Robert was "excited" that he got placed in the Midwest in a city where he knows "no one" because it allows more opportunity for "personal growth." While Jayla was glad she got placed in her home state, she was also excited that she was not placed in the same city she is from so that she will have an opportunity "to branch out." Like the other students in this study, even Professionals are not ready to feel fully settled. They are pursuing their long-term career paths immediately after college, but they still believe this is the right time in their lives to try something new by living in a new city. All students in this study enjoy service programs as an opportunity for living somewhere new and travelling in a way that is socially acceptable and strategically useful. Professionals, therefore, have four strategic reasons for choosing to enter their chosen career paths through a service program rather than the traditional job market. While both Professionals in this study plan to become teachers, the Professional approach also seems possible for students who aim to enter the nonprofit profession but who, like Robert and Jayla, are not quite ready to be settled into a certain location or exact position.

Therefore, Professionals reflect the trend in this delayed transition to adulthood of college graduates using their early to mid-20's to explore, even when they are ready to start their careers.

Aspiration versus Participation

This analysis up until now has focused on service program aspirations rather than actual participation. I was interested in understanding how students interpret their own aspiration to participate in these programs, knowing that some students may aspire to participate but for a variety of reasons be unable to do so—which is important for understanding the role service programs might play in reproducing inequality during the transition to adulthood. I briefly explore a few reasons why some students who have aspirations may be unlikely to translate those aspirations into participation and why it matters that some students are more likely to be able to participate than others.

First, some of these programs are extremely competitive and there are institutional gatekeepers who select who participates. For instance, Mark, an upper middle class History and Political Science student, was enthusiastic about teaching English abroad through the Fulbright, saying "I tried very hard to find my way back to [African country] for this year." The year he applied to his sub-Saharan African country of choice the acceptance rate was 12% (Fulbright 2016). Despite having a 3.9 GPA, graduating with honors, participating in a six week-long study abroad trip to this country, and having taught his own class at RHU about the country's history, he was not accepted to the program. Teach for America and Peace Corps, while not quite as competitive as the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant program, are also notoriously competitive. Peace Corps had an acceptance rate of about 30% (Peace Corps 2015b) and Teach for America had an acceptance rate of about 15% (Feeney 2015) for the same year (positions to

begin summer/fall 2015). Even programs that are not as competitive as these three can still not always be viable backup options for all graduates. For instance, Chris, a working class black man, hopes to participate in a less competitive, AmeriCorps-funded program that places recent college graduates in low-income high schools to be "college counselors." He is worried that his GPA, which is so low he chose to "abstain" from telling me, will lead to rejection. However, his mentor at RHU, an administrator who works with "Men of Color Engagement," participated in the same program and is hopeful that Chris will be accepted.

As I mentioned above, numerous students sought out specific volunteering activities during college, as Greg explained, "making sure I had the experience on my resume," in order to make it more likely to be accepted. For instance, students aspiring to participate in the Peace Corps often volunteered tutoring ESL students to have practice teaching English. To the extent that not all students have equal access to free time to volunteer or participate in other high-impact academic and non-academic experiences that look good on service program applications, students from higher class backgrounds are more likely to seem qualified by the institutional gatekeepers at these organizations and are thus more likely to be accepted.

Second, students must find it financially feasible to be able to participate in these programs. Students from upper-middle-class families generally have parents who are willing to continue supporting them financially after they graduate. Mark said that his "parents will be willing to subsidize me for a few years if I need their help." However, many other students will not receive financial support after they graduate. Corey's parents were willing to help him pay for college and will pay off his student loan debt, but told him "everything after college is all you." Nevertheless, Corey is fortunate compared to other students who received no financial support from their families through college. Melanie became homeless and financially

independent at 15, forced to move in with a boyfriend she had been dating for three months after her mother cancelled their apartment and did not invite her to keep bouncing around from place to place with her. She clearly had no help paying for college, nor any safety net to fall back on after graduation. As previous scholars have shown, continued parental financial assistance is essential to being able to use the time after college graduation as an exploration period (Settersten and Ray 2010; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Arum and Roksa 2014).

However, not all programs pay stipends that students can support themselves on. For instance, Corey fears that he cannot afford to participate in an AmeriCorps program he applied for in New York City because it only pays a stipend of $14,400, but New York has an extremely high cost of living. Other programs are even less financially feasible and require the student to fundraise their own "salary." All of these programs are Christian and called it "support raising." John explained support raising is "a different approach" than fundraising because "I was supposed to keep the people who supported me in the loop and update them on what all was going on," so that the students create support networks that expand beyond financial relationships—and the students themselves feel better about the fact that they have to raise the money because they are also building relationships and using the opportunity to share their faith. The amount to be support raised was often extraordinarily high, such as John needing to support raise $40,000 for his one-year program or Nicole needing to support raise a total of $77,832 so that she would receive a "salary" of $25,944 each year for the three-year program—undertakings both have firmly committed to. Sometimes the students must support raise more than they will be paid back, such as Christina needing to raise $24,000 but will only likely be paid $14,400 of it. The lowest amount any student had to support raise, if it was required, was about $15,000.

Third, other family obligations sometimes prohibit making a service program aspiration a reality. These family obligations can include new family ties they are forming with dating partners. For instance, Shaniqua wanted to participate in the Peace Corps, volunteering at an ESL program in college to strengthen her application. Her boyfriend of four years had agreed to apply with her (the Peace Corps allows couples to be placed together). However, when the deadline approached and she realized that he had not worked enough on his application, she decided not to submit hers because they had decided they "will live together after graduation." When I interviewed her in mid-April of her senior year, she did not know where they will live or what job she might find. She hopes she can get a job that uses her psychology degree "because I want a job where I can apply the skills I learned to a grad school application," but she doubts her ability to "find one."

Family obligations can also come from parents (Charles, Fischer, Mooney, and Massey 2009), such as Sofia feeling "nervous" about accepting her TFA placement in Texas because of "the immigration status of my family." It is a "constant worry of what if my parents get pulled over and one of them gets deported?" and then "who's going to look after my brother?" If they were detained she would need to be available to care for her brother but would be more than 15 hours away. Finally, family obligations can also be financial. Mathilde's family members are refugees from a war-torn country in the Middle East and "a lot of people in my family have cancer because of depleted uranium dropped on [country] during the war. And a lot of them don't have financial means to provide for themselves, so … I was supporting a lot of people." Through parts of college she has worked 35-45 hours a week on top of 15 credit hours of classes each semester; she has done this despite having a full scholarship to cover all of her own

expenses. Therefore, even if she is paid enough while participating in the Peace Corps to support *herself*, she does not know if her family would get by without her financial support for two years.

This class-based difference in turning aspirations into reality matters because students often do not have well-formed alternatives if they are rejected by these service programs. Enthusiasts and Professionals hope for the best and put most of their time into applying for a service program(s) without having well-developed backup plans. Backup planners generally do not have more backup plans in case they are rejected from the service programs they applied to. Without well-formed alternatives, the students will be stuck scrambling after graduation to find something meaningful or strategically useful, and upper middle class students will be more successful in finding last-minute connections or opportunities. For instance, Sarah's father is upset that she has not already taken advantage of any of "his connections" to find a post-grad job the way she used them for internship opportunities in high school and college. She would almost certainly find a decent job through his network if she takes that route, like Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) demonstrate in their book following women from different class backgrounds through and out of college.

However, lower-class students do not have parents with connections to good jobs after graduation. If the service program aspiration does not work out, these students may well end up adrift: seeking employment of any kind to support themselves rather than finding work that will be strategically useful for their long-term careers or even shorter-term meaningful employment. Like Shaniqua, I also doubt her ability to find a job that uses her psychology degree. More likely, she will move to a city where her boyfriend can find a job because of his chemistry degree and there are more "things for him." She will be stuck finding a job to support herself, one that is unlikely to be related to her long-term aspiration of becoming a social worker. Chris, the student

with a low GPA who is worried about being rejected by the service program, would likewise likely end up adrift if not accepted. He admits he does not really have any other solid "backups" though he was "still working on other applications." Considering one backup application he submitted is for an event planning job at Marvel Studios that he is unqualified for, he seems unlikely to end up in a strategically useful job if he cannot transform his service program aspiration into participation. This inability to transform a service program aspiration into reality can temporarily set a student adrift, but also possibly harm their ability to be as successful at eventually pursuing the meaningful careers they hope to seek in a few years. Therefore, this disparity in participation versus aspiration has class-based implications such that lower class students will be more likely to end up adrift immediately after college and may be less likely to get back on track to pursuing higher paying jobs in the future—thus potentially reproducing inequality during the transition to adulthood.

DISCUSSION

Overall, while the students used one of these three approaches for their service program aspiration, their narratives collectively point to several different important themes related to service program aspirations. First, all three approaches are consistent with the new cultural ideas about what a job should look like in the 20's (Arnett 2004; Settersten and Ray 2010) for those in a high enough class position to be able to follow these new cultural values. All narratives told stories about attempting to pursue jobs that are meaningful (both personally and civically) and a good fit through a service program. For Enthusiasts, this meaningful work sometimes stood in contrast with less fulfilling and less hands on work they will probably pursue in their long-term careers. For Backup Planners this meaningful work was pursued in the meantime when they were unsure if they could pursue their long-term goals. For Professionals this meaningful work was the beginning of their long-term careers of meaningful work. However, all talked about this time immediately after college as being the ideal to time pursue these types of passion-based jobs/service programs before they have to take on more adult responsibilities later—although some already have significant adult responsibilities.

Also consistent with previous studies about the delay of the transition to adulthood, service programs themselves were actively delaying settling into long-term careers (except for Professionals), a marker many people still use in assessing this transition to adulthood. Thus, service programs typically delay the timing at which young adults hit the adulthood marker of career. However, as Settersten and Ray (2010) argue, this delay is not necessarily a bad thing. As long as they are using service programs strategically, this time of "job shopping" (Settersten and

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Ray 2010) or job exploration can be beneficial in the short and long term. In the short term, service programs can help recent college graduates avoid taking on whatever jobs they could find, so that instead the jobs are fulfilling, allow them time for personal growth by pursuing their passions, and can help long-term careers—even if indirectly. Given that all students talked about these strategic advantages (though to differing levels), it seems students at least intend for service programs to play this role.

This study has extended the implications of a common finding about elite higher education: due to the intense focus many students have for getting into college and pursuing the perfect college experience, many students, even high achieving ones, are in a position of feeling unprepared to make decisions about post-grad plans (Settersten and Ray 2010; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). Some college students in this study discovered that service programs can fill this void in a strategically productive way, a solution promoted both within student networks and by universities themselves by having these service program resources prevalent throughout campus. Therefore, as elite colleges continue to focus on identity development and liberal arts over professional occupational programs, more students may turn to service programs as a result. While this study cannot address service program aspirations at different types of colleges, this study along with prior research would suggest that students at elite schools would be more likely to form service program aspirations not only because students from higher social class backgrounds are more likely to attend elite colleges, but also because of the institutional differences—a hypothesis that could be tested by future research.

Finally, this study has also found strong evidence of perceived linkages between service programs and graduate school. Like Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) argue, students widely perceive that participating in a service program will give a boost to applications that are not

particularly strong. As quotes above indicated, students considering graduate education as diverse as medical school, law school, MA in occupational therapy, and a PhD program in archeology all believe that their service programs could be a "resumé builder" that facilitates future acceptances. Also as indicated above, service programs are perceived by students to be means of focusing areas of study. Many students are considering several different types of degrees, such as Chris saying he is considering graduate work in social work, sociology, or psychology. Therefore, service programs connect to graduate school by narrowing the area of focus so that they can decide which programs to apply to, but they will also allow their applications to be more specific. Given that 13 students in the study are considering academic programs (rather than professional), this specificity could significantly increase the likelihood of acceptance and being successful once in graduate school when they need to develop research projects. Also as demonstrated above, it allows them a mental break from school so that they are ready to be enthusiastic to return to school. However, unlike traditional means for taking a break that require pursuing a job, students perceive that service programs are a more ideal way to take this break. Because of the specified end date, students are not as scared about getting "stuck" working and never returning to school. For instance, Mathilde's mom is staunchly against her getting a job after college: "my mom is like, 'Don't find a job in between! Because you'll start working that job and you won't finish grad school!'" However, with the guaranteed end date, students say it will be easier to transition from service programs into graduate studies than from a traditional job that does not have a built in end date. Therefore, some students interpret service programs as being a part of their educational pathway: the connecting piece between college and graduate school. For others it begins their career trajectory or fills the time when young adults do not yet feel ready for the adulthood markers of career or finishing education.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings from this paper reveal that having one framework for service program aspirations is not accurate. Instead, students have different interpretations and strategic uses for their service program aspirations. While some of these strategic uses overlap, the approaches generally fell into one of three categories: Enthusiasts, Backup Planners, and Professionals. The Backup Planners are consistent with the backup planner argument put forward by Armstrong and Hamilton (2013), though not all do so solely because they underachieved in college. Backup Planners have a variety of reasons they may need a backup plan after graduation. However, the other approaches are not consistent with the backup plan framework, as both Enthusiasts and Professionals prioritize participating in a service program above any other post-grad plans. Likewise, the gap year argument is applicable to some Enthusiasts and Backup Planners who have clear plans for a job or graduate program after the service program. For instance, Jackson's possible deferment of his job for a year and Corey's delay of medical school for a few years are both clear examples of gap years. However, the gap year framework is certainly inappropriate for Professionals considering they are already pursuing their long-term careers and thus are not taking a gap before starting their career plans. Likewise, the adrift framework does not seem appropriate for any of the groups, as these programs are perceived by the participants as preventing (or delaying) students from being adrift if they were at risk of it. The civic citizens framework reflects most Enthusiasts and Professionals who are strongly motivated to solve social problems (though some Enthusiasts emphasize their passion for travelling far more than their passion for solving the social problem), but it over-represents the

commitment most Backup Planners express and fails to account for how participation fits into this life course stage. Therefore, the typology I identify in this analysis provides a new framework for understanding service program aspirations based on the interpretations of the participants themselves. It complicates the framework to account for the varied ways that young adults approach these programs.

However, concerns about some young adults being adrift after they graduate college remain. As explained above, not all students will be able to participate in a service program, even if they aspire to. This difference is often class-based so that lower class students will be more likely to result in their service program aspiration unfilled and thus without well-developed strategic alternatives. Programs need to pay enough to be feasible for participants to live off the stipend without any family financial support, let alone not requiring the student to be able to raise the money from their social network. The programs also need to have loan deferral processes set up or pay enough to also be able to make payments for student loan debt, so that students with significant debt can still afford to participate. Without these qualities, only students from upper middle or upper class families will be able to afford to participate in them. If these class barriers prevent participation, only young adults from higher social class backgrounds may be able to take advantage of these perceived strategic advantages or take part in this new educational pathway that connects college to graduate school via a service program.

Nevertheless, even young adults who *do* participate in service programs immediately after graduation have not necessarily prevented being adrift after their programs finish. While service programs delay students feeling adrift after they graduate, they cannot indefinitely solve the problem, as the programs have fixed lengths. Sarah expressed that her biggest fear is that "I would go there, have these two years, and then still not know what I wanted to do at the

end...still not really have a sense of direction." Therefore, service programs might be able to play a role in ensuring fewer students leave college adrift—as they are a good alternative that can both help young adults have a meaningful experience at the right time in their lives while also working to help solve social problems—and colleges certainly seem to already be promoting them as such. However, for service programs to successfully play this function, the programs themselves need to be aware of the fact that many young adults are aspiring to participate in them as a means of job shopping, identity building, and career aspiration formation. Thus, the programs should help mentor young adults to successfully achieve these goals so that they will not leave directionless or without a next step, while also working to ensure class background is not a barrier to participation. If this process is enhanced, perhaps service programs could come to play a role post-college that gap years do in Europe post-high school: a time for young adults to feel free to explore possibilities before needing to settle into their next step in life. While they could play this role after high school as other authors suggest to prevent young adults from entering college adrift (Settersten and Ray 2010; Arnett 2004), the programs in the US seem largely designed to be post-college experiences, as most positions require a college degree and the cultural norm on college campuses is promoting them as a post-college opportunity.

Overall this study was able to identify how college students who aspire to participate in a service program after college approach these programs, identifying three general approaches students use. I found that service programs work to delay the timing of the adult marker of career for most students (except Professionals), though student's subjective interpretation of this delayed timing varies: Enthusiasts prioritize this delay while Backup Planners feel constrained from pursuing their preferred option of immediately entering the adulthood markers of career or finishing education. However, this study is limited in that not all people in the US who

participate in service programs do so immediately after college. People who participate while in different life course positions than recent college graduates may use different approaches to understand their participation. Likewise, it cannot address whether service programs *actually* have the strategic advantages students believe they do. For instance, do service programs aid acceptance and success in graduate school? Do they help students who enter them unsure about career paths form more concrete plans? Future research is needed to address these questions.

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE[11]

1) Can you walk me through your life before you came to college? [For instance, what are your parents like? How was high school? What activities were you involved in?]

2) How did you go about thinking about post-high school?

3) How was the transition to college?

4) How has your college experience been? [major; activities; study abroad; summers]

5) Did you receive financial aid in college? How have you paid for college? [If loans] Are you expected to pay back your student loans or is your family going to do that?

6) How did you go about thinking about what you might want to do after college?

7) What programs (and other things) have you considered doing after graduation?

8) Describe the volunteer/service program(s) you may be involved with next year.

9) How did you first hear about this program?

10) Describe for me what you think you'll do on a typical day in the program. If there's not a typical day, describe for me a few kinds of days you might have.

11) What would you be most excited about if you did the program?

12) What would you be most nervous about if you did the program?

13) What do you think you would find most rewarding about participating in the program? Least rewarding?

14) Is there anything you would hope to gain from participating in the program? Is there anything you feel you would have to give up to be able to participate?
[Ask 9-14 for each volunteer/service program considered.]

15) Who did you talk to about your post-grad ideas? What did they say? [Follow up: What about your family? What about your friends?]

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[11] Each interview varied based on the responses of the interviewee. The interview guide also changed over time as I conducted interviews and made adjustments based on new topics that emerged in previous interviews that I wanted to pursue in future interviews as well as shortening some questions when I reached saturation on those topics. This interview guide is the set of questions most commonly asked in the interviews.

16) Describe the other things that you considered doing after graduation [if considered things other than volunteer/service programs].

17) What are your ideas for after this program? What are some of your goals for the future? How do you think you will achieve those goals?

18) What would the ideal year after college look like for you if you had no financial concerns?

19) [I have so far recruited people by saying that I'm interested in studying college students who go on to do volunteer programs after they graduate. However, many people say that these types of programs are not volunteer programs and I understand that too.] Do you consider yours to be a volunteer program? Do you think any others that I mentioned are volunteer programs? Do you think your program is like the other types of programs I mentioned? Do you have an alternative word for this type of program or activity? What do you think of the word "volunteer/service program?"

20) Have you heard of the term voluntourism?

21) If by the end of the interview I do not know, ask about: age, gender, race/ethnicity, parent education and occupation (while growing up), religious beliefs, political beliefs, GPA.

APPENDIX 2: TABLE 2. DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

Name	College Major	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Social Class*	Type	GPA	Program**	Career Aspiration***	Grad School ****
Riley	Environmental Studies	Female	White	UMC	Enthusiast	3.5	Peace Corps, African Field Program	Field Researcher (Natural Science)	Yes
Brittney	Global Studies & Portuguese	Female	White	UMC	Enthusiast	3.5	Peace Corps	Foreign Service	Yes
Jackson	Business Administration	Male	White & "Arab"	UMC	Enthusiast	3.8	Fulbright	Intl Economic Development	Yes
Emily	Environmental Studies	Female	White	UC	Enthusiast	2.7	Peace Corps	Organic Farming?	Maybe
Mark	History & Political Science	Male	White	UMC	Enthusiast	3.9	Fulbright, AmeriCorps Advising Program	State Department	Maybe
Robert	Political Science	Male	White	UMC	Professional	3.2	Teach for America	Teacher[+]	Maybe
Christina	Psychology & Exercise and Sports Science	Female	White	UMC	Enthusiast	3.3	Christian Sports Program	Personal Trainer	No
Shabana	Global Studies & Communications	Female	Black	LMC	Enthusiast	3.5	Fulbright	Researcher or NGO?	Yes
Jayla	Psychology & Sociology	Female	Black	LMC	Professional	2.8	Teach for America	Teacher/ School Administration[+]	Yes
Nicole	Exercise and Sports Science	Female	White	UMC	Enthusiast	2.5	Domestic Campus Ministry Program	Unknown for her	No
Shaniqua	Psychology & Sociology	Female	Black	LMC	Backup Planner	2.7	Peace Corps	Social Worker	Yes
Megan	Exercise and Sports Science & Religious Studies	Female	White	WC	Backup Planner	3.5	AmeriCorps	Non-profit	Maybe
John	Exercise and Sports Science	Male	White	UMC	Enthusiast	3.7	International Campus Ministry Program	Physical Therapy or Ministry?	Maybe
Steven	Global Studies	Male	White	WC	Enthusiast	3.2	International Christian Program	Non-profit	No
Erica	Journalism & Global Studies	Female	White	LMC	Backup Planner	3.8	Christians Fighting for Human Rights	Non-profit or Lawyer	Yes
Emma	Economics & Public Policy	Female	White	UMC	Enthusiast	3.2	Peace Corps	Policy Analysis or Government Job	Yes
Melanie	Global Studies	Female	White	P	Enthusiast	3.5	TFA, AmeriCorps Advising Program	Nonprofit or Government Job	Yes

Name	Major	Gender	Race	Class	Type	GPA	Program	Career Aspiration	Grad School
Hope	Linguistics	Female	White	LMC	Enthusiast	3.0	Peace Corps	National Law Enforcement[+]	No
Shannon	Biology & Global Studies	Female	White	UC	Enthusiast	3.0	Peace Corps, International Health Program	Doctor or Intl Public Health[+]	Yes
Greg	Classical Archeology & Religious Studies	Male	White	P/WC	Enthusiast	2.9	Peace Corps	Professor or Curator (Archeology)[+]	Yes
Sarah	Global Studies & Italian	Female	White	UC	Backup Planner	3.5	"Peace Corps like program"	Something political?	Yes
Corey	Biology & French	Male	White	LMC	Backup Planner	3.5	France Tutoring Program, AmeriCorps Tutoring Program	Doctor[+]	Yes
Michelle	Exercise and Sports Science	Female	White	WC	Backup Planner	3.3	City Year, TFA	Occupational Therapy[+]	Yes
Soraya	Global Studies	Female	Middle Eastern	UMC	Enthusiast	3.4	Middle East Tutoring Program	Curator or Public Policy?	Yes
Courtney	Economics & Public Policy	Female	Black	UMC	Enthusiast	3.7	Peace Corps, City Year, TFA	Professor (Public Policy)	Yes
Justin	Business Administration	Male	White	UMC	Backup Planner	3.8	TFA	Finance/Business[+]	No
Chris	Sociology	Male	Black	WC	Enthusiast	--	AmeriCorps Advising Program	Unknown for him	Yes
Tiffany	Sociology	Female	White	LMC	Enthusiast	3.6	AmeriCorps	Legislator	Yes
Mathilde	Global Studies & Geography	Female	"Other"	LMC	Backup Planner	3.5	Peace Corps	Epidemiologist	Yes
Sofia	Sociology & Hispanic Linguistics	Female	Hispanic	WC	Enthusiast	3.0	TFA, AmeriCorps Advising Program	Teacher or Researcher?	Yes

Notes:

*Social class categories: poor (P), working class (WC), lower middle class (LMC), upper middle class (UMC), and upper class (UC)

** Remember, only Peace Corps, Teach for America, AmeriCorps, City Year, and Fulbright have retained their true names. All others are pseudonyms. For students thinking about a wide variety of programs I list their top choice and the one they are most likely to do (if different).

***Career Aspirations are more certain for some students than others. For simplicity, I have included either the top one or two choices they are thinking about. For students whose aspirations are more certain, I have indicated this accordingly.[+] For students who seem to have very little idea what they want to do for their career, I indicated this with a question mark (?) and for those who claim to have absolutely no idea I write "unknown for her/him"

****Grad School column is the likelihood the students expresses about eventually attending graduate or professional school. Note I do not ask if they plan to attend graduate school if they do not bring it up in their discussion of their post-grad plans.

-- Indicates that the student refused to answer the question

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