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# STATE SPONSORED VOLUNTEERISM

Lessons from the AmeriCorps program, and  
employability applications in the United States and  
European Union

## Author's Declaration

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I, the undersigned, Graham Patterson, hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

This is a true copy of the thesis, including final revisions.

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## Abstract

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In both Europe and the United States nearly fifty percent of young workers with bachelor's and master's degrees are accepting jobs which require less than their educational attainment, the highest rate of divergence ever recorded. While the fiscal crisis and high youth unemployment compounds the trend, the problem goes deeper and the diminished returns on education investment along with skill mismatches are changing the math for individuals and governments which invest in higher education. This paper looks at the possibility of using formalized volunteer programs such as AmeriCorps and the European Voluntary Service to help address both youth unemployment and the education-to-job disconnect. In order to ascertain the efficacy of such a plan, a survey was carried out which captured responses from 826 AmeriCorps alumni. In addition there was a thorough review of complimentary research focusing on the employability outcomes of program graduates. The results show increased skill sets, larger work-relevant networks and better financial outcomes for participants. Such programs however were also found to be quite divergent in their aims and methods, and the paper suggests that policy transfer of the most beneficial approaches would further assure beneficial outcomes.

## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

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A study performed by the Center for University Affordability and Productivity revealed that out of 41.7 million working university graduates in the United States, only fifty one percent were in positions which required a bachelor's degree; thirty-eight percent of their position required no more than a high school diploma (Vedder, 2013). Compounding the situation, the USA Bureau Labor Statistics estimated that the number of university grads will grow by nineteen million between 2010 and 2020, while the number of jobs requiring that level of education is expected to grow by less than seven million. This is not a situation unique to the United States, in fact the data that exists in Europe shows an even larger disconnect in many countries. The Office of National Statistic's in the relatively strong labor market of the United Kingdom for instance, released a 2013 report showing that the country is only able to provide fifty-two percent of university graduates with jobs which require their degree level. This figure is up from thirty-nine percent before the financial crisis, a trend both throughout Europe and the Unites States (Cribb).

At the same time, youth unemployment rates remain historically high, and while they have diminished from their peak at the height of the financial crisis, they seem to have stabilized at five-fifteen percent above pre-collapse levels, a point which many scholars are calling the "new normal" (Yen, 2011). According to Eurostat, the EU's statistical service, in 2014 "the seasonally adjusted rate of youth unemployment across the 28 EU Member States (EU28) stood at 22.9 per cent, more than double the overall unemployment rate of 10.6 per cent." (Figure) For comparison, "in 2007 the EU28 youth unemployment rate was 12.1 per cent". While some of this "new normal" can be attributed to the fact that young people are staying in education longer, and a larger percentage of them are pursuing higher degrees, the NEET group – i.e. persons 'not in employment, education and training' now includes 7.5 million young Europeans, the largest number ever recorded.

This level of unemployment reinforces the trend of recent graduates accepting jobs which do not utilize their educational attainment, devaluing a master's degree according to some research, to a point below the benefit which a bachelor's degree conferred on students a generation ago (Time Magazine, September 2014). According to several studies, being unemployed in your early 20's (most studies look specifically at 22 year olds, who have typically graduated from university by this age) or working below your qualifications for more than a short period of time, serves to cement future mobility options with measureable effects in wages for at least as long as these studies have been collecting data, at this point, 20 years. While university attainment continues

to lead to significantly better economic outcomes, “comparing average university and high-school (primary-school) earnings outcomes is highly misleading, because in an environment of job scarcity, the overqualified tend to take the jobs of the sufficiently qualified” (Vedder, 2013).

With these factors as a base, this paper looks at government sponsored formalized volunteer programs in the United States and European Union. Focusing specifically on AmeriCorps and the EU's recently refreshed Erasmus+ program, it assesses their ability to create better long-term outcomes for youth. Recent studies show that a majority of employer's rate work experience or skill attainment as the most important qualification for applicants, with only sixteen and twelve percent respectively valuing grades or a degree from a specific university as most important (Flanagan, 2010). The question therefore becomes, is it possible to utilize formalized government-supported volunteer programs to launch careers which lead to similar and sometimes even better outcomes than university degrees (bachelors/master's), and for those who do pursue high education, to better their outcomes not only through skills training and work experience, but also by helping them choose a sector of long-term interest as well as direct them into areas of the economy which have lower levels of unemployment? If so, what are the costs and externalities, and can they be justified as an alternative to higher education alone.

While the answer to these questions are important for anyone considering the cost of pursuing a university degree, for the governments of Europe and the United States the equation works out a bit differently. In the United States the majority of higher education spending is funded by individuals, most of whom take out loans. The government provides the vast majority of these loans (~88%), which now stand at a total of over 1.2 trillion, the largest form of consumer debt behind home mortgages. With more than one in ten of these loans in default ( [Figure](#)), an additional ~22% with a late payment in the last year, and increasing student demonstrations urging recipients to stop paying in protest of high education costs and a lack of relevant jobs, this is seen by policy makers as a potential powder keg (New York Times, May 14<sup>th</sup> 2015; [Figure](#)). In most of Europe a relatively large percentage of higher education funding is subsidized by the government, and the money is largely seen as an investment in a workforce which will eventually provide repayment in taxable income. If equal job outcomes can be achieved through cheaper and/or more effective means therefore, it would make economic sense to focus more funding on these programs. As an interviewee who was a founder of Germany's own government volunteer program stated, “Europe needs less young people with two master's degrees, and more of them with one job”.

In order to determine the costs and benefits of formalized volunteer programs, this paper begins by providing background on the governmental volunteer programs in the United States and Europe, focusing primarily on their stated goals, practices and outcomes in regards to member development and employability. It then looks at literature and theory which is relevant to framing and providing context to the research, as well as at ideas of how successful policies might be transferred. It then takes an in-depth look at whether AmeriCorps does in fact increase employability as well as social mobility, by analyzing outcomes of members spanning all the way back to the 1960's. This is accomplished both by looking at previous research and reports, as well as by examining the results of a survey of 800+ alumni which was completed as part of this project. Where correlations are found, the factors which lead to them are examined.

After an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the longer running and much larger AmeriCorps program, the focus turns to Europe, where the possibility of incorporating the lessons of AmeriCorps into the EU's new and growing program are examined. This section focuses on differences in the Europe context, such as language diversity, employment mobility, cultural biases, as well as on the unique opportunities which would accompany the adoption of a similar program. It also examines initial success stories in the Erasmus program, with an eye to enabling two-way sharing of the most beneficial strategies. We then look at a case study of Germany's national volunteer program, which provides ideas regarding alternative paths towards the creation of government sponsored volunteer programs in Europe. In closing, there is an overview of the findings as well as policy recommendations and tips about potentially beneficial areas for future research.

## Chapter 1: Background of AmeriCorps and Erasmus+

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*"Your pay will be low; the conditions of your labor often will be difficult. But you will have the satisfaction of leading a great national effort and you will have the ultimate reward which comes to those who serve their fellow man." – Lyndon B. Johnson*

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The Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program was founded in 1965 by the national government of the United States. Originally conceived by President John F. Kennedy, the intent was for it to be a domestic version of the Peace Corps, and as such, it was tasked with pursuing the elimination of poverty in America. VISTA's strategy primarily involved two elements.



Its first and initially overarching strategy was to support poverty sector nonprofits through the provision of subsidized employees. The salaries of these employees were paid wholly by the government, and the individuals who volunteered to fill these roles were responsible for helping to strengthen and build successful programs which the nonprofits had previously been unable to afford. The second focus was on developing the skillsets of these “members”, who most typically agreed to serve for a year, during which time they received a small living stipend (initially 125% of the poverty level), as well as an education grant upon successful completion of their contracts. The AmeriCorps program worked to ensure the skill development of members by obligating grantees to provide specified training elements in exchange for their funding.

The VISTA program would later evolve into AmeriCorps, which is now overseen by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), a confusingly named but publicly funded and managed agency of the federal government. Since the founding of VISTA 50 years ago, the organization’s mission has been expanded beyond poverty alleviation and now encompasses a plethora of social goals, currently supporting nonprofits in nearly every sector (with the exception of strictly religious and political organizations). While the targeted societal outcomes have been expanded, the core of the program’s operations remain the same – supporting civil society organizations by offering subsidized employees, and ensuring training and skill building for participating members, in addition to their modest financial remuneration.

AmeriCorps currently has a yearly budget of 1.18 billion, making it the largest single government investment of this type in the world. In 2014 the agency employed ~500 staff members, who were responsible for overseeing the working arrangements of ~90,150 AmeriCorps volunteer members. The cost per participant hovers around \$13,000/year, which includes those serving terms from a standard minimum of three months, all the way up to a full year. The majority of participants are between the ages of 18 and 24, and use their service term either as a “gap year” prior to beginning the pursuit of an associated/bachelor’s degree, or as a means of developing skills and strengthening their resume before looking for work following their university studies. Members who complete a year long term receive \$5730 in grant money which can be used towards higher education funding or the pursuit of other job oriented training/certification (with smaller amounts for those who complete shorter terms).

While AmeriCorps’s goal for society is to “expand individual opportunity, build family stability, and create more sustainable, resilient communities”, for individuals who offer their time it promises to help them “graduate, gain career skills, pursue higher education, and find work”, as

well as provide “valuable skills for the future, including leadership, teamwork, and project management experience.”

There are several recent CNCS programs and initiatives which provide evidence that the organization continues to take its role of delivering employment benefits to members seriously. Employers of National Service for instance was launched in 2014 with the support of President Obama. It gathered more than 200 corporations, such as Disney Inc., Comcast and NBC Universal, who promised to proactively hire AmeriCorps Alumni. Programs like this, along with continued investment in research into employability outcomes show that the CNCS is proactively working, perhaps more now than ever, to live up to their stated intention of providing long-term benefits to members.

Besides the direct benefits received by participants, the AmeriCorps programs supports nonprofits which help deliver social benefits to society, assisting the government in many of their social goals (Frumkin, 2010). The data varies somewhat in this area by sector of nonprofit served, but shows that here alone the government received between \$1.70 and \$4.55 in benefit and reduced costs for every dollar spent. The wages paid to recipients also provide relatively direct stimulus to the economy, and the jobs provide a direct line into future employment with nonprofits, a sector which accounts for nearly ten percent of all wages and salaries paid in the United States.

## Erasmus+/European Voluntary Service |

The Erasmus+ program is a complex collection of several EU strategies aimed at enhancing connections between European youth through education, youth exchange programs, joint master’s degrees, and many other initiatives. It was most recently modified in 2013 in order to bring several different programs with similar aims under one umbrella. One of these is the European Voluntary Service (EVS), which is the most similar European level program to AmeriCorps. It was founded through a joint decision by the European Parliament and the Council (1686/98/EC) in 1996, before recently being rolled into the Erasmus+ program. Its stated intents are to “...foster solidarity and mobility among young Europeans, and hence help them become more active citizens, and provide them with a formative experience.” The European Voluntary Service program has ~6300 participants and a budget of ~52.5 million euros per year, with average spending of 8300 Euros per participant.

The program provides participants from the age of 17-30 with the opportunity to engage in full time voluntary service for anything from a few days, all the way up to a full year. Unlike AmeriCorps there is a requirement that members serve in a country other than their own, which sometimes even takes place outside of the EU. The programs they work in must be generally focused on building civil society and be specifically focused on “youth information and policies, young people's personal and socio-educational development, civic engagement, social care, inclusion of the disadvantaged, environment, non-formal education programmes, ICTs and media literacy, culture and creativity, and development cooperation.” In other words, almost any NGO sector outside of medicine and direct education, which have their own specific programs.

Organizations can request grants from the EU to support between 1 and 30 program participants. In addition to qualifying based on their missions, they must show that they will provide training in several key competencies, the primary among these being “skills which lead to employability, (and) a sense of social inclusion and well-being.” While the program was originally focused almost entirely on providing a means of culture exchange, the financial crisis and recent reorganization under Erasmus+ has expanded its aims, which now includes providing for the employability of members, whether through education or cultural experience.

Because it will be covered later in the analysis, it is worth mentioning the process which leads an individual from identification of the program they wish to participate in, to an actual offer. This primarily involves the following three steps which take place after an individual has found out about the program generally and decided that it might be a good fit for them (copied from program literature):

<b>Step #</b>	<b>Established Program</b>	<b>Unestablished Program</b>
1.	Contact an organization which is recruiting volunteers for a granted project using the online database of accredited organizations	Contact an organization to discuss starting a project
2.	Interview with organization for position	Get them to agree to host it and apply for EU funding
3.	Be chosen to participate in project	Receive approval from EU for project and begin volunteering

## Employability and Education |

Higher education attainment has traditionally translated to better economic outcomes. The mechanism through which this result is derived involves two main factors, namely higher rates of employment as well as higher salaries. For an idea of how this plays out in the years following graduation, we can look at figures in the United States, where the unemployment rate for 25 to 34 year old graduates of four-year universities was 3.3 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, while for high school graduates in the same age group, it was 11.8 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). In addition, median fulltime annual earnings in 2013 for the same age range was almost exactly \$30,000, \$50,000 and \$60,000 for graduates with a high school, bachelors and master's degree respectively (Borzaga, 2006). While these results vary to some degree by country, in Europe the same trends hold true.

Given this, there are still strong reasons propelling students to obtain higher degrees. Still, as was discussed in the introduction, a significant portion of the benefit is not derived from the fact that the jobs graduates end up finding are a good match for their educational attainment or because that education was even a requisite. Rather it is often the case that scarce jobs go to the "highest bidder", or the individual with the highest amount of education willing to work in that position, even if their training overshoots the requirements.

There have been small but growing signs that AmeriCorps and EVS programs are being viewed by the US and EU as a way to address the employment part of the equation, by providing participants with the equivalent of jobs which helps address the high instance of youth who are out of both education and work. A 2011 report by the EU for instance stated that "New strategies that provide the base for future programmes suggest an increased focus on employability."

Statements like this are not unique, especially since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008, since which there has been an increased focus on expanding the programs based on thinking that their expansion might assist with the problem of youth unemployment. There have even been new campaigns launched which encourage youth who are having a difficult time finding jobs to use a term of voluntary service to allow them to effectively reengage in the workforce.

Despite the increased attention on using AmeriCorps and the EVS as a means of keeping youth out of the ranks of the unemployed, the research for this paper found no official documentation which shows that governments are attempting to utilize these programs as an alternative or boost to education. This is somewhat shocking given the current situation in the realm of education since such already established programs could theoretically provide similar or complimentary

outcomes as those derived from (additional) education (skills, networks, confidence, etc.), at a lower cost. Pursuit of such outcomes are already elemental components of the volunteer programs in the US and Europe, so a move to make such programs acceptable as alternatives to traditional higher education, at least in some fields, seems to be an option worthy of consideration (Flanagan, 2010).

Such a realignment would need to include the strengthening/creation of at least two factors. The first is more certain validity that successful completion of the program is the equivalent of educational attainment, and the second is that completion of a program would need to be viewed by potential employers as such. The fact that a university degree is accepted as validation of the recipient having certain heightened potential as an employee is tied to these two factors, and it would be necessary to match them in order to ensure that future employers would see AmeriCorps and EVS as substitutes.

### **Disconnects**

The principle next-steps to enabling these programs to achieve status as direct and sustained employability builders as well as alternatives and additions to certain forms of higher education are:

- Sufficient program tracking in the realm of outcomes to show that the programs provide or have the potential to provide alumni with the same benefits as higher education in relation to employability outcomes, and/or would be significantly beneficial as additions to higher education.
- Providing some degree of standardization to ensure that there are comparable outcomes across volunteer sites
- Effective communication of the value of the experience to society

Currently these steps are receiving haphazard attention.

As regards tracking, the European Union is doing an especially poor job of systematically following outcomes of the alumni of its programs. While there may be reasons for this in some instances, for instance in short-term projects of less than three months where the impact is likely not worth measuring, without this information there is no way to ensure that their aims in regard to long-term employment benefit are in fact being realized. Especially with their new stated programmatic goals in this area, and the enormous advances in the ease of tracking through the

utilization of technology, the question arises, why isn't this being done? The United States' AmeriCorps program has many shortfalls in this area as well, and also seems to focus primarily on the immediate benefits of the programs to organizations and individuals, rather than on long term effects. Still, longitudinal studies are budgeted for and carried out regularly and the results of these are readily available. These help confirm the value of program expenditure.

Standardization of outcomes is difficult in this realm because the service delivery effectively takes place almost solely through the efforts of government contractors, namely the nonprofits/NGOs which host volunteers. With little day to day oversight and varied programming in each sector as well as contractor training skill levels, it is difficult to ensure a standardized outcome. While funding proposals must specify training and skill building outcomes for participants, limited efforts are currently being made to ensure that they took place, or to ask participants to rate their experience, especially in a manner which has actual impacts, for example as a factor in determining future grant making to an organization.

Effective communication of the value of program participation is innately difficult for governments, which do not typically have large budgets for the promotion of programs or strong internal communications departments. There have been attempts to address this shortfall in both AmeriCorps and the EVS, however neither program receives high levels of visibility. One effort which has shown some promise, although not yet a great deal of penetration, is announcements by high level officials, such as presidents in the United States who typically hold at least one event a year extolling the virtues of the program and of those who serve.

## Chapter 2: Literature and Theory

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### Literature: Effects of Participation on Individual

The typical financial arguments state that the more the government can assure citizens have the requisite skills to acquire and maintain jobs which optimize their individual earning potential, the more productive and therefore better off society will be (Tschirhart, 2001).

At least on the surface, justifications for this kind of expenditure, as gauged from program literature and the platforms of politicians, tend to be quite straightforward (Avalos, 1999). Slightly more complex is the additional proposition which states that such measures help strengthen the middle class, in turn allowing government to more broadly spread the tax burden. The end result

is citizens who are able to pay back the system which helped them, because of the effects of the system – the ideal fiscal circumstance in a government program

As regards civil society, the arguments in favor of supporting a national volunteer program are many, but from an expenditure justification standpoint, the primary focus is usually on the extent to which the social functions of government end up receiving additional backing when civil society is further reinforced. The extra support, the argument goes, not only strengthens society and leads to more positive individual outcomes, but takes some of the burden off the government (Lecy and Van Slyke, 2012).

In, Christopher Simon and Changhua Wang's paper *The Impact of AmeriCorps Service on Volunteer Participants: Results from a 2-Year Study in Four Western States*, they find that national service volunteers end up being more active in community groups and that they increase their social capital through their volunteer work both because they meet others who might help them materially in the future and because they gain experience which is seen generally viewed in a positive light, in turn translating to positive impressions of the doer. In *How Undergraduates Are Affected By Service Participation*, Alexander Astin and Linda Sax find that in addition to increased community involvement, university students who volunteer end up doing better academically, and stating in surveys that they have more life satisfaction and civic mindedness following their experience. The list goes on, with researchers finding everything from a higher likelihood to help others, enter politics, and be less likely to blame social service recipients for their situation (Hamilton and Fenzel, 1988).

### ***Volunteering and Employability***

In 2012, the Department of Labor issued a "policy guidance" in the form of an Unemployment Insurance Program Letter (UIPL). This notice officially promoted volunteering as a method of "expand(ing) opportunity for unemployed individuals by enabling them to develop and maintain skills, expand their network of contacts, and enhance their resumes". The guidance states that volunteerism can be a beneficial strategy to help with finding employment and therefore "does not need to interfere with unemployment compensation recipients' responsibilities to be able and available for work and actively seeking work". The guidance encourages state workforce agencies to promote volunteering to individuals receiving unemployment compensation (Oates, 2012)."

The relationship between volunteering and employment has traditionally been primarily descriptive in nature (Jones, 2000; McDonald & Coffield, 1996) or been treated as a component of studies on employment in the nonprofit sector (Gay, 1998). The most significant findings have been the linking of human capital accumulation to volunteering, but the actuality of this raising a person's future earning power, while demonstrated casually, has been far from proven. Still the vast majority of analysis points to causality in this direction.

The nonprofit sector, which volunteer work naturally leads into is also growing. Between 2007 and 2010, the nonprofit sector gained jobs at an average rate of 1.9 percent per year, while the private sector lost jobs at a rate of 3.7 percent per year. Between 2000 and 2010 the annual growth rate for employment was also higher for nonprofits, at 2.1%, whereas the for-profit sector shrank by -0.6% (Collamer, 2013). Several social scientists tie this to the overall increase in service sector jobs, which tends to have skills that are transferrable in this area, as well as to the increased dependence on the government's utilization of nonprofits to deliver social services.

Nonprofit employment is also broader than is usually assumed, and therefore less vulnerable to changes in the economy. By focus the sector is approximately 57% dedicated to health services, 15% for education, 13% for social assistance, 7% for civic associations, 3% for arts, and 2% for professional services. Because of its wide variation volunteer programs also have the potential to provide work to those who are interested in almost any field, an important factor for governments to keep in mind as they build their programs.

## Chapter 3: Evaluation

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There is a breadth of research which focuses on volunteerism in the US, and Europe, but a very limited amount which focuses specifically on AmeriCorps and the EVS program. The aim of this evaluation therefore is to build upon the research which has already been done, by analyzing it as well as contributing to it through an analysis of survey results from 800+ alumni of the AmeriCorps program.

The AmeriCorps program was chosen as a focus rather than the EVS because it has been in existence in some form for fifty years now (as opposed to ~15 years for the EVS), which provides the appropriate longitudinal span for an analysis of this type. Additionally it is much larger than its European counterpart (both in budget and participation) and has significantly more data available both from internal as well as external research. While policy transfer is rarely as



straightforward as it seems it should be (Benson, 2011; Evans, 1999), there are many similarities between the US and EU in the challenges which are being faced in the realms of youth unemployment and skill mismatch, and the hope is that because of this, as well as the fact that the EU is operating in an ever more similar manner to a federal government, the lessons from the United States could be adapted relatively easily as Europe grows its own program (Evans, 2013).

In order to determine whether AmeriCorps is a prudent and competitive government investment, as measured by long-term financial outcomes in relation to educational attainment and financial backgrounds, several factors are examined in Alumni, such as skills gained and current income. The hope is that more information in this realm might allow governments to determine whether programs increase the expected income, and therefore tax received from a participant over their lifetime and in relation to other alternatives (such as a Master's degree for instance), perhaps justifying program expansion on a purely financial basis. Additionally it attempts to provide evidence which will allow governments to make better decisions about how programs are delivered and about the potential possibilities for such programs, particularly in the realms of employability and education substitution/enhancement.

## Available Research Data

The independent data which is available tends to focus geographically and programmatically, and as such, to provide more proof of the inequality of program delivery, rather than any conclusive evidence about true outcomes.

The *Cost-and-Benefit Study of Two Americorps Projects in the State of Washington* for instance, looks at two different projects in that state and examines the participant outcomes. It finds a wide variation depending on initial education level, with high school dropouts receiving more than three times the benefit of those who completed university. "At only \$17,000 and \$5000 respectively, there is no hope of the federal government obtaining full refund for their upfront costs (in the realm of \$20,000) in tax dollars." Another study however on programs in the state of California found that there were more than \$46000 of benefits derived both in lifetime income boost as well as government savings from lower utilization of various forms of welfare (Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development, 2008). Many studies also find increased likelihood of participants entering a career in government or which assists with social functions of government, yet the actual pay in these sectors vs others is not examined, leaving it unclear if actual incomes are really worth the investment.

Another challenge, which applies to the survey conducted in this paper as well, is the fact that AmeriCorps Alumni have a higher rate of educational attainment than the national average for their age group. “Nearly nine in 10 (88%) currently have a bachelor’s degree or higher (versus 77% at the time of their initial service)”, while the national degree attainment rate for 25 – 34 year olds is 42%. Deciding on the population which AmeriCorps Alumnus should be compared to is therefore difficult, especially in regards to the 11 percent who pursue education after completion of their AmeriCorps term.

An examination of 16 studies found these government-relevant trends:

Helped Fiscally:

- Lowered youth unemployment
- As a form of training, led to higher income potential and/or skill development
- Provided support for services which are complimentary to government’s

Socially:

- Increased societal intercultural knowledge and skills

There wasn’t enough data however to call any of these conclusive, and each of them had variations in different locations or programs.

The primary research for this paper was carried out through means of a survey of AmeriCorps Alumni, using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods.

# Research Design

Mixture of Quantitative and Qualitative

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## Quantitative

- Survey Result Analysis
- Financial Outcome Tracking

## Qualitative

- Interviews
- Research

### *Methodology*

I reached out to AmeriCorps Alumni in three ways, namely by posting the survey on alumni focused Facebook and LinkedIn sites, and by sending out an email asking for participation directly to 8364 Alumni who are members of the official AmeriCorps Alumni group representing the 16 largest chapters in the country.

I asked these questions:

- Length of time in AmeriCorps Time since service was completed
- Kind of economic background (broken into Quintiles)
- Self-reported value of service
- Self-reported was job following AmeriCorps service better than without service Skills which were strengthened (from list of ten)
- Continued working in social sector
- Did work-relevant network grow because of service Do employers value service (Qualitative) Experience finding a job (Qualitative)
- If returned to school was value placed on service (Qualitative) Additional comments (Qualitative)

I also performed qualitative interviews with a random sample of survey takers who agreed to be followed up with, as well as with. The data was analyzed using general statistical analysis, computer assisted qualitative data analysis, as well as combined methods including case studies, conversational analysis and phenomenological methods. This allows for a comprehensive

assessment of data which arises from a variety of sources and which looks at many different aspects and facets of the AmeriCorps program.

This survey assess the long-term impact of AmeriCorps on participants' employment and life skills. The study sample comprises a nationally representative sample of 826 AmeriCorps members and compares them to non-members in comparison groups. The study compares the employment outcomes of AmeriCorps members over time with individuals not enrolled in AmeriCorps, controlling for age and initial economic status.

The Survey looks at eleven areas, namely:

- Individual Financial Outcomes
- Professional Development
- Skill Development
- Unemployment
- School-To-Work Transition

To measure these, a questionnaire with 14 items was disseminated to Americorps Alumni on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Alumni email newsletter groups. Out of roughly 10,000 diverse alumni who were contacted, 826 responded and completed the survey. The questions focused on their time in Americorps, its role in their development, as well as on their current situation. Data from the ind2013er database (percentiles were based on the income for 2005) was used to determine the percentile scores for the general public, and these are examined in reference to the results from the Alumni survey.

The data was analyzed using SPSS 20 and the following statistical tools were used:

1. Bar and pie charts to compare the distribution of responses of the participants
2. Multiple comparison tables to determine the improvement of skills based on time served and self-reported value of respondents experience in Americorps.
3. Chi-Square was used to determine association between the categorical variables. A p-value of less than 0.05 indicates a significant association.
4. Mann-Whitney U was used instead of Independent Samples T-Test due to the fact that these are ordinal scores and are not normally distributed, thus not following the assumption of normality to run a t-test. It was used to determine if there are significant differences in the mean percentile income of those who were in Americorps, in reference to the General Public.

## Validity

Three factors must be acknowledged when looking at the validity of the survey data. The first is the fact that the survey compares AmeriCorps alumni to the general population, which includes a percentage of AmeriCorps alumni. Therefore the comparison population isn't in fact an ideal distinctive comparison group. Because alumni are only .00282% of the general population in the United States, this has been determined to not provide a statistically relevant effect, even though it must be noted.

The second factor is based on the fact that AmeriCorps alumni who completed the survey, proactively added themselves to networks for alumni, and therefore might not be representative of all alumni. If this factor effected the direction of the results it would be possible to argue that it might have elicited more positive responses on average, from those who had experiences which made them continue to identify as alumni, and want to involve themselves with the organization. While this cannot be ruled out, the cost of becoming a member of these groups is very low (a search and click on Facebook and/or LinkedIn (sometimes just a click if either site used profile data to suggest the addition), and a web search for AmeriCorps alumni groups, clicking on the official site, and entering a few bits of qualifying data to add yourself to the newsletter), while the benefits have the potential to be rather high (job search assistance, social connection with others who have shared experience, etc.). Based on this rationale, it is assumed that a representative sample of alumni were contacted with requests to complete the survey, and a representative sample ended up completing it, thus validating the results.

Finally, as was mentioned previously, there are a variety of reasons that it is difficult to identify a comparison group for AmeriCorps Alumni. The primary means of distinguishing them in this study is by looking at their financial backgrounds and the general possibility for social mobility compared with that of those who serve in AmeriCorps.

Following are the results of the data analysis.

## Data Results and Discussion

### Basic Results

Figure 1. Time spent in Americorps service

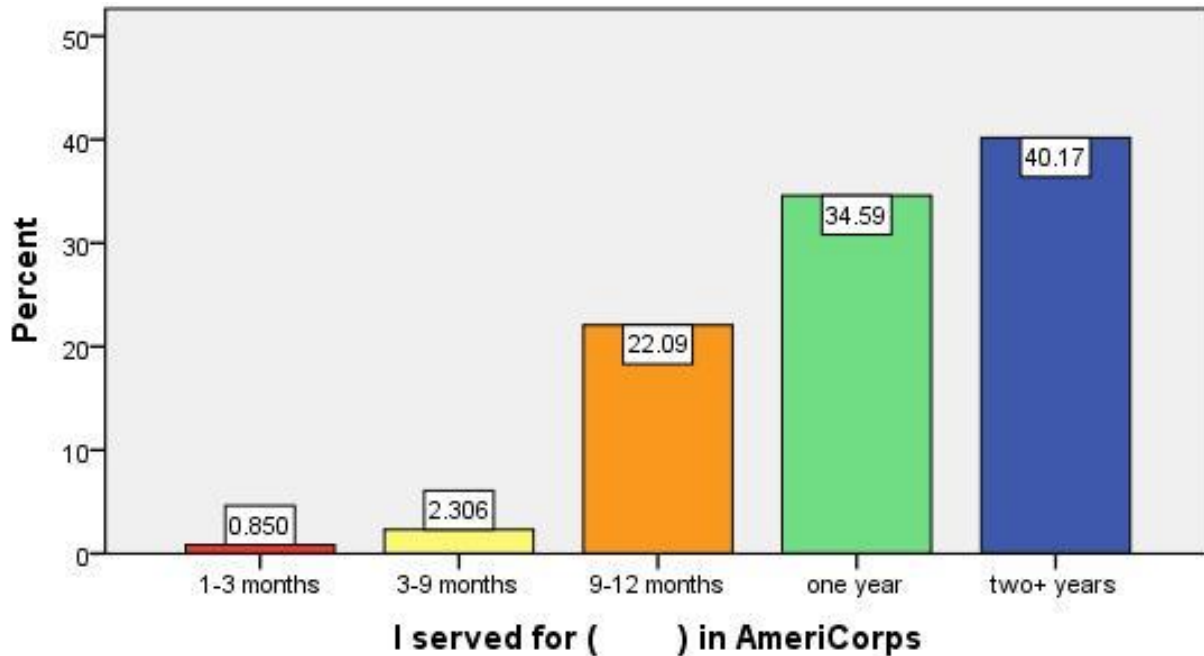


Figure #1 shows that roughly 3/4<sup>ths</sup> of respondents served for one year or more in AmeriCorps (74.76%), with only ~3% serving less than nine months. The standard term of AmeriCorps is one year, with the chance of being renewed (a maximum of two full education awards may be claimed, which would translate to two years of service). Data from AmeriCorps showing the average length of service for all participants was not immediately available, therefore it was not possible to determine whether these are typical levels.

Figure 2. Experience in Americorps

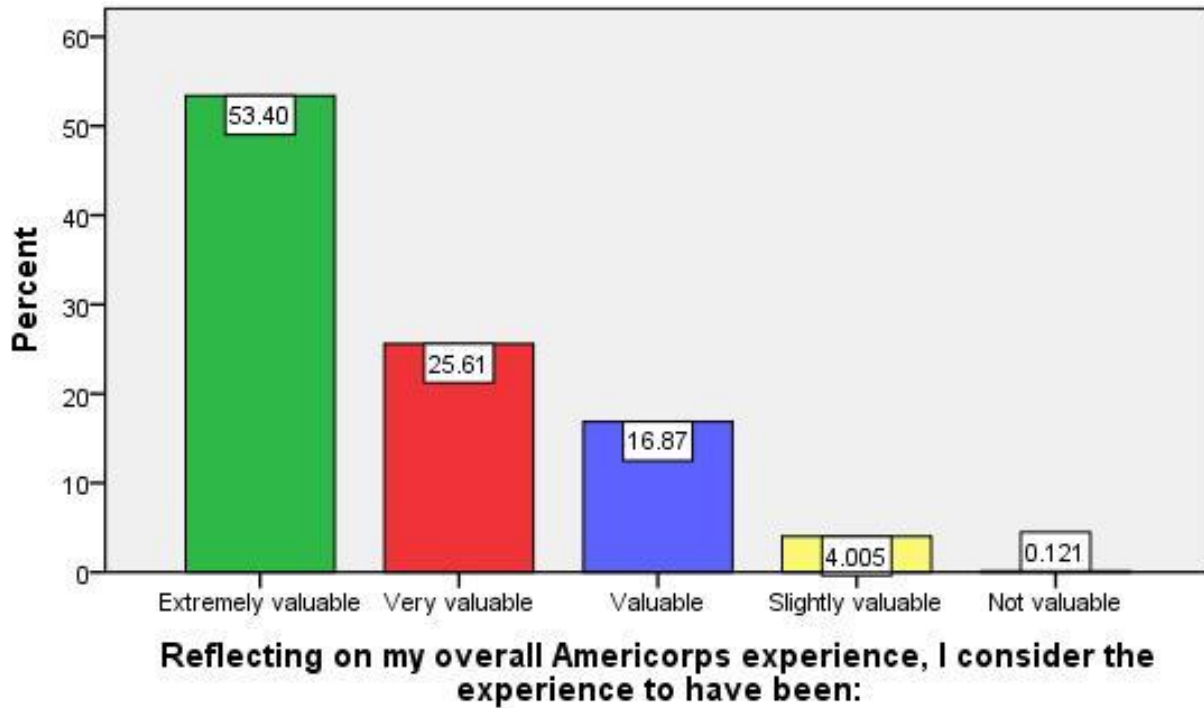


Figure #2 shows that the majority of respondents feel that their Americorps experience was either extremely or very valuable, (79.01%), with less than 1% feeling that it had no value, and 4% finding it slightly valuable.

Figure 3. Expectations of respondents about their first job following Americorps

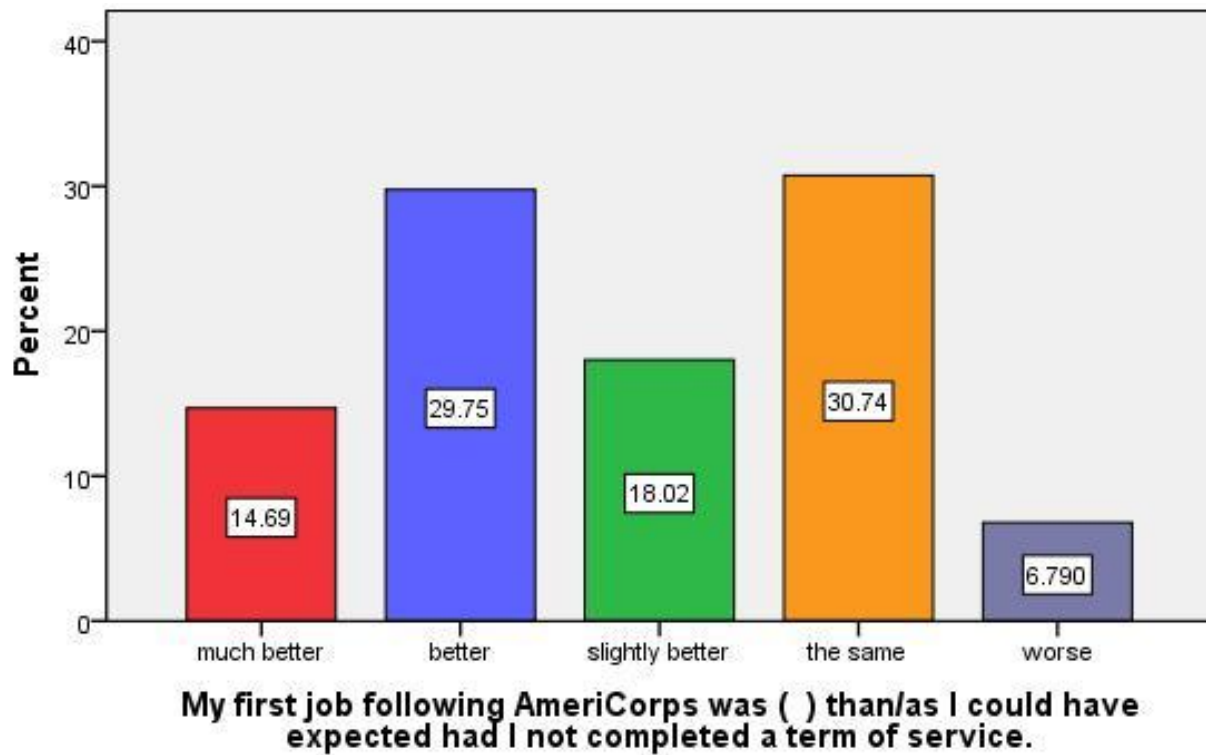


Figure #3 shows that 62.46% of AmeriCorps reported that their first job was some sort of improvement from what they could have expected had they not served. A significant percent also reported that there was no improvement (30.74%), while 6.8% reported that the experience had ended up in a worse outcome.



Figure 4. After term, continued working in social sector

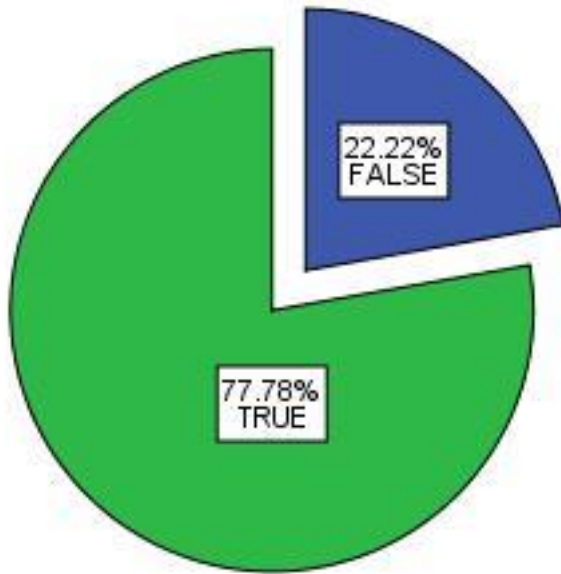


Figure #4 shows that most respondents continued their work in the social sector (77.78%). According to a 2012 report by the Center for Civil Society Studies at Johns Hopkins University, nonprofit employment represents 10.1 percent of total employment in the United States, the third largest sector in the US economy. Still, AmeriCorps Alumni are more than seven times more likely than the average American worker to find their employment in this sector.

Figure 5. Term finished

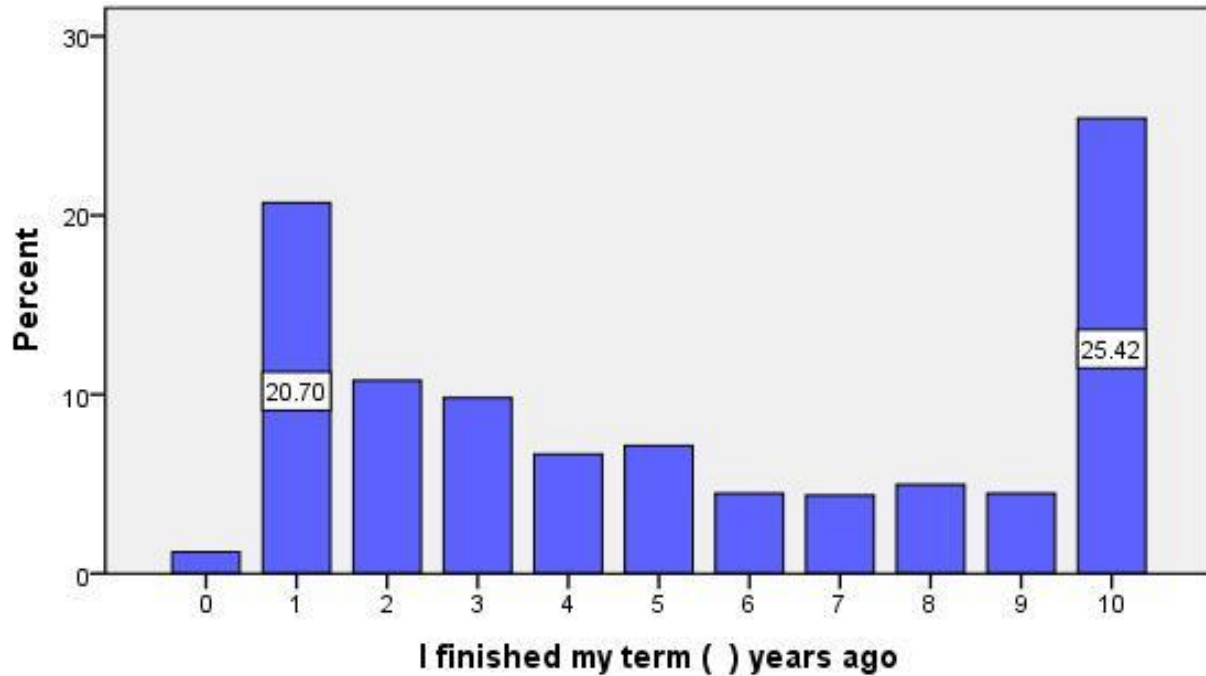


Figure #5 shows that more respondents finished their AmeriCorps service 10+ years ago (25.42%) or just a year ago (20.70%) than any other time. The years between one and ten represented between 4% and 10% each, with only a tiny fraction (1.2%) having completed their term less than a year ago. The fact that most respondents completed their AmeriCorps service five or more years ago provides increased validation to other elements of the survey which rely on longitudinal evidence, such as salary levels.

Figure 6. Percentile Distribution

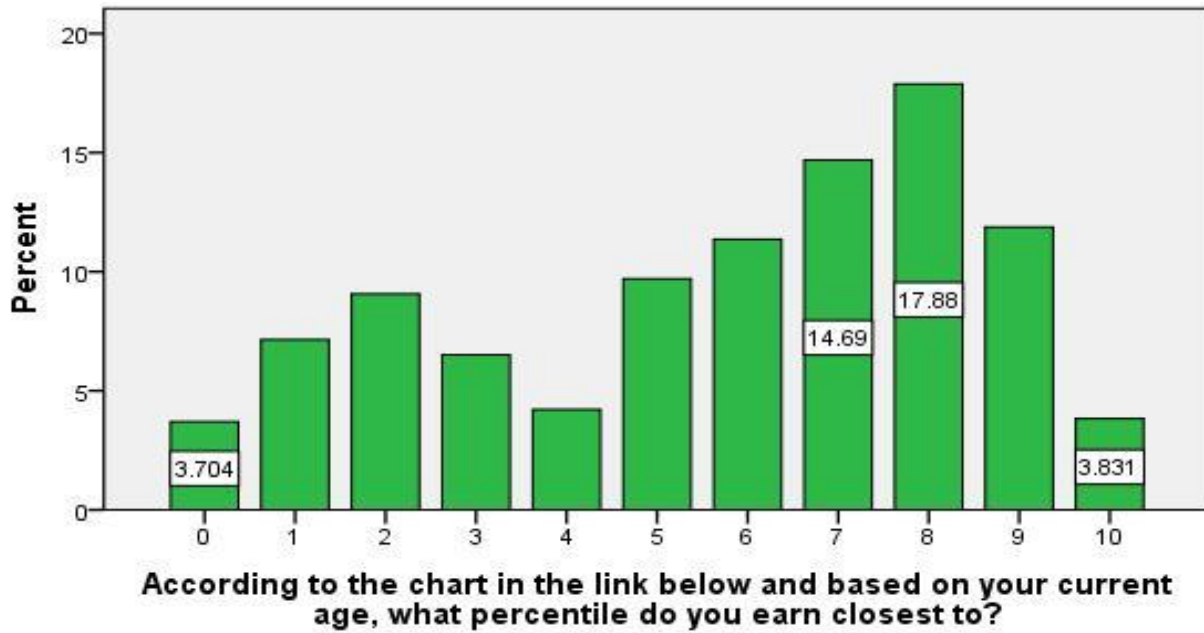


Figure #6 shows alumni responses to a question which was accompanied by the graph below, and which asked them to designate which percentile income bracket they earned closest to, based on their age. The general working population would therefore fill each percentile equally (at 10%), while the unemployed would be at 0. A plurality of respondents are in the 6<sup>th</sup> through ninth, indicating higher than average wages. It should be noted that several respondents used the additional information area to point out that they had recently become mothers and were not currently earning an income, and therefore unsure how to answer this question. Some of those respondents put zero, while others chose their earning level prior to maternity leave.

U.S. Total Money Income Distribution by Age, 2012

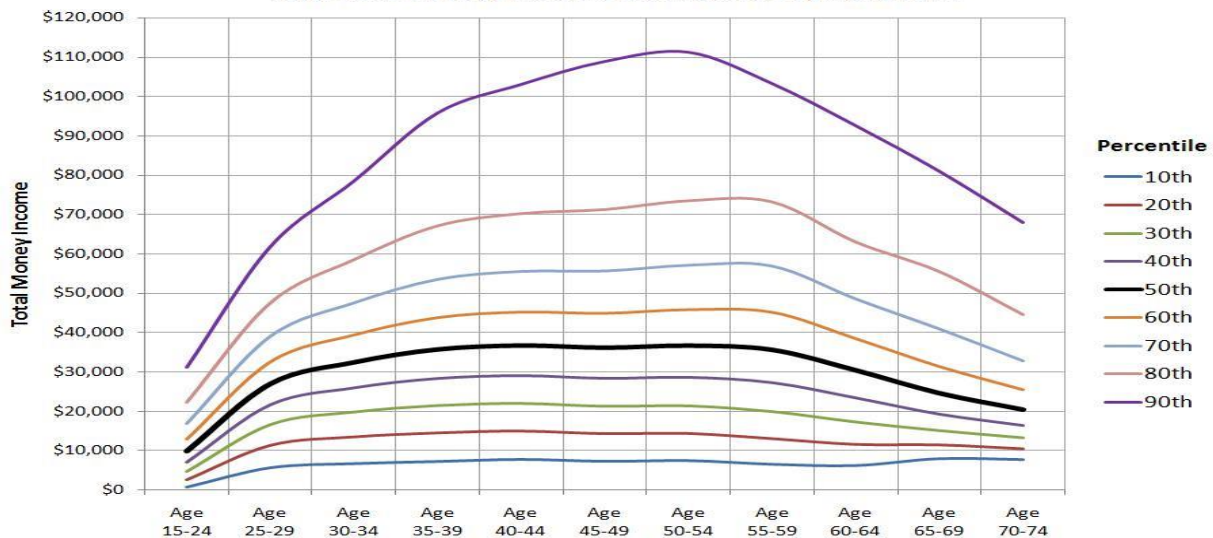


Figure 7. Income Background

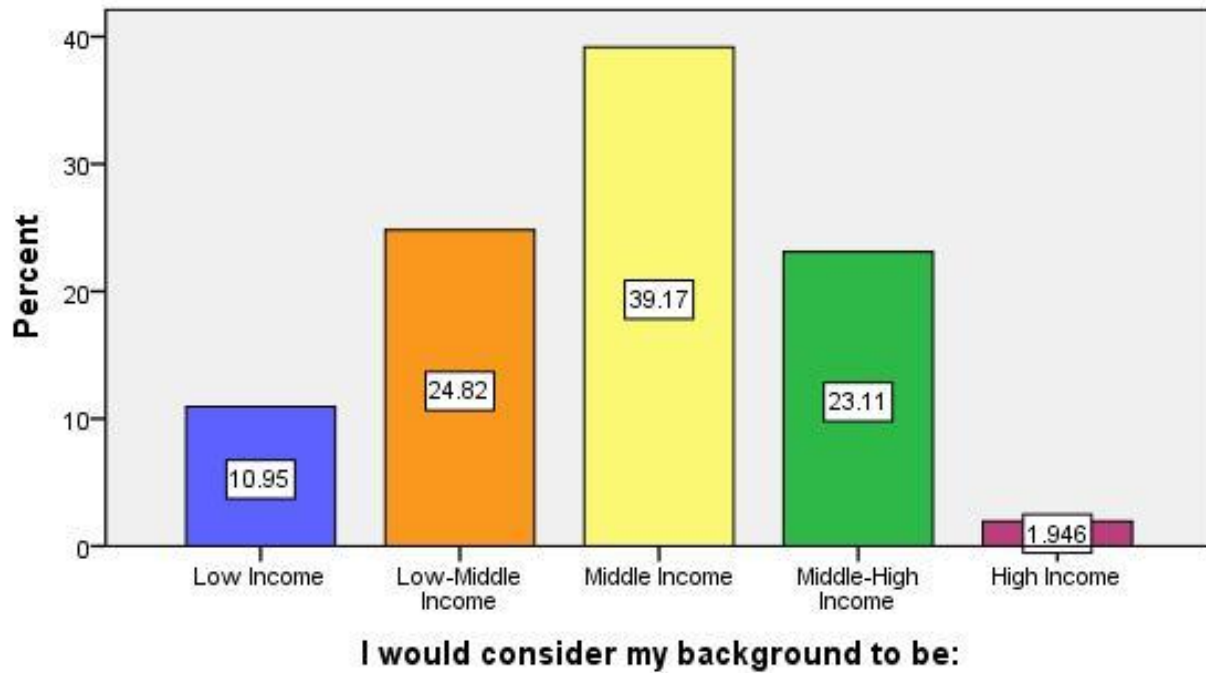


Figure 7 shows a near bell curve, with the majority stating that they came from a Middle Income background (39.17%), roughly an equal amount stating that they were Low-Middle or Middle-High, and with ~11% coming from Low Income backgrounds, and 2% from high income. While self-reported income level while growing up cannot be quantified as anything much more than a feeling the results do closely mirror responses to this question among the general US population.

*“My work-relevant network grew as a result of my AmeriCorps term of service.”*

Figure 8. Network Growth

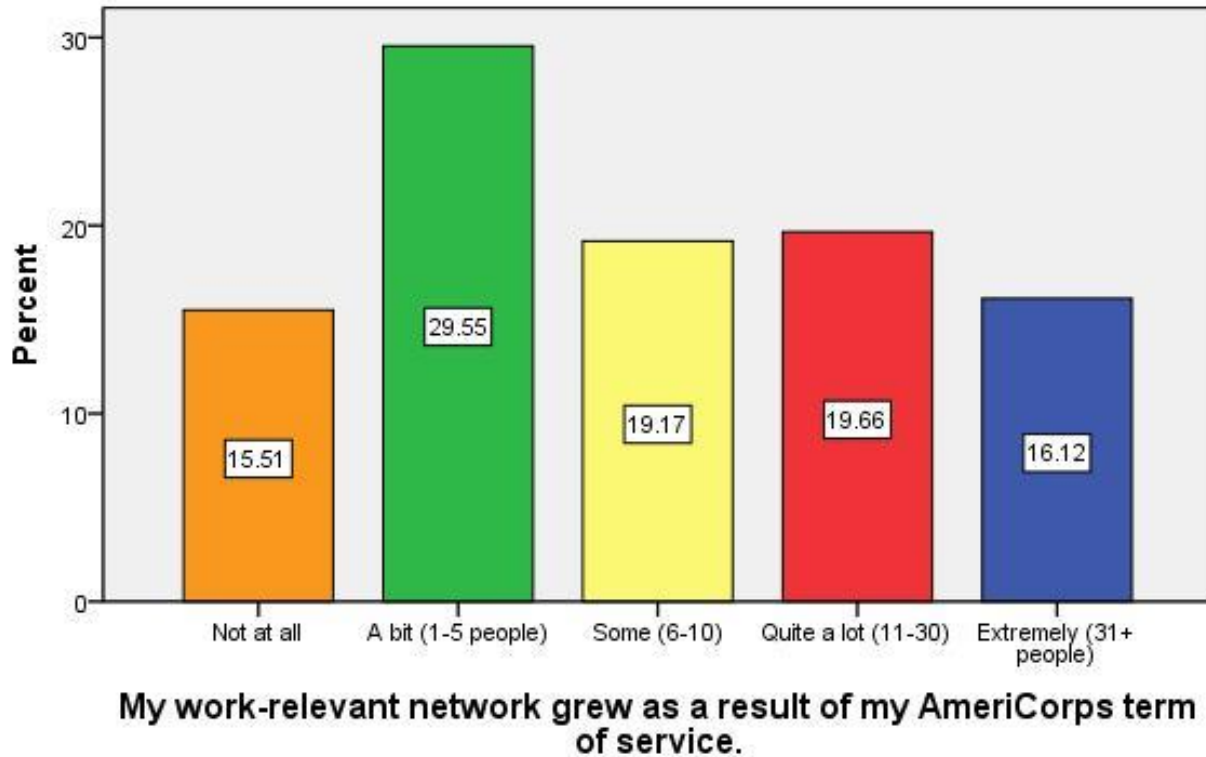


Figure 8 shows that most respondents had some degree of network growth, with only 15.51% stating that their “work relevant network did not grow at all. Out of the possible answers, a majority of respondents saw an increase in their network of 1-5 people (29.55%), but more than half of all respondents saw increases of between 6 and 30+ people. Research shows that larger and more “dense” networks lead to better job outcomes, which might help explain the fact that a majority of alumni in this survey were the beneficiaries of higher than average incomes.

*“I significantly strengthened the following skills as a result of my service:*

Figure 9. Skills strengthened

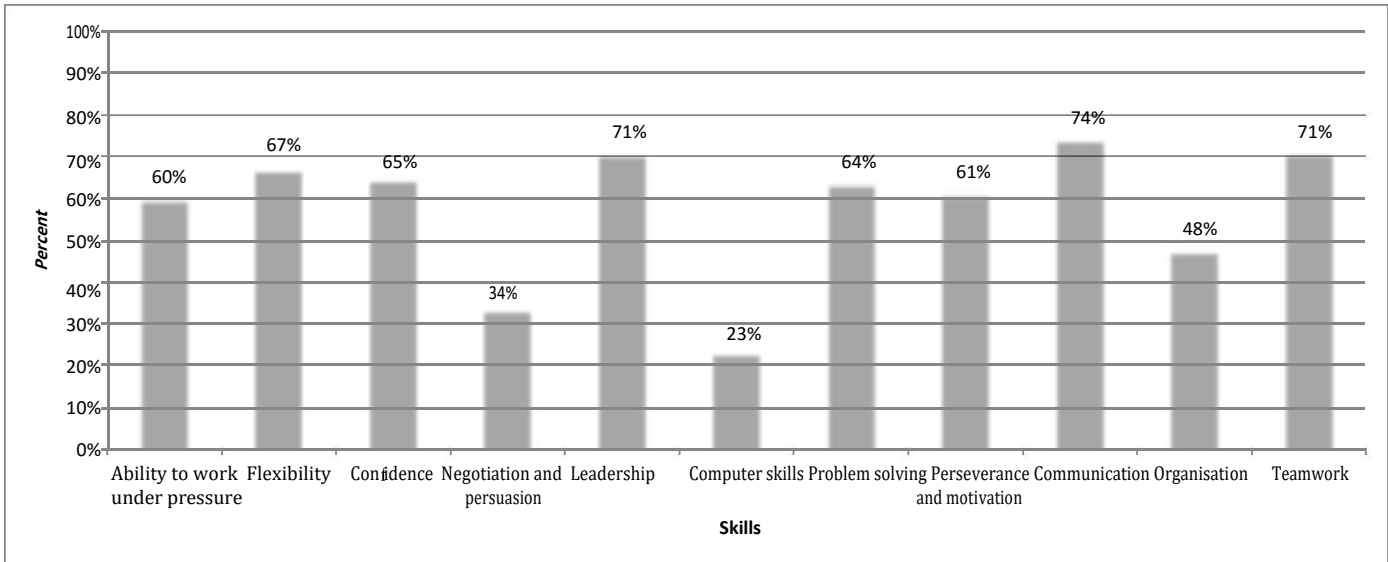


Figure 9 (Note: The skills listed as options were taken from a 2012 study in the United States, which asked 1000 employers what skills they considered to be most important for their employees to possess. These were the top ten.) These responses shows that the three most improved skills were Communication (74%), Teamwork (71%), and Leadership (71%), with Flexibility (67%), and Confidence (65%) following just behind. Skills which were strengthened by a minority of members were Organization (48%), Negotiation and Persuasion (34%), and Computer Skills (23%). The vast majority of respondents (97%) reported that they had strengthened at least 3 skills.

Table 1. Multiple Response Cross Tabulation of Skills strengthened and time served in Americorps

Skills	I served for ( ) in AmeriCorps										Total	
	1-3 months	3-9 months	9-12 months	one year		two+ years						
	f%	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	
Ability to work under pressure	5	1.04	1 2.07	12 25.05	13 26.92	21 44.93	48 100.00					
			%0%1	%	0 %	7 %	3 %					
Flexibility	5	0.93	1 1.86	13 24.12	16 30.06	23 43.04	53 100.00					
		%	0	%0	%	2 %	2 %	9 %				
Confidence	5	0.96	1 1.92	11 21.54	16 31.92	22 43.65	52 100.00					
			%0%2	%	6 %	7 %	0 %					
Negotiation and persuasion	2	0.74	6 2.22	63 23.33	77 28.52	12 45.19	27 100.00					
		%	%	%	%	2 %	0 %					
Leadership	3	0.53	1 1.93	11 20.70	17 30.88	26 45.96	57 100.00					
			%1%8	%	6 %	2 %	0 %					
Computer skills	0	0.00	5 2.66	31 16.49	70 37.23	82 43.62	18 100.00					
		%	%	%	%	%	8 %					
Problem solving	4	0.78	8 1.56	11 23.24	15 29.69	22 44.73	51 100.00					
		%	%	9 %	2 %	9 %	2 %					
Perseverance and motivation	6	1.22	8 1.62	11 23.53	14 29.01	22 44.62	49 100.00					
		%	%	6 %	3 %	0 %	3 %					

Communication	5	0.84 %	1 1	1.84 %	13 9	23.28 %	19 1	31.99 %	25 1	42.04 %	59 7	100.00 %
Organization	3	0.78 %	6	1.57 %	20.37 78	13 %	33.94 0	16 %	43.34 6	38 %	100.00 3	100.00 %
Teamwork	5	0.87 %	1 3	2.27 %	14 6	25.52 %	16 0	27.97 %	24 8	43.36 %	57 2	100.00 %
Total	7	0.87	1	2.11	17	22.26	27	34.45	32	40.30	80	100.00
				%7%	9	%	7	%	4	%	4	%

Chi-square = 186.354, df = 44, p-value = 0.000

Chi-square results show that there is an association between the skills and the length of time served in AmeriCorps, and that the increased length of service was correlated in every skillset with higher reported strengthening.



Table 2. Multiple Response Cross Tabulation of Skills strengthened and experience in Americorps

Reflecting on my overall Americorps experience, I consider the experience to have been:												
Skills	Extremely valuable		Very valuable		Valuable		Slightly valuable		Not valuable		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Ability to work under pressure	30	63.35	11	23.40	52	10.77	1	2.28	0	0.21	48	100.00
	6	%	3	%		%	1	%	1	%	3	%
Flexibility	31	59.00	14	26.53	63	11.69	1	2.78	0	0.00	53	100.00
	8	%	3	%		%	5	%	0	%	9	%
Confidence	32	63.08	13	25.19	51	9.81	1	1.92	0	0.00	52	100.00
	8	%	1	%		%	0	%	0	%	0	%
Negotiation and persuasion	17	65.19	59	21.85	30	11.11	5	1.85	0	0.00	27	100.00
	6	%		%		%		%	0	%	0	%
Leadership	35	61.93	13	24.04	71	12.46	9	1.58	0	0.00	57	100.00
	3	%	7	%		%		%	0	%	0	%
Computer skills	12	63.83	42	22.34	21	11.17	5	2.66	0	0.00	18	100.00
	0	%		%		%		%	0	%	8	%
Problem solving	32	62.70	13	25.39	52	10.16	9	1.76	0	0.00	51	100.00
	1	%	0	%		%		%	0	%	2	%
Perseverance and motivation	31	63.89	11	23.94	46	9.33	1	2.84	0	0.00	49	100.00
	5	%	8	%		%	4	%	0	%	3	%

Communication	35	59.46	15	25.80	73	12.23	1	2.51	0.00	59	100.00
	5	%	4	%		%	5	%	0	7	%
Organization	25	65.80	81	21.15	40	10.44	1	2.61	0.00	38	100.00
	2	%		%		%	0	%	0	3	%
Teamwork	35	61.89	14	24.83	68	11.89	8	1.40	0.00	57	100.00
	4	%	2	%		%		%	0	2	%
Total	44	54.73	20	25.62	13	16.17	2	3.36	0.12	80	100.00
	0	%	6	%	0	%7%			1	%4	%

Chi-square = 495.591, df = 44, p-value = 0.000

Chi-square results show that there is an association between skill accrual and experience in Americorps, and that the experience was listed as more valuable by those who reported more heightened strengthening of skills. It is highly significant and in every skill area a report of having engages in an “extremely valuable” experience was more than twice as likely tied to the acquisition of a skill than those who found their experience “very valuable”, more than four times more likely than those who found it “valuable”, and more than 20 times for those who found it “slightly valuable”.

Table 3. Cross Tabulation of perceived background income to current Percentile Income

I would consider my background to be:	Percentile Income										Total	
	10th to 20th Percentile		30th to 40th Percentile		50th to 60th Percentile		70th to 80th Percentile		90th Percentile			
	f	%	f	%	%	%	f	%	%	%	f	%
Low Income	23	29.11%	14	17.72%	13	16.46%	18	22.78%	11	13.92%	79	100.00%
Low-Middle Income	41	22.16%	22	11.89%	49	26.49%	55	29.73%	18	9.73%	185	100.00%
Middle Income	36	12.00%	31	10.33%	73	24.33%	116	38.67%	44	14.67%	300	100.00%
Middle-High Income	26	15.03%	16	9.25%	27	15.61%	61	35.26%	43	24.86%	173	100.00%
High Income	1	6.25%	0	0.00%	3	18.75%	5	31.25%	7	43.75%	16	100.00%
Total	127	16.87%	83	11.02%	165	21.91%	255	33.86%	123	16.33%	753	100.00%

Chi-square = 55.071, df = 16, p-value = 0.000

Table 3 shows social mobility for alumni, with all categories of respondents experiencing significant levels of upward mobility. This area is of particular interest because it does the best job of determining, in relation to those with a similar background, whether participation in the program has some positive benefit on long-term economic outcomes. While it could be argued that more ambitious individuals or those with more support to overcome low income backgrounds end up participating in

AmeriCorps, there is no evidence for that, and it is generally not viewed as a way to overcome disadvantages perhaps most so because of the meager wage which it pays in relation to other opportunities. While this cannot be claimed conclusively, the fact that there are also significant boosts for middle income individuals (who view the experience more as a year of service to others, rather than as an alternative to unemployment), with more than 40% ending up in middle-high or high income brackets, provides additional indication that program participation is correlated directly with at least a portion of these results.

### **Economic Mobility**

Upwards economic mobility was shown in the survey to be strong among AmeriCorps Alumnus, but these results are only relevant in relation to a comparison group. The United States generally scores well regarding the percentage of individuals who are able to surpass the level of income of their parents, however this varies by group (Bridgeland, 2012).

*The data show that when the population is divided in fifths, the middle three groups of the income distribution are fairly mobile. For this middle group, where one is born in the distribution does not determine where one will end up. But for those born in the bottom or the top fifth, mobility is much more constricted, suggesting that birth circumstances play more of a role in lifetime outcomes. In the last 20 years, the probability that an individual would leave the bottom quintile was 30 percentage points higher for those with more than a high school diploma compared to those who never graduated, making education the most significant driver of upward intergenerational mobility. The community where one lives—and the social networks that come with that community—can have both a positive and negative influence on one's economic mobility."*

*(Pew Trust, US Intergenerational Economic Mobility 1984 to 2004)*

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To compute mobility, individuals are generally categorized into five income brackets, based on their position in the national income distribution and quantified by comparing income rank as a child (general average of parent's income from birth to age 15) to income rank as an adult (generally the average of income from age 36-40) (Fields, 1999). While it was not possible to acquire data from the survey which was exact since childhood income was based on self-reporting, or to acquire equivalent age ranges for measurement of adult

income, both measurements were taken and were split into quintile ranges. In all instances, except for those who started in the highest initial bracket, there were found to be significant upward mobility trends in comparison to the average. These were most profound for those who started in low income and low-middle income brackets. More than 50% of those who began in the low income bracket ended up earning in the 50<sup>th</sup>+ percentile as adults, and over 65% of low-middle income individuals.

While these results require much more study and validation, the initial trends and correlations look very promising in an area which has proven to be one of the most significant challenges for government to overcome (Isaacs, 2008).

### **Qualitative Feedback**

#### **Please describe your experience finding a job after completing AmeriCorps**

The vast majority of respondents said they were able to find work within 3 months of completing their terms, or that they continued their education (either bachelors or master's degree). Some stated that there was not enough support for the transition or help with using non-competitive eligibility (one of the benefits of service, which allows alumni to be hired into government jobs without the need for the hiring agency to proceed with the same level of rigor to identify them as a better match than any other applicant).

*There was not a lot of support in helping me find a job after Americorps. I believe exiting Americorps should go through an exit interview a couple months before the end of their service and the regional office provide them with information on how to properly use usajobs.gov to find a job. I would have like to have used my non-competitive eligibility but usajobs.gov is very difficult to navigate and understand.*

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#### **Employers Value My Service**

Relatively few respondents stated that employers gave value to their term of service, while most said that their future employers were not aware of the program, and that it needed to be explained. Those who continued with nonprofits stated a higher level of employer value, most likely tied to a higher level of recognition.

*“Value was based on the skills I learned AND the fact that I showed my commitment to service. As previously stated, my employer has a lot of*

*AmeriCorps, and it is great to work with and partner with current AmeriCorps, as an alum. "*

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**If you returned to school, was there any indication that value was placed on the fact that you served in AmeriCorps? If so, please elaborate.**

Those who went on to pursue a Bachelor's or Master's degree generally found that their experience in AmeriCorps helped them participate and provide more real-life feedback in classes than their peers who had not served. The majority of those who remarked on the application process and who had some way of gauging (such as through an interview which questioned them about it) stated that the experience helped them gain acceptance to the program which they ended up completing.

*After my AmeriCorps term of service, I went to graduate school for nonprofit management. There was a sense of being treated as a "leader," in this major because of my experiences... I would say my employer after graduate school was more impressed with my AmeriCorps term of service, than my graduate school. My employer hosts several AmeriCorps members, and it's a great opportunity for past AmeriCorps to meet and work with current AmeriCorps.*

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*I have a greater knowledge base in my classes because of AmeriCorps. I am able to use my skills and knowledge to contribute to discussions.*

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*It was something that set me apart from my peers. I had more life experience than many of those in my classes.*

*I was given a full scholarship for an MBA because of my volunteer experience.*

*When I apply for PhD program 10 years later, the fact that I had done AmeriCorps was seen as very favorable during the application process. I was accepted at every school I applied to, and when I started at the University of Michigan, in my introduction email the head of the doctoral program introduced me to the rest of my cohort by saying that I was this, that, and a former AmeriCorps volunteer.*

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## **Additional Comments**

I the section for additional comments there were a variety of responses, which primarily focused on life changing experiences, or problems which they hoped would be solved to make the program more effective for others. The problems tended to focus on transition periods after completion of the AmeriCorps term. There was also general feedback that AmeriCorps wasn't well known outside of the nonprofit sector, and sometimes even within it, and that the skills learned and job experience carried more weight than the fact that they had been a part of the program.

*"It was a little bit of a difficult adjustment after the program ended. I had really high expectations of potential jobs and they seemed to fall flat in their descriptions, or I didn't have the right experience for them. I think things may have changed a bit since the program is a bit more well known now. I ended up going back into the field I was in before I joined AmeriCorps."*

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*"I never planned for what happened to me in AmeriCorp, I wouldn't change it for the world. I thought I'd just be going back to the job I'd had that had just ended (my service was with the non-profit I'd been working for the prior 6 months), but it wasn't. It was so much more that I wasn't prepared for..... It was unlike any experience I'd had previously and I'm very glad that situations pushed me to do it." "Being an AmeriCorps VISTA has been a defining experience of my life and I continue to build on things I learned then in my career now."*

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*"Very easy, I found many jobs in my field due to my AmeriCorps experience. However I don't believe having served in AmeriCorps helped initially to get me the job i.e. I believe employers didn't look into the AmeriCorps positions just the skills."*

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## Case Study: Germany's Bundesfreiwilligendienst program

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In the last twenty years at least fifteen nations have instituted national voluntary service programs, either built from the ground up, or transitioned from previous forms of required service, usually military. Almost just as many countries are currently exploring the possibility of creating such a platform (Haß, Serrano-Velarde and Rabea, 2010). When countries have looked to existing models when building their own, they have primarily looked at the AmeriCorps program in the United States, and what is now called the Bundesfreiwilligendienst program in Germany. This latter program transitioned in 2011 from being an alternative to required military service, to the post “draft” system which is now structurally similar to AmeriCorps. While it is very early to determine whether this new era of Germany’s program is effective from the employability or education perspective, *Manufacturing Civil Society: Principles, Practices and Effects* which looks at

Germany’s transition from mandated army service to volunteer civil service participation finds initial positives. The program was slow in starting but grew quickly to the point that now there are more people wanting positions than positions available.

While the new version of this program is difficult to gauge, the previous one received quite a lot of analysis and was credited in part with the very low incidence of youth unemployment in Germany in comparison to other countries (Burk, 1992). This was tied both to the fact that participants gained skills, had experiences which allowed them to better choose whether further education was necessary and if so in what field they wanted to end up, and created networks of job contacts. In *New Challenges for the Cooperation between Civil Society and the Public Sector: The National Voluntary Service in Germany*, Beller and his colleagues find that while there are some hiccups that come with transitioning such a program, initial data seems to show that it is accomplishing everything that it was before, and sometimes even more as outcomes are more beneficial for those who voluntarily opt in, rather than in the previous system which mandated participation.

I interviewed administrators of the Bundesfreiwilligendienst program in Germany on the national, regional and local levels, who expressed their initial surprise in the amount of participants which signed up for the program once it became voluntary rather than required a few years ago. Initially there had been a significant budget for advertising the program, however this budget has now been cut to zero as the number of interested



participants soon passed the number of available spots. Currently there are more than 4 interested citizens for every open spot. Along these lines they also theorized that the quality of service given by program participants was likely of a higher caliber because of increased desire, and that the graduates of the programs were being regarded in a better light now because of the competition they faced in accessing a position initially.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

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Providing young people with more structured pathways into work could help lower youth-unemployment levels as well as assure that there is a stronger correlation between skill and education accrual and actual need. This would be the case especially during periods of economic downturn. They would also provide governments with a very easy and relatively cheap means of addressing maintaining the value of educational investment, by ensuring skill and network building for those who graduate in difficult economic times where traditional means of achieving these things, namely through employment, are scarce. The externality of increased support for civil society at a time when they are likely more in need of social support, and when the services they provide are more called upon, is a further benefit.

There is a lack of support for program participants on the regional level during their service, and almost no support after they complete their programs. The lack of established forms of assistance, especially in a national volunteer's transition from service to mainstream work misses a huge opportunity for the government to ensure that the benefits from service are realized and that they translate to the kind of lifestyle and lifelong outcomes which ensure the program ends up being cost effective for the government.

That being said, countries must do a much better job of tracking longitudinal program outcomes, through continued engagement by tracking the progress of alumni. Without this information they cannot justify their program's expenditures, other than by stating the number of people who came into contact with the program, which is the current state of things in many areas. Because of this, programs are also not able to identify which measures are working or distinguish them from ideas which are having few or even negative effects. The good news is that both the United States and European Union seem

to be on a path towards maintaining and disseminating better data, but the program must become more rigorous.

There are good ideas in progressive sub-programs which could be easily spread, however there is no codified or systematic way for best practices to be shared in a way which actually leads to quick adoption of beneficial structures. Setting up systems which track feedback and sharing this would provide opportunities for the entire institutions of AmeriCorps and Erasmus+ to increase the strength of their offerings. Beyond this, a regular meeting of top officials in all countries which run formalized volunteer programs would provide opportunities for cross-country improvements.

Programs do not do a good job of assisting the young and relatively inexperienced participants in finding placements which will be a good fit for their experience, goals, and based on their reasons for serving. This is especially the case with the Erasmus+ program, where interested parties do not have access to a centralized database which lists all opportunities and provides application information. This could be easily accomplished by developing more intuitive websites and by providing program literature which speaks to the audience which will most benefit from these programs.

There is limited government oversight of hosting sites, which leads to haphazard levels of quality as regards the benefits which participants depart with

## Recommendations for Future Research |

Of course further research and justifications for program expenditure generally would be greatly helped by more systematic tracking of factors related to the life progress of alumni of these programs. Still, there are many areas which could benefit from further study of the outcomes related to formalized volunteerism programs which do not require additional data (Brudney, 1992). Primary examples are independent analysis of the data collected by both AmeriCorps and Erasmus + program research which if not immediately available, could be obtained through a Freedom of Information request, or something along those lines. There is also need to look more into social mobility connected to established data, as initial feedback from this study showed quite strong signs of a connection and stickiness in the area, which a notoriously difficult area for governments to address, and an increasingly important one as discord grows surrounding at least the perception of a growing class divide.

The research which still needs to be carried out, ideally by third parties to ensure objectivity, is expansive but primarily would focus on new initiatives which are being launched by AmeriCorps and Erasmus+ to see if they are actually translating into better results; gathering representative and significantly large groups of participants who are tracked from the time of their applications all the way through several years (15-30) after the completion of their terms, to see how different aspects of their backgrounds and program experience translate into benefits in the medium to long term. With access to such data it might finally be possible to justify the existence of (or need to tweak the programs).

Based on the research which was examined as well as on the results from the survey that was conducted as part of this dissertation, this paper closed with the following thoughts and policy suggestions. No all elements were able to be covered in detail in the paper, given spacing regulations, however each is backed by detailed analysis. In no particular order:

- Formalized government sponsored volunteer programs provide a variety of benefits to society, specifically by supporting civil society organizations that

deliver services which are complementary to those of the government, by assisting individuals with immediate employment as well as long-term employability benefits, as well as providing direct stimulus to the economy. Having such programs in place makes economic sense in most developed economies, and having such a program running in a way that can quickly be scaled up during difficult economic times provides a relatively cheap employment building measure which helps avoid youth unemployment and its many negative outcomes. In the EU especially such a program might help relieve problems in difficult economic circumstances which result in the unemployed in weaker countries spilling over and effecting the whole EU. In order to achieve the benefit of this however the EU would need to build their program, and provide the option for participants to service in their own country.

- More resources should be put into matching applicants with tracks which enhance their studies or provide them with skills which are relevant to their future working plans.
- There is a need for better tracking of all programs, especially longitudinal tracking of Alumni. Simple and inexpensive programs which rely on automated surveys emailed to past participants could result in impactful data, while not requiring a lot of investment or overhead.
- There should be more focus on the transition period from provision of support to program graduates. One idea is to provide two months of salary following program completion to assist in keeping participants who have just lived for a period on a poverty level wage, and probably don't have a lot of savings, off of public services (Brown, 1999). More analysis would need to be done, but "Only a third of alums (32%) – and just 30 percent of respondents from the class of 2013 (n=834) – strongly agree that upon finishing their service, they knew how to navigate "life after AmeriCorps" (e.g. find jobs, get into schools of their choice)."
- In the EU more research should be done on the benefits of having domestic voluntary program infrastructure in place in the lead up to tough economic times, so that there is less migration of jobless people, limiting the spillover effects of those countries with the worst economies. *How can you apply to European Voluntary Service?*

- Applying to the EU program is currently very complicated for an individual.

Because of this, it's very difficult for a person who isn't very knowledgeable, proactive and motivated to get started in it. Recommendation would be to have a central database like in AmeriCorps or the German program, where you create a profile and can apply for opportunities.

- Nonprofits include organizations which deliver very specialized job skills, like hospitals, universities, etc. It would be beneficial to have sub-programs which are aimed at each of the sectors and which are beneficial for those who want to end up working in them.

## Appendix: Graphs and Figures

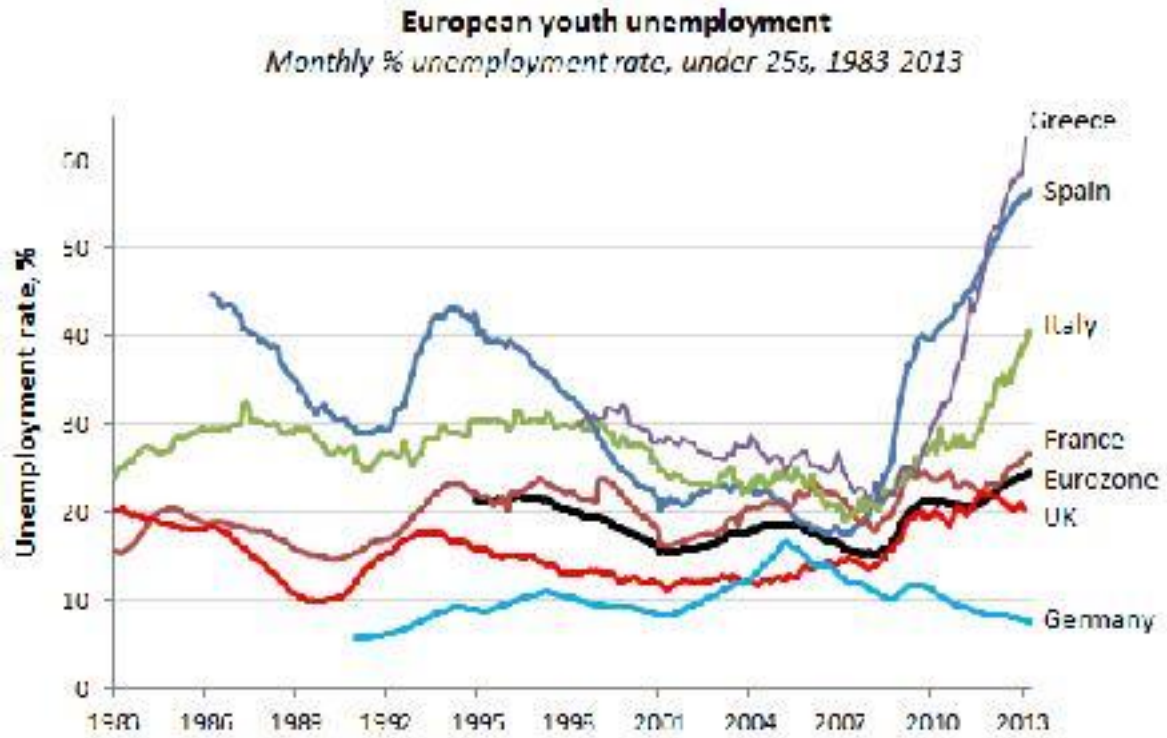


Figure 1

## Percent of Loan Balances Ninety Or More Days Delinquent

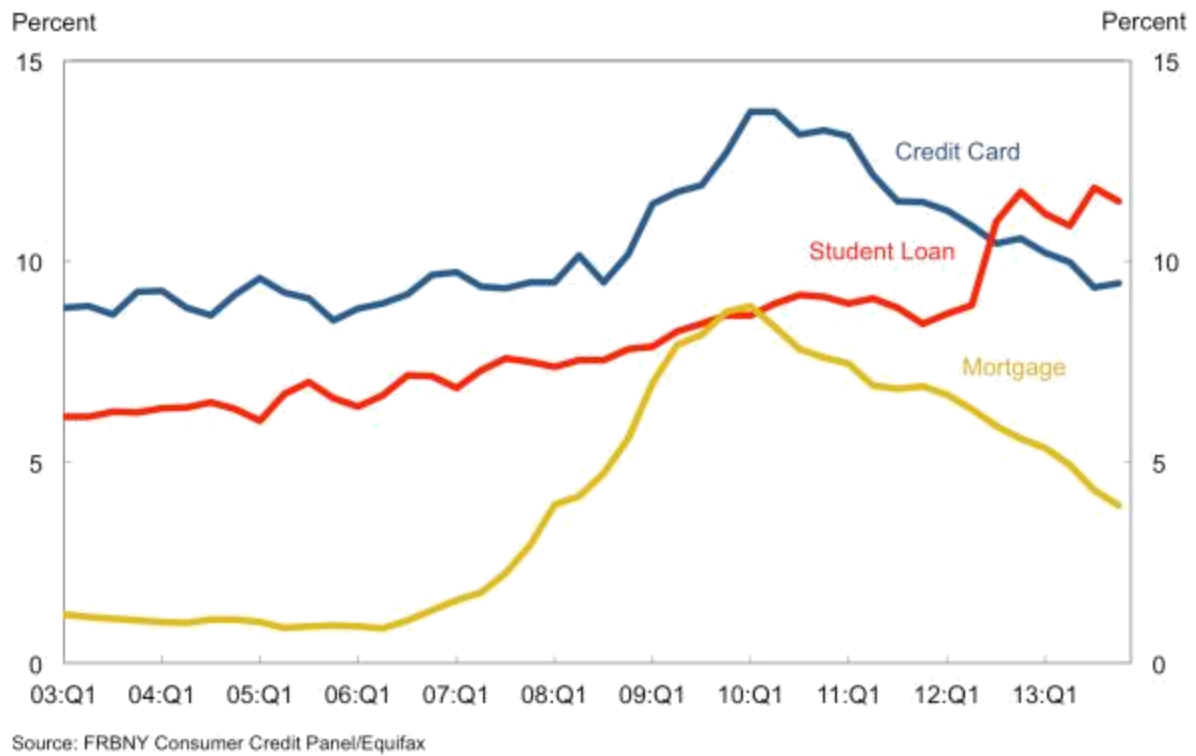
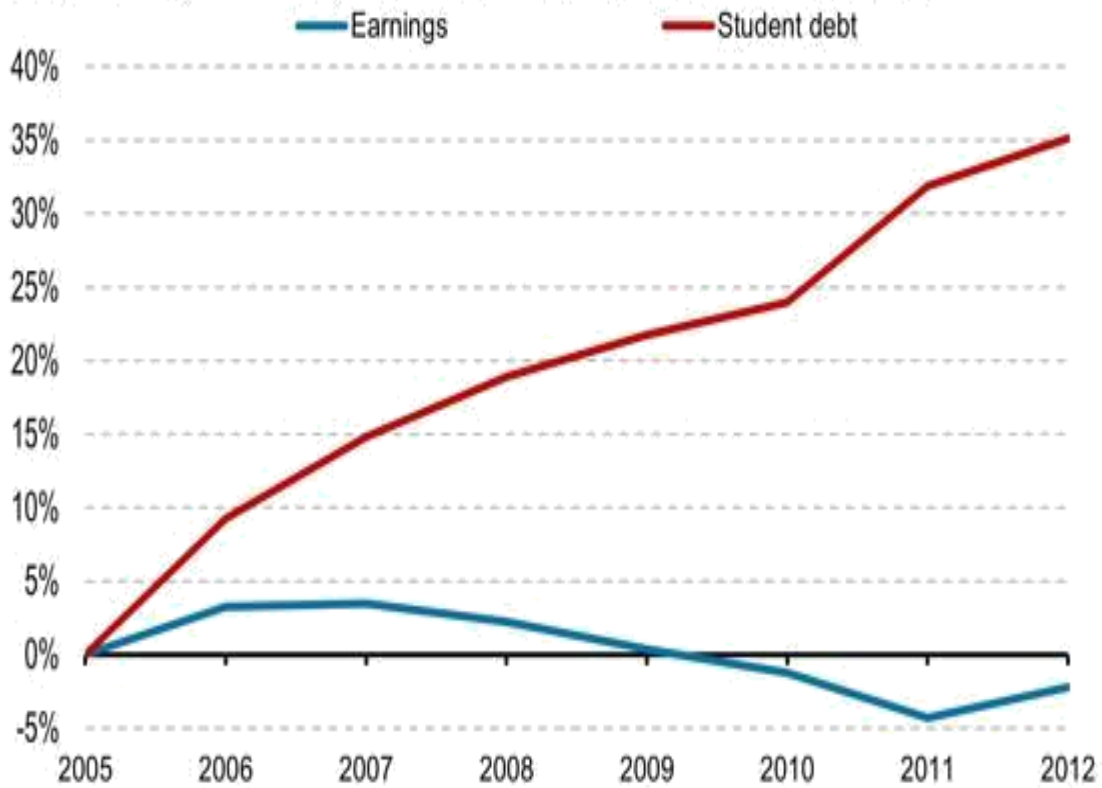


Figure 2

## What Young People Make and What They Owe

Percent change from 2005 in median annual earnings of people 25-34 years old holding just a bachelor's degree and average student loan balance for people under 30 years old.



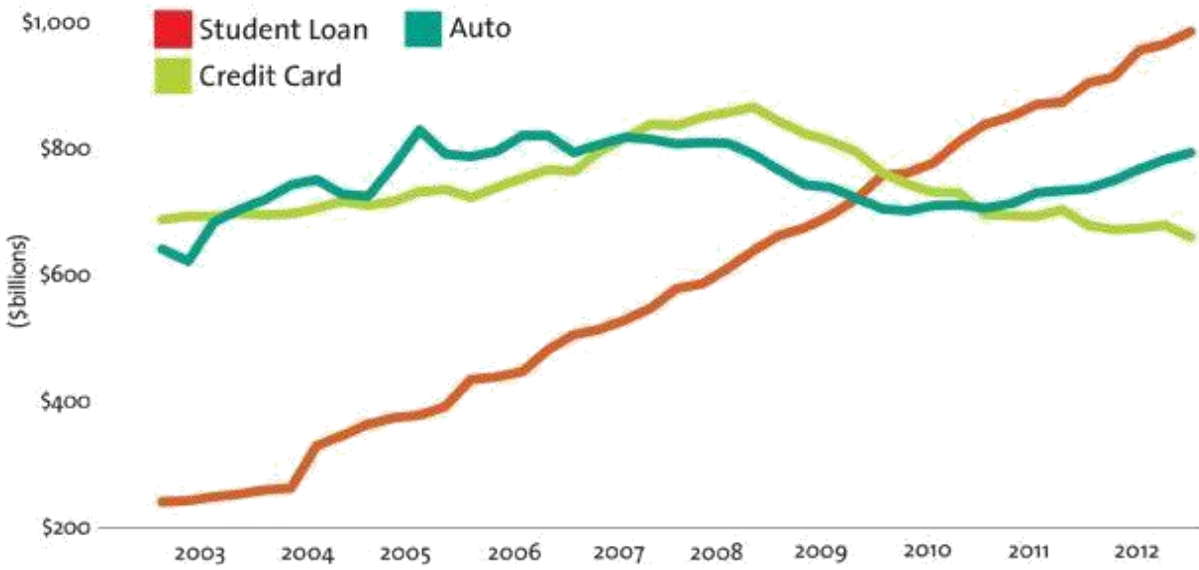
Source: National Center for Education Statistics (earnings); NY Fed (student debt) | WSJ.com

Figure 3



# Maxed Out

Total debt held by borrowers



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of New York

Mother Jones

Figure 4

Figure 5. Youth unemployment rates, 2008 and 2012 (second quarter, %)

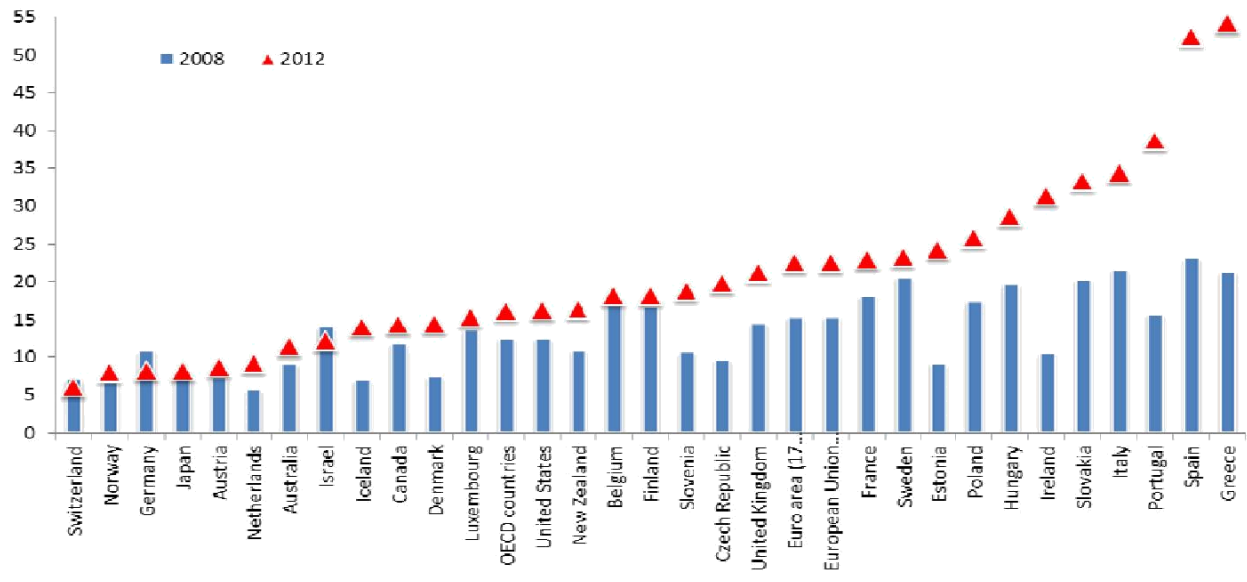


Figure 5

Education and relative mobility  
 % adult children in each income quintile from  
 bottom/top

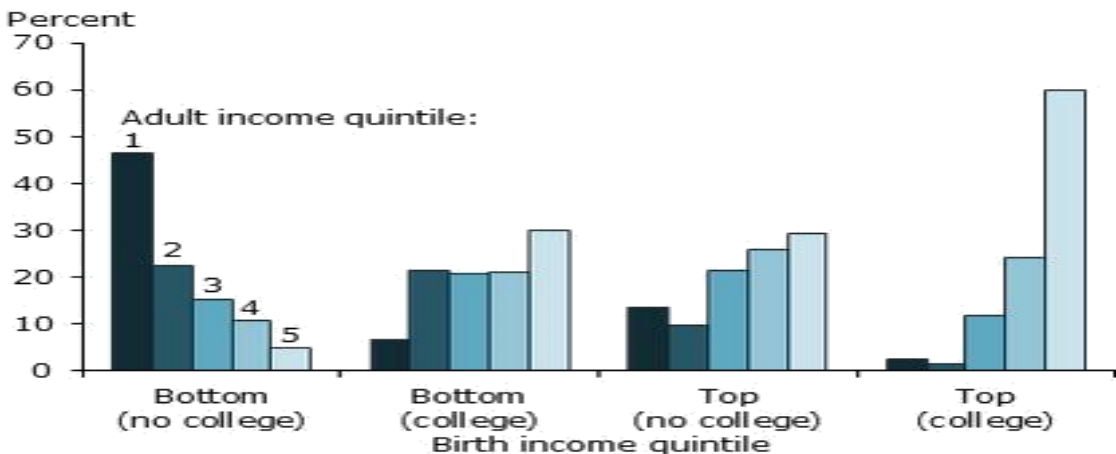
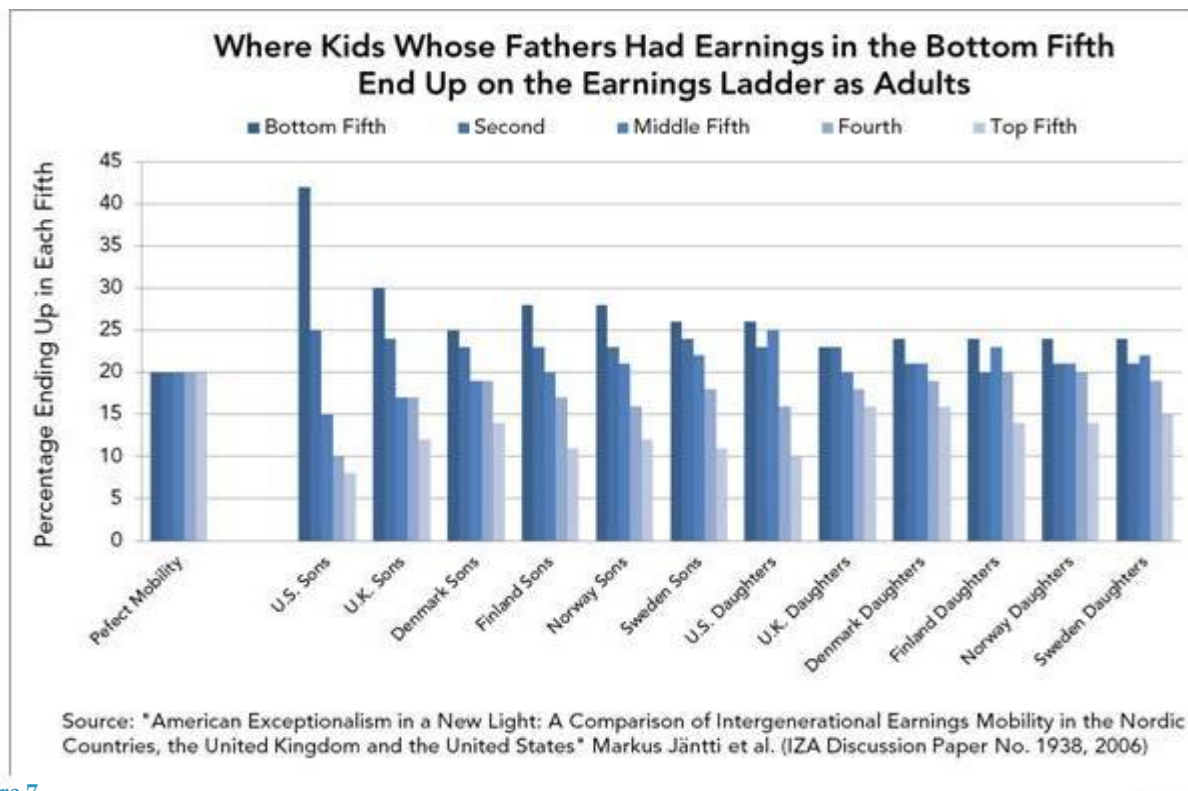


Figure 8

Source: PSID and authors' calculations.

Figure 6



Source: "American Exceptionalism in a New Light: A Comparison of Intergenerational Earnings Mobility in the Nordic Countries, the United Kingdom and the United States" Markus Jäntti et al. (IZA Discussion Paper No. 1938, 2006)

Figure 7

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