

**Community Engagement Scholars Program (CESP)
at the University of Minnesota**

At the University of Minnesota, the Community Engagement Scholars Program (CESP) works to encourage students to become actively involved in community activities, through off-campus experiential learning and place-based educational opportunities, and to be recognized for integrating community work into their educational experience. These experiences complement classroom learning, foster personal, professional and civic development, and allow students to work with others to enhance the well-being of their communities.

This program entails 400 hours of direct community service (with 120 hours directly tied to academic learning), 1 integrative community engagement capstone project that addresses a crucial community need, and six on-going reflection activities (ranging from topics of diversity to privilege to community building and collaboration). Reflection activities are designed to help students see how their academic experiences and community-based work are transforming their attitudes, assumptions, and perspectives, as well as how their service positively impacts their community. At the end of the program, students are asked to look back on their reflections in order to identify patterns and create meaning out of their diverse experiences and, ultimately, to gain a better understanding of what “service” means. All students at the University of Minnesota have the opportunity to participate in this program, if they attend an information session.

This study was conducted to assess the association of CESP participation (on the 2012 cohort) with academic outcomes by comparing the following variables at the end of students’ junior year (i.e. by Summer 2015):

- Cumulative GPAs
- Credits earned
- Enrollment by the end of each academic year (retention)

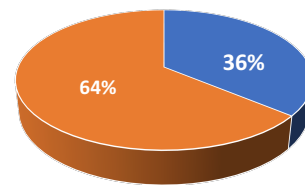
between

- the treatment group (students in the CESP 2012 cohort) and
- the comparison group (matched students in 2012 cohort who did not participate in CESP)

*PSM is used to create equivalent treatment and comparison groups.

- Underrepresented students (students of color, first-generation, and/or low-income)

Overall CESP 2012 Cohort (N= 242)



■ Underrepresented students ■ Non Underrepresented students

Sample (n= 182)

	CESP	Non-CESP *through PSM
All students	116	116
Underrepresented Students (UR)	66	66

	Mean (SD) Cumulative GPA [All Students]	Mean (SD) Cumulative GPA [UR]	Mean (SD) Credits Earned [All Students]	Mean (SD) Credits Earned [UR]	% Retention [All Students]	% Retention [UR]
CESP	3.48 (.37)	3.43 (.35)	147.66** (23.18)	152.33* (23.98)	93%*	89%
NON-CESP (Matched)	3.39 (.38)	3.37 (.34)	139.31 (21.47)	141.37 (19.86)	83%	81%

Note. * indicates significance, which is $p < .05$; ** indicates significance which is $p < .01$; Columns in orange - all students, columns in blue – underrepresented students.

In summary, by their junior year, CESP participants had earned more credits than NON-CESP participants. This finding also held for underrepresented students. CESP participants also had a significantly higher retention rate than those who did not participate in CESP. Additionally, CESP program participants, on average, had higher GPAs but this was not a statistically significant difference. Although we cannot say that CESP has a significant relationship with all of our outcomes of interest, 3 major outcomes (GPA, credits earned*, and retention*) are significant or favoring CESP participants. Therefore, CESP seems to be worthy of continued support, investigation/data collection, and offers some academic benefits to its student participants.

Acknowledgements

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