# Immersion Experiences & Social Responsibility:
Cultivating Development, Measuring Impact

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Developmental Transitions
Emerging Adulthood & University Life

- "Life Narratives"/"Story of Me" (McAdams, 2013)

  - *"…emerging adults aim to reconstruct the past and imagine the future in such a way as to provide their lives in full with ... meaning, unity, and purpose" (p. 280).*

- Sense of Purpose (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003)

  - *"Purpose is a part of one's personal search for meaning, but it also has an external component, the desire to make a difference in the world, to contribute to matters larger than the self" (p. 121)*

- Civic Identity: What's my place in the world? (Youniss & Yates, 1997)

  - *"Instead of being focused primarily on the question 'Who am I?' youth are concerned about the society they will inherit and have to describe how they can best relate to it" (p. 22).*
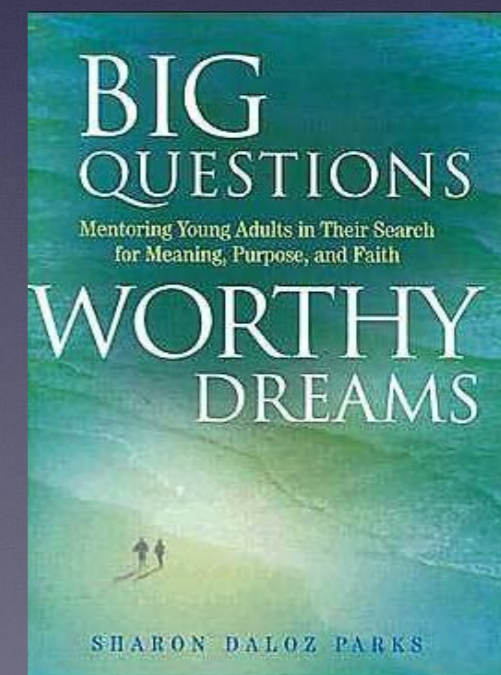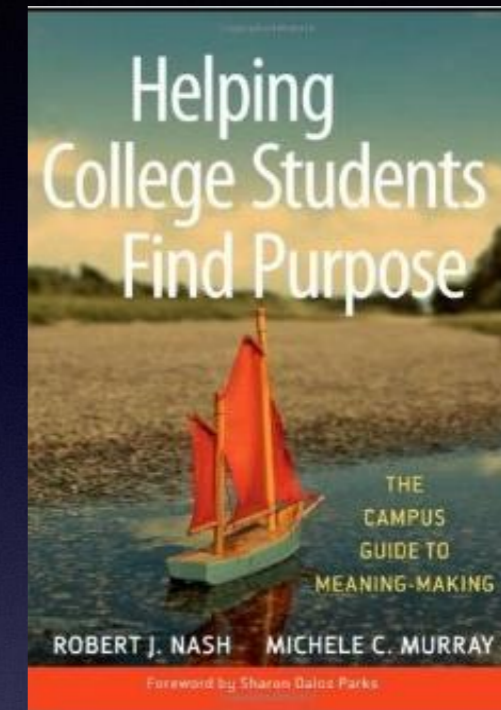
Stretching Comfort Zones
Crossing Borders

- College service and immersion experiences are intended to enrich the formational opportunities of emerging adults

  - Stretch beyond didactic ways of learning

  - Explore the world through experiential and emotional channels

Hart, Atkins, & Donnelly (2006, p. 644): "*Participation in community service provides a real-world context in which participants can explore moral questions, engage in moral discourse, perform moral actions, and reflect on complicated moral issues. It is for these reasons that community service has been extolled as a context for moral development (e.g., National Commission on Service-Learning, 2001).*"

From a Faith-Based Lens
Service and Immersion As A Meaning-Making Context

"When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change. Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer, is the catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection."
Fr. Kolvenbach, SJ (2000)

The Heart Feels What the Eyes See:
The Impact of Service-Immersion
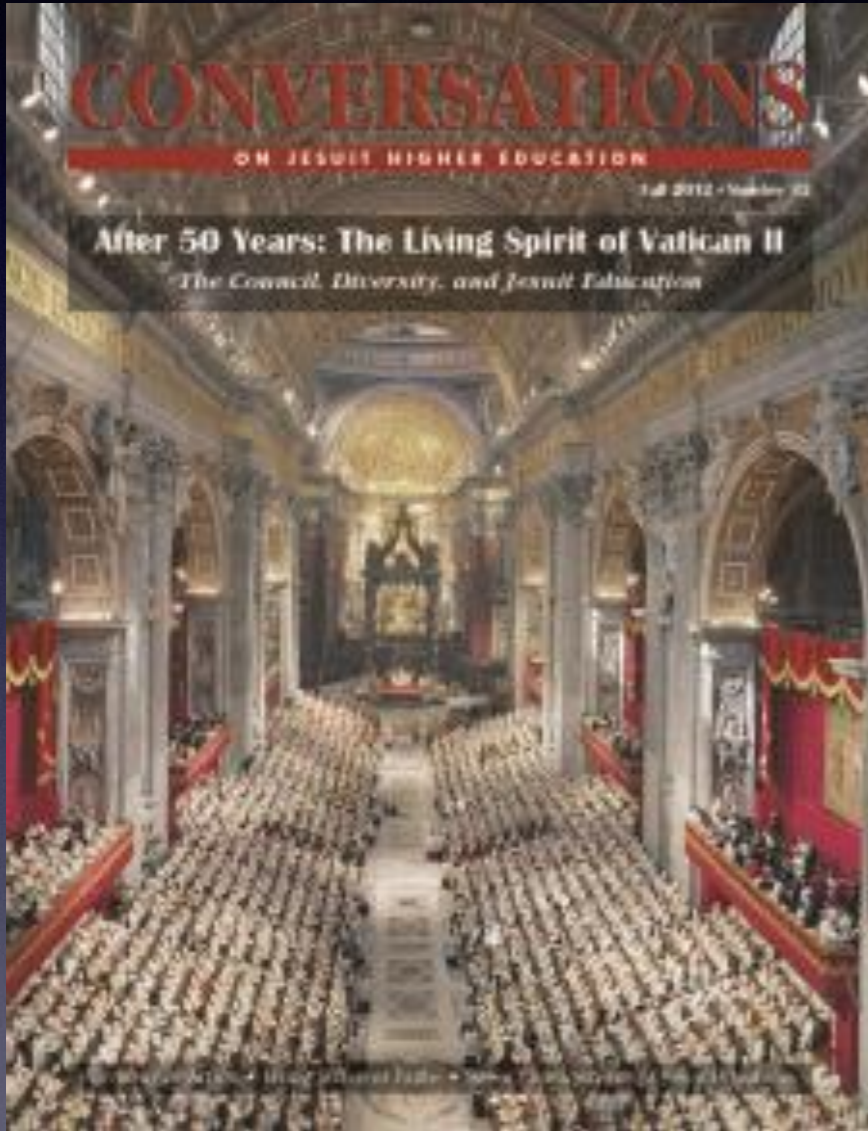
- John Savard, S.J. <u>Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education</u> (Fall 2012)
  - Surveyed 316 student participants pre/post immersion experience through 13 Campus Ministry offices across the USA; 7 variables were investigated: values, spirituality, compassion, social justice, cultural sensitivity, critical thinking, and sense of vocation.
  - Participants reported notable growth in their sense of compassion, spirituality, and social justice
- *"The power of immersion is rooted in the intense experience of full absorption of the lives of the poor and marginalized" (p. 50).*

Making-Meaning: The SLU Context
A Narrative Analysis of the Survey on Student Service (2010-2011)

- What conceptual lenses shape how volunteer experiences are interpreted?
- See J. Taylor (2002) Metaphors we serve by: Investigating the conceptual metaphors framing national and community service. Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 9(1), 45-57.
    - *"Service is war"* (e.g., war on poverty)

    - *"Service is business"* (e.g., Corps for Nat'l & Comm Service)

    - *"Service is border crossing"* (e.g., meeting the 'other')
        - See Hayes & Cuban (1997) Border crossing: A critical framework for service learning. Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 4(1), 72-80.

"Service is Border Crossing"

Learning outcomes = Identity awareness, multicultural competence and global understanding

Service involves crossing both real and figurative borders, being immersed in new experiences with people from different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds, and challenging individuals to move outside their comfort zones and learn more about their own and others' identities.

Examples

"It helps me to be more culturally aware and sensitive as I increase my understanding of these cultures."
"My own identity was strengthened and I believe multicultural diversity is really important."
"It opened my eyes to other people's lifestyles and allowed me to learn about their values and culture."

- 2,100 students responded to the annual campus-wide survey

- Four writing prompts, related to learning about 1) self, 2) others, 3) diversity, and 4) vocation

- 3,200 written remarks to code; 5 distinct metaphors emerged

  - Border Crossing, Career Preparation, Unselfish Action, Self-Awareness, Civic Responsibility

- 33.5 words (average for each response); "Border Crossing" was most elaborated (39.4 words)

Contemplatives-in-Action
The Importance of Formation and Follow-up Experiences

"…solidarity is learned through '**contact**' rather than '**concepts**'…"
(Fr. Kolvenbach, SJ, 2000)

Meaning-making experiences in service and immersion contexts give greater substance to otherwise abstract concepts, often through very personal and emotional channels

Immersion Participant's Reflection: *I was surprised by how little I knew. Going into each encounter I thought I knew the main message of pretty much every perspective we were going to hear. But actually seeing the emotional delivery really put a new meaning behind the words they were saying. This trip really helped me get in touch with a more compassionate side of myself….*

Formation and Guiding Principles

- Campus Ministry Immersion Trip Formation

- School of Education Formation Process

- Both heavily influenced by Fr. Kolvenbach, S.J.

  - "Solidarity is learned through contact rather than concepts"

  - Meetings, readings, and discussion before trip
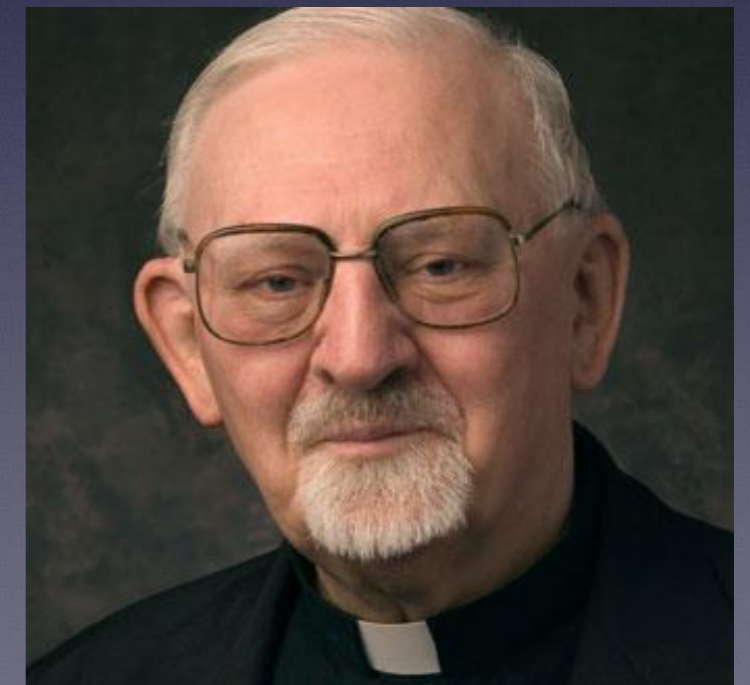
Formation
Creating Community, a Habit of Reflection, & Meaningful Learning Categories

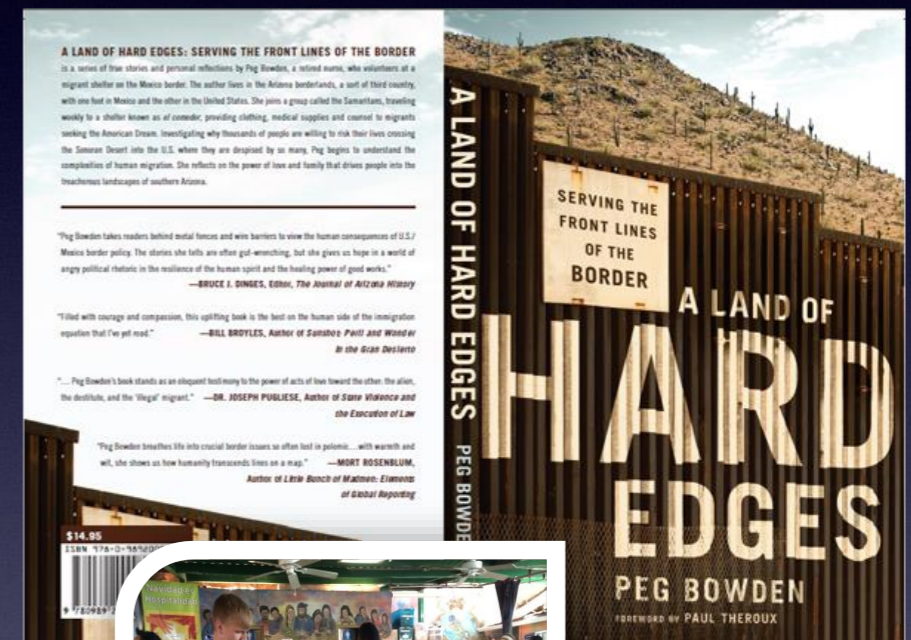- **Kino Border Initiative: Immersion at the US-Mexico Border**

  - Six meetings in the Spring Semester

  - 4 Pillars – Community, Spirituality, Justice, and Solidarity

  - Reflection and discussion of Peg Bowden's volunteer memoir

    - A collection of stories from her experiences at the "comedor" of KBI

- **St. Martin de Porres School: Immersion in Belize City**

  - Weekly classes for an hour in the Spring Semester

  - 3 guiding course topics

    - 1) Belize details and background

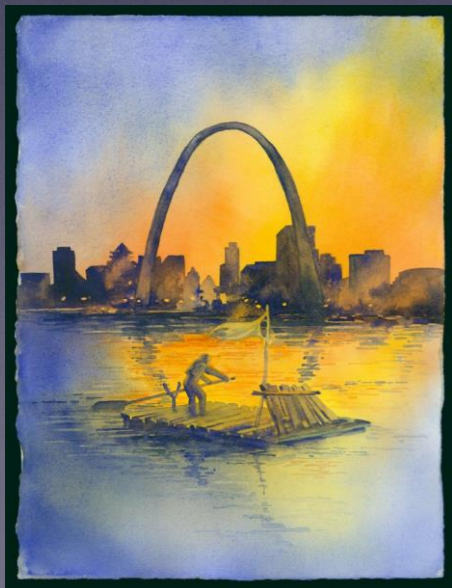   - 2) Cross-Cultural Analysis

    - 3) Trip Preparation

  - Work assessed through papers

Assessment: Just Another Way to Tell a Story

- ## Extending Savard's Method

  - Assessing for "impact" (like Savard; avoiding the more common satisfaction survey)

  - Using validated scales, rather than single item comparisons

  - Adding comparison groups, rather than tracking change in just one group

"There are lies, damned lies, and statistics"

P.S. The CSCE team would love to help you share your organization's stories of impact.

Assessment Questions

Part 1:
How does student involvement in an immersion experience compare with a control group in terms of civic attitudes?

Part 2:
Comparing pre to post scores, how does an immersion experience affect various civic attitudes?

Part 3:
Comparing cohorts, how does a short-term immersion experience differ over time?

Main Measure

Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (Moely et al., 2002)

1. **Civic Action (8 items; α = .87)**
   - *I am committed to making a difference.*
   - *I plan to do some volunteer work.*

2. **Interpersonal & Problem-Solving Skills (12 items; α = .83)**
   - *I can communicate well with others.*
   - *I find it easy to make friends.*

3. **Political Awareness (6 items; α = .82)**
   - *I am aware of current events.*
   - *I understand the issues facing this nation.*

4. **Leadership Skills (5 items; α = .67)**
   - *I am a good leader.*
   - *I feel that I can make a difference in the world.*

5. **Social Justice Attitudes (8 items; α = .74)**
   - *It is important that equal opportunity be available to all people.*
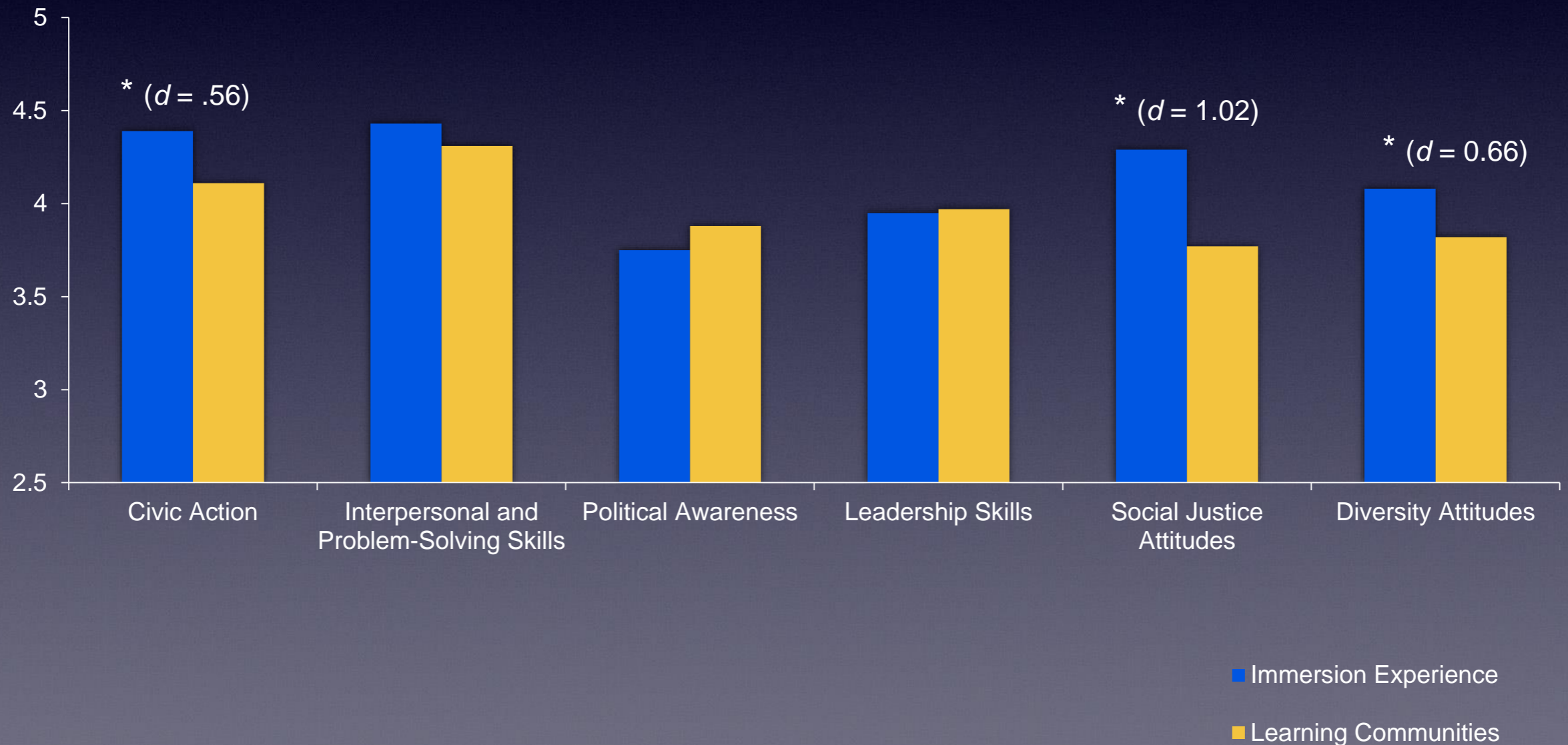
6. **Diversity Attitudes (5 items; α = .53)**
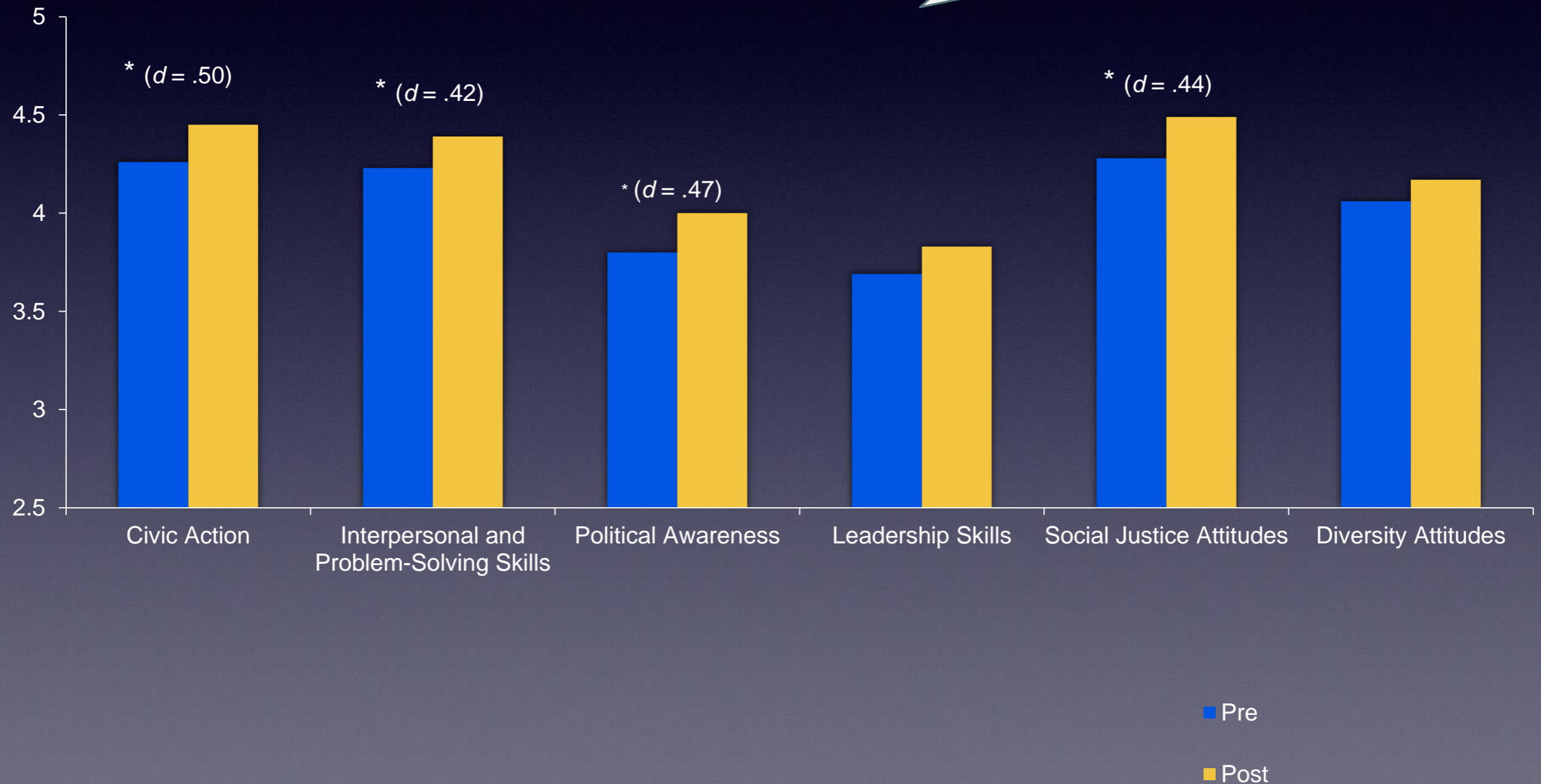   - *Cultural diversity within a group makes the group more interesting and effective.*

Part 2:
How does a weeklong immersion experience affect various civic attitudes?

Pre to post self-reported assessments ($N = 40$)

"My world perspective was greatly broadened after learning about the challenges that immigrants face at the border. It made me empathize with their struggles, and coming from a faith lens, I saw these people as those greatly in need of a compassionate response. Overall, it strengthened my personal sense of responsibility toward others."
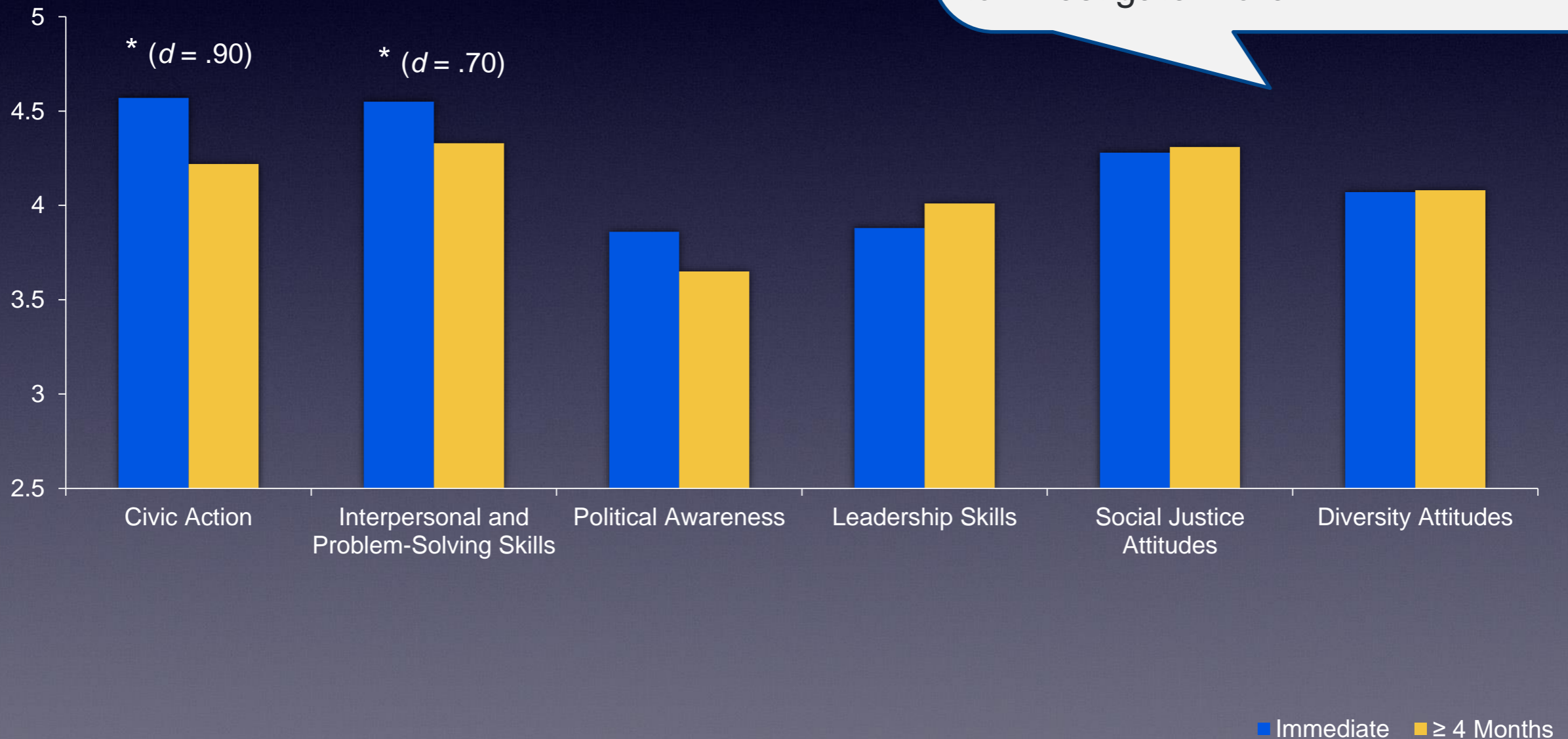
* ($d = .50$)
* ($d = .42$)
* ($d = .47$)
* ($d = .44$)

5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5

Civic Action | Interpersonal and Problem-Solving Skills | Political Awareness | Leadership Skills | Social Justice Attitudes | Diversity Attitudes

Pre
Post

Concluding our Story: Can short-term immersion experiences impact long-term civic responsibility?

YES! But…

- Results are consistent with Kiely's (2004) "chameleon complex"

- Complex social issues

    - As one student remarked in his self-reflections, *"My expectation to come up with a solution was not met, and I realize now why that was really an impossible expectation to have."*

- Still, they are poised to take purposeful, meaning-making actions that orient them toward just and principled ends
- Points to the need for follow-up experiences

- **Group Discussion**

- What reactions do you have to the data presented? Was it what you expected, given your experiences working with students?

- Discuss the importance of the formation process – what are the critical elements based on your experiences? What do you see as being the most beneficial – pre, during or post?

- How can students best be prepared for an immersion experience, both in the abstract sense but also experientially? What suggestions do you have for universities planning these programs?