Cultivating Public Service Motivation through AmeriCorps Service: A Longitudinal Study

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The public service motivation literature has helped scholars and practitioners better understand who is attracted to public service and why. However, little is understood about how public service motivation in individuals may be cultivated or how it changes over time. This article uses panel data collected by the Corporation for National and Community Service to track the longitudinal effects of participation in the AmeriCorps national service program on participants’ public service motivation. Findings reveal that participation in AmeriCorps programs had positive effects on participants’ levels of commitment to the public interest and civic awareness immediately after the program; many of these program effects were sustained seven years later. However, when observed in isolation, the comparison group showed significant declines in levels of commitment to public interest and civic awareness over an eight-year period, suggesting that public service motivation may initially decline upon entry into a public service career.

As members of the baby boomer cohort continue to become eligible for retirement over the next 15 years, human capital managers are being forced to strategically plan for their succession (GAO 2009). To address this impending exodus from the workforce, it is necessary to better understand who is attracted to service in the public and nonprofit sectors. Some public sector labor scholars have generated worker profiles to help hiring managers understand who is attracted to public service (Lewis and Frank 2002). Other researchers have explored what motivates individuals to pursue public and nonprofit sector careers (Perry and Hondeghem 2008a; Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2010). By better understanding these motives, managers can attract and retain top talent while also improving organizational performance. However, little is understood about how public service work itself affects individual motivation or changes an individual’s motivation over time. To aid that understanding, the public service motivation (PSM) literature is used to investigate the longitudinal impact of participation in AmeriCorps programs on individuals’ motives and behaviors. This research investigates several key questions: Does PSM in individuals change over time? Can PSM be cultivated? And if so, are changes sustained over time?

AmeriCorps and Service

To understand this study, it is important to briefly consider the nature and history of the AmeriCorps program. Housed within the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), AmeriCorps is a federally funded national service program that began in 1994. Though AmeriCorps positions vary in length and commitment, typically, AmeriCorps members agree to perform 1,700 hours of service in exchange for a modest living stipend and a $5,500 education award. Annually, more than 15,000 nonprofit organizations, schools, and public agencies are served by AmeriCorps members, including organizations such as the American Red Cross, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and Habitat for Humanity. Since its inception, 800,000 people have served in AmeriCorps programs, providing more than 1 billion hours of service (CNCS 2013).

Regarding the program as a tool with many functions, advocates of AmeriCorps generally use a “Swiss army knife” metaphor to describe its many purposes. AmeriCorps provides an opportunity for Americans to serve their country in a nonmilitary manner, leverages volunteers in the nonprofit sector in a cost-effective way, bridges social classes, cultivates a civic ethic in young people, produces valuable outcomes in communities, creates positive effects in program participants, and helps develop the next generation of civic leaders (Perry and Katula 2001; Perry and Thomson 2004; Perry et al. 1999; Tschirhart et al. 2001; Waldman 1995). This article...
specifically examines how participation in the program impacts individual program participants.

Though Perry (2004) argues that civic service in North America has endured a relatively cyclical existence, national service appears to be ascendant on the American policy agenda. Passage of the 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act is expected to increase the number of AmeriCorps positions from the current 75,000 to 250,000 by 2017. This impending large-scale expansion makes a richer understanding of program impacts and outcomes both timely and necessary.

Effects of AmeriCorps on Participants

Perry (1997) alludes to the importance of public institutions in cultivating and propagating civic-oriented behavior. He suggests that in order to develop PSM, institutions must be altered to demonstrate that civic-mindedness is a societal priority. One such program that might be particularly useful for cultivating PSM is AmeriCorps (Perry 1997; Perry and Wise 1990).

However, studies exploring the link between participation in AmeriCorps and measures of civic engagement reveal mixed results. Using a two-year preservice/postservice comparison, Simon and Wang (2002) find that program participants experienced a significant shift in values and subsequently became more involved in community groups. They also find that participation in AmeriCorps may strengthen social capital. Other research on community-level outcomes suggests that the presence of AmeriCorps programs can broker social capital and increase social service network density in communities (Varda 2011).

Similarly, in conducting a synthesis of research addressing the relationship between service and citizenship, Perry and Katula (2001) find that program participation does not necessarily lead to increased measures of civic engagement. However, Frumkin et al. (2009) (employing the data set used presently) find that participation in AmeriCorps can improve participants’ levels of civic engagement and connectedness to community.

The idea of using a public service program to foster public service is not new. Prior to the implementation of AmeriCorps, Perry and Wise (1990) suggested that the development of a national service program could be important to inculcating public service motives. As they argue, such a program would be “intended to develop normative and affective bases of public service motivation. One idea [would be] to provide a public service experience as a component of high school education. Another approach [would be] to make financial aid for college contingent on public service” (1990, 372). In a later article, Perry explicitly suggests that national service and AmeriCorps may get to the heart of public service motivation: “it is conceivable that innovations such as schools dedicated to public service themes and national service programs such as AmeriCorps*USA will fill gaps not adequately served by the family and other traditional institutions” (1997, 192).

Public Service Motivation

Over the past two decades, having been tested in numerous public service settings, the public service motivation literature has expanded dramatically. However, that research agenda has fallen short in that (1) the literature has not adequately explained how PSM changes in individuals over time, and (2) only limited research has examined how organizational and programmatic experiences can affect individual levels of PSM. These research gaps are addressed next.

Defining and Adapting the PSM Construct

While PSM began as a clearly defined concept, construct, and scale, means of measuring it have evolved. Wright (2008) notes that of the 16 published studies relating to PSM in 2008, only three used the scale in its validated form. Rather, PSM has typically been tested in narrower slices or using proxies (Alonso and Lewis 2001; Brewer and Selden 1998; Brewer, Selden, and Facer 2000; Karl and Peat 2004; Kim 2005, 2006; Naff and Crum 1999). More recently, research agendas have emerged that work to refine the construct (Kim 2011; Kim et al. 2013) or shorten the scale (Coursey and Pandey 2007; Coursey et al. 2008; Perry et al. 2008).

These varying conceptions and measures of PSM have contributed to an evolving contemporary view of PSM as an “other-regarding” orientation (i.e., a willingness or desire to put the needs of society before the needs of the self) (Perry and Hondeghem 2008a; Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2010). Today, PSM “refers to the intrinsic motivations (i.e., pro-social and altruistic inclinations) that draw people to serve the public good” (Perry and Hondeghem 2008b, 3). However, most scholars agree that the actual definition of PSM may not be as important as the other-regarding underpinnings common to these ideas, such as altruism and prosocial values (Perry and Hondeghem 2008b).

The current research builds on a previous analysis that explores the utility of using secondary data to measure levels of public service motivation (Ward 2011). Employing exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, I used maximum likelihood goodness-of-fit indices—normed chi-square, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI)—and Bayesian estimation methods to assess the fit of the hypothesized model. My hypothesized model demonstrated strong model fit to assess the effects of participation in AmeriCorps on PSM-related attitudes and behaviors for both the treatment and comparison groups. I found that individuals in the sample hold latent public service values such as commitment to the public interest, civic awareness, and attraction to public policy making.

While the commitment to the public interest and attraction to public policy making dimensions are congruent with Perry’s (1996) conception of PSM, I found that civic awareness is also a PSM-related value. In line with Vandenabeele (2007), I argued that civic awareness is important to the development of PSM and therefore is worthy of inclusion in the analysis of PSM. Finally, I also found a positive relationship between participation in an AmeriCorps program and the development of PSM-related values. Appendix 1 provides a list of the variables used, the associated latent variables, Bayesian estimates, and accompanying goodness-of-fit statistics.
that drive levels of PSM in individuals, including family socialization, religious socialization, youth volunteering, education, and income (Perry 1997; Perry et al. 2008). More recently, research has focused on the role that organizations play in affecting levels of PSM. These studies find that organizational membership, organizational environments, cultures, experiences, and tenure all have an impact on levels of PSM (Moynihan and Pandey 2007; Pandey and Stazyk 2008; Perry and Hondeghem 2008b). Research on the antecedent conditions of PSM, as well the effects that organizational experiences and cultures have on PSM, is an important next step for the field.

Further, goal and social cognitive theories have been used to better understand how organizational work contexts influence work motivation. Wright (2004) reports that work context dimensions such as procedural constraints, goal conflict, and goal ambiguity could have a negative effect on three important antecedents of work motivation: job difficulty, self-efficacy, and goal job specificity. Wright’s research demonstrates that organizational experiences and cultures affect individual motivations. Relating to organization culture, the organizational socialization literature has also sought to explain “the process by which an individual acquires the values, knowledge, and expected behavior needed to participate as an organizational member” (Cable and Parsons 2001, 2). This literature suggests that individuals adapt their values to the organizational culture, which has prompted additional PSM literature on adaptation (Christensen and Wright 2011; Georgellis and Tabvuma 2010; Wright, Christensen, and Isett 2013).

In another context, Moynihan and Pandey (2007) investigate how organizational factors influence individual public service motivation. Using a national survey of state-level health and human services managers in the United States, they identify a positive relationship between organizational reform and individual levels of PSM, thus demonstrating that organizations influence public service motivation. These findings are important because they signify that the relationship between PSM and organizational culture is bidirectional, meaning that work cultures can affect levels of PSM, in addition to individuals contributing to work cultures. Additional research investigating the relationship between public service motivation and person–organization fit has also been developed (Christensen and Wright 2011; Pedersen 2013; Taylor 2008; Wright and Pandey 2008, 2011), suggesting that mission congruence and organizational culture both significantly drive motivation.

There is an unclear distinction between the individual and institutional streams of PSM literature. The PSM literature initially developed when Perry (1996) identified the individual characteristics that form the PSM construct: attraction to policy making, self-sacrifice, compassion, and commitment to the public interest. Later, the antecedent conditions of PSM—sociohistorical factors, family socialization, religious activity, and volunteering activity—were identified as important drivers of PSM (Perry 1997), which then became incorporated into a larger “process theory” of PSM (Perry 2000). Perry argues that individuals’ experiences (as well as gender, level of education, and income) early in life can affect levels of PSM later in life. However, the literature still fails to explain both how PSM is developed or evolves in individuals and how interventions and public service experiences can affect PSM throughout a lifetime. Addressing this quandary, Perry and Hondeghem ask, “Do people enter the public sector because of the are motivated to public service, or do mechanisms of socialization, social identification, and social learning . . . in public organizations themselves increase public service motivation?” (2008a, 297). To date, a handful of studies have identified a positive relationship between organizational reforms and cultures and levels of PSM in individuals (Moynihan and Pandey 2007; Taylor 2008; Wright 2004). Building on the finding that organizational experiences can affect levels of PSM, coupled with the literature on AmeriCorps program outcomes, this article is based on the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** There will be significant positive differences in levels of PSM between the treatment and comparison groups immediately following participation in AmeriCorps.

### Longitudinal Analysis of PSM

One common critique of PSM research cites the literature’s reliance on cross-sectional data and the general lack of longitudinal research designs (Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2010; Wright and Christensen 2010; Wright and Grant 2010). Research has demonstrated a link between PSM and sector of employment (Brewer 2003; Crewson 1997; Houston 2006; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012; Posner and Schmidt 1996; Rainey 1982; Wittmer 1991). However, little research has been done to isolate the source or direction of this relationship, which raises important causal questions about the emergence and effects of PSM (Wright and Christensen 2010).

Additionally, although a better understanding of how PSM changes over time in individuals has been identified as an important “next step” by several of the leading PSM scholars (Wright 2008; Wright and Grant 2010; Perry and Hondeghem 2008b), only a handful of studies have been conducted on this topic (Georgellis and Tabvuma 2010; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012; Taylor and Westover 2011; Wright and Christensen 2010). In particular, Wright and Grant suggest that the next step for PSM studies “is to conduct research that can inform our understanding of its emergence and effects, as well as the strategies that managers can use to cultivate PSM and enhance its impact” (2010, 692). Longitudinal studies of employee motivation likely have not been conducted because this research design poses several problems, including the cost of administering surveys, high rates of career mobility and change, and difficulties associated with using secondary data to assess scales that previously have been tested for validity (Wright and Grant 2010).

Wright and Christensen (2010) provide one of the few longitudinal examinations of PSM. In that study, they analyze panel data collected by the American Bar Association to examine employment information from 1,292 private and public lawyers at two points in time: before employment in 1984 and again in 1990. They find that although PSM does not necessarily predict the sector in which the lawyers find their first job, lawyers’ interest in helping others does predict both their current and future public sector employment. They also find that both public and private sector lawyers value financial rewards at similar rates (Wright and Christensen...
proposes a third hypothesis:

Similarly, Mortimer and Lorence (1979) use a sample of 512 college seniors in the United States to measure the importance of extrinsic, intrinsic, and service-related work values. Ten years later, they find that respondents who valued people and service upon graduating college were more likely to choose professions stressing social welfare, teaching, or service. They also find, however, that over time, individuals value intrinsic rewards less and extrinsic rewards more. While their pre-workforce measurement and longitudinal design provide a useful contribution to the literature, "such designs rarely provide definitive evidence as to whether values are best defined as stable traits or dynamic traits" (Wright and Grant 2010, 693).

More recently, Georgellis and Tabvuma (2010) use panel data from the British Household Panel Survey to determine whether levels of PSM drop as a result of transitioning employment from the private to the public sector. They find a spike in levels of PSM immediately following a transition to a public sector job. According to their study, five years after a career switch, increased levels of PSM remained markedly higher than the reported baseline levels. Based on the longitudinal research indicating that job and sector experiences can have lasting effects on individual levels of PSM, this study proposes a second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Observed changes in PSM will be sustained seven years later.

In addition to reporting spikes in PSM upon switching to public sector employment, there appears to be a negative relationship between organizational or sectoral tenure and levels of PSM. In the same study mentioned earlier, Georgellis and Tabvuma (2010) also indicate that after switching jobs, levels of PSM among most groups (people transitioning from private to public sector; from public to private sector; from public to public sector; and private to private sector) decline, albeit slightly, over a five-year period. This finding is supported by Moynihan and Pandey (2007), who identify a negative relationship between organizational tenure and public service motivation. Similarly, Kjeldesen and Jacobsen (2012) use panel data from Danish physiotherapy students who sought employment in both the public and private sectors. They also find decreases in individuals’ levels of PSM upon joining the public sector, which they interpret as a shock effect. However, drops in levels of PSM are less dramatic among public sector employees than their private sector counterparts. While the research examining longitudinal changes of PSM is limited, these three studies indicate that PSM appears to slowly decline after transitioning to a new job or sector, unless the individual is transitioning from the private to the public sector. With this in mind, this study proposes a third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Levels of the adapted measures of PSM will decrease among the comparison group over the eight-year test period.

Methods

This research uses secondary panel data collected by Abt Associates for the Corporation for National and Community Service. That study, Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni, was designed to "identify the effects of AmeriCorps on members’ civic engagement and volunteering, employment and careers, educational attainment and life satisfaction" (2008, 8).

The study employed a nonrandom, quasi-experimental research design with treatment and comparison groups. The nationally representative sample (N = 4,513) contained two groups: a treatment group (n = 2,228) consisting of individuals who had participated in one of 108 AmeriCorps programs in 1999 (for 10- or 12-month stints) and a comparison group (n = 1,925) consisting of individuals who had expressed an interest in joining an AmeriCorps program in 1999 but ultimately decided to not participate. To help reduce the presence of selection bias, nonrandom sampling procedures were used among the comparison group. While these individuals did not join the AmeriCorps program, they were still found to be likely to be employed in a public service field (33 percent of the comparison group) (CNCS 2008).

Data collection. Between 1999 and 2007, data were collected at three points in time: at baseline (1999), immediate postservice (2000), and distant postservice (2007). In 1999, baseline data for the treatment group were collected by way of compulsory, in-person surveys that were administered within days of participants enrolling in their respective programs. Baseline data for the comparison group, acquired by telephone interviews, were collected three to four months after individuals contacted the Corporation for National and Community Service—roughly when their service term would have begun had they elected to enroll. In 2000, one to two months after completion of their service term, the majority of immediate postservice data were collected by telephone interviews with program participants, while members of the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps were surveyed during the final two weeks of enrollment in their service. Comparison group data were collected by telephone interviews 12 to 15 months after the baseline survey was administered. In 2007, approximately eight years after the baseline surveys were administered, distant postservice data were collected for both groups by telephone interviews (see appendix 2).

Response rates for both the treatment and comparison groups were relatively high at all three phases. Response rates for the treatment group of State/National AmeriCorps members were as follows: baseline = 100 percent, immediate postservice = 79 percent, and distant postservice = 53 percent. Response rates for the comparison group of State/National AmeriCorps members were as follows: baseline = 100 percent, immediate postservice = 75 percent, and distant postservice = 54 percent.

Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling techniques were employed to test whether theoretical constructs
identified in the PSM literature, as well as additional prosocial attitudes and behaviors, explain motivation among the sample. Multiple group modeling techniques were used to compare the treatment and comparison groups at the three time points to determine whether the model proposed in this research provides a good fit. Units used in the latent variables were standardized to address variations in the Likert-scale items among the different questions—most Likert scales were five items, but three- and seven-item responses were also used among the variables.

Using multiple group modeling, synchronous correlation designs were employed to allow for comparison of latent variables between the two groups at the same time points. Additionally, autocorrelation (stability correlation) techniques allowed for comparison over the three time points of latent factors within the same group. Deltas (both within- and between-group changes) are reported, signifying any changes among the latent factors. Comparing the findings of the synchronous and autocorrelation longitudinal analyses makes it possible to assess the validity of these independent findings.

Alternatively, fixed-effects analysis has been employed in similar studies using panel data (Clark et al. 2008; Frijters, Johnston, and Shields 2011; Georgellis and Tabvuma 2010), allowing for additional control of various independent variables. However, longitudinal confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling techniques allow for a more accurate understanding of how the latent factors change over time (as opposed to summing or averaging factor scores). Because the treatment group was sampled to be representative of the U.S. population, and the comparison group was matched to the treatment group, it is unnecessary to control in this way for demographic or sociohistorical attributes.

This analysis assesses how participation in AmeriCorps affects levels of public service motivation. Although the three dimensions used in this study were drawn from secondary data, they are closely aligned with the PSM construct. All of the measures employed have been previously empirically validated (Ward 2011). These dimensions (attraction to public policy making, commitment to the public interest, and civic awareness) are used to address important questions relating to both how PSM changes over time and how national service affects individuals and their PSM. The latent factors and corresponding questions are reported in appendix 1.

Using these latent factors, this study then compared both groups to determine whether the model works well for both groups at baseline. The latent variable means were constrained to zero in the comparison group, while this constraint was lifted on the treatment group, allowing for comparison between groups to determine whether there are significant differences in the latent factors. At the three waves of the study, measurement intercepts and structural means for differences in the treatment and comparison were examined to determine the program effect. The normed \( \chi^2 \), TLI (an incremental fit index that allows a penalty for adding parameters), and RMSEA were used in this study to determine model fit and differences between the means of the latent factors for each group.

Similarly, once differences were identified between the treatment and comparison groups, using the same method, differences within groups at different time points were examined. Findings from this series of analyses are compiled into graphical form in figures 1–3. All group differences represented in these figures met the common fit thresholds used in TLI, RMSEA, and normed \( \chi^2 \) analyses.

**Strengths and Limitations**

This study and data set offer several particularly encouraging strengths: a large sample size, a widely representative sample, a longitudinal design, and the use of a comparison group. Most notably, few public service motivation studies utilize a similarly large data set.

While attempts to mitigate selection bias were taken, because both groups demonstrated an interest in joining an AmeriCorps program, a limitation of this study is the potential for selection bias. Additionally, although the data set is representative of the program and the U.S. population, generalizability is limited to those individuals who are either interested or engaged in service. There is also potential for social desirability bias, whereby respondents answer questions in ways they perceive to be socially acceptable, as many of the questions are prosocial in nature. Additionally, since the original data were collected, the program has evolved in response to the political and economic climate and likely will continue to do so. Further, the compulsory nature of the baseline survey administered to AmeriCorps members potentially presents some ethical and accuracy issues, in addition to consistency bias, as this wave of data...
was collected using pencil-and-paper surveys instead of telephone interviews, which were used at all other data collection points. Finally, although the time and cost to undertake this research without significant support would be prohibitive, it would be desirable to examine longitudinal data that include Perry's (1996) original scale. Instead, closely aligned and empirically validated secondary data are used to address important questions relating to both how PSM changes over time and of the impact of national service on individuals and their PSM.

Results

Analysis of descriptive statistics at baseline revealed that 54 percent of participants in the study ($N = 4,153$) were part of the treatment group and participated in AmeriCorps ($n = 2,228$). In all, 74 percent of the sample reported themselves as female ($n = 3,058$) and 63 percent as white ($n = 2,611$), while only 4 percent reported being Asian ($n = 168$) and 5 percent Native American ($n = 209$). The mean age of the group at baseline was 26.7 years (range 17–79). Levels of education were relatively normally distributed: 5 percent had not completed high school ($n = 206$), 20 percent had received a high school diploma ($n = 810$), 32 percent had completed some college ($n = 1,337$), 32 percent had completed an undergraduate degree ($n = 1,327$), and 4 percent had completed a graduate degree ($n = 161$). Family income of participants in 1999 was normally distributed, with a median income range of $30,000–40,000 ($n = 3,056$).

Figure 1 reports the differences in the latent variable commitment to the public interest between the treatment and comparison groups at the three waves of data collection, located on the $x$ axis: time 1 corresponds to the baseline interview, time 2 corresponds to the immediate postservice interview, and time 3 corresponds to the distant postservice interview. Differences are reported as standardized units (listed on the $y$ axis) of latent variables, which were used to normalize variables that employed different Likert scales. Differences are reported between groups. Additionally, all group differences in figure 1 were found to be significant at the .001 level ($p < .001$).

Figure 2 reports the difference for the measure of civic awareness within groups and between groups. Similar to the previous graph, between-group differences at baseline are not significant, but after exposure to the program, the treatment group reported significantly higher levels. Between 2000 and 2007, both groups reported a significant decrease in measures of civic awareness, although gains in the measure that were reported among the treatment group appear to have been sustained over time.

Finally, figure 3 reports changes in attraction to public policy making. At the baseline interviews, although the differences were rather small (.099 standardized units), the comparison group reported significantly higher levels of attraction to public policy making. In 2000, both groups experienced significant increases in their attraction to public policy making. Between 2000 and 2007, neither group experienced any significant changes on this latent variable, but the comparison group was still slightly higher on this measure (.032 standardized units) than the treatment group.

After completion of the program (time point 2 in figures 1–3), two of the three adapted dimensions of public service motivation used

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**Figure 1** Standardized Within- and Between-Group Differences in Civic Awareness at Baseline, Immediate Postservice, and Distant Postservice

**Figure 2** Standardized Within- and Between-Group Differences in Civic Awareness at Baseline, Immediate Postservice, and Distant Postservice

**Figure 3** Standardized Within- and Between-Group Differences in Attraction to Public Policy Making at Baseline, Immediate Postservice, and Distant Postservice
in this study were significantly higher among the treatment group than the comparison group, thus providing partial support for the first hypothesis. In the case of commitment to public interest, at the immediate postservice survey (see figure 1), participants in AmeriCorps experienced a positive change of 0.27 standardized units over the comparison group, which suggests that AmeriCorps members demonstrate values consistent with being committed to the public interest at a significantly higher rate than those in the comparison group. Similarly, after participation in the program (see figure 2), AmeriCorps members reported a positive difference from the comparison group on measures of perceived civic awareness; that is, individuals who participated in AmeriCorps reported greater awareness of the issues affecting their communities.

Similarly, between the first two phases of the study (see figure 3), both AmeriCorps members and the comparison group experienced a spike in their levels of attraction to public policy making. This finding is inconsistent with the hypothesis that participation in AmeriCorps positively affects public service motives among participants immediately following the program. One potential confounding factor in this measure, however, is the occurrence of a presidential election in 2000, which could explain the steep spike in voting behaviors and interest in the news among both groups between 1999 and 2000. Given the positive differences among AmeriCorps members’ levels of commitment to public interest and civic awareness, when compared to a similar group of individuals who did not receive the treatment, it appears that participation in AmeriCorps had an immediate positive effect on participants on two of the three public service motivation dimensions.

When differences between the groups are analyzed at the distant postservice interview to determine whether treatment effects in public service motivation reverted back to the baseline over time, two measures of PSM between the two groups were significantly and positively different at distant postservice (2007): commitment to the public interest (time point 3 in figure 1) and civic awareness (time point 3 in figure 2). Both diagrams illustrate that after participation in AmeriCorps, these dimensions increased considerably among individuals but declined between 2000 and 2007. However, when compared to the comparison group, it appears that increases in commitment to public interest and civic awareness as a result of participation in AmeriCorps programs were largely sustained over the comparison group, as the levels of commitment to public interest and civic awareness dropped in the comparison group at a similar rate to those qualities in the treatment group. Apparently, because participation in the program does not appear to have affected attraction to public policy making immediately following the program, treatment effects cannot be sustained.

Discussion

Effect of AmeriCorps on Public Service Motivation

The findings displayed in figures 1–3 suggest that service increases public service motivation. In line with previous research on AmeriCorps program outcomes, performing service appears to cultivate higher levels of public service motivation (Simon and Wang 2002). This finding supports Perry’s (1997) hypothesis that AmeriCorps could be a good vehicle for increasing levels of PSM. These findings also build on research (Moynihan and Pandey 2007; Pandey and Stazzyk 2008; Perry and Hondgehem 2008b; Wright 2004) that indicates that organizational culture or experiences may affect individuals’ levels of public service motivation. This study showed that when compared to a nontreatment group, an intense service experience such as AmeriCorps had a significant positive impact on individuals’ levels of commitment to public interest and civic awareness. AmeriCorps members appear to leave the program more attached, committed, and willing to participate in their communities. Similarly, they report a deeper and more robust awareness of the issues that their communities face.

Finally, these findings support previous research suggesting that individuals who participate in service may hold values more closely aligned with public sector values, thus making them good candidates for public and nonprofit sector careers (Frumkin and Jastrzab 2009). This suggests that public and nonprofit managers could benefit from employing individuals who previously have demonstrated an interest in service and therefore will likely have greater knowledge of and commitment to their communities.

Sustainability of Effects over Time

This study further suggests that AmeriCorps service has a lasting effect on levels of public service motivation. In particular, individuals who participated in an AmeriCorps program demonstrated higher levels of commitment to the public interest and civic awareness seven years after their service. While this service does not appear to have a lasting impact on individuals’ levels of attraction to public policy making, both the treatment and comparison groups demonstrated increased interest in policy making, politics, and current events.

These findings are congruent with previous research that has found career changes to positively affect levels of public service motivation and job satisfaction, particularly when individuals switch from private sector to public sector jobs (Georgellis and Tabvuma
These findings also support Kjeldsen and Jacobsen’s (2012) research (using a sample of recent college graduates) indicating declines in PSM upon entry into a public sector career, although at a much lower rate than found with entry into the private sector. AmeriCorps members who transitioned from jobs in all sectors to an intensive service program experienced similar spikes in levels of PSM but then reported subsequent declines, although at a slower rate than the comparison group. Coupled with Wright and Christensen’s (2010) work, this evidence suggests that PSM may affect employment decisions throughout an individual’s career, meaning that service experiences early in life could have compounding effects over the course of a career. That these spikes in public service motivation occur early in the sample’s careers (they reported a mean age of 26.7 years) indicates that an AmeriCorps experience could generate higher levels of PSM throughout their lifetimes.

**Longitudinal Trends in PSM for the Comparison Group**

Among individuals who indicated an interest in public service but pursued non-AmeriCorps opportunities, levels of PSM appear to have declined. Because the comparison group was not exposed to AmeriCorps, it is possible to examine this group in isolation so as to track changes in PSM over the three time periods and to determine how public service motivation changes among a public service–oriented population. Examined in isolation over the eight-year period studied, this comparison group exhibited declines in two dimensions of PSM. This research supports previous findings demonstrating that individuals’ responses to intrinsic rewards diminish over time, while their responsiveness to extrinsic rewards increases (Mortimer and Lorence 1979).

This finding could be explained by Moynihan and Pandey’s (2007) research, which suggests a negative relationship between organizational tenure and public service motivation (i.e., the longer an individual stays with an organization, the more likely it is that his or her levels of PSM will decrease). While organizational tenure was not examined in the current study, declines in levels of commitment to the public interest and civic awareness were identified among the comparison group. This trend also suggests that levels of PSM may be prone to fluctuations in a life cycle, as has been demonstrated in research examining the effect that career switches have on levels of PSM (Georgellis and Tabuuma 2010).

More research using longitudinal data sets that contain longer time frames with larger age distributions should be conducted to better understand the effect that specific life events and cycles (e.g., marriage, children, death of a family member, divorce, and retirement) have on PSM. Research relating to these life cycles will likely have to turn to the volunteering, human resources, and civic engagement literatures to better understand how these events may affect PSM levels.

This research also suggests that PSM may fade among public and private sector employees, a finding that is supported by Kjeldsen and Jacobsen’s (2012) research, which indicates that levels of PSM drop over time but at faster rates among individuals employed in the private sector. If we conceive of PSM as driven by internalized needs, this accelerated decline in PSM among private sector employees is likely derived from either satisfaction of needs or dissatisfaction from failure to satisfy them. Among this sample, it is likely that AmeriCorps members complete their service term and then move on to other life priorities. This distant postservice decline is thus likely a reflection of needs satisfied. Additional explanations of this decline could be found in the civic engagement life cycle literature, which suggests that weariness, resignation, cynicism, arrogance, despair, and burn-out may cause individuals to disengage in service (Coles 1994).

By suggesting that AmeriCorps programs are producing lasting impacts at the individual service member level, this research offers several important practical implications. First (especially if the program expands as planned under the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009), through providing a clearer understanding of the underlying motives of individuals to participate, this study can facilitate AmeriCorps recruitment and retention. Further, this theoretically grounded empirical demonstration of program effects on participants could serve as a model for the newly created National Service Task Force, which aims to improve efforts to evaluate outcomes generated by AmeriCorps programs (White House 2013).

Taken with other research on AmeriCorps outcomes at the program service (CNCS 2013) and community levels (Simon and Wang 2002, Varda 2011), this empirical analysis of outcomes at the individual participant level lends credibility to the claim for its utility that describes AmeriCorps as a “Swiss Army knife” (Perry et al. 1999; Waldman 1995).

**Conclusions**

This research addresses two important holes in the public service motivation literature. First, it suggests that public service motives may be cultivated through an intensive national service experience such as AmeriCorps. This finding provides support for the first hypothesis, which predicted that immediately following the program, AmeriCorps members would demonstrate higher levels of PSM. Observed changes in civic awareness and commitment to the public interest remained higher among the treatment group seven years after the intervention, providing evidence that participation in an AmeriCorps program positively affected PSM among service members, partially supporting the study’s second hypothesis. These findings further suggest that national service programs such as AmeriCorps could play an important role in creating a human capital pipeline for filling public sector jobs (Frumkin and Jastrzab 2009), especially in light of the increasingly large number of them currently being vacated by retiring baby boomers. Additionally, this research suggests
a bidirectional relationship between public service motives and organizational experiences; that is, while individuals contribute to a public service or “other-regarding” culture, their public service experience may also have a lasting impact on these individuals’ values.

Second, beyond informing the literature about what motivates PSM, this article contributes to the emerging literature that considers how PSM changes within individuals over time. Here, when examining the comparison group in isolation, support is provided for this article’s third hypothesis: that PSM will decline over the eight-year test period. The results show that among a sample of individuals who demonstrated an interest in joining a national service program, a significant, albeit small, decline in two particular public service motives was found over the next eight years. Because the sample largely represents young adults (mean age at baseline was 26.7 years), this finding suggests that exposure to the inner workings of public sector careers could have caused individuals to experience declines in PSM. This finding supports previous research that has identified a negative relationship between organizational tenure and PSM (Moynihan and Pandey 2007). However, more longitudinal research examining the impact of life events on PSM needs to be conducted.

Finally, this study supports previous research that suggests that the AmeriCorps programs are successfully accomplishing their mission to make a positive, lasting impact on individual participants. While this is good news for national service advocates, more work needs to be done to assess the impact that this program is having on individuals and communities who receive the services provided by AmeriCorps.

References
Cultivating Public Service Motivation through AmeriCorps Service: A Longitudinal Study
Appendix 1  Bayesian Estimation: Latent Factors, Survey Items, and Regression Weights at Baseline for First-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Treatment and Comparison Groups from Ward (2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Variable</th>
<th>Latent Construct</th>
<th>Treatment Group (n = 2,228, df = 294)</th>
<th>Comparison Group (n = 1,925, df = 294)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (Un.)</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make positive difference in community (PSM 5)</td>
<td>Commitment to the public interest</td>
<td>1.187</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in community organizations (PSM 6)</td>
<td>Commitment to the public interest</td>
<td>.383</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel I have the ability to make a difference (PSM 4)</td>
<td>Commitment to the public interest</td>
<td>.877</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong attachment to community (PSM 1)</td>
<td>Commitment to the public interest</td>
<td>1.055</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of community needs (PSM 3)</td>
<td>Commitment to the public interest</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know about public health (PSM 17)</td>
<td>Civic awareness</td>
<td>.990</td>
<td>.990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know about literacy problems (PSM 18)</td>
<td>Civic awareness</td>
<td>1.074</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know about crime (PSM 19)</td>
<td>Civic awareness</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know about civic involvement (PSM 20)</td>
<td>Civic awareness</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know about environment (PSM 16)</td>
<td>Civic awareness</td>
<td>.719</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote in local elections (PSM 13)</td>
<td>Attraction to public policy making</td>
<td>4.280</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Posterior predictive p = .50.

Appendix 2  Selected Sample of the Telephone Survey Used at the Final Phase of Data Collection for the Treatment Group

Longitudinal Study of AmeriCorps Phase III
AmeriCorps Member Survey

Hello. My name is __________. I’m calling on behalf of AmeriCorps. When you enrolled in AmeriCorps, you became part of an important long-term study of AmeriCorps. This study will help us understand what happens to people after their involvement in AmeriCorps. May we continue with the interview?

First, just to confirm, did you serve in AmeriCorps in 1999–2000 or 2001. Yes □ No □

PRIME: Now I’m going to ask you HOW OFTEN you do certain things. Please answer if you do these things never, not very often, sometimes, very often, or always. How often do you do each of the following? (READ ITEM) Would you say you do this never, not very often, sometimes, very often, or always?

1. Participate in events such as community meetings, celebrations, or activities in your community.
   a. Never
   b. Not Very Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Very Often
   e. Always

2. Join organizations that support issues that are important to you.
   a. Never
   b. Not Very Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Very Often
   e. Always

3. Write or e-mail newspapers or organizations to voice your views on an issue.
   a. Never
   b. Not Very Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Very Often
   e. Always

4. Vote in local elections.
   a. Never
   b. Not Very Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Very Often
   e. Always

5. Try to learn as much as you can about candidates or ballot questions before voting.
   a. Never
   b. Not Very Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Very Often
   e. Always

6. Keep informed about local or national news
   a. Never
   b. Not Very Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Very Often
   e. Always

In the last 12 months how often have you …

1. Expressed your opinions using the Internet
   a. Never
   b. Not Very Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Very Often
   e. Always

2. Expressed your opinions through radio call-ins
   a. Never
   b. Not Very Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Very Often
   e. Always

3. Talked to other people to persuade them to vote for a particular party or candidate
   a. Never
   b. Not Very Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Very Often
   e. Always

4. Contacted a government official to express your opinion on a local or national issue
   a. Never
   b. Not Very Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Very Often
   e. Always

5. Worked as a volunteer for a political party or candidate running for national, state, or local office
   a. Never
   b. Not Very Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Very Often
   e. Always

124  Public Administration Review • January | February 2014
Appendix 2  Continued

PRIME: Now we are going to switch gears, where I am going to read you some statements. Please answer whether you strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, or strongly agree.

Please indicate how strongly you agree with each of the following statements about your community.

(READ ITEM.) Would you say you strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, or strongly agree?

a. You have a strong attachment to your community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

b. You often discuss and think about how larger political and social issues affect your community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

c. You are aware of what can be done to meet the important needs in your community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

d. You feel you have the ability to make a difference in your community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

e. You try to find the time or a way to make a positive difference in your community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

f. If people from different backgrounds took the time to understand each other, there wouldn’t be so many social problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

g. Some of your friends are of different backgrounds from you: racial, cultural, ethnic, or language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

h. Racism affects everyone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

i. You feel comfortable belonging to groups where people are different from you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

j. Diverse viewpoints bring creativity and energy to a work group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Note: A full version of the survey can be obtained from the Corporation for National and Community Service, Research and Policy team at info@cns.gov. A link to the full technical report can be found at http://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation.