

The background of the slide features a large American flag with its stars and stripes. In the foreground, the silhouettes of two individuals are shown from the back, both performing a military salute. The person on the left is standing upright, while the person on the right is slightly crouched or kneeling. The overall tone is patriotic and respectful.

# **The Wisdom of Heroes: Partnering with Community Veterans to Engage Students in Basic Research**

**Christina A. Downey**  
Assistant Professor of Psychology

# Overview

- Rationale, planning, and implementation of the IU Kokomo Partnership Project
  - Service learning/research project for 100-level students
- Outcomes of the project (anticipated and unanticipated) for the students, the veterans, and myself
- Selected research findings (Fall 2010 data)

# Experiential and Service Learning

- The two often appear interchangeable; however, service learning includes an element of reflection on one's growth as a member of society (Kozeracki, 2000).
- Service learning can improve student professional skills (Yi & Lambright, 2010), as well as greater multicultural awareness, civic engagement, and critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Furco & Root, 2010; Kozeracki, 2000).

# Rationale for Collaborative SL

- *Pure, unabashed curiosity!*
- Wish to expose students to diverse experiences, worldviews; interaction across generations
- Wish to inform, and solicit responses from, community partners regarding our current educational approaches
- Wish for some novelty in my course assignments

# Planning for Collaboration

- Conceptualizing project and all requirements
- Wanted to preserve the learning goals of my undergraduate research projects:
  - Defining a research question, limited lit review
  - Developing a hypothesis
  - Carrying out collection of original data
  - Summarizing that data to test hypothesis
  - Presenting to peers in class
  - Writing a simple report of findings

# Original vs. Revised Projects

- Research question:  
Entirely student design  
of topic
- Hypothesis: About  
observed behavior
- Data gathering:  
Observational
- Summarizing:  
Quantitative (%s)

- Research question:  
Students selected topic  
from limited set of  
choices
- Hypothesis: About  
observed themes
- Data gathering:  
Interview
- Summarizing:  
Qualitative (subjective)

# Example Research Topic

- Humanistic approach to personality
  - Assumes inherent goodness of all people
  - Assumes that negative behaviors are result of negative experiences, not personal “badness”
  - Assumes that individual worldviews drive understanding of life experiences and behaviors
- *What would you assume a veteran might believe about this theory?*

# Initiating Collaboration

- Met during summer with local Disabled American Veterans Commander, and head of the Veterans Service Office, Robert Ladd
- Facts I learned that amazed me:
  - Howard County has highest concentration of war veterans in the state of Indiana (~10%!)
  - Also, 4<sup>th</sup> highest concentration of war veterans among all counties nationwide

# Desired Assurances

- The comfort level of participating veterans would be fully respected, including:
  - Students would behave generally respectfully
  - Students would not ask veterans to recount specific war-related events of any kind
  - Students would not inquire about past or current mental distress suffered by veterans
- Anticipating this, I had developed a plan

# Implementation

- Students received a detailed (5-page) document on the first day of class describing all aspects of the project
- Due dates for specific tasks were included:
  - Required group meeting with instructor
  - Required completion of forms detailing group plans for the project
  - Annotated Bibliography of background sources
  - Work days for project (no lectures given)

# Implementation

- All group questions were reviewed and approved by me 2 weeks before interviews
- Questions were submitted to Commander Ladd for review and distribution to participating veterans
- Interview times were scheduled via communications between myself and Commander Ladd
  - Each group submitted 3 possible times during target week
  - Commander Ladd scheduled veterans individually

# Preparing the Students

- Continuous, persuasive emphasis on respectful behavior every time the project was discussed in class
- Tips on interviewing provided in class:
  - Being prepared to collect data appropriately
  - Introducing themselves, starting to open the floor
  - Introducing the topic
  - Responding to answers, asking for elaboration

# The Big Day

- I had scheduled rooms on campus for each interview, and made parking arrangements for veterans
- Students and veterans met for the first time in the interview room
- My general observations – what a range of interactions!



# Outcomes

- Anticipated
  - Students behaved themselves!
  - Students did successfully complete all aspects of these undergraduate research projects
  - Students voiced finding the interviews interesting and eye-opening, and some students with relatives who are veterans voiced renewed curiosity about and understanding of those experiences

# Outcomes

- Unanticipated
  - Students in the class who were veterans were put in contact with the local veteran's group
  - Veterans reported being enriched by experience
  - Data from Fall 2010 semester revealed some interesting findings, not all of which conformed to hypotheses (to be detailed in later slides)

## Comments from Veterans

*“[One veteran] just wanted to say how wonderful the interviews went and it was the best interview the he has conducted. He has done several interviews [with various media organizations]. So please let those students that did his interview know how appreciat[ive] he was of the interview and respect that was given to him.”*

## Comments from Veterans

*“Thinking back about the students interviews with local Veterans, again you have start[ed] a good thing in bringing awareness of Veterans views. Please keep up the good work. I know you have become a hero with our local Veterans and we greatly appreciate all your efforts in shaping todays youth.”*

# Research Activity

- Testing for changes in attitudes about community service during Fall 2010 term
  - Time 1: 2<sup>nd</sup> week of term
  - Time 2: 15<sup>th</sup> week of term
- Hs: No differences between classes in knowledge, but SL project students will show significant increases in positive attitudes about community service

# Measures

- **Community Service Attitudes Scale** (Shiarella et al., 2000)
  - 9 subscales, 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), all  $\alpha$ 's indicating good reliability:
    - Awareness of community needs
    - Actions leading to change
    - Ability to make a difference in the community
    - Connectedness between self and community needs
    - Norms about importance of volunteering
    - Empathy towards those in need
    - Costs to self for volunteering
    - Benefits to self for volunteering
    - Seriousness of need for volunteering to help community
- Interest in, and knowledge of, research in psych

# Results

- Mean baseline levels of most CSAS measures were quite high at beginning of term in both classes (no significant differences by group)
  - Awareness, Norms, and Benefits were all at or near 6 on a 7 scale (highly skewed)
  - Connectedness and Cost were closer to midpoint (more normally distributed)
- Paired t-tests of CSAS scales in each class showed no significant changes pre-post (all students in each class in same comparison)

# Results: Considering Student Age

- For the service learning class:
  - Younger: greater Costs (4.42 to 5.00;  $t(2,17)=-2.13, p < .05$ )
  - Older: reduced Norms (6.13 to 5.72;  $t(2,18)=2.87, p < .05$ )
- For the standard observational class:
  - Younger: reduced interest in organizing and analyzing data (3.00 to 2.41;  $t(2,21)=2.35, p < .05$ )
  - Older: increased interest in data collection (3.00 to 3.60;  $t(2,10)= -2.71, p < .05$ )
- No changes in knowledge of research

# Conclusions

- Small samples, need replication
- Service learning activities may mean different things to different age groups of students
  - Only students doing the SL project showed any changes in attitudes about community service
  - However, changes were not in expected direction
- If the learning objective is to increase interest in research generally, SL projects may not be best (*seen as more a civic activity than research*)

# Thank You

- Commander Robert Ladd, DAV Chapter 28
- All participating veterans:
  - Jim Ault
  - Terry Baumfalk
  - William Bolton
  - Jerry Fivecoate
  - Ken Gardner
  - Tom Hagan
  - Karl Hardiman
  - Spencer Hays
  - Woody Luecke
  - William Mezick
  - Ken Munoz
  - Annette Nearon
  - Rex Ritchie
  - Jeff Schwartz
  - Lori Schwartz
  - William Shannon
  - Jason Vazquez
  - Larry Woodhouse
- All participating students, especially Alese Bennett (RA on this project)

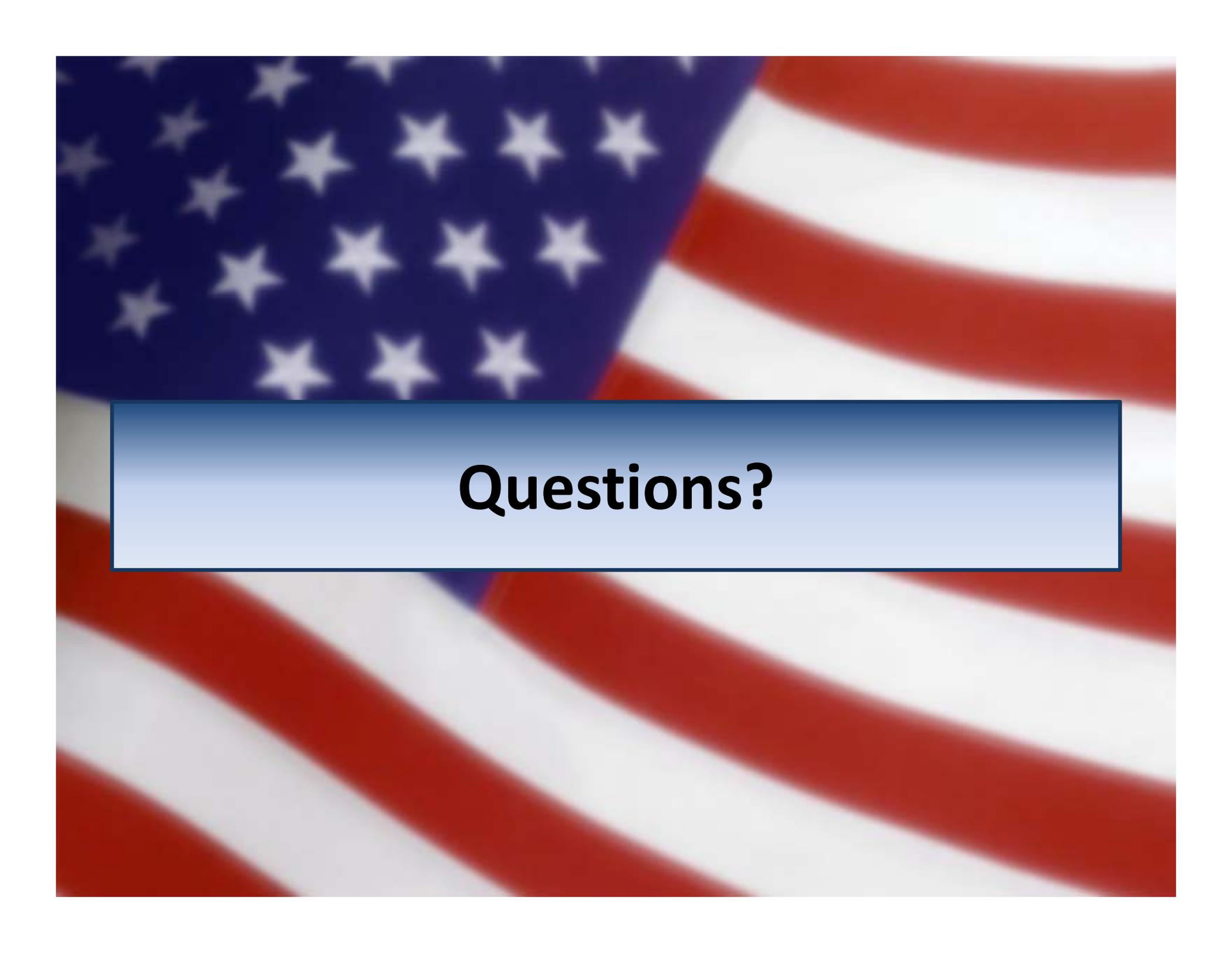
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The background of the slide is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the United States flag, showing the stars and stripes. A semi-transparent blue rectangular box with a thin dark border is centered horizontally across the middle of the image.

**Questions?**