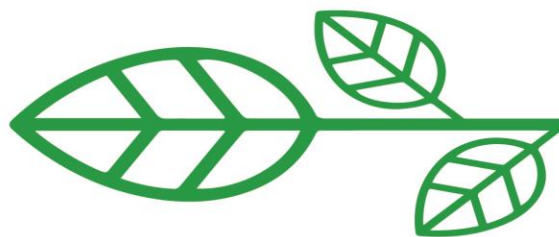# Exploring the Relationship Between Service-Learning and University Students' Purpose in Life

Mota Ribeiro*, L., Doroftei, A., Miranda, F., Bringle, R. G., Dias, P., Peixoto, R., Oliveira, A., Correia, M., Aramburuzabala, P., & Rosário, P.

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International Conference "University as an epicentre for social responsibility: commitment to people and the planet"
19 and 20 June 2023

Introduction

Service-Learning (SL) outcomes:

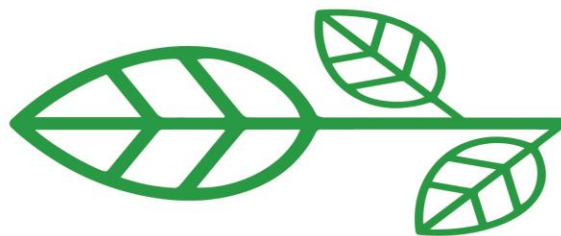|			
Academic learning	Civic learning	Personal growth	Communication and teamwork skills
Critical thinking	Self-esteem	Empathy	Creativity to help others

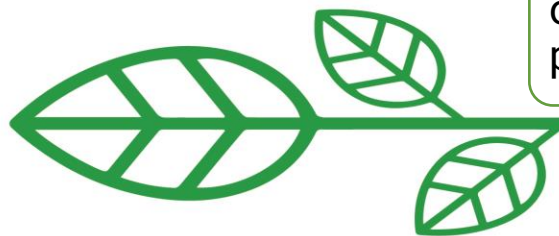(Bringle & Clayton, 2021; Castro et al., 2020)

Introduction

To thoroughly understand the development of students in higher education, it is necessary to look at the dimensions of spirituality and purpose in life (Astin & Astin, 2010)

Students' purpose in life tends to change over the first three years at university
(Astin & Astin, 2009, 2010)

A greater sense of purpose in life is associated with better psychosocial and physical health and healthier behaviors (Kim et al., 2022)

SL can address the dimensions of purpose in life, as it presupposes an involvement with and beyond the impact on the self, can stimulate the attribution of emotional meaning, and is based on the premise of making the world a better place (Moran, 2018)

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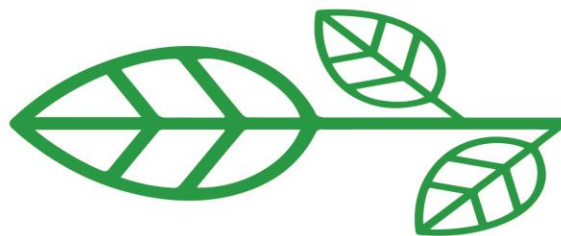CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

SL
SERVICE LEARNING

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer to the following research questions:

(Q1) How do students define their own life purpose?

(Q2) To what extent do students consider that their life purpose has changed after participating in a SL course?
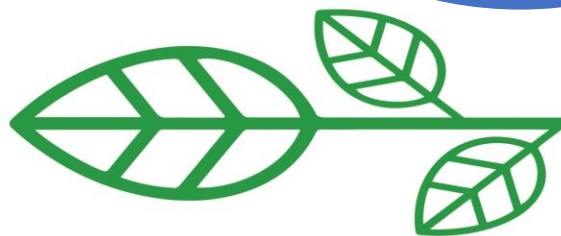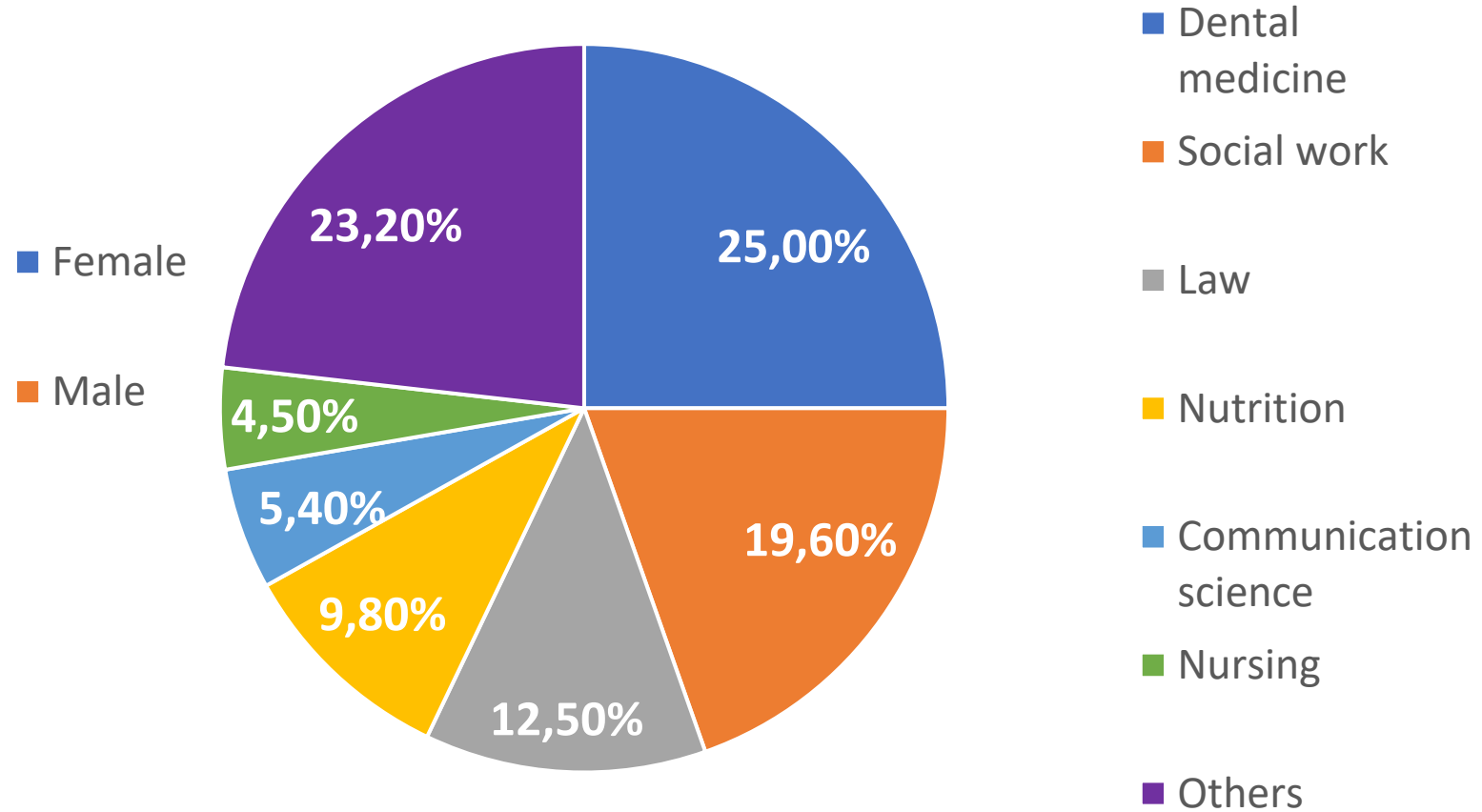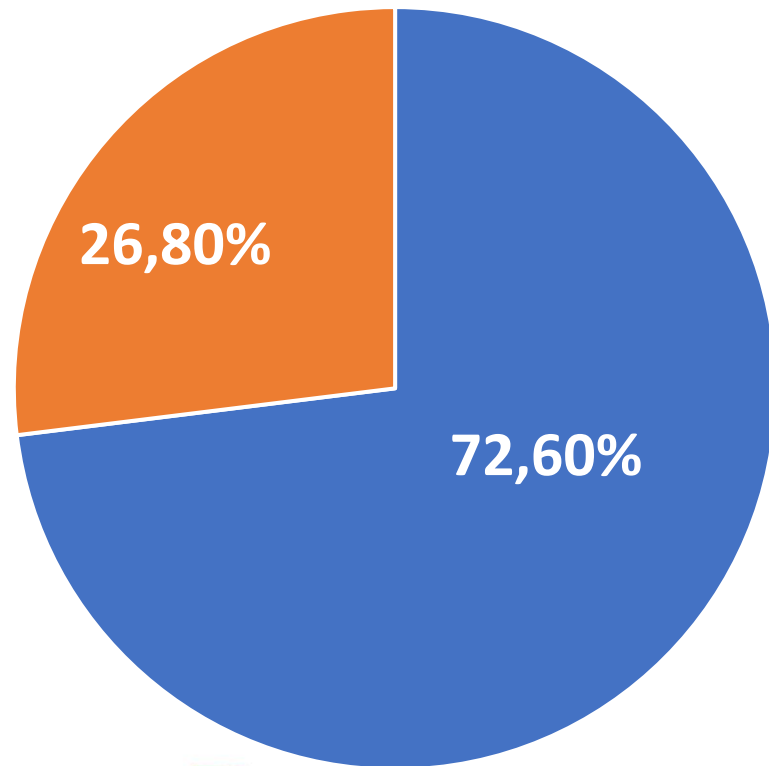
Method

- Online questionnaire administered to 112 university students after SL courses.

- Students involved in 15 SL courses in four different campuses in Universidade Católica Portuguesa.

Braga

Porto

Viseu

4 campuses in UCP

Lisboa
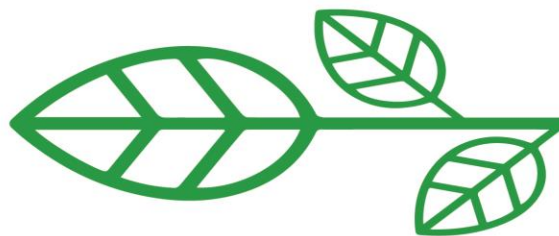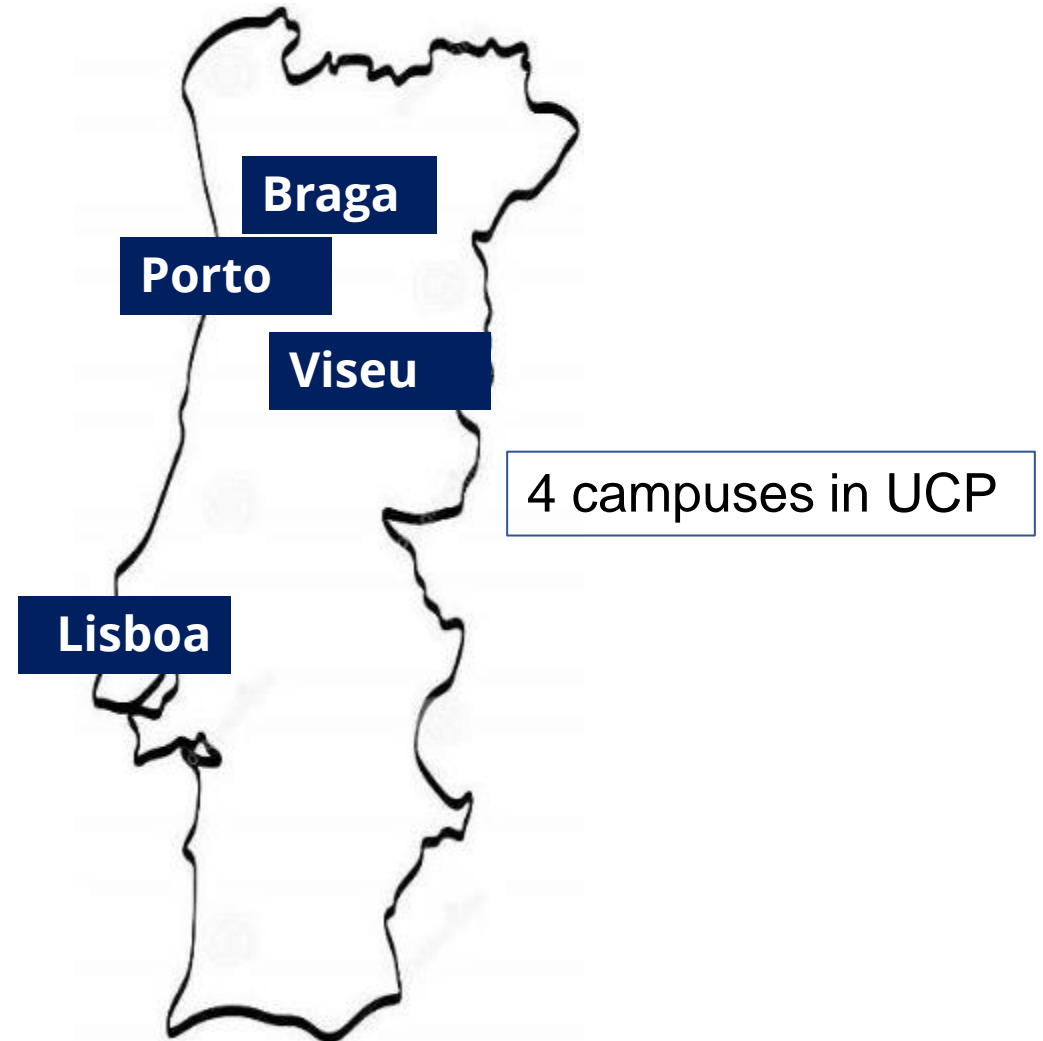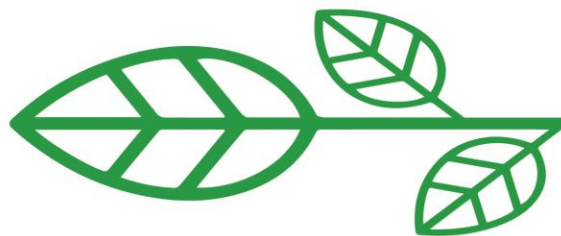
Method

Participants (N = 112):

- Aged between 18 and 51 years old (*M* = 23.25; *SD* = 6.51)

Method

Some examples of the SL courses:

- Social work students provided support for the social integration of children and youth who, in addition to being in a situation of failure, absenteeism or dropping out of school, were exposed to and/or had deviant behavior, by promoting awareness, information, and training in the areas of citizenship, health, and digital inclusion.

- Nursing students developed workshops on health, particularly on basic life support.

- Nutrition sciences students promoted healthy and sustainable food among vulnerable children and youth.

- Dental medicine students promoted oral healthcare among people with disabilities and their formal and informal caregivers. The students performed the diagnosis, identified treatment needs, defined and executed treatment plans and implemented activities to promote oral health.

Method

Purpose in life

- Open-ended question

- "Describe in your own words what you consider to be your purpose in life"

Four follow-up questions

- "To what extent has your life purpose changed as a result of the service-learning course?"

- "To what extent is the service you performed related to your life purpose?"

- "To what extent do you consider that being involved in activities to help others is part of your identity?"

- "To what extent do you think your service work in this course/extracurricular activity helped others?"
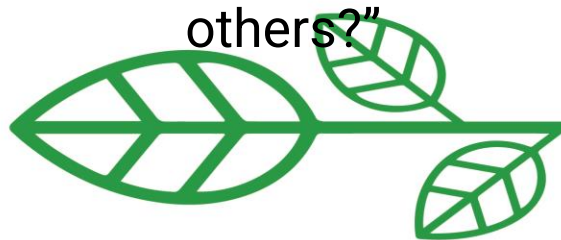
Results

Students' perceptions of their purpose in life reflects multiple dimensions: **social, personal growth, well-being, professional, relationship, economic, religious,** and **hedonistic.**

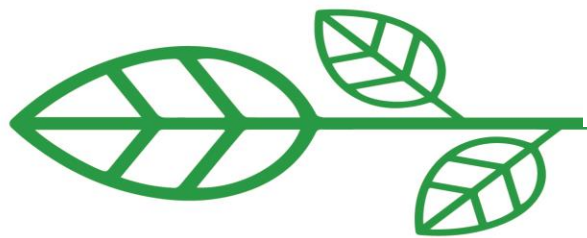| Category	References	%*
Social	87	78%
Help or take care of others	43	38%
Having an impact	20	18%
Build a better world	10	9%
Making others happy	8	7%
Practice the good	3	3%
Having empathy as a value	3	3%
Personal Growth	43	38%
Personal development	19	17%
Personal success	7	6%
Making the best of oneself, endeavor	6	5%
Achieve your own goals	5	4%
Being truth to oneself	3	3%
Personal fulfilment	3	3%

* Percentage values were obtained dividing the number of references of a code by the total of references obtained (N = 112)
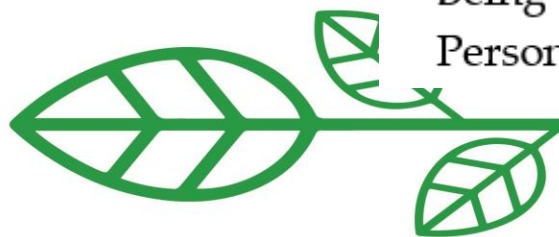
Results

Category	References	%*
Well-Being	**41**	**35%**
Being happy	22	19%
Being healthy	6	5%
Quality of life	6	5%
Enjoy every moment of life	5	4%
Have a peaceful, balanced life	1	1%
Traveling	1	1%
Professional	**15**	**14%**
Having a job, a career	7	6%
Professional fulfilment	7	6%
Being a good worker	2	2%
Relationship	**10**	**9%**
Build a family	5	4%
Having good relationship with the people around	4	4%
Making the family proud	1	1%
Economic	**7**	**6%**
Have independence, financial stability	5	4%
Being rich	2	2%
Religious	**2**	**2%**
Fulfill a divine purpose	1	1%
Practice Catholic values	1	1%
No purpose in life	**2**	**2%**

* Percentage values were obtained dividing the number of references of a code by the total of references obtained (N = 112)

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Results

Some examples of university students' answers:

- Social dimension

  - *I believe that my purpose in life is to use all the knowledge I have acquired throughout my academic career to help people achieve their goals, improve their quality of life or simply make them feel better about themselves* (male nutrition student)

- Personal growth dimension

  - (…) *to be a human being more evolved in many ways* (female nursing student)

- Well-being dimension

  - [have] *emotional, social and mental stability and above all have health* (female law student)
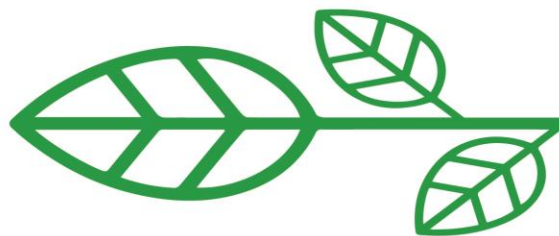
Results

Some examples of university students' answers:

- Professional dimension
  - *getting a job in the area in which I studied and that it makes me satisfied and happy* (female tourism student)

- Relationship dimension
  - *have a good family and social relationship* (female dental student)

- Economic dimension
  - *My purpose in life is to have a high standard of living, wealth and a high-status career* (male social work student)

- Hedonistic
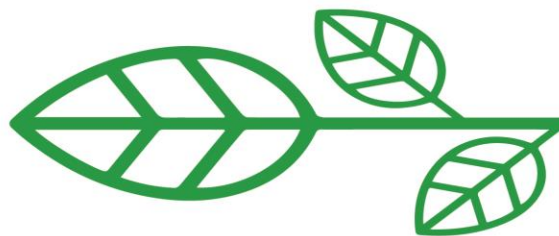 - *Travelling* (female social work student)
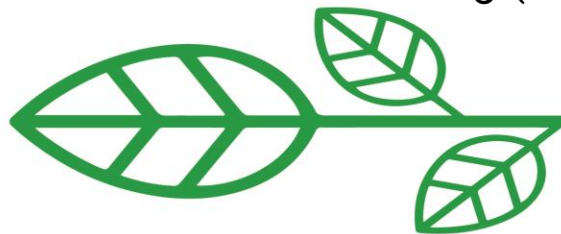
Discussion

Results meet the definition of purpose in life by Moran (2018), as students consider aspects related to themselves, to the need and willingness to help others, and to the community
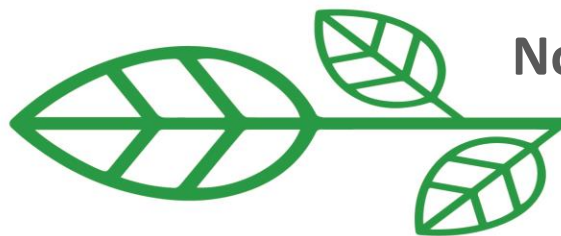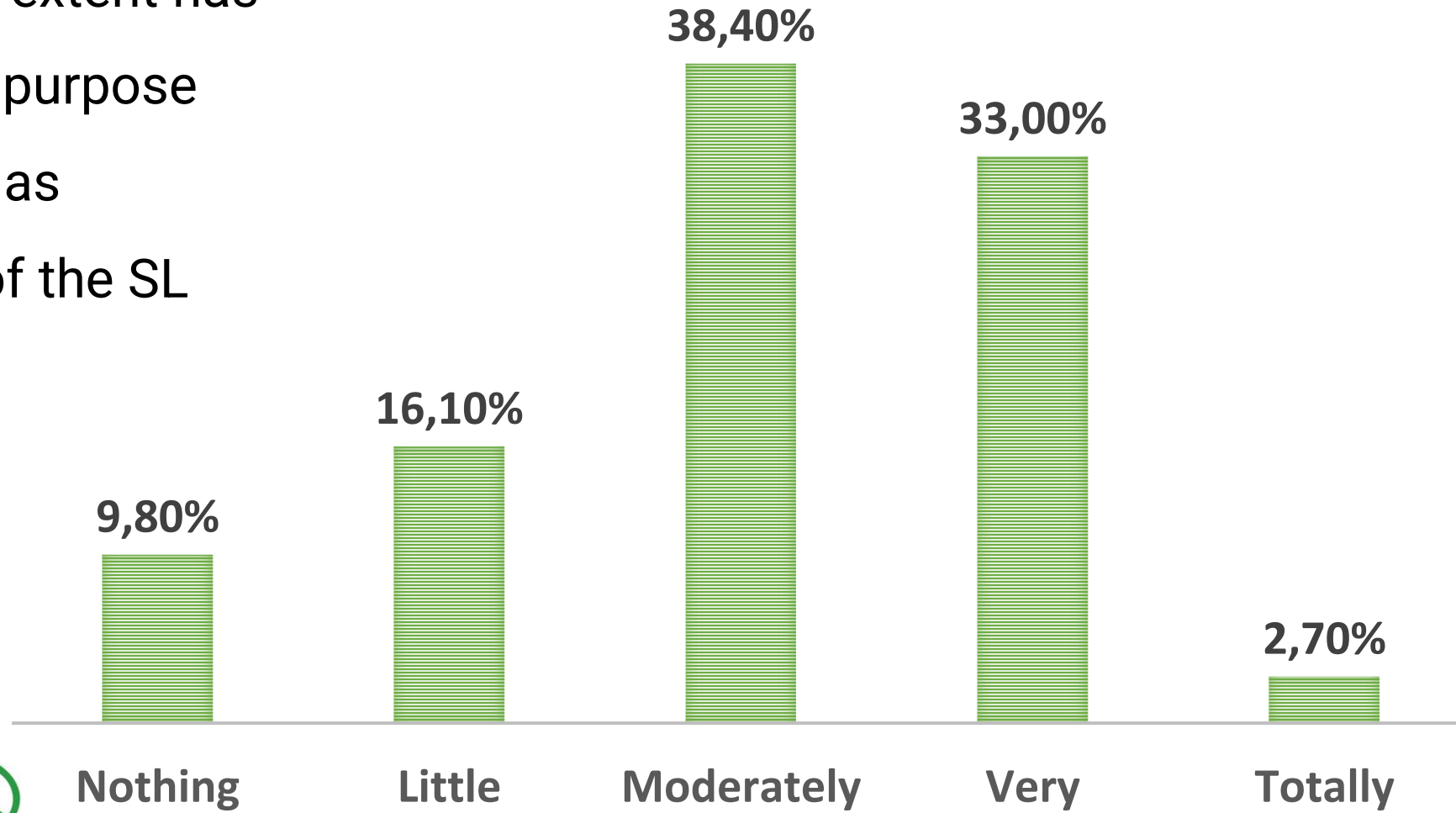
Students' purpose in life includes self-oriented goals and a pro-social orientation which is associated with well-being in middle age (Moran, 2023)

Students' formulations of purpose in life refer to civic purpose, as they consider the world beyond the self (Malin et al., 2015)
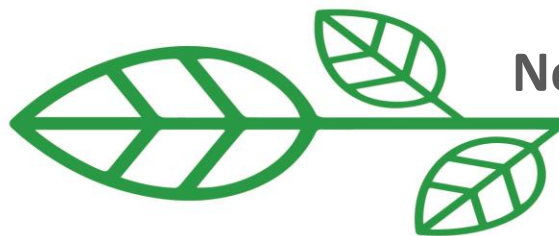
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Results

"To what extent has your life purpose changed as a result of the SL course?"

Nothing	Little	Moderately	Very	Totally
9,80%	16,10%	38,40%	33,00%	2,70%

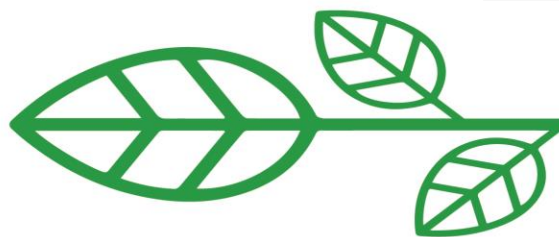# Results

"To what extent is the service you performed related to your life purpose?"

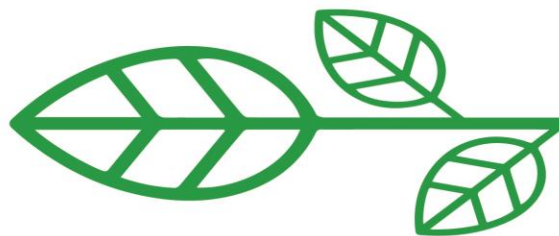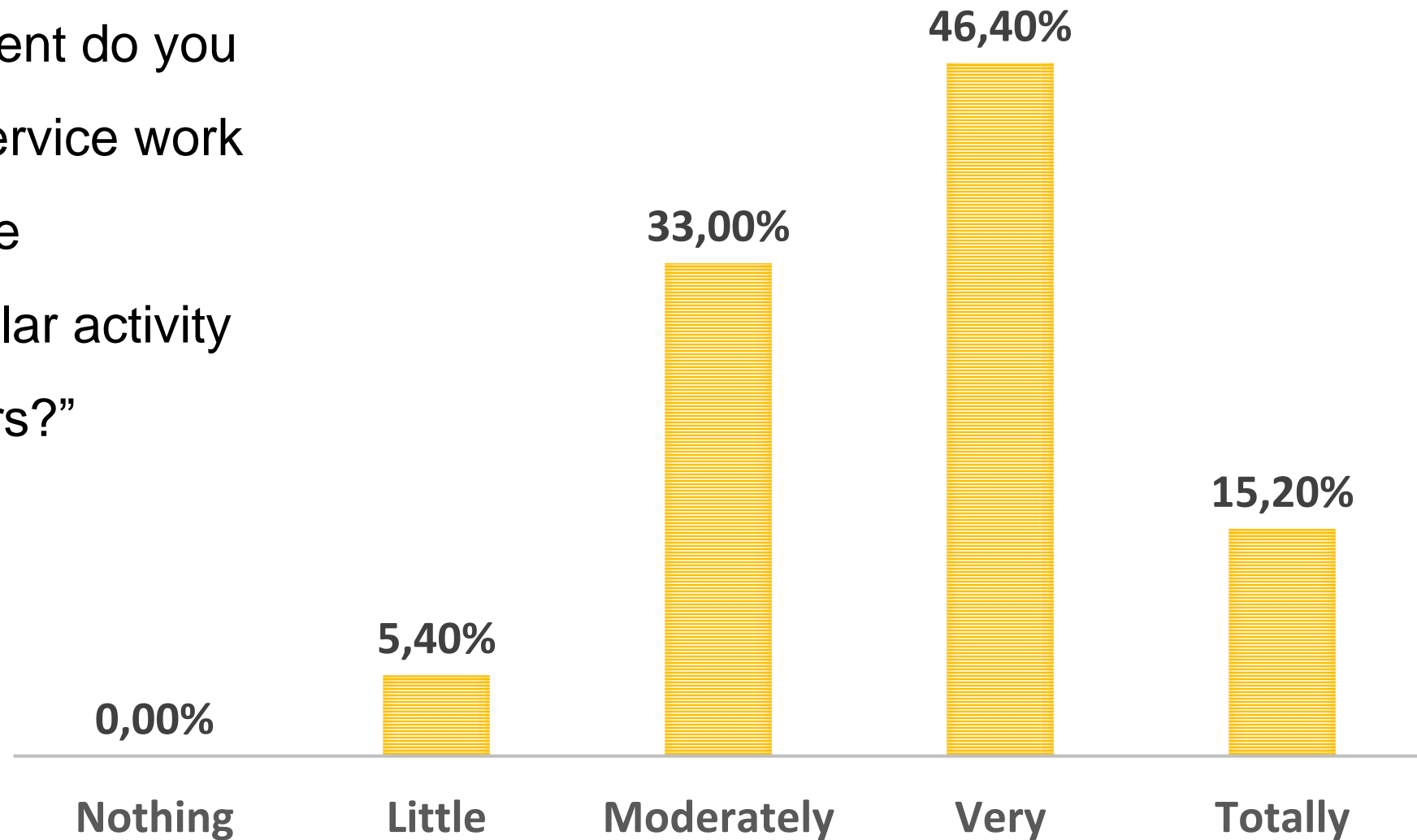|				
4,50%	8,90%	25,90%	45,50%	15,20%
Nothing	Little	Moderately	Very	Totally
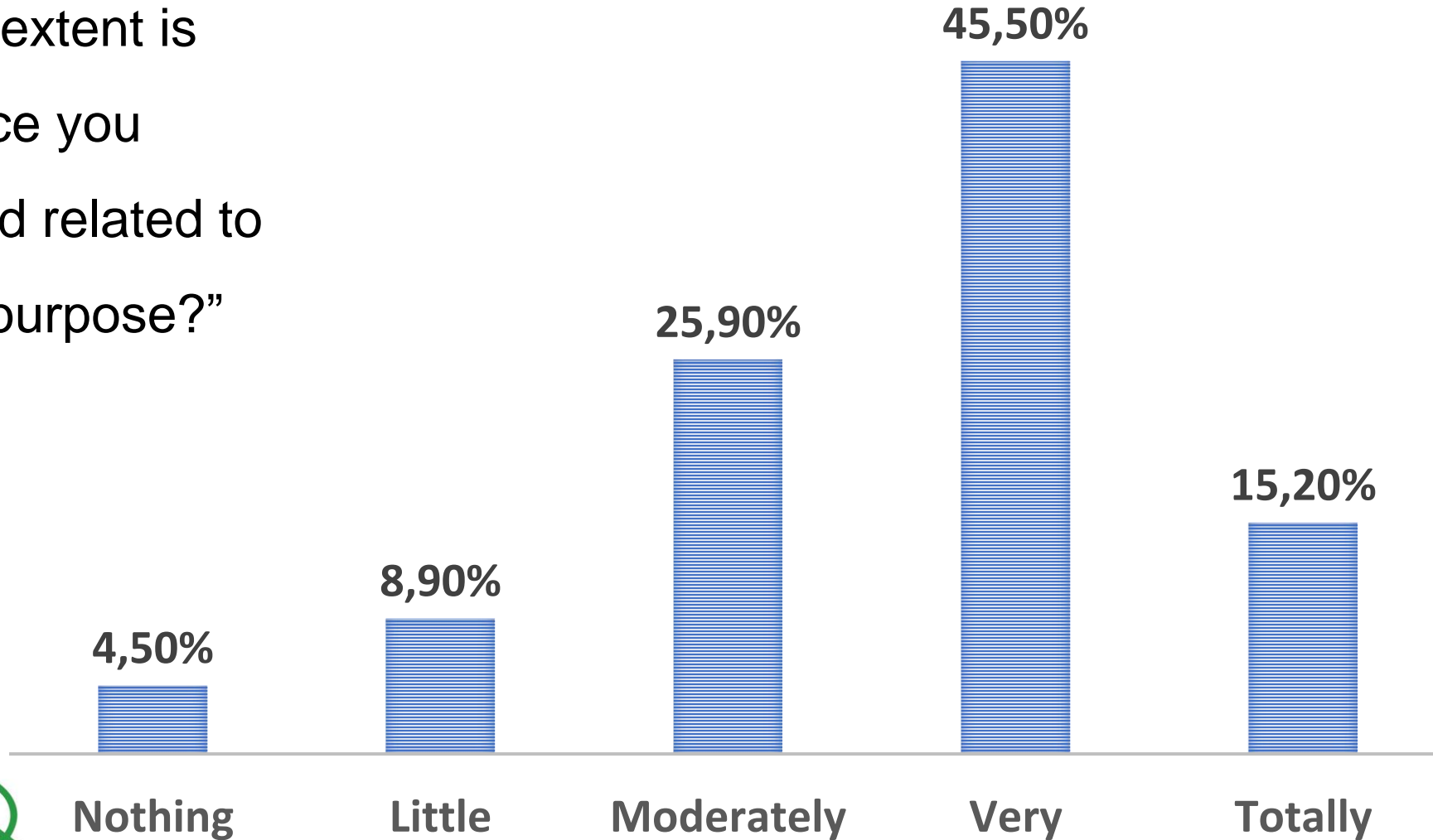
Results

"To what extent do you consider that being involved in activities to help others is part of your identity?"

Results

"To what extent do you think your service work in this course /extracurricular activity helped others?"

| Nothing	Little	Moderately	Very	Totally
0,00%	5,40%	33,00%	46,40%	15,20%
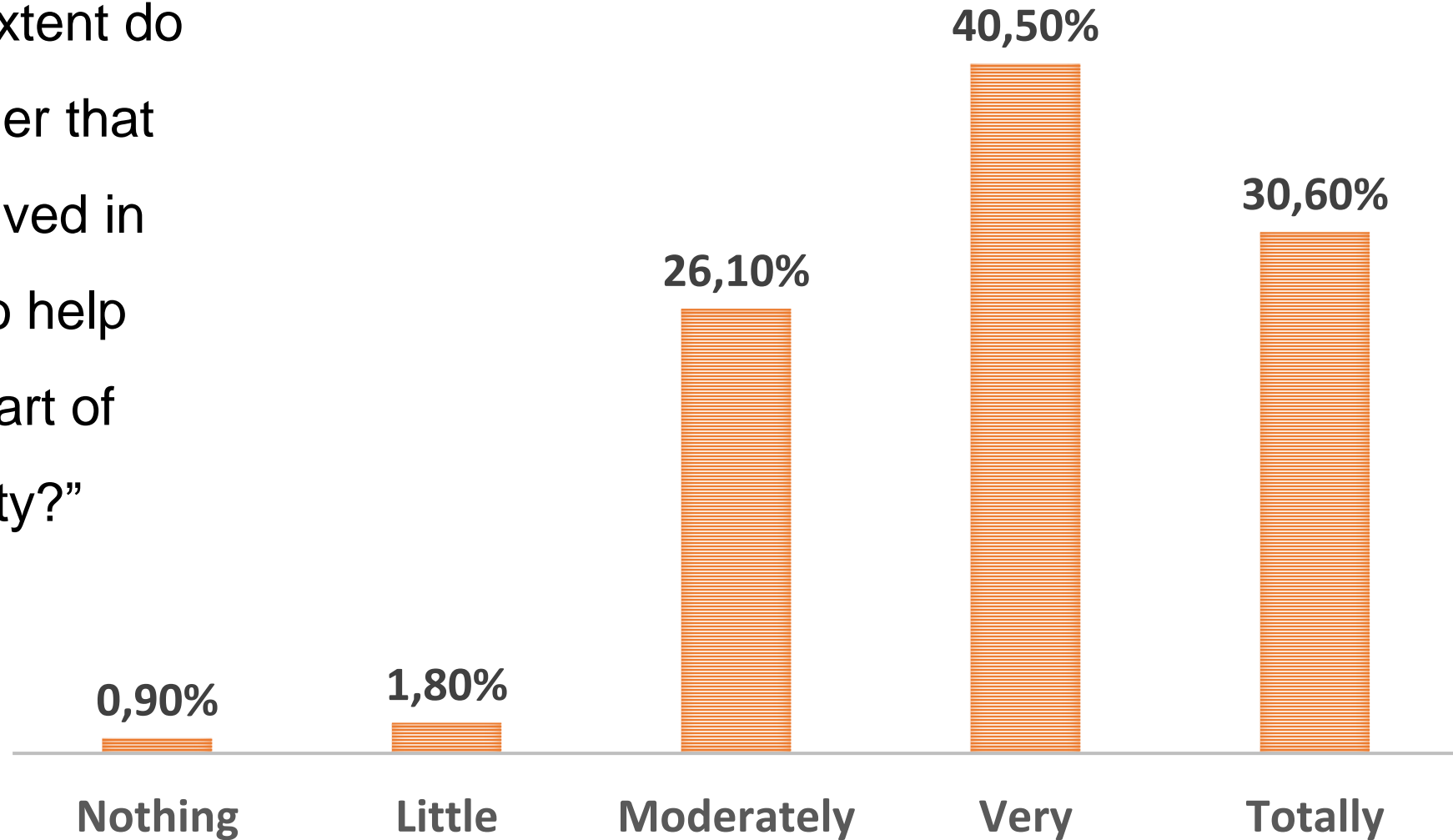
Discussion

Changes in students' purpose in life as identified in the literature (e.g., Opazo et al., 2018)

SL courses can contribute to students' exploration of values and personal meaning (Welch & Koth, 2013)

Early adulthood is one key moment for the development of purpose in life (Moran, 2017)

SL course was related their life purpose | students choose their program
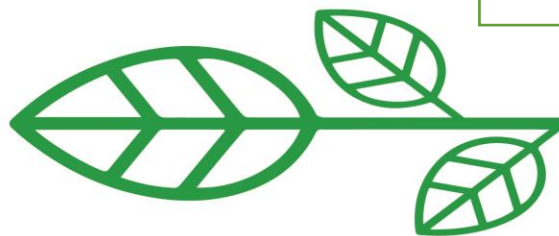
Conclusions

- Higher education institutions can be spaces that promote the development of students' purpose in life, since the students are confronted with new people, new cultures, and new ideas.

- When universities and teachers become involved in the process of developing students' purpose in life, students tend to demonstrate greater growth in their spirituality.

(Astin & Astin, 2009, 2010)
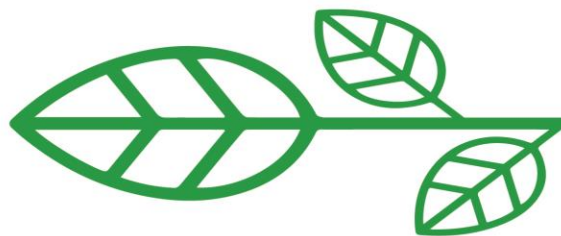
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