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This chapter summarizes institutional best practices in the assessment of service-learning.

Innovative Practices in Service-Learning and Curricular Engagement

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As civic and community engagement become more salient within higher education (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens, 2003), there is a need to examine critically the core components that allow campuses to realize Ernest Boyer's vision for the new American college that connects its rich resources "to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers, to our cities" (1996, pp. 19–20). Boyer's call is aligned with higher education rethinking about how community involvement can change the nature of faculty work, enhance student learning, better fulfill campus mission, and improve the quality of life in communities (Bringle, Games, and Malloy, 1999; Calleson, Jordan, and Seifer, 2005; Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens, 2003; Edgerton, 1994; Harkavy and Puckett, 1994; O'Meara and Rice, 2005; Percy, Zimpher, and Brukaradt, 2006). This civic dimension of higher education is the basis for the Carnegie elective Community Engagement Classification.

Although there are many manifestations of civic and community engagement, curricular engagement in general and service-learning classes in particular are core components as campuses progress beyond traditional models of engagement, such as expert-based approaches to outreach and professional service, that develop broader and deeper impact across the campus and within communities. Broader impact can be demonstrated by evidence of institutional structures to support the development of service-learning courses; the prevalence of service-learning classes across degree programs and schools; the level of participation of students, faculty, and community partners; and the range of community partners, service activities, and social

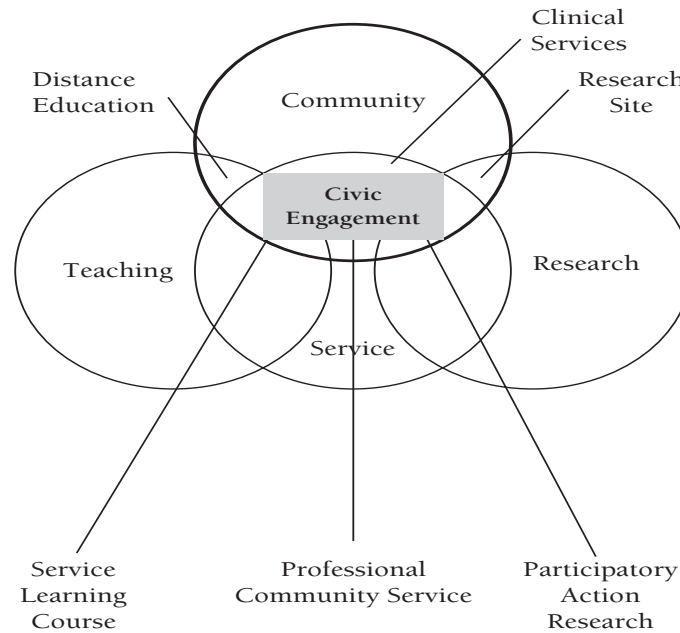
issues addressed. Documenting the breadth of impact is accomplished by reporting the number of service-learning classes, the number of students enrolled and hours they contributed to the community, the number of faculty and range of disciplines, and the number of community partners and types of community issues addressed through service-learning. Depth of impact can be demonstrated by the extent to which service-learning is integral to degree programs and majors, faculty work and rewards, student learning outcomes, institutional mission, and long-term reciprocal partnerships with community organizations that address community needs. Documentation of the depth of impact requires more varied forms of evidence, and this is the type of evidence that distinguishes campuses that have received the voluntary classification for community engagement.

As a core component of civic engagement, service-learning is defined as a “course-based, credit bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility” (Bringle and Hatcher, 1995, p. 112). This definition highlights the academic, curricular nature of service-learning; the importance of community voice in the development, implementation, and assessment of the impact of a service-learning course; the key role that reflection activities play in intentionally connecting the community service activity to reach targeted educational outcomes; and the importance of expanding educational objectives to include civic education. In service-learning, students are not only “serving to learn,” which occurs in other forms of curricular engagement and applied learning such as clinical, fieldwork, internship, and practicum, but also “learning to serve,” the unique civic dimension of the pedagogy.

Unlike many other forms of practice-based and community-based learning (examples are cooperative education, extension service placements, field education, internships, and practicum), service-learning is integrated into a course and has the intentional goal of developing civic skills and dispositions in students (Battistoni, 2000; Furco, 1996; Westheimer and Kahne, 2003). Unlike cocurricular community service programs (volunteer programs, community outreach, and student service organizations, for example), service-learning is academic work in which the community service activities are used as a “text” that is interpreted, analyzed, and related to the content of a course in ways that permit a formal evaluation of the academic learning outcomes (Furco, 1996; Zlotkowski, 1996).

Although not a new pedagogy (Stanton, Giles, and Cruz, 1999), service-learning has gained prominence in higher education during the past fifteen years with a presence in all institutional types and across all fields of study in American colleges and universities (Campus Compact, 2005; Zlotkowski, 2000). As an academic enterprise, service-learning is a dimension of faculty work that is most broadly defined as civic engagement (see Figure 4.1). Civic

Figure 4.1. Engagement of Faculty Work in and with the Community



Source: Bringle, Games, and Malloy (1999).

engagement can occur through teaching, research, or service that is done in and with the community and includes a variety of activities (see the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis Web-based Institutional Portfolio at <http://www.iport.iupui.edu> for sample performance measures and examples of evidence that can be collected to document civic engagement). However, we contend that service-learning provides the most important vehicle of community engagement because

when service-learning is institutionalized, then it is part of the academic culture of the institution, aligns with the mission, becomes an enduring aspect of the curriculum that is supported by more than a few faculty, improves other forms of pedagogy, leads to other forms of civic scholarship, influences faculty roles and rewards, is part of the experience of most students, and has widespread support, understanding, and involvement of students, faculty, administration, and the community. This leads us to the conclusion that service-learning is, thus, a necessary component of effective civic engagement and, if one cannot measure and evaluate every aspect of civic engagement, then service-learning is the most important critical indicator of a campus's civic engagement [Bringle, Hatcher, Hamilton, and Young, 2001, p. 93].

The Carnegie elective Community Engagement Classification endorses the centrality of service-learning in assessing community engagement by devoting one type of classification to curricular engagement and highlighting service-learning courses as the type of evidence that is sought to establish the quantity and quality of curricular engagement. Information is requested about numerous aspects of service-learning on a campus, but these focus primarily on the prevalence and nature of service-learning in the curriculum (individual courses, degree programs, and graduation requirements, for example) and the identification of student learning outcomes and their assessment. We concentrated our analysis of the institutional applications to evidence related to curricular engagement on these two themes.

Prevalence and Nature of Service-Learning Classes

We examined a selection of the applications submitted in the first wave to the Carnegie Foundation for the voluntary classification for community engagement and focused on the information related to curricular engagement. The evidence of curricular engagement in applications provides an important portrait of the status of service-learning in some of the most engaged institutions in American higher education. Capturing the prevalence and nature of service-learning depends on how a campus defines service-learning, how this definition is understood by faculty and staff across departments and schools, and how student enrollment in service-learning classes can be gathered (Zuiches, 2008). Most campuses in the first wave of applications offered their own campus-specific definitions of service-learning (Driscoll, 2008). Some have adopted a broader interpretation and definition of service-learning that includes cocurricular and other activities (Campus Compact, 2003). In all cases, however, service-learning must have an academic component that is integrated with the service activities through structured reflection and must target both academic and civic learning outcomes for students (Bringle, Hatcher, and Clayton, 2006).

Every campus demonstrated in its applications evidence of their capacity to answer questions about the prevalence of service-learning and other forms of community-based instruction, such as community-based research, cooperative education, and internships, even if this information was based on approximations rather than refined data. This is not trivial, for, we would speculate, the mechanism to document service-learning has developed only during the past decade or so. This capacity demonstrates that these institutions have defined service-learning and have the ability to monitor the prevalence of service-learning classes for reasons that predate the Carnegie application (for example, institutional research, accreditation, program evaluation, publicity, and strategic planning) or as a result of the Carnegie application.

The institutional applications also demonstrated that having this information about the prevalence of service-learning classes contributes to other

purposes of the institution, including accreditation, program review, and publicity about community engagement to external audiences (community leaders, community partners, and prospective students, for example), information for funding allocations and resources (the board of trustees, granting agencies, and legislators, among others), and internal purposes (including annual reports, benchmarking, faculty roles and rewards, recognition, and strategic planning). Most important, perhaps, this level of documentation increases the capacity for institutional assessment of student learning outcomes and community impact of service-learning.

Quantifying the prevalence of service-learning and community-based instruction presents a perplexing challenge. First, numbers of courses matter for some important purposes, but they are very limited in their implications for assessing the quality of curricular engagement and the quality of learning derived from curricular engagement. Concerning number of courses, the ideal aspiration would be that service-learning has a presence that is evenly distributed across academic units rather than clustered in a few and across various levels of the curriculum (first year, major, capstone, and graduate). Simply reporting the number of service-learning classes provides little information about the vertical distribution of those courses (within the curriculum of a major or degree program) or the horizontal distribution (across academic units, across community issues). We saw few examples of campuses organizing their data in this manner. In addition, only limited information was shared about how service-learning courses are aligned with the mission of the campus, and even less evidence as to how service-learning is responsive to community priorities or pressing social issues (Boyer, 1996). Revisions and additional questions in the Carnegie classification process now probe for this type of information. Such a mapping of vertical and horizontal density and the evenness of distribution was largely lacking in the first wave of documentation, but having this information will offer insight into the degree of institutional support of service-learning classes beyond merely counting the number of courses, students, faculty, and community partners.

Some campuses provided evidence in their applications on the development of multicourse curricula that focus on the learning outcomes most clearly aligned with civic engagement: community-based leadership, public service, study of the nonprofit sector, and community service studies. Many of these programs incorporate service-learning as the sole or dominant pedagogy of the curriculum. These new certificates, majors, and degree programs, coupled with programs and initiatives that reexamine and enhance the civic engagement of existing majors and departments, represent significant curricular innovations beyond the revision of isolated service-learning courses. The advantage of these curricular innovations is that they are intentional, coherent, and sequenced curricular developments that represent support from a number of instructors and faculty within and across

departments or programs. This movement toward an “engaged department” strategy represents an important development for resource allocation (Battistoni and others, 2003; Kecskes, 2004) and has implications for faculty development programs designed to support the integration of service-learning across the curriculum.

In addition, the documentation in the first wave of applications provides many examples for how the development of service-learning is linked to other curricular initiatives and cocurricular programs on campus. These include first-year success seminars, large-enrollment first-year courses, thematic learning communities, general education requirements, capstone courses, diversity initiatives, orientation programs, undergraduate research programs, international study abroad, and service-based scholarship programs. All of these are significant advances in curricular innovation beyond the integration of service-learning into an isolated course. These institutional strategies broaden the discussion and participation of faculty and staff and demonstrate the support of executive leadership who value service-learning as having a significant role in many areas of campus work. Whether it starts with mission, strategic planning, institutional problem solving (academic success and retention are two examples), individual faculty members, or helping academic units do their work better, service-learning is now recognized as an active learning strategy to achieve a wide range of campus goals.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment in Service-Learning

One type of quality control evident in documentation is how campuses support the development and implementation of service-learning courses. Most campuses reported strategies in their applications to support faculty development: faculty fellows programs, internal course development grants, and training sessions and workshops are examples. In addition, some campuses provided guidelines for service-learning courses and document a process to review course syllabi in order to designate a course as a service-learning course. Whether through a faculty advisory committee or at the campus level, such as a program review committee or curriculum review, this type of course review increases the capacity to formally designate service-learning courses in course bulletins or on student transcripts. These institutional strategies are based on the assumption that if a course is well designed and meets the designated criteria of a service-learning course, the course is more likely to produce desired outcomes for students and community partners on implementation.

The evidence offered to evaluate the degree to which service-learning courses and other community-based courses meet intended learning outcomes mirrors general practice in higher education for gathering these types of evidence. Assessment is heavily dependent, first and foremost, on self-report instruments that students complete, usually at the end of the semester.

This assessment may be general student satisfaction surveys or surveys tailored to service-learning. There were examples in the applications of surveys that were specifically developed within a course, common to a set of courses, or centrally distributed to all service-learning courses on a campus. Furthermore, the evidence offered about the use of this information was typically speculative, and the process of using the feedback to redesign and improve a course was not implemented in a systematic or programmatic manner. In addition, our analysis and that of Driscoll (2008) found little evidence of community impact through service-learning courses, a void that is consistent with the lack of community input and voice across all of the applications submitted to Carnegie in the first wave.

In addition to a common end-of-semester survey that permits the aggregation of data across the curriculum, some campuses reported using other sources of evidence to monitor student learning outcomes. In general, there is some, but at this point quite limited, evidence of how assessment of curricular engagement is coordinated with, linked to, or supported by other forms of institutional assessment and research. Some campuses integrate questions about service-learning involvement in either entering student or graduating student surveys. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is one of many instruments that can be used to document institutional accountability in civic engagement. NSSE was cited and used as an institutional assessment strategy by some campuses in the first wave of documentation. This survey has the advantage that the results permit comparisons with peer institutions, and it becomes possible to link results of NSSE to other institutional data, such as surveys from service-learning courses and student transcripts. However, NSSE and other similar surveys, including the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement and Community College Survey of Student Engagement, are limited in that they capture the level of activities as self-reported by students, focus on engagement as general student involvement in campus and classroom activities rather than civic engagement, and are not designed to explore directly the impact of these activities on student learning outcomes (see <http://www.csl.iupui.edu> for a sample listing of accountability tools for civic engagement and other surveys used in higher education).

Documentation of curricular engagement will be improved when methods are employed for collecting information on student learning that is evaluated by an independent source rather than students' self-reports. Very few studies currently provide this documentation, although the Carnegie documents do establish that research and scholarship are being conducted on service-learning by faculty and staff that is contributing to a growing body of knowledge (see the National Service-learning Clearinghouse at www.servicelearning.org for resources on conducting research). Almost nonexistent in the applications was the capacity to answer questions about learning at the level of the program (within a major or across the general education curriculum; Katz-Jameson, Clayton, and Bringle, 2008) or institution.

Attempts to evaluate student development and learning over time for a cohort of students are only beginning to develop (Terkla, O'Leary, Wilson, and Diaz, 2007; Wilson, Diaz, O'Leary, and Terkla, 2007), and evidence about the effects of curricular engagement in the postgraduation behaviors and attitudes of students is extremely limited (Astin, Sax, and Avolos, 1999; Vogelgesang and Astin, 2000).

Service-learning provides an excellent opportunity for developing procedures to assess the civic outcomes of service-learning at the course, department, and institutional levels. As Cunningham (2006) notes,

One of [the] goals is the broad-based education of students to be effective engaged citizens in our democratic society, and to be good citizens in our increasingly international world. Civic learning outcomes from higher education are difficult to document, but they are one of the most important social and civic contributions our colleges and universities provide to our society [p. 4].

Again, most evidence provided in the applications on civic learning outcomes consisted of self-report measures of attitudes and beliefs at the course level; there was little evidence at the program or institutional level and no evidence of longitudinal research in materials submitted to Carnegie. Future work on measuring civic outcomes of curricular engagement should specify the learning outcomes germane to the civic domain (Battistoni, 2001; Kirlin, 2003) and identify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of civic-minded graduates (Bringle and Steinberg, forthcoming; Hatcher and Steinberg, 2007). This work is also being addressed by two working groups convened by the American Association of Colleges and Universities and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. The goal of these groups is to develop rubrics for civic learning outcomes. Once they are developed, campuses can use or modify these rubrics to evaluate student products such as electronic portfolios and written narratives as authentic evidence that is collected through a structured reflection process, with these products evaluated in a systematic way (see Ash, Clayton, and Atkinson, 2005) to evaluate student learning.

Conclusion

The documentation that campuses provided in the first wave of the Carnegie elective Community Engagement Classification demonstrates that service-learning is a valued pedagogy for engaged campuses. Service-learning is viewed as central to community engagement not only because it is a core component of the Carnegie elective classification but also because many institutions now have the infrastructure to support the development of service-learning classes. The prevalence of service-learning is readily documented, an important step toward the institutionalization of service-learning in higher education (Bringle and Hatcher, 1995).

There is now a need to go beyond mere counting to develop strategies to assess the quality of service-learning experiences for students, faculty, institutions, and communities. There is also a need to move from course assessment to institutional assessment and research at the program and institutional levels. In addition, institutions need to move from student self-report measures to more authentic forms of evidence, such as student products or responses to structured narrative reflection prompts, that capture student learning. These developments will position curricular engagement to contribute to and improve how the academy thinks about learning outcomes, curricular development, assessment, and community impact.

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