

## **Enhancing the Service Learning Programming through On-going Assessment and Evaluation**

### **Session Presenters:**

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### **Presentation Description:**

CPCC's Service Learning Center, in collaboration with its Planning and Research staff, used existing instruments to develop assessment tools to examine the impact that service learning has on its students, community partners, faculty and institution and will present the results of those assessments. Furthermore we demonstrate a multi-dimensional approach and discuss how we 'connect' the results to improve and strengthen the program.

Assessment and evaluation are important themes of this presentation. It is through these processes that we believe program enhancement can and will occur. At the onset of the service learning evaluation, we consider the following questions:

- What do we want to know? (Is the program delivery effective?)
- What will we look for? (Indicators)
- What will we measure? (Outcomes)
- How will we gather the data? (Quantitative, Qualitative)

By considering the above questions, our framework will structure the assessment design, data analysis, and reporting of the results. In particular, we need to know how we define effectiveness of the service learning program and what we will look for as indicators that the program is effective. We also consider what we intend to measure and how to measure the outcomes that we are expecting. Our survey instruments were developed on-line and we'll have links to our websites highlighting those instruments.

A special feature of this presentation is a community partner survey developed on-line and e-mailed to our busy community partners. We assessed the measurable outcomes of service learning among our community partners. We were interested in the overall organizational impact of our service learning students. We assessed community partners' observations in a number of categories and will report that data. Specifically, community partners reported that students reduced the workload and completed more projects than would have been otherwise completed. In addition, problem areas are also

reported by the agencies and looking at those areas helps service learning staff with planning of the subsequent semesters and learn how community partners value the contribution that students and the college provide to their agencies. Also the data helps strengthen responsiveness to community partners by identifying areas that need improvement. Furthermore, responsiveness to community partners meets part of the criteria that we use in defining service learning at our campus:

- ❖ i.e., Service learning fosters and promotes “civic-engagement” and “partnerships” that represent a new dimension of academic work.

Next, we can link students’ experiences with the service learning course to determine another criterion that we are interested in assessing: student impact. In order to assess student impact, we will examine the self-completed surveys that students complete at the end of their service. We ask students specifically about their experience in several identified categories to determine the areas that students’ experiences match the objectives of the curriculum or long term goals of service learning. We are interested in outcomes that are reported in the service learning literature such as: new student awareness of social problems, career match or mismatch, deeper understanding of course material, increased desire to help others, better understanding of the role of community in the larger society—and others. We look at the various sections to identify themes in the data that emerge. The themes that emerge should lead to a composite of service learning outcomes identified in the literature and part of our overall objectives of the program.

In addition, we are interested in the faculty impact of service learning courses. We wanted to know if teaching service learning courses impacted the faculty professionally and used faculty surveys to measure that outcome. Also, we asked faculty members their perceptions and attitudes about their service learning students. Do faculty members perceive that the students are learning the course material through service learning activities and are those activities contributing to the quality of discussion in the classroom? We also asked faculty if service learning enhanced the learning experience. Again, these outcomes are indicators that the program is contributing to student performance. Long-term outcomes less evident might be increased civic responsibility among the students and better student retention.

By measuring student, faculty and community partner impact and finding positive results or indicators of success, we expect that institutional data of students in service learning courses such as grade performance and retention rates will reflect the institutional impact that gets the attention of stakeholders: the faculty members who teach the classes and the administrative staff that are interested in measurable outcomes of student performance. We are basing our hypotheses on assessment data of the social factors involved in the program and thus our conclusions are driven by a logical connection of program impact, based on initial data that confirm positive indicators by the students, faculty and community agencies. We have begun looking at this data to identify positive student outcomes. In addition, we review our student participation in the service learning program. By using the multidimensional approach, we are not relying on one instrument to tell the story of service learning at our campus. By looking

at the various dimensions of the program, we can begin to understand how the various parts contribute to the program as a whole. Ideally, each step in the assessment process is completed, changes are made to strengthen and improve the program, and the process begins again.

The program is delivered as a PowerPoint presentation. A community partner on-line survey, student survey, faculty survey and institutional data results which compare student retention and grade performance of service learning students to other students will be presented. Also included is an interactive activity designed to explore refining the evaluation process. In general, the program participants should walk away with a new appreciation of evaluation and assessment.

We close the loop by talking about where we go next and solicit interaction from the audience by engaging the audience in several feedback loop scenarios. Specifically the objectives of our presentation are for attendees:

1. To understand the importance of building an evaluative component into your program early and that evaluation needs to be on-going, not sporadic.
2. To understand how evaluation results can be used to strengthen and improve an existing program.
3. To examine the results of student, community, faculty and institutional impact of the service learning program at CPCC.
4. To explore ways that information can be integrated and revealed in performance over time.
5. To understand how to refine the evaluation process, linking outcomes with program goals and objectives, involving all the 'stakeholders' in the program.

The status of our project at CPCC is that we have compiled the various pieces of our evaluation and are beginning to see how the pieces fit together in a coherent fashion. Most importantly, the assessment process began early at the onset of the service learning program so we have baseline data that we can use to compare the evolution of the program on our campus. We are moving toward using the data gathered to strengthen and improve the program over time.