

***Rewarding Service Learning in Community Colleges  
through Faculty Reward Systems***

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Prepared for CCNCE, May 25, 2007, 10:30 – 12:00

This research examined the extent to which curricular service learning endeavors by faculty are rewarded through promotion and tenure processes in community colleges. Within the realm of higher education, community colleges are emerging as significant providers of undergraduate education and serve about one half of all undergraduates in the country (American Association of Community Colleges, 2006). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), more than 1,100 community colleges serve more than 10 million students yearly (AACC, 2006). Additionally, community colleges focus on teaching, with an emphasis on smaller class sizes and with faculty whose primary interests lie within the context of providing a rich and meaningful educational experience, rather than on research.

Framed within Boyer's work on faculty reward systems (see figure 1) and the need to examine what colleges are rewarding, this mixed-methods research utilized a modified survey from the American Association of Community College's (AACC) 2003 Service Learning Survey followed by 10 interviews with service learning representatives.



*Figure 1.* Boyer's four dimensions of scholarship

The 61 survey respondents were from 30 states and represented a return rate of 33%. According to AACC, the colleges that responded originally to the 2003 survey were dispersed throughout the United States with no one area over- or under-represented. However, according to AACC, more urban and suburban community colleges responded to the survey, with 42% from urban areas and 37% from suburban areas, with rural campuses underrepresented. Each college was asked to identify itself as a rural, urban, or suburban institution. AACC acknowledged that a greater number of urban and suburban colleges responded to the 2003 survey. According to AACC, almost one half of the community colleges in the United States have fewer than 3,000 students, yet only a quarter of those colleges responding had fewer than 3,000 students. In fact, almost 33% of the colleges responding had large enrollments of more than 11,000 students. Hence, the responding colleges were more likely to be larger than typical community colleges in the nation. This study population mirrored these same characteristics.

A statistical analysis was performed on the 15 survey items and the results were examined on numerous dimensions. Individuals were asked to complete the surveys in a consensus fashion and the data were analyzed by consensus and individual responders as well as by specific demographic indicators such as rural, urban, suburban responders. Regardless of the dimension assessed, results remained consistent across all types of responders, including the interview participants. The 10 follow-up interviews were about one hour in length and comprised individuals from 9 states. Interview participants included individuals from both faculty and administrative positions.

The results indicated that only 3% of the participants reported service learning faculty endeavors to be a significant factor in faculty promotion and tenure processes,

which actually indicates a disappointing decline from the results of the AACC 2003 survey. Further, these findings indicated that the incorporation of active learning strategies in the classroom and faculty community service activities are much more likely to be perceived to be rewarded in promotion and tenure processes, even though service learning is both a form of community service and an active learning strategy. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that active learning strategies or community service was likely to be counted in the faculty promotion or tenure processes, which is a significant discrepancy when juxtaposed against the same question for service learning activities!

Since community colleges educate more than one half of the undergraduates in the country, these two year schools throughout the country and their constituents could benefit from this research, as service learning experiences can improve the learning process, foster more meaningful relationships between faculty and students, while also serving the community. Further, as the reward systems of promotion and tenure apply to colleges and universities as well, this research would also be of interest to four-year colleges also. Finally, throughout the course of the research, one exemplary two-year school was discovered with a robust and vital service learning program and will be highlighted in the presentation, specifically stating how that institution tied service learning faculty endeavors to their faculty reward systems.

Implications suggest that continued efforts need to be made to further the understanding of what curricular service learning is, how faculty service learning endeavors can be better integrated into the rewards systems of promotion and tenure, and how faculty reward systems can be aligned to achieve congruency with institutional

missions. Additionally, this research also suggests that there may be a generational gap in faculty understanding and perceptions of what curricular service learning is and how it can be integrated within disciplines.

This study addressed service learning only as it is integrated within specific courses and disciplines. This study acknowledges the potentially profound impact of co-curricular service learning activities. However, for a variety of reasons, the most common form of service learning on community college campuses is the form where service learning is integrated within specific courses.

The presentation will encourage a robust and lively exchange about faculty reward systems and the perception of service learning. Specific suggestions will also be given for service learning representatives as well as some ideas for faculty when presenting their service learning materials.