

Service-Learning: Influences on Institutional Practices and Civic Engagement Development

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Description of Session

Following up on six community colleges who responded “yes” to having a service-learning program in two American Association of Community College (AACC) national surveys, we will report on conditions associated with these model programs and trends found in long term community college service-learning programs. To complement the institutional influences, we will also discuss the outcomes of recent research on civic engagement and learning outcomes attainment in community college students.

The presented information comes from two studies. The first to be discussed is a mixed methods study comprised of a qualitative multiple-case descriptive case study and a survey. Six colleges that answered in the affirmative to using service-learning in both the 1995 and 2003 AACC national surveys on service-learning in community colleges were studied using surveys and interviews. College respondents, consisting of service-learning coordinators, faculty, and administrators, were surveyed or interviewed to provide multiple viewpoints of emergent service-learning issues found on their campuses. The study is still ongoing, focusing on discovering phenomena that affect service-learning programs and the factors that impact the survival of these programs.

Information from a second study on the influence of service-learning on civic engagement will also be presented. Over a three year period, 12 colleges that were currently or had previously participated in AACC’s *Community Colleges Broadening Horizons through Service Learning* project were asked to administer surveys to classes that included service-learning and to the same or similar classes that did not include

service-learning. By the end of the study, 189 surveys from service-learners, and 89 surveys from non-service learners who also had no prior experience with service-learning were collected.

Motivations/Foundations for Session

The foundation for this session on service-learning is research and programmatic. It is important for service-learning advocates to know both the impact of service-learning on students as well as the components that are present in sustained community college service-learning programs. Additionally, it is valuable for service-learning leaders to learn about factors that seasoned service-learning leaders have encountered that had an impact on the survival of these programs. Learning from others who have already navigated these factors, new service-learning leaders will be more prepared to anticipate possible difficulties ahead.

Session Achievements

It is the presenters' goals to inform attendees about best practices associated with long term service-learning programs and identify motivations for community organizations to engage in service-learning with their local college as part of the sustainability of the program. Our goal is also to discuss motivations students have for participating in their communities after having experienced service-learning. We aim to engage attendees in connecting institutional relationships with community college student civic engagement.

PowerPoint will be used to present the research. Each presenter will discuss her perspectives during the first half of the session. The second half will be designated for group discussion and questions and answers. A handout will be used for attendees to

discuss and synthesize institutional best practices with the overall student civic engagement goal. An evaluation profile will be created to elicit attendee feedback.

Participants will come away from the session with knowledge concerning the preliminary findings about aspects that are common to community college service-learning programs in existence for more than a decade as well as information about service-learning's impact on student civic engagement development. The purpose of this session is to present factors that have been associated with program longevity as well as factors that have been reported by service-learning leaders as having an impact on the survival of these programs.

Other Information on the Research

The study on factors associated with program longevity of community college service-learning programs is ongoing. At this time, six service-learning coordinators have provided survey results on current program background, program administration, and community connections. They have also been interviewed by telephone. One emerging finding is the use of service-learning advisory boards by sustained programs. As the study progresses, more information about the impact of such boards on sustaining the service-learning program over time will be sought.

The study on service-learning's impact on civic engagement has been concluded. Final results will be presented at the session. Findings revealed that students who participate in service-learning appear to increase their level of civic engagement and understanding at levels greater than a comparison group of students who learned the same or similar academic material but did not participate in service-learning.