

*Rewarding Service Learning In Community Colleges through Faculty Promotion and Tenure Systems*

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As a follow-up to several questions posed by the American Association of Community Colleges in 2003, this research examined the extent to which curricular service-learning endeavors by faculty are rewarded through promotion and tenure processes in community colleges. The 2006 research sampled participants from the original 2003 survey sample. The 2006 follow-up sample consisted of community colleges that had self-identified as a service-learning community college in the 2003 research; hence, all community colleges in the sample were known to have a curricular service-learning program.

Within the realm of higher education, community colleges have emerged 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 (Vaughan, 2000). Two-year schools literally have the power to positively transform lives and communities through a variety of creative and effective educational pedagogies.

This research was framed within Boyer's work on faculty reward systems (see figure 1) and the need to examine what colleges are rewarding. According to Boyer

(1990), integration is the assimilation of isolated facts into an integrated, interdisciplinary whole. The scholarship of application, according to Boyer, refers in part to higher education serving the greater public good by applying specific knowledge to solve community problems or to enrich the lives of a surrounding citizenry. The scholarship of discovery refers to research endeavors, and the scholarship of teaching refers to being well-grounded in the literature, the ability to communicate that knowledge to students, while also understanding how to improve student learning. service-learning is just such a tool to accomplish discovery, integration, application, and effective teaching while at the same time accomplishing in part the community college mission of service to the community.



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

Boyer stated that “excellence in the classroom all too often is undervalued” (1990, p.37) and faculty service-learning endeavors may well reflect his sentiment. Boyer believed that higher education institutions have long focused on rewarding non-classroom behaviors such as publications or research and that it is long past due for colleges to actively and passionately reward behaviors which directly facilitate student learning.

This mixed-methods research, based in Boyer's model, used a survey condensed and modified from the AACCC 2003 service-learning survey, and was then followed

by 10 interviews. The 2003 survey queried participants about a host of service-learning issues, including questions about funding and community partners. The 2006 survey used only items which focused on the degree of institutionalization of service-learning programs and faculty reward systems. Based on research by Furco (2002) indicators of institutionalization included items such as numbers of students participating, numbers of disciplines represented, the existence of a stand-alone service-learning office, and numbers of faculty participating. The researcher wanted to explore if those colleges that had more fully institutionalized their service-learning programs were more likely to reward faculty service-learning endeavors through promotion and tenure mechanisms. In addition, the research addressed the larger issue of faculty reward systems as related to teaching and organizational missions.

The 63 survey respondents were from 30 states and represented a return rate of 35%. According to AACC (Prentice et al, 2003) the colleges that responded originally to the 2003 survey were dispersed throughout the United States with no one area over- or under-represented. Additionally, according to AACC more urban and suburban community colleges responded to the 2003 survey, with 42% from urban areas and 37% from suburban areas, with rural campuses underrepresented.

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. It does stand to reason that a greater percentage of larger colleges would participate in the survey, as

service-learning programs do require some resources to implement and administer and larger schools may have access to greater resources. This 2006 study population mirrored the characteristics of the 2003 participants. Not one institution that had a 2003 service-learning program had abandoned the service-learning program in 2006. Some colleges were at varying development points and degrees of institutionalization, but all were still engaged in a service-learning program and most to a rather robust extent.

A statistical analysis was performed on the 15 survey items and the results were examined on numerous dimensions and the questions are listed below:

*Survey Questions Without Forced Choice Response Choices*

1. Please indicate which category would best describe your institution.
2. Indicate the primary person or office responsible for organizing or coordinating service-learning.
3. In total, how many students perform academic service-learning during the academic year?
4. On average, how many hours of service does a typical service-learning student provide as part of a course (per quarter or semester)?
5. Indicate the curricular areas in which students participate in academic service-learning.
6. Approximately how many full-time faculty teach courses with service-learning components during the academic year?
7. Approximately how many part-time/adjunct faculty teach courses with service-learning components during the academic year.
8. How are faculty encouraged or recruited to become involved in service-learning?
9. Is service-learning widely perceived to be an active, effective learning strategy at your college?
10. Is faculty participation in community service (within or outside the institution) a factor in faculty promotion or tenure?
11. Is faculty participation in service-learning a factor in faculty promotion or tenure (or tenure-like mechanisms, such as continuing contract)?
12. Is faculty participation in active learning strategies a factor in faculty promotion or tenure (or tenure-like mechanisms)?
13. Is civic responsibility or community service integrated into your college's mission, vision, or strategic plan?
14. Does your institution have a service requirement for graduation?
15. Please explain why your college has a service-learning program and share any other thoughts you may have on service-learning as it relates to your colleges reward systems (promotion, tenure, or tenure-like mechanisms).

Individuals were asked to come to consensus about the questions with campus colleagues prior to responding. The data were analyzed by both consensus and individual responders, as well as by specific demographic indicators, such as rural, urban, or suburban responders. Regardless of the dimension assessed, results remained consistent across all types of responders including the follow-up interview participants. For example, regardless if the college had designated service-learning office with large numbers of faculty and students participating, they were no more likely to reward faculty service-learning endeavors than were colleges with less developed programs. The lack of reward of service-learning in promotion and tenure may point to a more pervasive issue. Do faculty know what is rewarded? Do administrators know what is actually rewarded by senior faculty groups? Do senior faculty reward what is encouraged to be rewarded by administration? Do colleges actively promote reward systems that support and encourage effective classroom teaching and that also support organizational missions?

The 10 follow-up interviews were about one hour in length and were comprised of service-learning representatives from colleges in nine states. The ten colleges were selected for in-depth, follow-up interviews based on a positive response to a question about service-learning as a factor in faculty promotion and tenure along with the degree of institutionalization of their respective service-learning programs based on a model similar to Furco's (1990). Interview participants included individuals from both faculty and administrative positions who had significant service-learning responsibilities on their respective campuses.

The main impetus of this research was to ascertain if service-learning faculty endeavors were rewarded in promotion and tenure processes and to contrast that with whether active learning strategies and community activities were also counted in those same processes. The results indicated that less than 2% of the participants reported service-learning faculty endeavors to be a significant factor in faculty promotion and tenure processes, a decline from the results of the AACC 2003 survey in which 7% of colleges responded affirmatively. 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 than is service-learning, 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 were likely to be counted in the faculty promotion or tenure processes, a significantly higher figure than for service-learning activities. Perhaps the results of this research indicate nothing more than that curricular service-learning is a relatively new educational phenomenon in higher education and the systems have yet to catch up.

As community colleges educate more than one half of the undergraduates in the country, focus on teaching, and most purport strong college-community ties, two-year schools throughout the country could benefit from examining their respective missions and assessing if their institutional reward systems and processes support their missions. Service-learning experiences can improve the learning process by providing active learning experiences that are curriculum focused, foster more meaningful relationships between faculty and students, serve the community,

encourages interdisciplinary activities, as well as provide a plethora of other benefits (Cipolle 2004 , Cooks, Scharrer, & Morgan, 2006; Elwell and Bean, 2001; Ehrlich, 2000).

Community colleges have the opportunity to stand as beacons for meaningful, long-lasting learning, for social change, and for building sustainable and reciprocal community partnerships while promoting a more engaged citizenry. Colby et al. (2003) state that it is simply not possible for higher education institutions to be value-free. The values of community colleges have always been on teaching and service to local communities in an accessible and affordable manner. Service-learning activities stand as a single, powerful pedagogy to impact learning, effect social change, and build college-community relationships in almost every locale in the United States.

Without directly tying service-learning faculty initiatives to reward systems, community colleges, as well as other higher education institutions, may run the risk of actually discouraging service-learning initiatives in favor of activities that may be perceived by faculty to result in more political capital on their college campuses in the future.

Results suggest that continued efforts need to be made to further the understanding of what curricular service-learning is, what its multifaceted benefits are, 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. All public education institutions have significant obligations to their surrounding citizenries and constituents, but community colleges have unique responsibilities in learning, in encouraging an

enlightened and engaged citizenry, in sustaining democracy, and in serving their local communities. Perhaps now more than ever before these two-year schools could proactively propel humanity in a positive way through encouraging faculty service-learning endeavors.

Further, this research brings to light several other issues. If administrators support an endeavor, such as service-learning, how can they insure that it is actually translated into organizational reward systems and processes? When senior faculty are heavily involved in faculty reward systems, yet are not as likely to be involved or understand a new pedagogy like service-learning, how can they reward something that they themselves do not utilize or understand? Additionally, most colleges stated that service-learning is directly related to their college's mission, yet they are not rewarding it. Do colleges need to examine their respective missions and determine whether their reward systems promote and support their missions, values, and ideals? Educational institutions have not necessarily always been models for their rates of change or organizational flexibility, yet in this age of an ever increasing need for a learned population, funding shortages, increased accountability, and promoting global citizens perhaps now is the time for colleges to examine some of these issues.

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