UCF College of Arts and Humanities

Project Name
CSLAT: Comprehensive Service-Learning Assessment Tool

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Section 2: Statement of the Research Problem

Problem: Immediate Need for Comprehensive Service-Learning Assessment
Since the early 1990s, academic service-learning and community-based research have been on the increase in the United States. Campus Compact, a national organization of university and college presidents, estimates that nearly a third of the students at the 1000+ member institutions participate in related activities, and their work in the community had a national economic impact of over $7.1 billion in 2006. Programs related to service-learning, like most aspects of education in these challenging budget times, are under intense scrutiny at all levels. Institutions that want to secure and increase funding for these valuable programs must devise and implement rigorous models for their assessment. The problem our research addresses is that at this time, there is no dynamic, interactive, multi-dimensional tool available for assessing the range of concerns and elements of a service-learning course or program.

For the first time in 2006, the Carnegie Foundation’s national institutional benchmarking program added “community engagement” as a category for ranking. In anticipation of and response to this development, universities around the nation have increased their commitment to assessing and documenting their work in areas such as community-based research, service-learning pedagogy, and partnership and outreach. This huge shift in emphasis is but one indicator of changes afoot in national values related to education. This change was, in part, due to the work of Carnegie Foundation leader Ernest Boyer, whose 1994 article, “Creating the New American College,” emphasized the need for universities to connect with their communities in meaningful ways. UCF, like other institutions, has developed an interest in and emphasis on scholarship of engagement, and that is just the work that the research project we completed furthers.

National and international service-learning leadership groups including the International Association for Research in Service-Learning and Community Engagement consistently call for high standards for qualitative and quantitative research in this area. A tool like the one we advanced through this research project, and which taps into widely-respected views on service-learning, will meaningfully address this need.
Section 3: Research Project Details

Scope of Work and Timetable
Beginning in December of 2007, the faculty research team worked to develop this tool by drawing on existing models of assessment and our own plan for expansion of these models. We proposed and completed the activities below as follows:

December 2007
- Read and research on the latest statistics on service-learning assessment and on cutting edge service-learning practice. Completed.

January 2008
- Collaborate with each other and other UCF and Florida service-learning practitioners and researchers to identify their most crucial assessment needs. Completed.

February and March 2008
- Develop a web-based, database-driven interactive assessment tool that will allow all relevant stakeholders to evaluate their contributions to and benefits derived from the service-learning experience. This aspect of the grant is still in progress. During April and May team members developed a set of criteria for our assessment tool and began the process of developing the web-based tool. Moving forward we will collaborate with the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning to complete the tool development.

April 2008
- Pilot of the tool with our own wide range of spring 2007 service-learning courses and those of a few volunteers. Courses will include Honors Literature of AIDS, Honors Composition II, Technical Communication Theory and Practice, Issues in Second Language Acquisition, and Problems in Evaluation in ESOL. Completed in Honors Literature of AIDS, Honors Composition II, Issues in Second Language Acquisition, and Problems in Evaluation in ESOL. We secured feedback on assessment activities and students’ interests in the data collected. We used this information to develop a plan for informal student focus groups that shaped our emerging tool.

May and June 2008
- Analyze results of the pilot process and revision of the model based on those results. Completed. We also conducted focus groups with students, faculty, and community partners to identify their interests in, uses for, and experience with assessment. Based on that we developed the CSLAT model.
- Design a plan for university-level implementation of the tool. This process is still in progress. We will present the assessment model to service-learning track affiliated faculty members at the FCTL summer conference and to community partners at our annual community partner lunch in May 2009 to begin formal implementation of the tool.
- Apply for additional funding to support more research with the tool and promotion of it for national use. In progress. We expect to incorporate the tool into a number of funding applications during the 2009-2010 academic year. We will complete a bit more work on/with it before making it central to applications.
July 2008

- Write and submit of a collaborative article for the *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning* or *Metropolitan Universities* journal. (*Metropolitan Universities* has already expressed interest.) *In progress.* We presented a poster and panel presentation on the model at the International Association for Research in Service-Learning and Community Engagement in New Orleans in October and received excellent feedback and response, which is informing our process of writing the article. We presented a panel presentation at the Florida Institute on Service-Learning and Community Engagement and, again, received positive feedback on our work.

**Summary of Outcomes:**

Our team worked together efficiently to research service-learning assessment models around the country and find ways to effectively incorporate them into the UCF model. Our most valuable work was in the form of focus groups of students, faculty, and community partners, who, in the formative stages, helped us to develop a dynamic model for assessment that incorporates multiple perspectives on service-learning assessment.

**Findings**

Through the process we learned a great deal about service-learning assessment and how we can make it more effective and valuable across the curriculum. Some of our most interesting outcomes were:

- Students generally are not aware of campus and community-wide impacts of service-learning; they are very interested in this information and campuses need to find strategies for sharing this information with them. As a result of this finding, Amy Zeh has already created videos, posters, and other materials to raise students’ awareness of UCF service-learning activities and where their work fits into the big picture.

- Community partners genuinely want to be co-educators in service-learning courses and have significant need for and interest in data that comes from our campus-based assessment. They also have useful outcomes data that can improve our assessment process.

- Faculty members want more information about best practices for assessing service-learning. More robust and consistent models for assessment will be helpful to them not only when they are grading on a class level, but also when they are selecting and planning future service-learning projects. Faculty members are interested in seeing more general models for service-learning assessment that address broader objectives of the pedagogy but feel confident about their ability to make discipline-based assessments. They are eager to receive suggestions for incorporating community impact assessment in their courses and scholarship.

- A dynamic assessment model, moving forward, needs to better incorporate community impacts of service-learning. This issue is to begin to be addressed on campus through the 2009 FCTL summer conference, where we will share new strategies for capturing information about community impacts with service-learning track participants. We expect to see a meaningful increase in community
impact assessment moving forward, which should lead to better educational experiences for students, improved programming and increased funding.

Dissemination

- We have presented our research on this work in two venues: one international conference and one state conference as follows:

- We have served as consultants for Bowling Green State University as they develop their assessment program; the team was offered a total of $250 for this consultation, which we are directing to UCF service-learning efforts. BGSU specifically wanted detailed information about our model, which suggests that it will be useful for national audiences moving forward. This will further strengthen UCF’s and CAH’s reputations as leaders in rigorous and academically valuable service-learning.

Next Steps

Moving forward we will:

- Use the information we’ve gained through this research to shape faculty professional development on campus during the 2009 FCTL Summer Conference.
- Complete our planned article for the *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*.
- Use data emerging from this project in applications for grants that will directly benefit CAH programs.
- Complete our online interactive assessment tool and launch it for use by first UCF faculty and then others beyond our campus.