Consortial Collaboration and the Creation of an Assessment Instrument for Community-Based Learning

Margueritte S. Murphy and Kathleen S. Flowers

Abstract

This article describes the development of the Community-Based Learning (CBL) Scorecard by a grant-funded consortium of liberal arts institutions. The aim of the scorecard was to promote assessment that improves student learning with an instrument that employs a quantitative scale, allowing for benchmarking across institutions. Extensive interviews with faculty who participated in the pilot *(Charles & Choi, 2013)*, including specific perceptions of the value of using the scorecard to assess the students' CBL experience and improve learning outcomes, were reviewed. Results indicated that the CBL Scorecard, with appropriate administration, serves as an adaptable tool for assessment of CBL that can provide timely feedback and reminders of best practices to faculty. Increasing student response rates, the scorecard's value for faculty development, and improving the experience for community partners are discussed.

Introduction

*I*mportant conversations are occurring locally and nationally about the value of higher education, including the impact of community engagement on college students and the vital role community partners play in the coeducation of students. Ideally, initiatives designed to address community opportunities and concerns dovetail with frameworks that support student learning. This article focuses on community-based learning (encompassing for our purposes service-learning and community-based research), generally acknowledged to be complex and multidimensional *(Eyler & Giles, 1999; Mackaway, Winchester-Seeto, Coulson, & Harvey, 2011; McDonald, 2012; Zhang et al., 2011)*. Community-based learning has pedagogical aims, but those aims are joined to those of social justice and, more specifically, to meeting the needs of the community. The tasks and responsibilities of the students are aligned with course content, but must also work within the structures of the local partnership. As a form of experiential education, community-based learning may be utterly unpredictable as it unfolds, messy as a day-to-day experience, and shaped by serendipitous encounters with individuals from backgrounds and realms of experience that

may differ greatly from those of traditional-aged college students. Instructors who employ community-based learning in their courses year after year recognize intuitively the complexity and depth of learning that takes place, and that it is qualitatively different from what students glean from textbooks and classroom lectures. But measuring this learning, capturing its difference from traditional learning in institutions of higher education, is not simple.

One challenge is capturing what may be a qualitative difference using quantitative measures. Researchers in the growing assessment of learning movement often face difficulties in navigating the divide between quantitative and qualitative approaches, and such difficulties may reflect another tension: that between assessment for accountability and assessment for improvement, as Peter T. Ewell frames it. According to Ewell *(2009)*, assessment for improvement typically relies on both qualitative and quantitative evidence, whereas assessment for accountability requires demonstration of "conformity with an established standard of process or outcome" and hence quantitative, cross-institutional measures *(p. 8)*. Although most assessment specialists see improvement of student learning as the foremost goal, many recognize that such results are still unfortunately rare or, at least, difficult to demonstrate *(Angelo, 1999; Banta & Blaich, 2011; Blaich & Wise, 2011)*.

Research Goals and Questions

This article reflects on the development of the Community-Based Learning (CBL) Scorecard by a consortium of liberal arts institutions, funded by grants from the Teagle Foundation (hereafter referred to as the Teagle Consortium). The consortium chose to use the term "community-based learning" as "accurately descriptive" of the programs and courses to be assessed and "unburdened by the negative connotations and history implied by a 'client–server' dynamic between the community and colleges engaged in CBL" *(Rhodes College, Systematic Assessment of Student Learning, 2008, p. 8)*. The aim in creating the scorecard was to promote assessment that improves student learning, but with an instrument that employs a quantitative scale, allowing for benchmarking across institutions. The CBL Scorecard was developed both to assess "the value added of CBL programming on student learning and civic engagement" and to "close the assessment loop by developing a process for applying Scorecard results to course/program improvement and by broadly disseminating and encouraging the use of the protocol and collected data institutionally, regionally and nationally" *(Rhodes College, Systematic Assessment of Student Learning, 2008,*

p. 1). Our aim is to assess the assessment: to clarify ways in which the CBL Scorecard has succeeded, as well as to acknowledge its limitations. For such analysis, we rely on the results of research carried out by Drs. Robiaun Charles and YuKang Choi as doctoral students at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education and Human Development in the form of extensive interviews with Teagle Consortium faculty who participated in the CBL Scorecard pilot and on our own experience with the scorecard at our home institution, Hobart & William Smith Colleges, supplemented by comments provided to us by participating institutions.

Our analysis is framed within questions raised in the literature on assessment of service-learning and community-based research as well as the current literature on assessment of student learning outcomes in general, such as how to implement assessment in such a way as to facilitate improvement of learning, or how to develop models that are both sustainable and transformative. Using these research-based recommendations for the employment of the CBL Scorecard should provide an adaptable tool for guiding the change that leads to improved student learning outcomes in CBL courses and programs.

A Different Epistemology

A starting point in considering how to assess community-based learning is the recognition that not only is there a distinct knowledge base buttressing this practice *(Brammer et al., 2012; Shapiro, 2012)*, but also that its epistemological bearings are distinctive *(Butin, 2010; Eyler, 2009; Eyler & Giles, 1999)*. As Janet Eyler *(2009)* observes, "Knowledge in the classroom tends to be compartmentalized into disciplines, whereas in use in the community or workplace it tends to be organized around problems or domains of practice" *(p. 29)*. The student experience of such knowledge is unique, as the impact of actual community engagement is both broad and deep. Thus community-based learning adds an affective component to the acquisition of academic content, complicating and developing cognition with real-life application of concepts learned. Tellingly, assessment of the learning in community-based learning has taken diverse directions. Assessment instruments and methods have been devised to measure not only cognitive outcomes, but also changes in civic engagement, personal development, intercultural understanding, organizational and communication skills, and most recently empathy *(Bringle, Clayton, & Hatcher, 2013; Everhart, 2016; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Ming, Lee, & Ka, 2009)*.

Although community-based learning is a cross-disciplinary pedagogy, it also supports discipline-based learning and knowledge production—in economics, sociology, political science, environmental science, history, rhetoric, architectural studies, education, and religious studies, to name only a few. At the same time, with an experiential base it is "holistic in nature" *(Mackaway et al., 2011, p. 1)*. Hence the challenge of charting the difference that community-based learning makes, given that learning outcomes may reflect many fields, realms of experience, and facets of individual growth.

Assessment as Research, Assessment Based in Research

The limitations of some approaches to assessment of community-based learning have been studied. A common approach is to survey students at the completion of a community-based learning experience, but when such a survey asks students to report on their learning as opposed to demonstrating their learning, satisfaction may be indistinguishable from actual learning. (The in-house survey we employed at Hobart & William Smith Colleges before the development of the CBL Scorecard suffered from this limitation.) Such reports are "a weak measure of the complex cognitive outcomes we expect from service-learning" *(Eyler, 2000, p. 13)*. Ideally such indirect assessment would be paired with a more direct assessment of learning if the aim is measuring academic and/or cognitive learning outcomes, as opposed to a sense of personal growth or commitment to community engagement. Assessing embedded student work is one viable and frequently proposed alternative or complementary assessment method *(Fitch, Steinke, & Hudson, 2013; Molee, Henry, Sessa, & McKinney-Prupis, 2010; Shapiro, 2012)*. Yet developing criteria and rubrics that may be employed across multiple disciplines when aspects of the learning are discipline- and/or course-specific is challenging, to say the least.

A related approach that may be less discipline-specific focuses on student reflection in the form of writing and/or discussion, a component of community-based learning critical to its effectiveness and impact *(Eyler & Giles, 1999)*. Yet questions arise here, too: Students vary in their reflectiveness; writing skills impact the quality and clarity of reflections; some students for personal or cultural reasons experience discomfort with personal revelation that may be a part of reflection, and respond instead with superficial or dissembling entries; reflection may be more common in some disciplines than in others; and the degree to which the instructor communicates, designs, and structures the reflection exercise for

students matters *(Mackaway et al., 2011, pp. 7–8)*. Nonetheless, such direct measures and others, such as evaluating student problem-solving competency through interviews *(Eyler & Giles, 1999)*, may be effectively employed and may compose part of ongoing research on how community-based learning supports the goals of a liberal education *(Eyler, 2000; Jameson, Clayton, & Ash, 2013)*.

Such studies raise the question of the relationship between assessment and research. Undoubtedly after 35 years of research since service-learning gained recognition as a field *(Eyler & Giles, 2013)*, any assessment ought to rely on research, no matter which facet of the learning is under consideration. Further, the relationship between research and assessment is reciprocal: assessment is as important to ongoing research as research is to assessment. Eyler and Giles observe: "The assessment of the effective implementation of key elements of service-learning are critical for strengthening research in this field" *(p. 55)*. In sum, research into the learning in community-based learning gains when an assessment method or instrument is research-based, focused on defined outcomes, and rolled out with ongoing inquiry into its strengths and limitations.

The Teagle Consortium's Community-Based Learning (CBL) Scorecard

The initiative to create a replicable instrument to assess community-based learning began with a collaboration among faculty and administrators at Rhodes College, Niagara University, and Franklin & Marshall College with a Teagle Foundation planning grant to fund the initial stages (2007–2008), followed by the award of an implementation grant.

The goals for both planning and implementation were as follows:

1. Systematically assess the value added of CBL programming on student learning and civic engagement, using the CBL Scorecard we developed for measuring CBL course/program effectiveness;

2. Close the assessment loop by developing a process for applying Scorecard results to course/program improvement and by broadly disseminating and encouraging the use of the protocol and collected data institutionally, regionally, and nationally and;

3. Expand and sustain a consortium of liberal arts colleges committed to establishing and sharing effective

practices for the assessment of community-based learning. Two sub-goals for the consortium are to:

a. Disseminate information about the impact of CBL on student cognitive learning and;

b. Create a culture of assessment on the campuses of participating institutions *(Rhodes College, Systematic Assessment of Student Learning, 2008, p. 1)*.

Among the activities undertaken during the planning phase were reviews of existing assessment instruments for community-based learning and of the literature about such assessment. One result of this review process was the finding that "several large research studies have already established the connection between effective practices for community-based learning courses/programs and student learning outcomes." Consortium members decided "to build on this research, rather than duplicate it, using success factors linked by research to student learning as the basis for our Scorecard" *(Rhodes College, Systematic Assessment of Student Learning, 2008, p. 2)*. This choice was key as consortium members confronted the challenge of developing an instrument that was replicable and could be used across disciplines, programs, and institutions, thereby affording cross-institutional benchmarking. The focus of the instrument would be practices in community-based learning courses and programs found to enhance cognitive learning outcomes as opposed to affective ones. Research that was especially germane to the identification of these effective practices or "success factors" included the work of Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee *(2000)*; Eyler and Giles *(1999)*; and Eyler, Giles, Stenson, and Gray *(2001)*. In selecting success factors, consortium members chose those appropriate to a cross-disciplinary instrument, eliminating such variables as "the student's degree of interest in the subject matter, . . . since CBL programs/courses at liberal arts institutions are not necessarily tied to a specific major or interest" *(Rhodes College, Systematic Assessment of Student Learning, 2008, p. 8)*.

The Teagle Consortium recruited new members for a total of 11 liberal arts colleges and universities by 2011, which enlarged the pool of courses and programs for the pilot of the CBL Scorecard. This increase made possible collaboration among a larger group of practitioners as the scorecard was further developed, revised, and refined, and helped create a community of practice. We at Hobart & William Smith Colleges were deeply grateful for the outreach of Niagara University. As one of 28 baccalaureate colleges earning the

2010 Carnegie engaged designation, we value enhanced assessment of community-based learning at the course and program level for the ongoing improvement of learning, and we were excited to join in this promising collaboration with peers from similar institutions.

After an initial pilot of the CBL Scorecard at Franklin & Marshall, Niagara, and Rhodes during the planning phase of the project, the consortium worked with Dr. John Braxton (Vanderbilt University) and Dr. Willis Jones (then a graduate student at Vanderbilt, now faculty at University of Kentucky) to build a more robust data collection instrument *(Rhodes College, Community-Based Learning, 2010)*. Braxton and Jones began by engaging in an extensive literature review of the research on effective pedagogies and practices for community-based learning. From this literature review a list of statements regarding best practices in community-based learning was obtained. This large pool of best practice statements was then reviewed by a group of educational practitioners and researchers for clarity and face validity. The reviewers selected 32 of these best practice statements, which were grouped into four "domains of practice": (1) placement quality, (2) application and connection to academic learning, (3) reflection, and (4) quality of community partnerships.

To further explore the validity and relative importance of the 32 statements, Braxton and Jones recruited nationally recognized experts in community-based learning to complete a Q-sort task. A Q-sort is a comparative process in which respondents are required to sort their responses to statements into a predetermined number of piles. For this analysis, respondents were asked to place the 32 best practice statements into five piles, assigning rankings ranging from "not essential at all" to "most essential" for high-quality community-based learning. In Q-sort tasks, response categories are generally forced into an approximately normal distribution by specifying the number of statements that can be placed in each pile on the scale. For this Q-sort task, respondents were forced to place four statements in each of the two most extreme categories ("not essential at all" and "most essential"), six statements each were forced into the "somewhat essential" and "very essential" categories, and 12 statements were forced into the "essential" category.

Braxton and Jones mailed this Q-sort task to eight community-based learning experts and received a response rate of 50%. They then created weights for each best practice statement based on the findings of the Q-sort task. Each response pile in the Q-sort was given a value ranging from 1 ("not essential at all") to 5 ("most essential"). Next, they calculated means scores for each ques-

tion based on the Q-sort results and used those means scores as response weights in the CBL Scorecard. Question means scores ranged from 1.25 to 4.25. Thus at multiple stages (i.e., review of literature in planning stage; Braxton and Jones review of literature; survey of top specialists), the development of the CBL Scorecard drew on the most up-to-date and widely recognized research in the field. Given the extensive literature reviews and testing via field experts, we are confident of the face and content validity of the CBL Scorecard. As the consortium notes in the Year 5 progress report to the Teagle Foundation, "This approach is unique in both its focus on the course or program as the unit of analysis and its foundation in existing research on effective service learning practice" *(Rhodes College, Community-Based Learning, 2013, p. 4).*

Other crucial aspects of the CBL Scorecard were also unique and, we felt, important steps forward for assessment of community-based learning. Versions of the same instrument were developed for three audiences: faculty, students, and community partners. The inclusion of community feedback was a central aim of the consortium from the start; surveying all three groups with versions of the same instrument was a significant innovation. Further, although the instrument is a quantitative one, its focus on best practices as opposed to the measurement of particular learning outcomes avoids measuring only the most easily measured hallmarks of learning, a potentially reductionist analysis. It also avoids the murkiness of self-reporting of learning on which many other survey-based assessments rely, as it asks about the degree to which students experienced certain practices, not about their sense of success with learning. Finally, the CBL Scorecard includes only practices that have been found to be valuable to community-based learning across disciplines and programs, obviating the need to adjust the scorecard for different courses and discipline-specific subject matter.

Assessing the Assessment: Research by Charles and Choi

Having administered the CBL Scorecard over five semesters (spring 2011–spring 2013), the Teagle Consortium invited Robiaun Charles and YuKang Choi, doctoral candidates at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education and Human Development, to conduct interviews with faculty participants as part of a mixed methods research project. With "the goal of making the instrument more useful as a classroom diagnostic tool that can be readily used by instructors without professional interpretation,"

the consortium collaborated with Charles and Choi to generate the following research questions:

1. What are the practices responsible for high performing community-based learning?

2. What are recommendations that can make other community-based learning courses better?

3. What is an appropriate process/protocol for assessing community-based learning courses on an ongoing basis? *(Rhodes College, Assessing Community-Based Learning, 2013, pp. 4–5)*

Charles and Choi used quantitative data gathered through the administration of the CBL Scorecard to identify high-performing courses, selecting 48 out of 90 courses in the consortium database, eliminating 42 because of incomplete responses. Within these 48 courses, the researchers employed theoretical sampling to identify high-performing courses, thereby narrowing the sample to 30 for a qualitative study. They invited the instructors of these courses to be interviewed by phone, with the result that faculty teaching 21 high-performing courses participated in the study, a sample that represented 70% of the faculty teaching high-performing courses and seven of the consortium institutions. (See *Charles & Choi, 2013*, for a full description of the methodology they used to construct the sample *[pp. 16–21]* and of the data analysis and coding of the transcripts *[p. 24].*) The interviews lasted 60–90 minutes. As Charles and Choi remark, "Although the scorecard provided information about what was happening in these selected courses, we conducted the interviews to learn how it was happening, why it was happening and when it was happening" *(p. 22)*.

For the purposes of this article, the third research question is most germane: "What is an appropriate process/protocol for assessing community-based learning courses on an ongoing basis?" Charles and Choi *(2013)* identifies six themes that arose through the interviews and their subsequent data analysis:

1. Light bulb moments

2. What exactly do the results mean?

3. How are scorecard results going to be used?

4. Be mindful of the community

5. Administration and execution of the scorecard needs to be standardized

6. A necessary evil *(p. 47)*

The "light bulb moments" experienced by faculty came mostly in the form of reminders of how to plan community-based learning courses intentionally rather than seeing the scorecard results as providing new information. Nonetheless, faculty comments as reported by Charles and Choi *(2013)* were overwhelmingly positive. Respondents found the scorecard helpful, remarking, for instance, that "it helped you think more comprehensively about what we wanted for our course" *(p. 48)*; "you think more broadly about course design because you have a scorecard as a framework to operate out of" *(p. 48)*; and "this is what you want to look for when you're putting together your syllabus, when you're creating your course or when you're working with an institute or center or whomever you are working with in putting it together" *(p. 49)*. Only one comment included in Charles and Choi's report seemed to question the value of the scorecard (classified under "a necessary evil"): This faculty member wondered whether there is not "an inherent tautology in developing these measurement scales to prove what good outcomes are when they're developed to prove what good outcomes are" and called for more longitudinal studies and other ways to measure the impact of community-based learning courses *(p. 52)*.

Faculty did identify limitations or weaknesses in the scorecard. An important flaw that was, at least partially, addressed in subsequent administrations of the instrument was the delivery of the results. The earliest feedback came in the form of raw data; faculty asked instead for more easily interpretable results *(Charles & Choi, 2013)*. There was also almost universal concern that the data could be used for faculty evaluation rather than course development and improvement; if that were the case, faculty would be reluctant to participate. Further, as courses vary, faculty noted that it should be used as a guide; the individual instructor could then decide how it might best inform course design and practice *(p. 50)*. Finally, the faculty interviews made evident a need to standardize the administration and execution of the scorecard, because "[m]any participants also were not clear on the who, what, when, where and how of the scored execution and administration in their classes" *(p. 51)*. Clearly it is vital for institutions to establish a protocol for administration that is transparent and convenient for faculty and yields a high response rate.

Another limitation of the scorecard articulated in these interviews concerns the participation of community partners. Although the desire to include the community voice in assessment was a priority for the CBL Scorecard project, in effect, community partners sometimes lacked access to computers. Perhaps more damning

than problems of delivery was that of perspective: Many of the scorecard questions were not relevant to the community partner's experience of the community-based learning project *(Charles & Choi, 2013, pp. 50–51)*.

Recommendations From Charles and Choi's Report

As a result of their study, Charles and Choi made seven recommendations to the Teagle Consortium:

- Develop separate scorecards for faculty, students and community partners.

- Create a standard protocol for administering the Teagle Scorecard and consider using technology.

- Refine and improve data collection and entry into, and management of, the Teagle Scorecard database.

- Explicitly identify the Teagle Scorecard as a tool for improvement, not evaluation.

- View the Teagle Scorecard as a tool to inform key performance indicators (KPIs) for effective practice in CBL courses.

- Create Teagle Scorecard informed KPIs and a related KPI scorecard.

- Implement the project team's research-based ongoing assessment model for faculty of community-based learning courses.

These were among 17 recommendations in all, made to different constituencies: institutional policy makers, faculty members who use community-based learning, and research funders, as well as to the Teagle Consortium. The last three recommendations refer to key performance indicators derived from the CBL Scorecard intended to be more easily interpretable for application to course practice. To our knowledge, this revised instrument has not been piloted. (See *Charles & Choi, 2013*, for further information about the key performance indicators and this proposed next stage.) At Hobart & William Smith Colleges we continue to use the most recent version of the CBL Scorecard, as faculty have found it helpful and instructive, and administering a single instrument over 6 years has allowed us to compare year-to-year data and analyze trends. Further, we suspect that some of the faculty discontent may reflect

dissatisfaction with earlier formats for delivery of results. As noted above, during the first semesters of implementation, results were delivered in "raw" statistical form. The delivery format was subsequently revised for greater readability and applicability to course improvement.

Lessons Learned, Implementation Suggestions

The development of the CBL Scorecard was an iterative effort, incorporating feedback from participants, with gains in face and content validity from the work of Braxton and Jones. Through six implementations of the scorecard between 2010 and 2014, the consortium built a database and a report format that translates raw scores into more readable results for faculty, organized by the four domains: placement quality, application and connection to academic learning, reflection, and quality of community partnerships. Among the consortium members, there was agreement about the quality of questions and the yield of useful information. Yet, at the end of the grant, the loss of a central office to gather results from each institution, compile data, and benchmark across institutions, served as a deterrent to many of the consortium members. Representing an institution that found utility in outcomes from the CBL Scorecard, we suggest that institutions review their capacity to consistently implement such an instrument and their "comfort" with the limitation to internal assessment without cross-institutional comparison.

To achieve a high response rate, we suggest the following approach:

1. Initial efforts included sending the survey out electronically at the conclusion of the semester, yielding a low response rate in some courses making it difficult to interpret results. Regarding administration of the survey after the last day, a participating Hobart & William Smith Colleges professor noted, "I am surprised and disappointed to see that only half of my class responded; they were reminded, and they all promised. Regardless, it is very useful to see the survey items again, because it reinforces my course learning goals." To increase the response rate, CBL Scorecard questions may be loaded onto SurveyMonkey or an institution's internal evaluation tool, and the survey administered during the last or penultimate class in a computer lab.

2. Alternatively, if hosting the last class in a computer lab is not a feasible option, all students could access the survey via personal tablets or laptops or comparable devices on loan from Information Technology. (Note: Although the survey is not cumbersome, the questions are asked in a matrix format that would lead to a frustrating experience on personal hand-held phones.)

3. The method we employ, after trying various approaches, involves distributing paper copies of the survey to professors who collect and return them to an entity (in our case, the Center for Community Engagement & Service-Learning at Hobart & William Smith Colleges) that has the capacity to enter the data manually.

4. It is vital to differentiate the CBL Scorecard from the course evaluation, since their objectives are entirely different, and to confuse evaluation with assessment of effective service-learning practices could have a negative impact on faculty evaluation. Administering course evaluations immediately before or after the administration of the CBL Scorecard can also generate "assessment fatigue" and lead to less helpful responses from students.

5. Finally, we have found it effective to remind students during an initial service-learning training or during service-learning site visits that their feedback is important and that participation in the anonymous and voluntary survey assists institutional efforts to advance community-based learning as a thoughtful and proactive teaching method and a mutually beneficial collaboration among community partners, students, and faculty.

Other Challenges

As noted, Charles and Choi *(2013)* found that faculty teaching high-performing courses commented frequently that the feedback from the CBL Scorecard was helpful as a guide and a reminder of best practices for community-based learning pedagogy. However, faculty concerns about the misinterpretation of the intent of the survey were also noted in this research. Hobart & William Smith Colleges addresses this concern by making every effort to assure faculty members that class-specific results from the CBL Scorecard

are shared only with the faculty member, and any aggregate data appears without class-identifying comments.

All members of the consortium share the belief that community partners have a unique and vital knowledge base, and student interaction with community partners through community-based learning classes is a fundamental aspect of robust learning. When the CBL Scorecard was developed, questions incorporated research that accounted for this best practice. Indeed, one of the four domains of practice reflected in the scorecard is "quality of community partnerships." For instance, in the survey for students, they are asked to register the degree to which statements like the following are true of their community-based learning experience: "Community partners have a clear sense of what community-based learning projects will accomplish for them"; "The goals of community-based learning projects carefully consider the traditions/culture of the local community"; and "Community partners provide feedback on students' work on the project." However, due to challenges, including community partners' inability to take time away from important day-to-day operations of managing their non-profit agencies, community partners of the consortium members were not a part of the initial convening where the scorecard was developed. During subsequent consortium meetings, community partner voice was present and a valued component to the discussion. In proverbial hindsight, a better practice might have been to provide a stipend or comparable benefit for community partners who participated.

After conversations with community members, staff at the Center for Community Engagement & Service-Learning at Hobart & William Smith Colleges willingly acknowledged the time-consuming burden on community partners of responding to two evaluative tools (feedback on student performance and community partner scorecard) and discontinued administration of the CBL Scorecard to community partners. Nonetheless, we learned that providing feedback on student performance served as a welcome way for community partners to feel a part of the student learning process. Consequently, we request feedback through a six-question survey (available at *http://www.hws.edu/academics/service/pdf/SL_evaluation09.pdf*) at the conclusion of each semester and gather community partners annually in informal settings to address the ideals set forth in the community partner survey. Such performance feedback is collected and provided to faculty members for inclusion in consideration of students' final grades.

Ultimately, various consortium members employ the scorecard in ways that best align with their program and community engagement goals. The scorecard may serve as a guide to staff who support the faculty with opportunities to enhance the community-based learning experience, and to promote dialogue between community partners and faculty members. "As a planning document, the scorecard informed our pedagogy and ultimate approach. Essentially, it served to remind us that community partner involvement and reliable, regular contact was essential," reported Jay Szczepanski, director of the Learning Resource Center at Flagler College *(personal communication, December 15, 2013)*. Other institutions found it useful for faculty development opportunities around community-based learning, as a formative rather than summative tool. As Lisa Wolfe from Franklin & Marshall College's Ware Institute for Civic Engagement commented:

> In the spirit of collegiality, we have used the scorecard as an educative tool. Especially for new practitioners, it clearly summarizes the standards for high-quality/high impact community-based learning and can be used as a rubric for identifying areas where there is the most potential for growth. *(personal communication, March 13, 2015)*

At Hobart & William Smith Colleges, we have used CBL Scorecard results to guide planning of faculty enrichment opportunities and the scorecard itself for discussion with faculty of effective community-based learning pedagogy. Professor Mary Kelly from our Education Department noted:

> The scorecard provides us with a reflective tool to assess the degree to which our service learning projects utilized best practices. It was a good reminder that, for example, participating in a service learning project along with students could have a positive impact on learning outcomes, and can be a lot of fun, too. *(personal communication, July 18, 2016)*

Conclusion

To return to our initial research goals and questions, to what degree has the CBL Scorecard met the Teagle Consortium aims of assessing community-based learning with an instrument that

employs a quantitative scale to afford benchmarking across institutions and provides a mechanism for closing the assessment loop, offering feedback to faculty to improve student learning? A recent evaluation of the research assessing the cognitive outcomes of community-based learning concludes: "Overall, these empirical investigations of cognition in service learning and related pedagogies support the importance of well-integrated service learning, the role of critical reflection, and the value of assessment methods that are grounded in theory" (*Fitch, Steinke, & Hudson, 2013, p. 68*). All three of these goals are central to the CBL Scorecard and its aims and development: CBL Scorecard questions draw on widely recognized research to promote the most effective pedagogical practice for student learning, and among the hallmarks of that practice are the full integration of the experience in the community with course content and reflection activities that are relevant and encourage critical thinking. The "success factors" promoted by the CBL Scorecard are "environment variables that correlate in the research with such standard student learning and developmental outcome measures as GPA, writing skills, critical thinking skills, leadership, values, career choice and post-college activity" (*Rhodes College, Assessment of Student Learning, 2008, p. 8*). As a result, we are confident that this instrument helps further the aims of a liberal education through the enhanced cognitive and affective development of our students, gained in robust and meaningful community-based learning experiences. In other words, strengthening the effectiveness of community-based learning courses and programs through ongoing assessment bolsters learning in the liberal arts, especially the integrative, collaborative, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary learning that will best prepare students for a rapidly changing, increasingly complex and interdependent world.

Although hardly a "silver bullet," this instrument also addresses some of the challenges facing the assessment movement, most specifically the issue of "closing the loop." A major concern has been how to move from assessment of learning to improvement of learning based on assessment results. As Blaich and Wise *(2011)* remark:

> Although much of the national conversation about assessment and accountability focuses on the pros and cons of different approaches to measuring student learning and experience, we have learned from the Wabash Study that measuring student learning and experience is by far the easiest step in the assessment

process. The real challenge begins once faculty, staff, administrators, and students at institutions try to use the evidence to improve student learning. *(p. 3)*

Ewell *(2009)* sees a lack of specifics in assessment evidence as part of the difficulty in moving from assessment to improvement:

Many institutions simply do not know, however, how to implement evidence-based continuous improvement. Why is this? One reason is the general nature of most assessment results when compared to the concrete realities of changing curriculum and pedagogy. Although exceptions are apparent, most assessment evidence is simply not fine grained enough to yield actionable information at this level. A similar reason is that such evidence tends to be presented in the form of central tendency measures, which don't show the patterns of strength and weakness or the variations in performance across types of students needed to guide intervention *(Kuh, 2007)*. Finally, information about outcomes alone doesn't tell faculty what to fix. *(p. 16)*

Admittedly, the CBL Scorecard does not yield direct evidence of student learning, so its results may be less easily interpretable into changes in classroom practice. However, it does give faculty feedback with clear and direct application to the community-based course they teach. That the results are course-specific is one of its strengths. In short, its summative role feeds into a formative one. As one faculty member put it: "It helped me realize what I wasn't doing that I needed to do" *(Charles & Choi, 2013, p. 49)*.

With the end of the Teagle grants, we no longer had funding for a central mechanism through which to gather responses from various institutions and produce cross-institutional benchmarking. Nonetheless, the instrument has the potential for benchmarking, as our pilot demonstrated. At Hobart & William Smith Colleges we plan continued use of the CBL Scorecard, with results from each of the past 10 semesters building internal benchmarking capacity to guide adjustments to individual courses and programwide alterations. Such capacity provides individual faculty with the data to understand anomalies that may occur and thereby to strengthen the effectiveness of service-learning in their courses over time. This benchmarking capacity also provides us with aggregate data to review with our Service-Learning Advisory Council in a broader

effort to promote institutional conversations about how to ensure high-quality service-learning experiences and enhanced student learning outcomes. Research is under way that would use scorecard results to further illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of CBL offerings, such as their impact on different student cohorts and related questions. In addition, from our perspective as an institution with the Carnegie community-engaged classification, we find the CBL Scorecard helpful in documenting and encouraging the practices represented by that certification. Ideally, there would be an interinstitutional mechanism to compile data and promote cross-institutional benchmarking, but until that opportunity arises, we will proceed at current capacity.

As a last note, we must add that in addition to the individual institutional uses of the CBL Scorecard, there is another compelling consequence of this collaborative effort: the formation of a community of practice where colleagues have established relationships that support personal development and institutional growth. These are by-products that will indeed be enduring.

Acknowledgments

References

Angelo, T. A. (1999). Doing assessment as if learning matters most. *AAHE Bulletin, 51*(9), 3–6.

Astin, A. W., Vogelgesang, L. J., Ikeda, E. K., & Yee, J. A. (2000). *How service learning affects students*. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California. Retrieved from http://heri.ucla.edu/publications/

Banta, T. W., & Blaich, C. (2011). Closing the assessment loop. *Change: Magazine of Higher Learning, 43*(1), 22–27.

Blaich, C., & Wise, K. (2011). *From gathering to using assessment results: Lessons from the Wabash National Study* (NILOA Occasional Paper No. 8). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment. Retrieved from http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/occasionalpapereight.htm

Brammer, L., Dumlao, R., Falk, A., Hollander, E., Knutson, E., Poehnert, J., . . . Werner, V. (2012). *Core competencies in civic engagement* (A Working Paper in the Center for Engaged Democracy's Policy Papers Series, Merrimack College). Retrieved from http://scholarworks.merrimack.edu/ced_pubs/1/

Bringle, R. G., Clayton, P. H., & Hatcher, J. A. (2013). Research on service learning: An introduction. In P. H. Clayton, R. G. Bringle, & J. A. Hatcher (Eds.), *Research on service learning: Conceptual frameworks and assessment: Vol. 2A. Students and faculty* (pp. 3–25). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Butin, D. W. (2010). *Service-learning in theory and practice: The future of community engagement in higher education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Charles, R., & Choi, Y. K. (2013). *Toward an approach to identify effective practices for faculty teaching community-based learning (CBL) courses: A study project for Rhodes College and members of the Teagle-funded Consortium* [Capstone report]. Retrieved from https://discoverarchive.vanderbilt.edu/handle/1803/5289

Everhart, R. S. (2016). Teaching tools to improve the development of empathy in service-learning students. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 20*(2), 129–154.

Ewell, P. T. (2009). *Assessment, accountability, and improvement: Revisiting the tension* (NILOA Occasional Paper No. 1). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment. Retrieved from http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/PeterEwell_005.pdf

Eyler, J. S. (2000, Fall). What do we most need to know about the impact of service-learning on student learning? *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, Special Issue,* pp. 11–17.

Eyler, J. (2009). The power of experiential education. *Liberal Education, 95*(4), 24–31.

Eyler, J., & Giles, D. E., Jr. (1999). *Where's the learning in service-learning?* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Eyler, J., & Giles, D. E., Jr. (2013). Review essay: The endless quest for scholarly respectability in service-learning research. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 20*(1), 53–64.

Eyler, J. S., Giles, D. E., Jr., Stenson, C. M., & Gray, C. J. (2001). *At a glance: What we know about the effects of service-learning on college students, faculty, institutions and communities, 1993–2000: Third edition.* Retrieved from http://www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/4192_AtAGlance.pdf

Fitch, P., Steinke, P., & Hudson, T. D. (2013). Research and theoretical perspective on cognitive outcomes of service learning. In P. H. Clayton, R. G.

Bringle, & J. A. Hatcher (Eds.), *Research on service learning: Conceptual frameworks and assessment: Vol. 2A. Students and faculty* (pp. 57–83). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Jameson, J. K., Clayton, P. H., & Ash, S. L. (2013). Conceptualizing, assessing, and investigating academic learning in service learning. In P. H. Clayton, R. G. Bringle, and J. A. Hatcher (Eds.), *Research on service learning: Conceptual frameworks and assessment: Vol. 2A.* Students and faculty (pp. 85–110). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Kuh, G. D. (2007). Risky business: Promises and pitfalls of institutional transparency. *Change, 39*(5), 30–35.

Mackaway, J. A., Winchester-Seeto, T., Coulson, D., & Harvey, M. (2011). Practical and pedagogical aspects of learning through participation: The LTP assessment design framework. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice 8.3.5.* Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/1471237/Practical_and_Pedagogical_Aspects_of_Learning_Through_Participation_the_LTP_Assessment_Design_Framework

McDonald, B. (2012). Assessment in service-learning. *Online Submission.* Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED535897)

Ming, A. C. C., Lee, W. K. M., & Ka, C. M. H. (2009). Service-learning model at Lingnan University: Development strategies and outcome assessment. *New Horizons in Education, 57*(3), 57–73.

Molee, L. M., Henry, M. E., Sessa, V. I., & McKinney-Prupis, E. R. (2010). Assessing learning in service-learning courses through critical reflection. *Journal of Experiential Education, 33*(3), 239–257.

Rhodes College. (2010). *Assessing community-based learning (CBL) in liberal arts colleges: Year 2 progress report.* Memphis, TN: Teagle Foundation.

Rhodes College. (2013). *Assessing community-based learning (CBL) in liberal arts colleges: Year 5 progress report.* Memphis, TN: Teagle Foundation.

Rhodes College. (2008). *Systematic assessment of student learning in community-based learning programming: Report on an assessment planning grant to Rhodes College, Niagara University and Franklin and Marshall College.* Memphis, TN: Teagle Foundation.

Shapiro, D. F. (2012). Collaborative faculty assessment of service-learning student work to improve student and faculty learning and course design. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 19*(1), 44–57.

Zhang, G., Zeller, N., Griffith, R., Metcalf, D., Williams, J., Shea, C., & Misulis, K. (2011). Using the context, input, process, and product evaluation model (CIPP) as a comprehensive framework to guide the planning, implementation, and assessment of service-learning programs. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 15*(4), 57–84.

About the Authors

Margueritte S. Murphy is currently faculty liaison and advisor to the Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning at Hobart & William Smith Colleges. She holds a Ph.D. in comparative literature from Harvard University. Besides her interest in community-based learning and assessment, she has published widely in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, including two monographs and a coedited collection, often taking an interdisciplinary approach.

Kathleen S. Flowers is the director of the Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning at Hobart & William Smith Colleges. She earned her Ed.M. from the University at Buffalo.