Building Faculty Capacity: Initial Impact of a Service-Learning Faculty Learning Community Model

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Abstract

Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) offer a collaborative and structured environment for professional development, enabling educators to build their capacity to incorporate service-learning into their teaching practices. This study examines the initial impact of a FLC for institutional awareness and implementation of service-learning at Slippery Rock University. The FLCs allowed scholars to gain theoretical and hands-on experience in service-learning pedagogy. This article outlines a FLC model based on a conceptual framework of six course attributes to promote structure, clarity, and inquiry. Through intentional structural revisions, the FLCs evolved to more effectively provide a space where faculty could integrate service-learning into their courses. Participants increased both their self-reported awareness of the six attributes and confidence in their ability to implement the attributes in their teaching practices. Further research is needed as the FLC model is adjusted; however, the results indicate a positive impact on faculty development and support institutional change.

Keywords: service-learning, faculty development, faculty learning community, community engagement

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With the goal of building an engaged campus, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania (SRU) used the institutional self-study process to leverage institutional commitment and transform the use of service-learning pedagogy. Furco (2010) stated that "an 'engaged campus' is characterised by the *authenticity* and *genuineness* with which community engagement is integrated into the research, teaching and service mission of higher education institutions" (p. 387). SRU is committed to advancing community-based learning and service-learning practices through a variety of efforts and with support from the university's Office for Community-Engaged Learning (OCEL). The OCEL aimed to strengthen the service-learning practices at the university by developing a conceptual framework to structure the content of a faculty learning community (FLC).

Prioritizing the development of FLCs represents advancing community-based learning and service-learning practices on our campus. The purpose of faculty development for service-learning is to foster curricular reform while also assisting faculty with scholarship, leadership among colleagues, and advocacy for service-learning (Bringle et al., 1997). Cox (2001) detailed how FLCs were change agents for transforming institutions into learning organizations. Additional changes included communication across disciplines, increased faculty interest in teaching and learning, inquiries into the scholarship of teaching, and growth in civic responsibility. When designing faculty development opportunities, Hatcher and Bringle (1995) argued for "a more deliberate, organized, and centralized approach to faculty development that would yield more tangible results more quickly" (p. 113). Notably, a curriculum about the tenets of

service-learning should be complemented by opportunities to reflect on their practice (Bringle et al., 1997). Furthermore, institutional support is necessary to enhance faculty curricular work.

In this article, we describe one approach to creating faculty development to support the high-impact practice (HIP) of service-learning by designing and implementing FLCs. One of the overarching goals was to build capacity among faculty members to effectively implement new teaching strategies, such as service-learning pedagogies, to contribute to the institutionalization of service-learning. Weaver and Kellogg (2017) described institutionalizing community engagement/service-learning as "establishing the goals and values of community engagement as norms within the well-established organizational culture of a university campus" (p. 119). Thus, faculty development was an essential component in the process and development of an assessment plan. The inquiry aims to examine faculty's perceptions of their awareness of the six attributes for service-learning and their confidence in implementing each of them to foster institutional change on our campus.

Moreover, an assessment plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the service-learning FLC became important to ensuring the quality of the experience from both process and outcomes perspectives. Hansen and Williams (2005) suggested that "learning community assessment strategies must necessarily be comprehensive, multi-faceted, and inclusive of multiple frameworks in an effort to systematically assess complex outcomes" (p. 70). Conducting an initial evaluation of faculty members' perceptions of the FLC can help identify key areas for enhancing faculty capacity to inform targeted strategies in building awareness and confidence with implementing service-learning pedagogies.

Profile of Slippery Rock University

As a member of a 10-university state system, SRU is a teaching-oriented public higher education institution in Western Pennsylvania, approximately 50 miles north of Pittsburgh. The regional university has a total enrollment of approximately 8,800 students, with about 7,400 undergraduates and 1,400 graduates. During the period of this inquiry, Slippery Rock was comprised of four colleges: Business; Education; Health, Engineering, and Science; and Liberal Arts. Graduate programs are offered in education, business, and health sciences, including a master's in physician assistant and doctorates in physical and occupational therapy.

Service-Learning at SRU

"The fundamental educational mission of Slippery Rock University (SRU) is to transform the intellectual, social, physical, and leadership capacities of students in order to prepare them for life and career success" (Slippery Rock University, 2022a). Holland (1997) found that the presence of service-learning in the university mission, along with setting clear goals and additional support structures, increased university support of service-learning on campus. As part of the mission, the university demonstrates a strong commitment to advancing community-based learning and service-learning practices through various efforts and support from the OCEL. In addition, the university earned the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification in 2020 and aims to earn CCEC reclassification in 2026.

Multiple campus initiatives and institutional changes preceded the establishment of the service-learning FLCs. Collectively, the events contributed to the goal of institutionalizing an engaged campus at SRU to align with the tenets of service-learning institutionalization as described by Furco and Holland (2004):

> Like most educational initiatives, service-learning achieves institutionalization when it becomes an ongoing, expected, valued, and legitimate part of the institution's intellectual core and organizational culture. However, in comparison to other educational initiatives, service-learning presents some unique features that challenge traditional conceptions of what "institutionalization" means. Specifically, service-learning's multifaceted structure, multi-disciplinary philosophical framework, and broad organizational impacts require institutional leaders to think differently about why and how to institutionalize this educational initiative. (p. 24)

Furthermore, Bringle and Hatcher (2000) described how efforts for institutionalization need to be multifaceted, related to the mission, and supported by presidential leadership, allocations in the budget, and a centralized office to coordinate campuswide

service–learning opportunities. Each of these factors represents deliberate and supportive actions implemented at SRU. Previously, service–learning was undertheorized and operationalized without integrity on our campus. Additionally, service–learning pedagogy was self–reported, resulting in an inflation in course tracking. Over time, structured initiatives and changes were established to institutionalize the service–learning practices at SRU (see Figure 1).
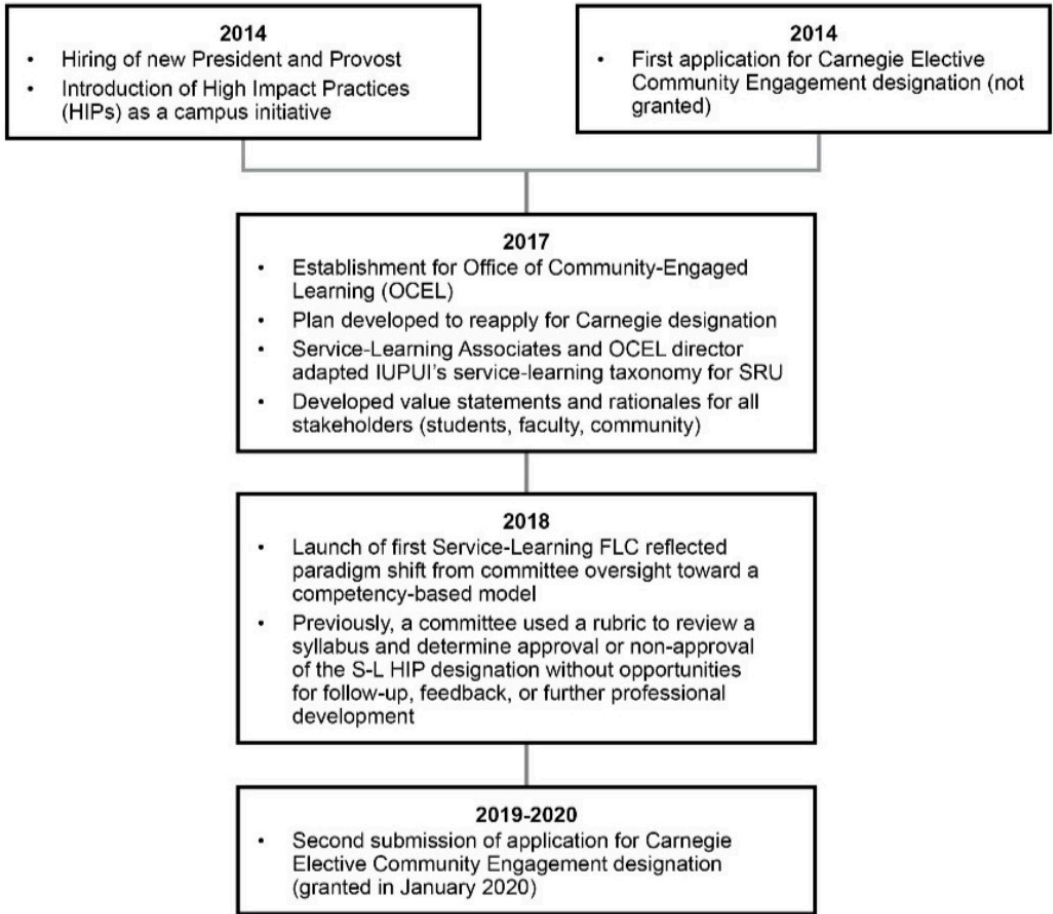
Faculty Development to Contribute to Institutionalizing Service–Learning

Bringle and Hatcher (1996) identified four key constituents essential for successfully implementing service–learning in higher education: the institution, faculty, students, and community (p. 224). Faculty members make a critical difference in service–learning, from course design to mentoring students in their experiences. Faculty development and support are essential for sustaining service–learning initiatives. Universities can provide faculty development opportunities that create a shared understanding of service–learning while establishing and maintaining its academic integrity (Hatcher & Bringle, 1995). Bringle and Hatcher (1996) also explained that faculty will develop confidence in their use of service–learning pedagogies and increase the presence of service–learning in the fabric of the university.

Although faculty development can take varying forms, Hatcher and Bringle (1995) argued for an intentional approach and presented four reasons for structured offerings. First, a shared vocabulary, including a definition of service–learning, is necessary for faculty to understand the pedagogy of service–learning. Second, academic integrity

Figure 1. Timeline of Initiatives and Changes in Community–Based Learning and Service–Learning Practices

2014
- Hiring of new President and Provost
- Introduction of High Impact Practices (HIPs) as a campus initiative

2014
- First application for Carnegie Elective Community Engagement designation (not granted)

2017
- Establishment for Office of Community-Engaged Learning (OCEL)
- Plan developed to reapply for Carnegie designation
- Service-Learning Associates and OCEL director adapted IUPUI's service-learning taxonomy for SRU
- Developed value statements and rationales for all stakeholders (students, faculty, community)

2018
- Launch of first Service-Learning FLC reflected paradigm shift from committee oversight toward a competency-based model
- Previously, a committee used a rubric to review a syllabus and determine approval or non-approval of the S-L HIP designation without opportunities for follow-up, feedback, or further professional development

2019-2020
- Second submission of application for Carnegie Elective Community Engagement designation (granted in January 2020)

is fostered and quality control is offered for curriculum revision. Third, faculty experience increased support and confidence as they learn from colleagues, gain information about resources on campus, and establish relationships with faculty in other disciplines. Fourth, institutionalization ensues when faculty are motivated to engage in the learning to implement service-learning. Moreover, Bringle et al. (1997) explained that faculty development extends beyond working with faculty to weave service-learning into their courses. It also involves the active and engaged roles as scholars, leaders, role models, and service-learning advocates.

Various models of faculty development exist to integrate teaching, scholarship, and service. Gravett and Broscheid (2018) suggested that the selection of a model should align with the achievement of specific outcomes. One category of "extended and immersive programs" (p. 159) includes FLCs. With the strengths of being high impact and participatory, FLCs offer opportunities for a sense of belonging, building relationships, and program development. Shortcomings include their time-intensive nature, the need for planning, logistical complexity, and possible costs.

At SRU, the structure of the FLCs reflects a model developed in the 1990s by Milton Cox and colleagues at Miami University (Cox, 2004). In this model, participants represent cross-disciplinary faculty and staff in groups of six to 15 members. Cox described the FLC as an opportunity to "engage in an active, collaborative, yearlong program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning and with frequent seminars and activities that provide learning, development, the scholarship of teaching, and community building" (p. 8). Cox's model associates multiple teaching and learning goals with the FLCs, including

> building a university-wide community through teaching and learning, nourishing the scholarship of teaching and its application to student learning, broadening the evaluation of teaching and the assessment of learning, increasing faculty collaboration across disciplines, and creating awareness of the complexity of teaching and learning. (p. 10)

FLCs can be cohort-based or topic-based.

Cohort-based FLCs focus on the needs of a particular group of faculty members, tailoring topics and content to their needs and interests. Topic-based cohorts focus on a specific university-wide initiative related to teaching and learning. Faculty members often propose topics to the FLC program director, who then distributes the information across campus.

Faculty Learning Communities at Slippery Rock University

Slippery Rock University (2022b) defines a topic-based FLC as "small, cross-disciplinary groups of both faculty and staff who work collaboratively to develop 21st-century approaches to teaching and learning in higher education and engage in the scholarship of teaching." The university charges the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) to provide professional development to support faculty and staff as they build on their teaching and research, in which FLCs are one of many opportunities developed by the CTL. FLCs provide broad overview training for faculty members across campus to become acquainted with the essential components of HIPs and provide a collaborative environment to guide faculty to develop competence in a particular area of teaching and learning (Cox, 2003). The term "high-impact practice" (HIP), introduced by George D. Kuh (2008), refers to active learning processes that promote strengthening teaching practices and approaches to deep learning through student engagement. One or two individuals recognized as experts in the area facilitate FLCs, meeting at least five times during a single semester. At the completion of the FLC, faculty will be able to incorporate what they learned into their courses; furthermore, by demonstrating professional competency in a particular HIP, they will be designated HIP practitioners. Faculty are awarded a professional development stipend through the successful completion of a particular HIP FLC. The university also assigns the HIP designation to one or more of the faculty member's courses.

Service-Learning Faculty Learning Community Development and Structure

Service-learning is one of the 11 HIPs established by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). SRU launched the Service-Learning Faculty Learning Community (SL-FLC) in fall 2018

to support faculty members in advancing their service–learning practices through professional development. The goal for faculty was to develop competencies in the essential components of service–learning and engage in the scholarship of engagement. SRU models its approach to service–learning after the AAC&U's "high–impact educational practices" (Kuh, 2008) and the Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) Center for Service and Learning (Hahn et al., 2016). Service–learning at SRU is based on six attributes (Table 1) adapted from Hatcher et al. (2016): reciprocal partnerships, diversity of interactions and dialogue, community activities, civic competencies, critical reflection, and assessment.

The purpose of the SRU conceptual framework is to inform practice in three ways:

1. The value ("We believe . . .") statements give meaning and purpose to concepts that the SRU community cares about.

2. The attributes characterize the practice and allow for a structure that promotes exploration and discovery.

3. The criteria that are applied define the expectations in a quality service–learning course that possesses integrity and rigor.

SRU faculty and staff adapted the conceptual framework from IUPUI and added the value statements and criteria. The order of the attributes was also changed from the original taxonomy to create an artifact that reflects institutional values and practices.

The conceptual framework served as the basis for designing the SL–FLC through the introduction, discussion, and reflection on each of the six attributes. The SL–FLC included six 90-minute sessions during the

Table 1. How Values Inform Service–Learning Practice at Slippery Rock University

We believe . . .	Attribute	Our practice
that campus and community, working as equitable partners and coeducators, can create transformative change.	Reciprocal partnerships	Reciprocal partnerships and processes shape the community activities and course design.
engaging across difference promotes an awareness of the interdependence between self and society, which serves to humanize others and build vibrant communities.	Diversity of interactions and dialogue	Diversity of interactions and dialogue with others across difference occurs regularly in the course.
engaging in activities that reflect the concerns and priorities of the community deepens both civic and academic learning and enhances community well-being.	Community activities	Community activities enhance academic content, course design, and assignments.
the public purpose of higher education is to promote the development of engaged citizens who will uphold democratic values and serve the public good.	Civic competencies	Civic competencies (i.e., knowledge, skills, dispositions, behaviors) are well integrated into student learning.
critical reflection bridges service and learning in order to enhance and reinforce both, enabling meaning to be derived from the experience, and hastening the creation of capable citizens.	Critical reflection	Critical reflection is well integrated into student learning.
assessment shows evidence of impact among multiple stakeholders for the purpose of continuous quality improvement, including teaching, learning, partnership, and community impact.	Assessment	Assessment is used for continuous course improvement.

Note. Adapted from *Research on Student Civic Outcomes in Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Methods* (IUPUI Series on Service-Learning Research) by J. A. Hatcher, R. G. Bringle, and T. W. Hahn, 2016, Stylus Publishing.

semester, with each session dedicated to discussing one of the six attributes. Every SL-FLC had four to 12 faculty participants. The SL-FLC initially met face-to-face; however, with the advent of COVID-19, it moved to a virtual format. The FLC utilized the university learning management system (Desire2Learn) to provide a space for collaboration and supporting materials for each attribute.

The FLC was cofacilitated by the director for community engagement and a service-learning HIP-designated faculty member. A faculty member cofacilitated the sessions, offering participants a faculty perspective and examples of their own service-learning practices. The director for community engagement selects faculty members to ensure that each faculty participant is well-versed in service-learning and capable of serving as a mentor. The collaboration provided faculty voice, experience, and expertise with administrative direction, oversight, and stewardship. The two voices leveraged their assets in a way that mutually reinforced one another. The administrative consistency anchored the FLCs within OCEL, allowing for tracking, assessment, and the further evolution of the model. Faculty enhanced this arrangement with their rich examples, artifacts, and experiences from applied practice in their specific discipline. The complementary nature of the cofacilitators' voices was not a common practice but one that SRU intentionally chose to implement. The cofacilitators were responsible for leading each FLC session, establishing responsibilities based on each other's strengths, developing the materials for each session, and meeting outside FLC meeting times to reflect on the FLC process.

Outcomes

Six outcomes framed the FLC. Through the participation in the service-learning faculty learning community, participants will

- Complete an ongoing reflective self-assessment of their current service-learning practice throughout the FLC.

- Develop/revise course materials consistent with six (6) course attributes for service-learning.

- Learn new knowledge and skills from the examples of faculty peers to invigorate their engaged practice.

- Designate a course as HIP-S (service-learning).

- Learn how to operationalize course attributes through the RockServe (powered by GivePulse) online community engagement platform.

- Earn $300 in professional development and gain eligibility to apply for additional course enhancement funds through the OCEL community-engaged service-learning practitioner grant program.

The outcomes functioned to support faculty as they sought to develop a service-learning course or further develop their current service-learning courses. Participants also had access to additional resources, such as the community engagement platform RockServe (powered by GivePulse) and professional development funding.

Recruitment

Initially, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) utilized an application process to select members for each FLC to ensure a small cohort model and advertised the FLCs to the university community through email. In addition, the CTL established a webpage providing details on each FLC and details about the FLC model at the university. In recent years, OCEL worked in collaboration with CTL to advertise the SL-FLC. The OCEL designed flyers and distributed them to faculty through email and to campus mailboxes. The director for community engagement also extended individual email invitations to faculty who demonstrated an interest in service-learning. The FLC was intentionally designed to be open for faculty members at any level to join a cohort, not just tenured faculty members.

Initial Service-Learning Faculty Learning Community

The 90-minute sessions followed the same basic agenda when the FLC was first offered in fall 2018. Each commenced with the presentation of key components to define each attribute and examples of how the attribute can look in practice. After sharing the content, an interactive portion offered the time and space to brainstorm ways to integrate the attribute into each faculty member's course. Often, a think-pair-share model was used to promote dialogue among the participants. The facilitators asked participants to talk with different colleagues each week.

The deliberate request ensured that participants heard from various voices across multiple disciplines during the six sessions. The interactive session also provided the opportunity to collaborate on approaches for their specific discipline and establish a sense of community among their peers. At the end of each session, faculty members were provided time to share their ideas with their peers and receive feedback.

The FLC opened membership to all faculty members, and each participant was asked to design a course in their discipline where they could apply the concepts from the FLC. Participants needed to meet two requirements to complete the FLC and earn the HIP–S designation for their course. First, each participant was expected to attend all six sessions but needed to attend at least five of the six sessions. Second, each participant was required to submit a revised syllabus to demonstrate the integration of the service–learning attributes. Although the development of additional course materials was not required, it was highly encouraged throughout the FLC and provided participants the opportunity to receive feedback on their materials from the cofacilitators.

At the completion of the FLC, the cofacilitators evaluated each faculty member's syllabus and course documents for evidence of the service–learning attributes. If a faculty member needed further support to integrate the attributes in their documents, a cofacilitator met with them to discuss revisions. When the director for community engagement and cofacilitators deemed the courses acceptable for HIP–S designation, they made the recommendation to the University Curriculum Committee. The FLC enabled faculty to designate multiple courses by submitting revised syllabi that reflected the six attributes. This way, the designation was affiliated with the faculty member who teaches each course.

Faculty members who successfully completed and met the requirements of the FLC were provided a professional stipend of $300, which was supported through the university budget. According to Dostilio and Welch (2019), a variety of factors motivate faculty to become involved in community–engaged learning. One of those factors includes being prepared to provide logistical support for teaching and research (p. 163). The funding was provided to not only support the faculty but also reflect the OCEL's philosophy of investing limited resources in those faculty that invest in their own professional development through the FLC. Another form of financial support provided by the OCEL came in the form of HIP–designated course enhancement minigrant opportunities. The minigrants were intended to support access (mobilization), quality (consumable materials and supplies), and/or reciprocity (honoraria for community partners).

Evolution of the Faculty Learning Community

Over time, the SL–FLC evolved to sustain pedagogical change. Revisions were also needed during the shift to virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A key goal was to encourage discovery and a deeper understanding of the six attributes among the participants. A series of five advancements was implemented over a period of 3 years (see Table 2).

Table 2. Five Faculty Learning Community Advancements

Semester/Year	Advancement	Rationale
Fall 2019	Powerful questions	Powerful questions present many benefits to deepening the discussion.
Spring 2020	Flipped approach and virtual synchronous sessions	Asynchronous: hosted facilitator-created videos for main principles for each attribute; synchronous sessions became the place to work through problems, advance concepts, and engage in collaborative learning.
Spring 2021	Syllabus worksheet	Developed to assist participants with the development of their course by providing guidelines for each of the attributes.
Spring 2021	Community engagement platform (RockServe)	Short RockServe (GivePulse) tutorials were provided to align platform features to attributes.
Spring 2021	Support through OCEL	Graduate assistant and mini grants for additional support.

Powerful Questions (Fall 2019)

The first advancement with the FLC was the introduction of two to three powerful questions for each attribute. Powerful questions "stimulate reflective thinking, challenge assumptions, are thought-provoking, generate energy and a vector to explore, channel inquiry and promises insight, are broad and enduring, touch deeper meaning, and evoke more questions" (Vogt et al., 1994, p. 2). The introduction of the powerful questions promotes the goal of discovery and exploration by stimulating curiosity in the participants, which was a goal of the FLC facilitators. In the participants' responses, the facilitators discover what is important to the participants and give each one a voice in the process. The learning management system presented the powerful questions for each attribute within the weekly module, in advance of each session. The intent was to allow participants to reflect on each question before attending the weekly session.

Flipped Approach and Virtual Synchronous Sessions (Spring 2020)

In spring 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced a shift from face-to-face to a virtual environment, resulting in two significant FLC changes. First, the FLC sessions became synchronous sessions using video conferencing software. Second, the learning management system created additional readings and resources to cater to an online learning environment. The shift to an online environment led to the introduction of a flipped classroom approach to create a more active learning environment. The learning management system hosted facilitator-created videos where instruction that previously occurred during the in-person session was now viewed asynchronously in advance of the session. The change resulted in more efficient use of the synchronous meeting time by allowing for an interactive session with application and engagement surrounding each attribute.

The virtual synchronous sessions became the place to work through problems, advance concepts, and engage in collaborative learning (Tucker, 2012). The conversations revolved around clarifying questions related to the attribute and expanding on the concepts by addressing two to three powerful questions related to the attribute. This was followed by an interactive brainstorming session to allow participants to ponder the attributes in their practice.

Syllabus Worksheet (Spring 2021)

In spring 2021, the team created a syllabus worksheet to assist participants in developing their courses by providing guidelines for each of the attributes. The worksheet allowed the attribute information to be constructed and integrated into the course more strategically. Additionally, the worksheet provided a straightforward guide for participants to meet the updated FLC and university HIP designation syllabus requirements. The synchronous interactive sessions allowed participants to complete the section related to the attribute being discussed for that session and document any areas of development needed for their course. Cofacilitators invited participants to submit their updated worksheets before the session so they could receive feedback on their progress. The content for this worksheet could be later integrated into their course syllabus since some faculty courses would change due to new teaching assignments or the course they were developing being offered only once an academic year. The worksheet allowed participants to successfully fulfill the FLC requirements and receive approval from the University Curriculum Committee (UCC) in a timely manner.

Community Engagement Platform (Spring 2021)

Another revision of the FLC was the introduction of the community engagement platform GivePulse, which was rebranded as RockServe at the university. GivePulse is a "volunteer management and service-learning platform that enables anyone to find, list, and track civic engagement in their community" (GivePulse, 2022). RockServe is the university's digital community engagement platform where volunteers can find service opportunities from campus and off-campus organizations in one specific location online. It also serves as a portal for community members and organizations interested in partnering with SRU for short-term service projects, service-learning courses, or ongoing service programs to further the organization's mission and community-based efforts. As part of the FLC, facilitators added participants to the RockServe platform and provided short tutorials during the synchronous sessions. They demonstrated how specific features could assist participants in finding partners for their course and manage service-learning aspects of the course.

RockServe was utilized throughout the FLC to foster growth as an engaged campus. First, through the FLC, faculty were introduced to the platform in a way that would not be overly burdensome. RockServe also served as the platform where facilitators distributed surveys to participants and managed attendance using the "Impacts" feature. The Impacts feature is a way to measure and access potential forms of community engagement: It asks users to submit their impacts for a particular event and enables event administrators to verify individuals' impacts.

The FLC utilized Impacts for five purposes. First, facilitators used it to track FLC participant attendance, allowing participants to experience the function in the same way their students would if they used it through a course or project/partnership (such as automation). Second, RockServe taught participants how to operationalize course attributes into practice—for example, reciprocity in action through surveys and feedback mechanisms. Third, when a faculty member earns their HIP-S designation, all HIP-S courses and rosters are automatically uploaded into RockServe each semester. Faculty could utilize their RockServe course portals for service and partnership coordination and tracking if chosen. Fourth, RockServe houses all OCEL minigrants and reporting requirements and supports tracking, organization, and assessment. Finally, RockServe provides data to access service-learning efforts at the course level or across the university. The implementation and use of RockServe allowed the university to build an important infrastructure that did not exist previously toward the engaged campus. Connecting the FLC and HIP-S courses to RockServe was a very intentional and strategic initiative to make community engagement and service-learning deeper and more pervasive at SRU.

In the case of the FLC, each session equated to 1.5 impacts, and participants were asked to submit their impacts at the conclusion of each session. Then the facilitators tracked and verified their attendance.

Support Through OCEL (Spring 2021)

The last area of advancement focused on the additional support outside the FLC. First, a graduate assistant in the OCEL designed and developed RockServe training sessions—both group and individual. Second, the OCEL addressed financial support for the HIP-designated faculty members by offering minigrant opportunities designed to serve two purposes. First, the grants allowed faculty to enhance student outcomes and community benefit; second, they enabled faculty to promote professional competency development among HIP-designated faculty practitioners through the applied practice of community-engaged learning. More specifically, the grants supported the utilization, experimentation, and application of best practices in core competency areas. The funding also scaffolded and bridged a faculty practitioner's stages of development from fundamentals to quality-building to advanced integration as a community-engaged scholar.

Collectively, the five advancements in the FLC contributed to a more supportive and robust structure for faculty development around service-learning. Although other university-wide initiatives existed, the FLC remained the key to advancing service-learning among faculty. As part of the comprehensive plan that was developed to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of service-learning institutionalization at SRU, one of the main assessment strategies of the FLC was to conduct a pre- and postsurvey. This study examined existing programmatic assessment data to understand the outcomes and impact of the FLCs as a form of faculty development, as well as to guide the advancement of the FLC and the institutionalization of service-learning.

Measuring the Impact of SRU's Service-Learning Faculty Learning Community Model

An initial evaluation was conducted by the authors to examine faculty's perceptions of their gains from participating in a faculty learning community (FLC) in terms of awareness of and potential to implement service-learning. Three of the authors are HIP-S-designated service-learning faculty members, and the fourth is the director for community engagement, lending credibility to the study's focus on service-learning pedagogy and faculty development. This article outlines an FLC model based on a conceptual framework of six course attributes to promote structure, clarity, and inquiry. The attributes are considered by community engagement experts to be key components that both characterize and distinguish service-learning as a high-impact practice. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Slippery Rock University.

Recruitment

The FLC recruited faculty primarily through a campuswide email. Faculty who regularly engaged in service-learning and were interested in implementing it into their classes were encouraged to participate. Faculty represented each of the four Colleges, including Business; Health, Engineering, and Science; Liberal Arts; and Education, as illustrated in Figure 2.

The College of Health, Engineering, and Science had the largest number of participating faculty members; however, the greatest representation from a single academic program was six faculty members from Early Childhood Education (see Figure 3).

Pre- and Post-participation Survey

Participants completed a survey before and after the FLC sessions to gauge their knowledge of and confidence in implementing service-learning components. Questions focused on the six main attributes of service-learning adapted from Hatcher et al. (2016): reciprocal partnerships, community activities, civic competencies, diversity of

Figure 2. Faculty Participation by Academic College

■ Business ■ Health, Engineering, and Science ■ Liberal Arts ■ Education
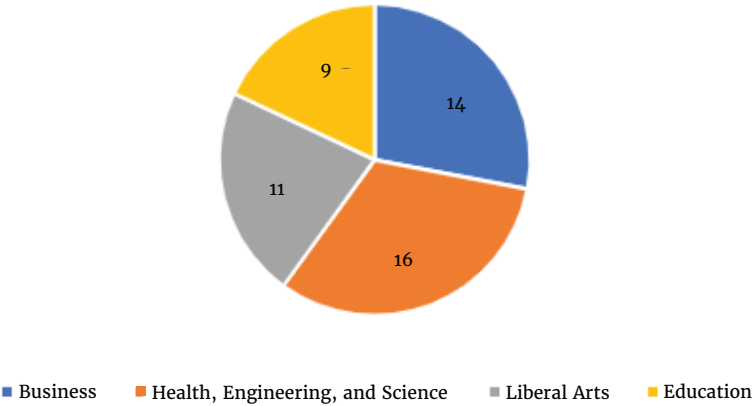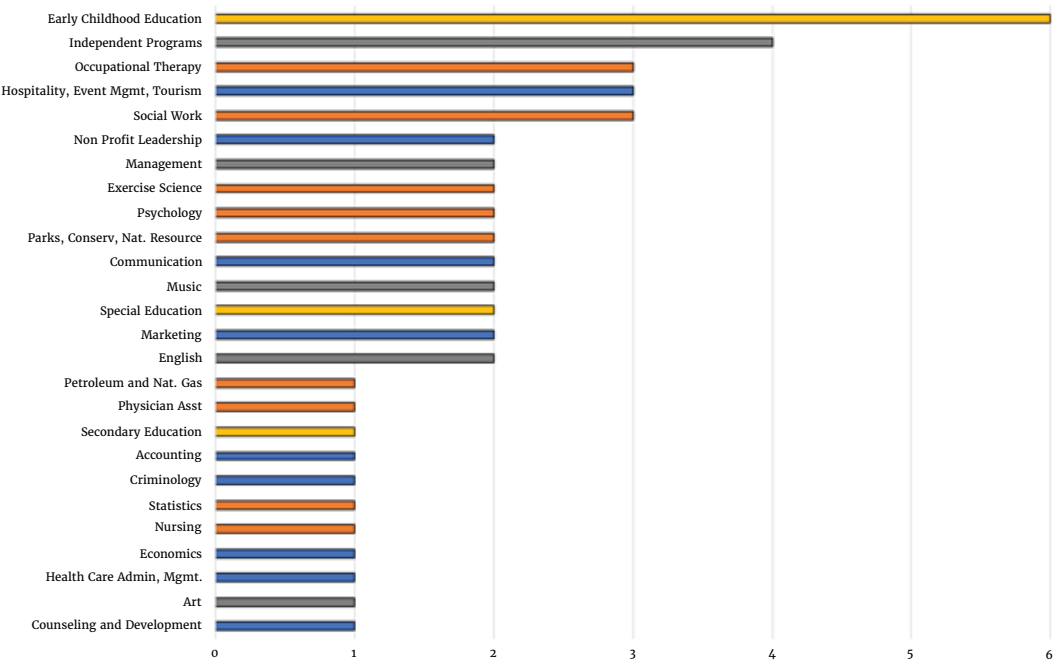
Figure 3. Faculty Participation by Academic Program

interactions and dialogue, critical reflection, and assessment. The team collected data using a seven-point Likert scale. They also asked participants to provide their reasons for participation and list two or three key takeaways they hoped to gain by the end of the FLC. In addition to the Likert-scale questions in the postsurvey, the team asked participants to rate the quality of each session based on content, relevance, and structure and to provide two or three items they learned from their participation in the FLC. Finally, each faculty member was encouraged to submit their course syllabi to the OCEL to apply for HIP designation through UCC for their relevant classes.

Findings

As part of our analysis, we employed both descriptive statistics to evaluate the distribution of sample values and *t*-test analyses to assess statistical significance (see Table 3 for the analysis of awareness and Table 4 for the analysis of confidence in implementation).

A paired two-sample *t*-test was conducted to assess the mean differences in the awareness of the six attributes. Administering pre- and posttests to evaluate awareness is appropriate because it enables a direct comparison of participants' knowledge, perceptions, or understanding before and after completing the FLC. By comparing the average performance before and after the intervention, the *t*-test provides insights into the program's effectiveness or teaching strategy. This statistical analysis allowed us to examine the paired data points and determine statistical significance, which we present in Table 3. The six attributes showed statistically significant increases post-assessment, with participants indicating the largest change in reciprocal partnerships, with a *t*-statistic of -6.29 (*p* < 0.001). It should be noted that statistical significance does not imply the difference is practically meaningful or large—it simply shows the results are unlikely to be due to random variation. It is also important to note that self-reporting of awareness has limitations because it relies on individuals' perceptions, which can bias their responses through overestimation, underestimation, or social desirability. Additionally, self-reports may not accurately reflect actual knowledge or behavior, making them less reliable for objective evaluation.

A paired two-sample *t*-test was conducted by the authors to assess the mean differences in confidence in ability to implement the six attributes. The results are presented in Table 4. The six attributes showed statistically significant increases in the post-assessment with participants.

Preparticipation Survey Results

As shown in Table 5, results from the preparticipation survey suggest faculty participants were more aware of the service-learning attributes than they were confident in implementing each of the attributes into their classes.

Post-participation Survey Results

Following the conclusion of the FLC, participants completed the same questionnaire regarding their awareness of and confidence in their ability to implement each of the six service-learning attributes in their classes. The expectation with the design and approach of the FLC was for participants to feel more aware of and confident in their ability to implement the attributes discussed in the FLC by the end of the program. Participants perceived their awareness of and confidence in ability to implement each attribute to be greater at the end of the FLC than at the start, which aligns with the goals of the FLC, as it is designed to enhance participants' understanding of and ability to apply the attributes over time. It highlights a perceived improvement, though it may or may not reflect actual skill development or measurable outcomes. Participants reported a larger increase in areas related to implementation compared to awareness, as shown in Table 6.

Faculty perceived the FLC to be beneficial, with each question eliciting a response of at least six on the 7-point Likert scale (Table 7).

Some participants did not finish or complete the process of submitting their final materials for HIP-S designation (see Table 8). Through individual follow-ups with participants, some indicated that their departments made curricular changes and reassigned their teaching workloads so they would not be teaching the course they worked on during the FLC. One faculty member left the university after completing the FLC, and others could not submit their syllabi before the deadline to get a HIP-S designation on the master class schedule.

Table 3. Descriptive and *t*–Test Analysis of Awareness of the Six Attributes (*n* = 23)

	Pretest		Posttest		Pre/post mean diff.	*t*-stat	*p* (2-tail)
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Reciprocal partnerships	3.74	1.66	5.91	1.08	2.17	−6.70	*p* < 0.001
Diversity of interactions & dialogue	4.04	1.33	5.83	0.98	1.78	−5.79	*p* < 0.001
Community activities	3.96	1.49	5.83	1.03	1.83	−5.31	*p* < 0.001
Civic competencies	3.96	1.22	5.61	0.94	1.65	−5.79	*p* < 0.001
Critical reflection	4.74	1.42	5.96	1.07	1.22	−3.48	*p* < 0.01
Assessment	4.48	1.38	5.57	0.95	1.08	−3.01	*p* < 0.01

Table 4. Descriptive and *t*–Test Analysis of Confidence in Ability to Implement the Six Attributes (*n* = 23)

	Pretest		Posttest		Pre/post mean diff.	*t*-stat	*p* (2-tail)
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Reciprocal partnerships	3.04	2.01	5.74	1.10	0.91	−6.29	*p* < 0.001
Diversity of interactions & dialogue	3.78	1.51	5.61	0.89	1.83	−5.25	*p* < 0.001
Community activities	3.74	1.81	5.91	1.04	2.17	−5.87	*p* < 0.001
Civic competencies	3.65	1.61	5.61	0.72	1.96	−5.55	*p* < 0.001
Critical reflection	5.00	1.45	6.17	0.58	1.17	−4.44	*p* < 0.001
Assessment	4.74	1.39	5.83	0.72	1.09	−3.27	*p* < 0.01

Table 5. Preparticipation Survey Results for Awareness of and Confidence in Ability to Implement Each of the Service–Learning Attributes

Attribute	Presurvey awareness	Presurvey implementation
Reciprocal partnerships	3.7 ± 1.6	3.1 ± 1.9
Diversity of interactions	4.1 ± 1.5	3.7 ± 1.6
Community activities	4.0 ± 1.5	3.8 ± 1.8
Civic competencies	3.8 ± 1.3	3.6 ± 1.7
Critical reflection	4.6 ± 1.5	4.9 ± 1.5
Assessment	4.5 ± 1.3	4.5 ± 1.5

Table 6. Post−participation Survey Results for Awareness of and Confidence in Ability to Implement Each of the Service−Learning Attributes

Attribute	Postsurvey Awareness	Pre–Post Change	Postsurvey Implementation	Pre–Post Change
Reciprocal partnerships	5.7 ± 1.2	+2.2 ± 1.5	5.5 ± 1.2	+2.7 ± 2.0
Diversity of interactions	5.6 ± 1.1	+1.8 ± 1.4	5.5 ± 1.0	+1.8 ± 1.6
Community activities	5.7 ± 1.0	+1.9 ± 1.6	5.8 ± 1.2	+2.2 ± 1.7
Civic competencies	5.4 ± 1.2	+1.7 ± 1.3	5.4 ± 1.1	+2.0 ± 1.7
Critical reflection	5.9 ± 1.1	+1.2 ± 1.6	6.0 ± 1.0	+1.2 ± 1.2
Assessment	5.4 ± 1.1	+1.1 ± 1.7	5.6 ± 1.0	+1.1 ± 1.6

Table 7. Postparticipation Survey Responses: Quality of Faculty Learning Committee

Question	Likert value (*M ± SD*)
Each week consisted of an appropriate balance of content, reflection, or discussion	6.4 ± 0.8
Materials on each attribute provided in advance were useful to me	6.5 ± 0.5
The D2L shell was useful to me as a way to organize my own materials	6.2 ± 0.8
Materials provided by my colleagues in the D2L shell were useful to me	6.0 ± 1.1
Spending time working on the FLC before each meeting was useful to my development	6.4 ± 0.9
The service-learning taxonomy was a helpful structure for understanding the potential of service-learning	6.7 ± 0.6
The developmental stages within the taxonomy were helpful for setting professional development goals	6.6 ± 0.6

Table 8. Faculty Learning Committee Breakdown by Semester With High−Impact Practice Designation

Semester/Year	Number of participants	Number of faculty receiving HIP-S designation
Fall 2021	4	4
Spring 2021	12	12
Fall 2020	--	No FLC due to COVID-19
Spring 2020	7	6
Fall 2019	7	7
Spring 2019	11	6
Fall 2018	--	No FLC due to administrative reasons
Spring 2018	9	9

Implications of the Early-Stage Assessment

The early-stage measurement findings highlight the FLC's effectiveness in fostering significant growth in faculty self-perception of awareness of the six identified attributes and confidence in their ability to implement service-learning across these attributes. This outcome indicates that the FLC's structured approach successfully provides faculty with both the theoretical foundation and practical tools necessary to integrate service-learning into their courses. The findings emphasize that participants gained a better understanding of the model and six attributes of service-learning and developed the confidence to apply the principles for each attribute effectively in their teaching practices.

Self-reported perceptions provide valuable insights into participants' experiences and self-assessments by offering a firsthand account of how they perceive changes in their awareness and confidence. We must acknowledge that the findings are based on self-reported perceptions, which can be influenced by biases such as social desirability (Nederhof, 1985) or overestimation of one's abilities (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Although these perceptions provide valuable insights into faculty experiences, they may not fully reflect actual changes in teaching practices. Additionally, participants may have a positive bias toward the FLC or faculty facilitators, which could influence their responses in a way that highlights improvements.

The results also highlight the deeper potential of FLCs as an established structured mechanism replicable for faculty development. Furthermore, the results suggest the value of using a conceptual framework to guide a learning community. Such a set of frameworks proved to add clarity, focus, and initial measurability in this case. By enhancing the capacity of faculty members toward designing and delivering service-learning courses, FLCs contribute to the institutional goal of fostering community-engaged learning. This success should readily be interpreted as reflecting the potential for developing FLC models to support other innovations in pedagogies, and thus proving that the models have the capacity for professional growth and educational enhancement.

The results point to six reasons that have potential for continuing growth as the FLCs evolve further in the future and implications for institutional change.

1. The representation of service-learning faculty in various colleges and disciplines indicates a level of institutionalization across the campus. However, efforts can continue for outreach to programs that are underrepresented. As our university revises professional development pathways in each of the colleges, the structure of the SL-FLC could be customized for specific colleges.

2. Although the six attributes defined the conceptual framework and guided the planning and implementation of weekly sessions, the further development of community-engaged competencies for SRU holds much promise. This idea came from Campus Compact as faculty and staff reflected on how the service-learning concepts could be expressed as competencies and perhaps illustrate tangible examples for faculty.

3. Furthermore, involvement in opportunities with Campus Compact holds potential for faculty and staff as conference attendees and presenters who share their service-learning courses and projects. Faculty have also pursued professional development to earn professional credentials through Campus Compact.

4. The FLC experience was a catalyst for scholarship among faculty, students, and staff. Faculty members have presented at regional conferences and have been encouraged to submit to national and international conferences, as well as publish their work.

5. As a result of participating in the FLCs, faculty assumed new roles as community-engaged learning associates and FLC facilitators. In recent semesters, there was an increase in minigrant proposals through the OCEL at SRU. With additional grants awarded to faculty, more robust projects can be implemented with mutual benefit for participants and community partners.

6. As SRU prepares for the Carnegie Community Engagement reclassification application, the self-study process holds potential for further exploration and development and provides a model for collecting assessment data to inform next steps.

This study examined the initial impact of the FLC on faculty's perception of their awareness of the attributes of service–learning and of their confidence in their ability to implement service–learning, and there are opportunities for further investigation to explore its long–term effects and broader applicability. Quantitative measures, such as pre– and posttest data, provided evidence of changes in faculty awareness of and confidence in ability to implement service–learning principles. Tracking the retention of service–learning elements in course syllabi or assignments over time can further measure the lasting influence of the FLC on teaching practices. The metrics provide a clear, numerical basis for evaluating progress and identifying areas for improvement.

Qualitative methods, such as participant interviews and classroom observations, can complement these quantitative measures by offering deeper insights into faculty members' experiences, challenges, and successes after they've integrated service–learning into their courses. Interviews can reveal perspectives on how the FLC influenced their teaching philosophies and interactions with students and community partners, and classroom observations can provide real–world examples of service–learning practices in action. Analyzing these qualitative data will help uncover contextual factors that may not be apparent through quantitative analysis alone. The quality of how the six attributes were integrated into classes could also be assessed to identify areas where faculty can enhance their approach. The authors also acknowledge this initial study did not evaluate the impact on students or community and was restricted to faculty's perceptions in being prepared to integrate service–learning into their courses.

Conclusion

This study aimed to assess and evaluate the outcomes and impact of a service–learning FLC as a model for institutional change. The findings point to the benefits of providing support to faculty through the FLC model and a deeper and more pervasive presence of service–learning in the curriculum at SRU. Faculty appreciated the experience and gained a better understanding of service–learning and the six–attribute model utilized at SRU. Participants also noted the FLC provided a deeper understanding of the complexity of service–learning; how to incorporate service–learning into an academic setting; and the importance of community partnership, streamlining projects to meet student learning outcomes better, and engaging in collaboration with other faculty members from across disciplines. Beyond SRU, institutions interested in designing and implementing a faculty development program might consider how our FLC model that centers on the six attributes can guide their planning.

With the recent development of a set of competencies (Table 1) for each of the six attributes, additional research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the competencies and the extent to which faculty are addressing the competencies. Early assessment points to an initial impact of a FLC for institutional awareness and implementation of service–learning at SRU, and many valuable insights are evident; however, the model will continue to be assessed and developed to meet the growing needs for professional development of faculty and continuing to establish an infrastructure that makes program assessment more accessible.

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Declaration of Interest

We do not have any conflicts of interest to disclose.

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