

Teaching Service Learning: What's in it for Faculty at Research Universities?

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Abstract

The current service-learning movement in higher education is one response to calls for engaged campuses, particularly at land-grant institutions. Many research universities now provide various incentives for faculty to incorporate service learning into their curricula. This case study focuses on faculty motivation to teach service learning at a Research I campus. At issue is whether or not incentives offered by the university are effective motivators for faculty participation in service-learning initiatives. On the basis of responses to a faculty survey, recommendations are offered for increasing faculty involvement in service-learning initiatives at research universities.

Introduction

The benefits of service learning for college students are well documented. They include improved learning, a better understanding of citizenship, increased social capital, and the promise of a lifelong involvement with their communities (Boyer 1990; Eyler, Giles, and Braxton 1997; Putnam 1995; Sax and Astin 1996). A recent analysis of more than three hundred college and university mission statements revealed that 95 percent explicitly recognize the importance of such outcomes (Campus Compact 2005, 5). However, the motivations for faculty to participate in service learning are less well known. Driscoll (2000) observed, "[T]here has been a paucity of research focused on faculty and service learning" (35).

At Purdue University, a land-grant institution and Research I university located in West Lafayette, Indiana, 108 courses were identified as service-learning classes in fall 2006. They are part of an initiative to encourage growth in service learning at the university that is overseen by the provost's office in the Center for Instructional Excellence. The center provides incentives to faculty to incorporate service learning into their courses, including awards, grants to help fund curriculum development, and training programs for instructors. At issue is whether or not these incentives motivate faculty to participate in service learning.

At Purdue, as at other research universities, the use of service learning varies between and among academic disciplines. Research shows that faculty most likely to incorporate service learning into their courses are in health professions, social work, education, agriculture, and human ecology. Those departments in which faculty are least likely to use service learning are physical and biological sciences, math, engineering, computer sciences, and business (*Abes, Jackson, and Jones 2002*). As a land-grant institution, Purdue has strong programs in engineering, the sciences, and business, disciplines that typically do not support service-learning efforts.

In research universities, service learning is often “a co-curricular practice, funded through short-term grants, and viewed by faculty as ‘just an a-theoretical (and time consuming) pedagogy that may be detrimental for traditional tenure and promotion committees to take seriously’” (*Burtin 2006, 474*). Furthermore, service learning is overwhelmingly used by the least powerful and most marginalized faculty (e.g., people of color, women, and the untenured) (*Antonio, Astin, and Cross 2000*). Faculty participating in service-learning projects are “more often viewed as second-class citizens with low pay, heavy teaching loads, and lesser prestige” (*Campoy 2002, 6*). Even colleges and universities that have comparatively extensive service-learning programs consistently have to revisit and rework their institutionalization and implementation (*Bell et al. 2000*).

Faculty and Service Learning: A Review of Recent Research

Service learning has its roots in the philosophy of John Dewey, who described learning as occurring through action and reflection, rather than through reading and recounting. “Students learn best not by reading the Great Books in a closed room but by opening the doors and windows of experience” (*Erlich 1996; Furco 1996*). Gray, Ondaatje, and Zakaras (1999) describe service learning as “a form of community service designed to promote student learning and development.” Practitioners of service learning focus on the active-learning process and course development rather than on empirical research (*Moore 1990*).

The current service-learning movement in higher education appears tied to the contemporary call for engaged campuses, particularly at land-grant institutions. The Kellogg Commission defines engaged institutions as those that have redesigned teaching, research, and extension functions so that they are more involved

with their communities (*Kellogg Commission 1999*). However, until engagement is seen as linked to “power, prestige and resources,” it is likely to “remain a passionate interest of some individuals” but is not likely to become a core mission of colleges and universities (*Holland 2001, 3*). Faculty are likely to develop and teach service-learning courses if they (a) have a personal desire to gain understanding and skills in service-learning pedagogy and (b) also believe that their institution values teaching and will protect them from budgetary and promotional pressures to invest that time in research and publication (*Stanton 1994*).

Studies of faculty motivation to participate in service learning have found that it is most often related to the desire to improve student learning, enhance curriculum, provide service to their community, and encourage students to personally value engagement in the life of their community (*Abes, Jackson, and Jones 2002; Hesser 1995; Hammond 1994; Stanton and Wagner 2006*). Faculty motivation to teach service-learning courses directly impacts the success of service-learning initiatives. Driscoll (2000) recommends that

... increased and immediate attention and resources be focused on research related to: motivations and attractions of faculty to service-learning; supports needed by faculty in service-learning; impacts or influences of service-learning on faculty; satisfactions reported by faculty; and the difficulties, obstacles, and challenges faced by faculty engaged in service-learning. (p. 35)

Factors common to successful service-learning programs include faculty-driven plans for implementation, open communication, solid support staffing, and collaborative approaches to problem solving (*Berman 1999*). Service learning also seems most institutionalized at colleges and universities that have created a central office that supports it, with that office reporting to the chief academic officer (*Bringle and Hatcher 2000*).

Factors that seem to deter faculty involvement in service learning include a lack of faculty incentives, an unorganized institutional structure, and poor staff and faculty training in service learning (*Berman 1999*). In a study of faculty and administrators engaged in service learning that was conducted at the University of Utah, faculty were persuaded that service learning empowered students and created better citizens; however, they were concerned about lack of rewards or recognition from the university (*Welch, Liese, and Bergerson 2004*). Faculty are also concerned about coordinating

people and tasks, the increased time commitment of service, and the difficulty of adjusting pedagogy (Hammond 1994). Additional reasons cited for not incorporating service learning into the curriculum include faculty's lack of knowledge about how to use service learning effectively, its lack of relevance to their courses, lack of time and logistical support to develop service-learning courses, and a lack of evidence that it improves academic outcomes. For faculty already using service learning, the "two strongest potential deterrents" to continuing service-learning efforts appear to be that "service-learning courses are time-intensive" and therefore cut into time for other professional responsibilities and "difficulty coordinating the community service component of the course" (Abes, Jackson, and Jones 2002, 10).

At research universities, as compared to institutions primarily known for teaching, faculty priorities may conflict with the renewed emphasis on teaching and public service. Research university faculty are faced with adding service duties to a workload often full with research and grant work, despite the public perception that they have a relatively easy work life (Singell, Lillydahl, and Singell 1996; Whitman, Hendrickson, and Townsend 1999). Modifications may need to be made in policies and procedures regarding retention, promotion, and tenure in order to reward and compensate faculty who go against the norm to invest the time required for service-learning activities (Hutchison 2001). "Perhaps more important than emphasis on changing the reward structure is demonstration of how service learning can support and enhance 'rewarded activities,' i.e. improved teaching and learning and contributions to a research program" (Abes, Jackson, and Jones 2002, 15).

Faculty at research universities may have more concern than other faculty regarding the potential rewards for service-learning efforts. Of faculty who teach service-learning courses at a variety of institutions, 16.7 percent indicated they might not continue to use service learning if it were not rewarded in their performance reviews and/or tenure and promotion decisions. However, when the data were analyzed based on institution type, 30 percent of service-learning faculty at research universities "indicated that not being rewarded in performance reviews and tenure and promotion decisions might cause them to discontinue using service learning" (Abes, Jackson, and Jones 2002, 15).

A university's incentive structure plays an important role in determining how faculty decide to allocate their time among teaching, research, and service. Faculty members spend time on activities supported by the institutional environment under which they were hired and resist changes that do not mesh with the univer-

sity's overall philosophy and mission. At premier institutions, "dissatisfied faculty are those who spend less time on research" (*Singell, Lillydahl, and Singell 1996, 443*). Faculty satisfaction with service learning also appears to be tied to factors already identified with faculty satisfaction in other areas. Those include freedom, autonomy, and control; work that has meaning and purpose; and feedback indicating that their efforts are successful (*Hammond 1994*).

The success of service learning seems dependent upon how well it is institutionalized and how faculty adopt and implement it. Administrative support for service learning can be in the form of recognition, development grants, salary increases, time off, resources, financial compensation, promotion, and tenure (*Scepansky 2004*).

Institutional support for faculty involvement in service-learning courses is the topic of an annual member institution survey sent out by Campus Compact, a national coalition of nearly 1,100 college and university presidents dedicated to promoting community service, civic engagement, and service learning in higher education. In the 2004 survey, institutions were most likely to report providing service-learning support in these areas: (a) materials available to assist faculty in reflection and assessment (78%), (b) faculty development workshops (77%), (c) curriculum models and syllabi available (76%), and (d) encouragement and financial support for faculty to attend and present at service-learning conferences (62%). Other supports included grants for curriculum redesign (49%) and service awards for faculty (39%). Recognition in terms of awarding tenure or promotion was also listed among many supports that institutions reported in a category called "Other." While 15 percent of institutions provided information in that category, the exact percentage of those that consider service learning when making tenure or promotion decisions was not available (*Campus Compact 2005*).

The following case study examines whether incentives offered by a research university can motivate faculty to incorporate service learning into their curricula. Data are analyzed to find suggestions for increasing faculty involvement in service-learning activities at research universities.

Methods

Faculty members at Purdue University who teach courses identified as service learning were surveyed, along with a random sample of those who do not. For the purposes of this study, service-learning courses were defined as those courses that have service learning as a major focus and include student reflection, which is one of the key components of service learning.

Eighty-two service-learning faculty were identified from a list maintained by Purdue's Center for Instructional Excellence and were asked to participate in the study. As a comparison group, a random sample of 107 individuals was drawn from all other faculty members on Purdue's West Lafayette campus. Both groups received an e-mail explaining the purpose of the study and how the information would be collected and used. The e-mail contained a link to the survey instruments. A second e-mail was sent two weeks later asking those who had not yet completed the survey to do so.

Twenty-three service-learning faculty (28%) and 22 non-service-learning faculty (21%) to whom the questionnaire was sent participated. This is a low response rate and limits the inferences that can be drawn from the findings. The small proportion of service-learning faculty responding to the study may reflect overly broad criteria for inclusion on the list of service-learning faculty maintained by the Center for Instructional Excellence. Additionally, some service-learning faculty might have rejected the assumption of this study that consideration of incentives such as grants, recognition, and promotion and tenure are important in determining their choice of professional activities. The small proportion of the general faculty responding might reflect the perceived lack of relevance of service learning to their teaching. Finally, three service-learning faculty members (13.0%) described their faculty rank as "Other," meaning that they were either continuing lecturers or adjunct faculty. It is possible that they considered themselves outside the promotion and tenure system or recognition within a traditional system. However, as Schuster and Finkelstein (2006) remind us, continuing lectureships and adjunct appointments are becoming the new majority in faculty appointments. As such, while this group may not be representative of the average tenure-track faculty engaged in service learning, they are an important group of engaged faculty to understand in terms of their motivation in a research context.

Data were collected using a survey instrument modified from the Campus Compact Annual Service Statistics Survey (*Campus Compact 2007*). The responses were anonymous. Participants were only asked only to identify their college or school and their faculty rank.

Findings

Table 1 displays the characteristics of the respondents to the survey. Some apparent differences in the composition of the subsets make it inappropriate to use formal statistical tests to determine

Table 1. Characteristics of survey respondents

| School or college | Service-learning faculty | | Nonservice-learning faculty | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| | n | % | n | % |
| Agriculture | 4 | 17.4 | 6 | 27.3 |
| Consumer and Family Sciences | 3 | 13.0 | 1 | 4.5 |
| Education | 3 | 13.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Engineering | 1 | 4.3 | 3 | 13.6 |
| Liberal Arts | 4 | 17.4 | 3 | 13.6 |
| Management | 1 | 4.3 | 1 | 4.5 |
| Pharmacy/Nursing/Health Sciences | 1 | 4.3 | 3 | 13.6 |
| Science | 2 | 8.7 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Technology | 2 | 8.7 | 4 | 18.2 |
| Veterinary Medicine | 2 | 8.7 | 1 | 4.5 |
| Total* | 23 | 99.8 | 22 | 99.8 |

| Faculty rank | | | | |
|---|-----------|-------------|-----------|--------------|
| Instructor (Dissertation not yet completed) | 2 | 8.7 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Assistant Professor | 5 | 21.7 | 4 | 18.2 |
| Associate Professor | 8 | 34.8 | 10 | 45.4 |
| Professor | 5 | 21.7 | 8 | 36.4 |
| Other | 3 | 13.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total* | 23 | 99.9 | 22 | 100.0 |

*Some percent columns do not add to 100% due to rounding.

significant differences between motivation of participants and non-participants or to investigate theoretically relevant correlations. Nevertheless, all schools, colleges, and ranks in the university are represented, and the subsets contain roughly comparable numbers of respondents in each of these categories. Therefore the findings of the case study can suggest relationships that might be found at Purdue and at other research universities.

Respondents were asked to rank the importance of factors identified in the research literature as motivating faculty participation in service learning. Responses were scored on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The questions included only those factors that could be affected by an institution and did not include other possible motivations for faculty involvement. Examples of the latter include using service

Table 2. Ranking of factors as important or very important motivators for participating in service-learning courses (in percents)

| | Service-learning faculty n = 23 | Nonservice- learning faculty n = 22 |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| Assistance in locating/arranging community service partners | 44 | 36 |
| Availability of service-learning assessment/reflection tools | 35 | 32 |
| Awards/recognition of service-learning efforts | 44 | 46 |
| Curriculum development support | 31 | 19 |
| Faculty training workshops | 30 | 28 |
| Financial support to attend service-learning conferences | 31 | 32 |
| Grant funding for service-learning curriculum design | 17 | 23 |
| Recognition of service-learning with regard to promotion and tenure | 4 | 14 |

Table 3. Citation of factors that would discourage participants from continuing their service-learning activities or that act as disincentives for nonparticipants to engage in service-learning (in percents. Respondents could list more than one factor.)

| | Service-learning faculty n = 23 | Nonservice- learning faculty n = 22 |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| Lack of faculty training | 4 | 40 |
| Lack of recognition of service-learning with regard to tenure and promotion | 43 | 35 |
| Lack of curriculum development support | 9 | 30 |
| Lack of assistance in locating/arranging community service partners | 26 | 25 |
| Lack of grant funding for service-learning curriculum design | 30 | 20 |
| Lack of awards/recognition of service-learning efforts | 30 | 10 |
| Lack of financial support to attend/present at service-learning conferences | 26 | 10 |

learning to improve student understanding of course material and to provide service to the community.

Participants also were asked to rank the importance of considerations that might discourage them from continuing their participation in service-learning activities if they were presently doing so, or from engaging in service-learning activities if they were not presently doing so. The presence of a factor might not operate as a motivation to participate, but its absence might well serve as a disincentive. For example, the belief that your service-learning activities can enhance your prospects for promotion and tenure might not serve as a motivation to engage in these since other activities, such as research and writing, can produce this desired result. However, the belief that your service-learning activities will not enhance your chances for promotion and tenure might well encourage you to direct your professional efforts elsewhere.

Table 2 outlines the set of factors we asked participants to rate in terms of their motivation toward service learning. Purdue faculty reported that if they have assistance in locating and arranging service partners, have access to some means of evaluating their service-learning programs, and believe they will receive some symbolic recognition for their service-learning activities, they will be more likely to become involved. Purdue faculty also indicated that the availability of funding for service-learning activities and consideration of service-learning activities in promotion and tenure decisions rarely motivated their service-learning participation. These findings apply to participants and nonparticipants alike.

Table 3 indicates that, for participants and nonparticipants alike, while linking service-learning activity to promotion and tenure is not an important motive for participation, belief that there is no such link would act as a major disincentive. Data in table 3 also show some major differences between participants and nonparticipants. While lack of faculty training and support for curriculum development appear to discourage nonparticipants from service-learning activities, they would not dissuade those who are already involved.

Discussion

At research universities there is increasing emphasis on publishing and being awarded grants as the criteria for obtaining promotion and tenure. In this context, teaching, especially labor-intensive methods such as service learning, can be seen by faculty as a counterproductive pursuit (*Boyer Commission 2001; Wilson*

2001). This raises the question of how to motivate faculty at these institutions to participate in service learning. This study focuses on how institutions might motivate faculty through formal structures, systems, and support. Our data from one research university compares service-learning faculty to nonservice-learning faculty. While the number of participants was small, the data raise some interesting questions and suggest some specific strategies for supporting research faculty in service learning.

First, data in table 2 suggest that explicitly linking service-learning activity to consideration for promotion and tenure would be unlikely to motivate much increased participation. Only 4 percent of participants and 14 percent of nonparticipants ranked recognition of service learning with regard to promotion and tenure as important or very important as a motivator for participation. This is an unexpected finding. Part of its explanation appears in table 3, which shows that lack of recognition of service learning with regard to promotion and tenure would be a disincentive to a large proportion of respondents: 43 percent of participants and 35 percent of nonparticipants. These percentages closely correspond to the finding that “thirty percent of (responding) faculty indicated that not being rewarded in performance reviews and tenure and promotion decisions might cause them to discontinue service learning” (*Abes, Jackson, and Jones 2002, 15*). Whatever the reason or reasons for this finding, our first suggestion is to be careful not to focus faculty service-learning recruitment and retention efforts solely on considerations of promotion and tenure. Rightly or wrongly, a sizable proportion of faculty appears to believe that service-learning activities actually do, at present, enhance promotion and tenure considerations, based on data such as those presented by the Boyer Commission. Others seem likely to believe that promotion and tenure decisions are not now, nor will they likely be in the future, positively influenced by considerations of service-learning activity.

That said, it is still important not to ignore those faculty for whom considerations of promotion and tenure serve as a deterrent from participation in service learning. Therefore, our second suggestion is to recognize service learning as a legitimate topic of research. The bar for gaining promotion and tenure is rising at both research and teaching institutions. New faculty are now pressured to publish early and often (*Jacobs and Winslow 2004; Valian 1999; Wilson 2001*). As shown in table 3 and as noted above, 43 percent of service-learning faculty and 35 percent of nonservice-learning faculty surveyed rated lack of recognition of service learning with

regard to tenure and promotion as important or very important factors that would prevent them from participating. Encouraging scholarship focused on faculty, which is sorely needed in the field (Driscoll 2000), would help ensure that service-learning activities would be rewarded at research universities.

Third, we suggest that more faculty training programs for service-learning activities be made available. Our data show that an impressive 40 percent of nonparticipants cite lack of training as a disincentive for their involvement. Our data also suggest that such training programs should include instruction in methods of assessing the success of service-learning activities. These educational benefits are likely to attract faculty of all ranks to service learning.

Fourth, assistance in locating and arranging community service partnerships was one of the most important motivators for the service-learning participants in this study. Forty-four percent ranked it as very important or important. Research universities should provide an infrastructure to support service-learning internships. This would reduce some of the administrative responsibilities that service learning places on faculty participants, which Hammond (1994) notes that they consider an area of concern.

Finally, university as well as community recognition should be given to successful service-learning projects. The availability of symbolic rewards can operate as a significant motivator of social participation (Huitt 2001; Reiss 2004). Data in table 2 indicate that 44 percent of participants and 46 percent of nonparticipants consider assignment of awards and recognition for service-learning efforts a significant motivator.

The findings of this case study can only be suggestive. Furthermore, there are many things a university cannot do, such as resocializing its faculty and modifying the criteria by which its prestige is assessed. However, other research universities may want to consider our data as they strive to create more engaged campuses.

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