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**Factors Influencing Faculty Members' Motivation in
Integrating Service-Learning into Their Syllabi**

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Research Roundtable Presentation – Institutionalization and the Community College

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Abstract

The purpose of this presentation is to share the results of a study which was conducted in 2006-2007 for a dissertation titled "Factors Influencing Faculty Members' Motivation in Integrating Service-Learning into Their Syllabi." Four research questions were addressed in this study:

- 1.) What are the factors which motivate faculty to integrate service-learning into their courses?
- 2.) Are student learning outcomes a significant motivator to faculty for including service-learning their courses?
- 3.) Can prior knowledge and research in service-learning be communicated to the studied faculty in such a way to engage their participation?
- 4.) What characterizes faculty who have incorporated service-learning into their courses?

Analysis of the data revealed that there is considerable interest in service-learning as a teaching pedagogy among the faculty members who were surveyed. However, the approach to institutionalizing a service-learning initiative must be carefully planned and formulated before it is presented to the faculty and should be viewed as another teaching tool to be utilized rather than a mandatory program.

Introduction

It has become increasingly important for community colleges to facilitate students' personal growth and to guide them in becoming responsible citizens and productive members of society. Extensive research in the area of service-learning suggests that this methodology also increases student engagement and persistence. To that end, it is more and more common to incorporate civic responsibility into the curriculum – the importance of giving back to one's community. This presentation will highlight the results of a research project which was completed in March, 2007, at the South Campus of Florida Community College at Jacksonville (FCCJ). The anticipated outcome and benefit of this project was to provide professional development activities to the faculty about service-learning in order to institutionalize and to expand the service-learning opportunities that currently exist.

Procedures

A needs assessment survey instrument comprised of 20 questions was developed and distributed to the 125 full-time faculty members at the South Campus of FCCJ. This included all liberal arts as well as continuing workforce education faculty. The survey questions addressed how much (if any) knowledge they already possessed about service-learning, whether or not they have used service-learning techniques in their teaching and for how many years, whether it was a positive experience, what makes a good service-learning experience for students, what student learning outcomes are important to them, and the relevance of service-learning to outcomes. Additionally, the survey included a question about professional development activities related to service-learning and whether the surveyed faculty members would be interested in them. The remaining

questions addressed the types of service-learning activities utilized, how students documented or reflected on their experiences, and demographic information such as total years of teaching, years of teaching at the studied institution, content specialty area, highest degree held, gender, ethnicity, and age.

Findings

The goal of this research study was to discover the motivating factors that would encourage faculty members to participate in service-learning by evaluating the results of the survey which was administered to all full-time faculty members at one campus of FCCJ. Of the 125 surveys which were originally distributed, 67 were returned. Subsequent to distribution of the survey instrument, one faculty member retired and two others passed away; therefore, from the 122 faculty members who actually could have responded, 55% were returned. The faculty members participating in the survey represented several teaching disciplines within the continuing workforce education and liberal arts areas.

The comments offered by respondents were diverse. An underlying theme was the motivation of faculty members to improve student learning, particularly critical thinking skills. Of the 67 faculty members responding to the survey, 34% would be motivated to integrate service-learning as a teaching pedagogy to enhance critical thinking skills for students, 21% to promote citizenship/civic responsibility for students, 25% to encourage teamwork/collegiality with fellow faculty members, 10% to increase student retention rates, and 10% for all of these reasons. These responses are consistent with much of the

literature which indicates the main reasons faculty members are encouraged or recruited to become involved in service-learning is for the benefits it provides to students, particularly the improved learning of core competencies.

It is apparent that there is interest among a number of the faculty who responded to the survey in learning more about, and becoming involved with, service-learning as a teaching pedagogy. Any future service-learning initiatives, however, must be optional for the faculty. As much of the literature states, mandatory service-learning programs are almost always doomed to failure. That is consistent with some of the comments from the surveyed faculty. Some of the faculty mentioned that they do not appreciate being forced to participate in such activities by the administration. For a service-learning program to succeed, the institution should start small and recruit a core group of faculty to provide the leadership to their colleagues. In addition, many of them pointed out that neither they nor their students have the time to devote to the completion of service-learning projects.

Faculty are motivated by many different factors to adapt to new ways of teaching. Based on the data gathered, it was ultimately determined that there are a number of faculty members who have already experimented with service-learning while many others who responded to the survey are interested in becoming more involved with service-learning as a teaching pedagogy. Improvements can be made in communicating to the faculty and in offering professional development opportunities, particularly guest speakers and workshops. Forty-six percent of the respondents would be interested in a guest speaker, 51% in attending a workshop, and 38% in attending a conference. When asked what they would hope to gain from any/all of these activities, 57% wanted

examples/cases for their disciplines, 31% assistance with syllabus composition, 45% assistance with project design, and 52% interaction/networking with faculty members from other institutions who are experienced with service-learning.

There has been minimal research on what factors motivate faculty members to integrate service-learning into their teaching; most of the research has instead focused on student learning outcomes. Therefore, this study may prove useful to other institutions and for future research in the area of institutionalization and the community college.