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Transcending Disciplines, Reinforcing Curricula: Why Faculty Teach With Service Learning

BY RUDY M. GARCIA AND GAIL ROBINSON

Service learning as a teaching methodology has a growing following among faculty in higher education. Service learning combines community service with classroom instruction, focusing on critical, reflective thinking as well as personal and civic responsibility. Service learning programs involve students in activities that address local needs while developing their academic skills and commitment to their communities.

In 2004 the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) supported a study to identify factors that motivate faculty to include service learning in their courses. The research on such factors has been limited. Studies on the impact of service learning have concentrated on three areas: (1) documenting students' perceptions of the impact that service learning placements have had on them (Giles and Eyler 1994); (2) assessing long-term outcomes on specific constituencies of students (Osborne, Hammerich, and Hensley 1998); and (3) delineating the impact of service learning experiences on students' learning of course content and fulfillment of course goals (Osborne, Hammerich, and Hensley 1998).

Prominent features of quality service learning programs—such as meaningful placements, connections

between subject matter and community issues and experiences, critical reflection, and preparation for diversity and conflict—depend primarily on the faculty (Eyler and Giles 1999). Driscoll (2000) stated that “future research must examine both directions of the relationship between faculty and service learning—the role of faculty with service learning, as well as the effects of service learning on faculty.” The most important factors to investigate include faculty motivations and outcomes in offering service learning.

Faculty are key stakeholders in service learning partnerships between college and community. They control the curriculum and instructional methods (Hammond 1994). Austin and Gamson (1983) have described faculty as independent workers who are motivated by the intrinsic rewards of research and teaching. But faculty motivations are rarely referenced in the service learning literature.

Primary Motivators for Service Learning Faculty

- Service learning coordinator
- Student development
- Core competencies
- Civic engagement



Understanding what motivates faculty to include this methodology in their curriculum may provide service learning program coordinators or college administrators with information necessary to increase the participation of faculty. If service learning is to be sustained or institutionalized, faculty's participation must be followed by efforts to support involvement (Bringle and Hatcher 2000). Exploring the motivational factors of faculty enhances the understanding of the academic profession by clarifying the reasons why faculty change their teaching to include service learning in their courses. This study provides data regarding the motivational factors behind faculty who adopt the service learning pedagogy.

METHODOLOGY

Rudy Garcia selected the topic of faculty involvement in service learning for his doctoral dissertation. AACC agreed to help identify colleges to participate in the study and disseminate the results. Garcia developed a survey instrument focused on four primary research questions:

- Who motivates faculty to include service learning in their courses?
- What institutional support factors motivate faculty to include service learning in their courses?
- What student learning outcomes motivate faculty to include service learning in their courses?
- What rewards motivate faculty to include service learning in their courses?

The respondents for this study were service learning faculty from community colleges that have participated in federally funded grant programs managed by AACC and the Community College National Center for Community Engagement (CCNCCE). Both organizations have been involved in national service learning projects since the early 1990s and have provided funding and training for service learning development. After piloting a survey instrument at Albuquerque TVI

Community College, Garcia sent it by mail and e-mail to faculty via the service learning coordinators at 40 community colleges involved in Learn and Serve America initiatives through AACC and CCNCCE. The study surveyed 395 faculty members at the 40 colleges. Two hundred faculty from 20 colleges completed the survey, for a response rate of 51 percent.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The proportion of full- to part-time faculty in the study may be seen as unusual (see table 1), because community colleges traditionally have more part-time faculty than full-time. However, part-time faculty may simply have been less likely to respond to the survey, due to limited time on campus or lack of access to the survey.

Many colleges focus primarily on training full-time faculty in service learning. Training is generally more accessible to faculty who are on campus daily, are more invested in a college's academic programs, and may have funds for professional development. Most of the colleges responding to the survey have had organized service learning initiatives, including faculty training, for five to 10 years.

TABLE 1 Respondents' Demographics

Faculty rank	
Full-time	84%
Part-time	16%
Longevity at college	
1–5 years	29%
6–20 years	51%
More than 20 years	20%
Gender	
Women	73%
Men	27%
Academic discipline	
Career education	22%
Developmental education	12%
General education	11%
Liberal arts	53%
Community education	2%

The majority of respondents were veteran female faculty who teach full-time. These are important data for a service learning coordinator or administrator to consider regarding faculty recruitment. If veteran faculty are already involved in the pedagogy, then recruitment efforts should be directed toward new faculty members. Instructors who have worked at a college for several years could be good mentors for younger, less experienced service learning faculty.

The colleges surveyed were comprehensive community colleges where service learning has traditionally worked well in the arts and sciences (i.e., liberal arts course work). In this study, faculty involved in service learning hailed from sociology, psychology, communications, English, and other related courses. Nationally, community college faculty use service learning most often in the social sciences, humanities, English, and health (Prentice, Robinson, and McPhee 2003).

The demographic information from the study presents a typical profile of a female faculty member who teaches

full-time in the liberal arts and has been at the college for many years. The following findings may be useful for service learning coordinators and administrators in targeting service learning recruitment and development efforts on their campuses.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The results of the study provided answers to the four primary research questions listed in the methodology section.

A service learning coordinator or director is the primary individual who motivated faculty to include service learning in their courses (see figure 1). Half of the 20 responding colleges have a service learning office or center staffed by a full- or part-time coordinator or director. When a college commits to a designated office and staff, faculty are more likely to view the coordinator as the primary resource for service learning training and assistance.

FIGURE 1 Primary Individual Who Motivates Faculty to Offer Service Learning

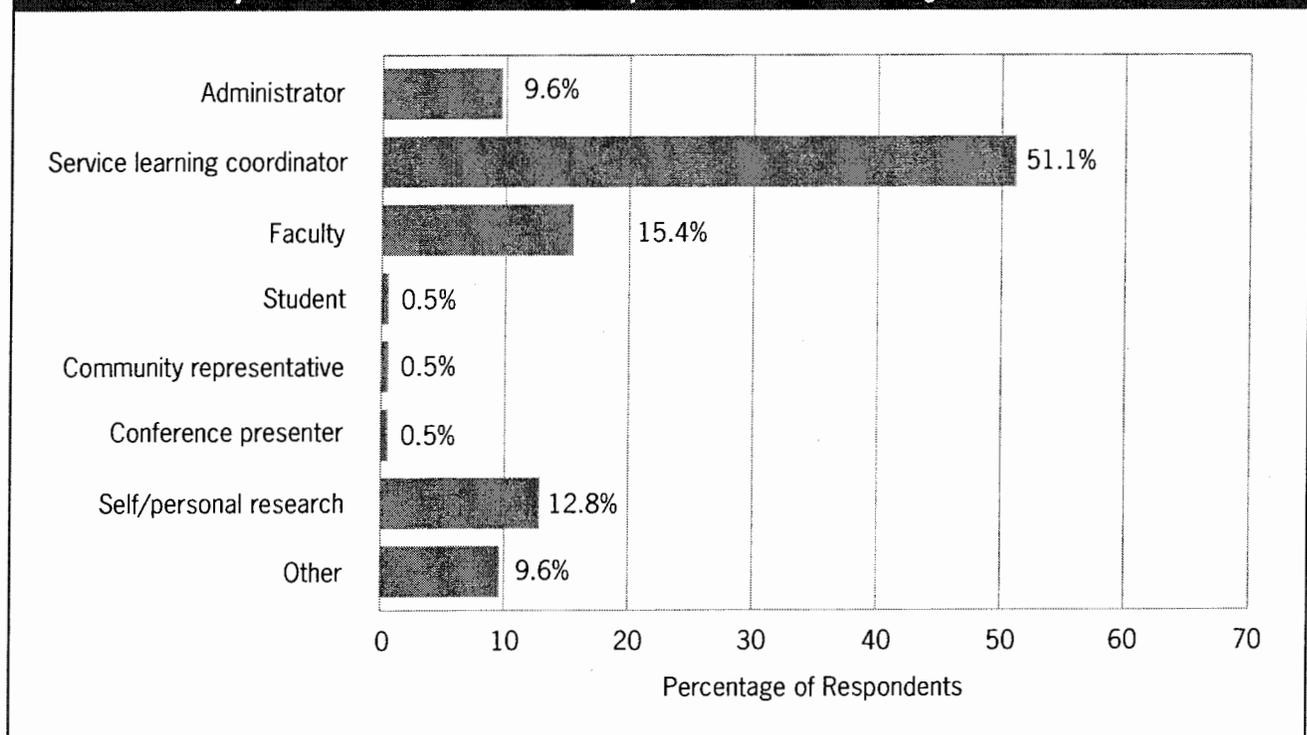


FIGURE 2 Institutional Factors That Motivate Faculty to Offer Service Learning

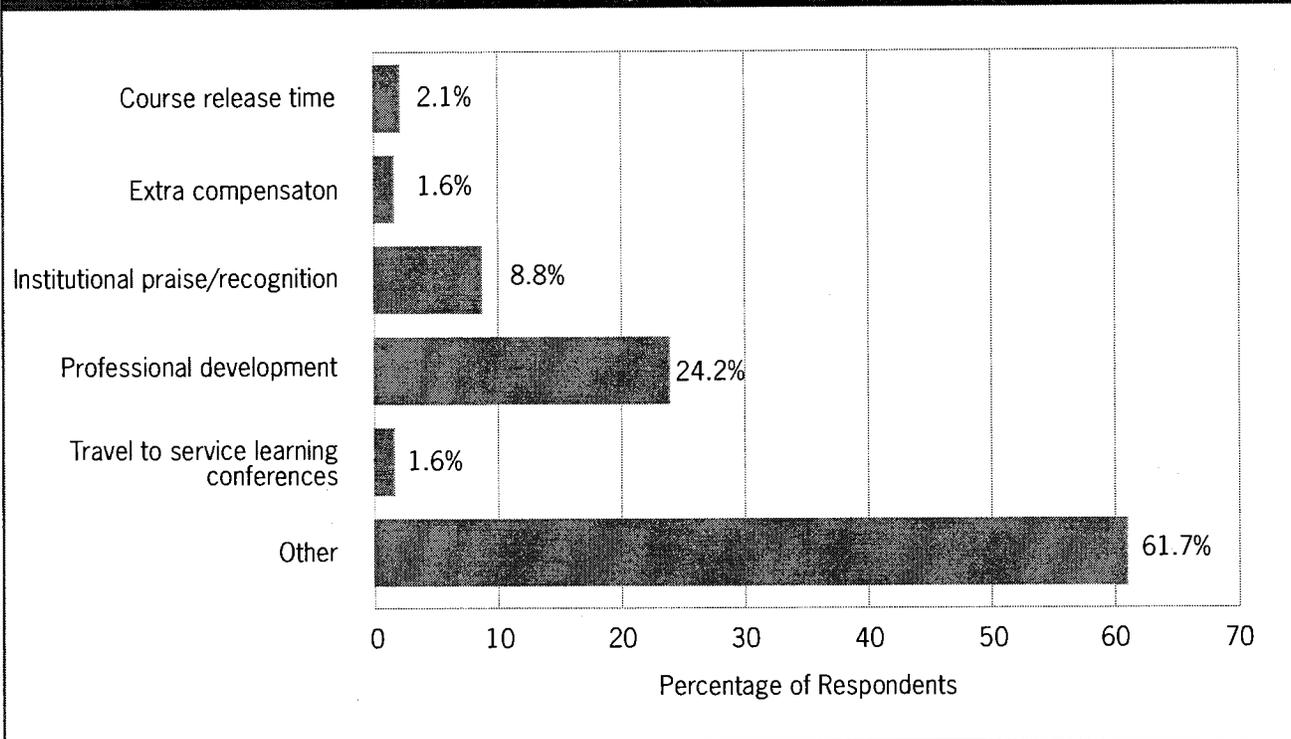


Figure 2 shows that faculty members were not strongly motivated by institutional support mechanisms like release time or recognition, but professional development can be important. Further analysis of the “other” category suggested that faculty were motivated by the benefits service learning provides to students (e.g., learning more about social issues, real-world experiences, and core competencies), as well as benefits to the community (e.g., providing people and resources to meet local needs).

Figure 3 shows that improved learning of core competencies is the primary outcome that motivated faculty to include service learning in their courses. Students’ comprehension of social problems and social change were also important.

The primary reward that motivated faculty to include service learning in their courses was the knowledge that it creates civic responsibility opportunities for students (see figure 4). Civic responsibility means active participation in the public life of a community in an informed, committed, and constructive manner, with a focus on the

common good (Gottlieb and Robinson 2002).

In a follow-up item to figure 4, 37 percent of faculty agreed that service learning provides a pathway for students to become involved in the social issues of their communities. Similarly, 28 percent believed that the guided reflection component of service learning provides students with opportunities to understand how they can become involved in their communities.

IMPLICATIONS

Faculty are motivated by many different factors in their teaching. Sometimes money—in the form of stipends or grants—can be a key motivator for faculty to become involved in new techniques or programs. The results of this study indicate that faculty were motivated not by money, but by individual needs (improving students’ learning of core competencies and understanding of social problems) as well as by environmental needs (civic responsibility of students). Faculty were motivated by the intrinsic factors that service learning presents.

FIGURE 3 Outcomes That Motivate Faculty to Offer Service Learning

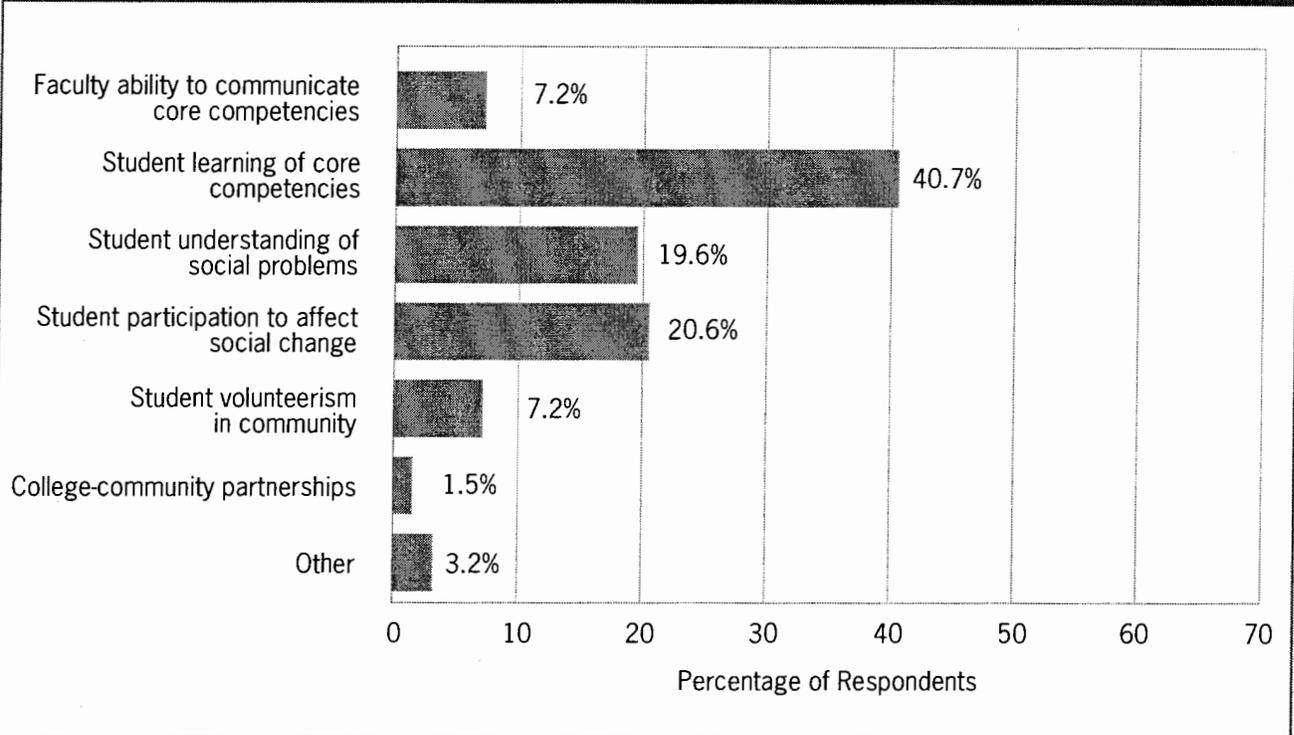
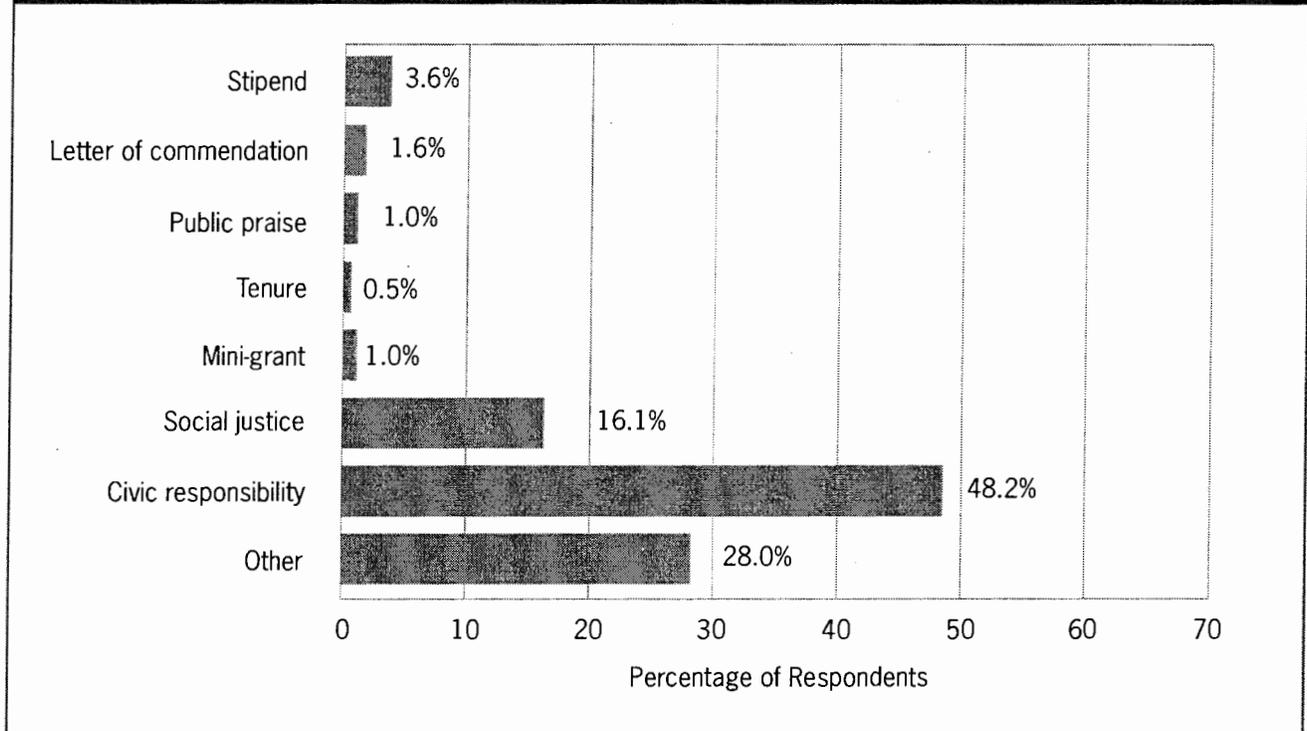


FIGURE 4 Rewards That Motivate Faculty to Offer Service Learning



Faculty were primarily motivated by a service learning coordinator to include service learning in their courses. This is important for colleges to consider when establishing service learning programs. Even if faculty members have course release time or some form of extra compensation, running a campus-wide service learning program may be a burden to them. Depending on the size of the college and its partnerships, the administration of service learning can require the attention of a full-time coordinator or director. With a coordinator on campus, faculty have an individual on whom they can rely for assistance when integrating service learning into their course work.

The motivation of enhancing students' sense of civic responsibility is one that merits more attention (Gottlieb and Robinson 2002). Training is currently available from various organizations on service learning development, but more resources and training are needed for faculty to learn about integrating civic responsibility into service learning experiences.

The results of this study provide information that is useful in developing service learning programs. The motivations that drive faculty to become involved in service learning directly relate to students' learning of course work and community issues. The rewards faculty seek are those that come from students becoming involved in the social issues of their community and gaining real-life learning experiences. The importance of civic responsibility allows for the presumption that faculty want their students not only to learn their course work, but also to become effective citizens in their communities.

PROGRAM AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Community college administrators, instructors, and coordinators may want to consider the following recommendations for motivating faculty to participate in service learning.

Expand to more disciplines. The data showed the largest concentration of faculty coming from liberal arts.

A focus should be placed on other instructional disciplines in the college as well. Service learning can work in any instructional discipline. Service learning coordinators could create marketing plans to target other college divisions not involved in service learning, including faculty brown-bag luncheons, presentations at faculty senate or department meetings, one-on-one meetings with faculty and department chairs, and faculty peer mentoring.

Identify a service learning coordinator. This study showed the service learning coordinator as the primary person who motivates faculty to include service learning in their course work. The administration of service learning requires training and management of students, faculty, staff, and community partners; thus a dedicated coordinator—whether faculty or staff—is a good investment.

Offer training in civic responsibility. Students' civic responsibility was the primary reward motivating faculty to use service learning. Colleges should offer training for faculty, students, and community partners to provide the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate civic engagement with service learning. AACC's *A Practical Guide for Integrating Civic Responsibility into the Curriculum* offers activities and exercises to this end.

Recruit part-time faculty. Adjunct instructors are an ideal target group and should not be excluded from instructional training. Part-time faculty may also be involved with community agencies where students can do their service. Recruitment efforts should be designed for both daytime and evening hours—whenever most adjunct faculty members are on campus. Service learning coordinators should meet with department deans to determine which instructors may be good candidates for service learning.

Recruit male faculty. Greater numbers of women tend to be involved in service learning than men. Colleges could focus on targeting more men to become involved in service learning to improve gender equity in this area.

REFLECTIONS OF FACULTY

Numbers do not tell the whole story behind faculty's motivations for participating in service learning. AACC collected the following written reflections from faculty at some of its Horizons grantee colleges.

I have been a long-time advocate of service learning in the classroom and in recent years have found myself moving into teaching more quantitative courses. Perhaps it is a function of how I was taught, but my impressions were that qualitative courses seem to be an easier fit for service learning activities. However, once I changed my focus, I found that integrating service learning into a business statistics course is easily accomplished and changes the way that students view data analysis forever.

We analyzed substandard housing in our county, stratified by 38 zip codes, and presented the

report to Habitat for Humanity. We analyzed one year of admittance data for a local children's museum. We developed survey instruments for a local nonprofit clearinghouse and gathered economic data for a food bank. Once again, service learning has proven to be a meaningful, versatile academic tool that transcends disciplines, reinforces curricula, and encourages civic engagement.

Debbie Collins
Associate Professor, Business Administration
Anne Arundel Community College, Maryland

Alarmed by the years-long apparent decline in student engagement and involvement, I elected to undertake a service learning project tied into two topics in a principles of management class—the planning function and corporate social responsibility. We collaborated with the Red Cross to train sandbaggers for service in emergency flood situations. I was dubious as to how students would react to the opportunity to get training on filling sandbags, and worked out an extensive Red Cross orientation and video on flood relief operations prior to the physical side of the project. This we tied into a classroom activity developing a disaster preparedness plan for the college.

The results? Enthusiasm, student interest, solid discussions, and active participation on planning

as a management activity (when does that ever happen?), followed by nearly 100 percent attendance at the sandbag training on a cold winter day when the foundation trench had to be hacked out of frozen ground. The reflection activity that followed was well received. Student feedback was overwhelmingly positive and my faith in the underlying desire of our college students to make a contribution to society was strengthened. And by the way, they understand how important planning is to execution as a manager, and that as a manager they have a responsibility for the well-being of society!

Robert Lewallen
Program Chair/Assistant Professor,
Management and Human Resources
Iowa Western Community College, Iowa

Introducing service learning to my classes has given me a boost of adrenaline in instruction that I haven't felt for years. I have 17 years of instruction experience, not including all those years as a graduate student, and I was becoming frustrated with what I call "being the idea man" for students, struggling to get them to think outside of their own small space in time. Service learning takes the focus off the student and his or her limited experience and puts it on the service, on "other than myself," which I believe is the best way to grow.

[Working with a dog-rescue program in a

medium-security prison] has broadened my own scope of civic responsibility; my generosity with other socially conscious groups has grown, and it has awarded me an appreciation for individuals working in the corrections system. Becoming part of a network of people working to the good—humane society staff, corrections officers, inmates, college students, elementary students, and staff—is the best lesson I've ever learned, and the best I've ever had the chance to teach.

Cindy Yeager
Instructor, Ethics
Hocking College, Ohio

Service learning has allowed me to go the next step with my students and involve them in the community college's "community" while giving me the opportunity to expose the students to a new form of relevance. If my students are engaged, then I am more excited about the learning that takes place in and out of my classroom and laboratory. Before I became involved with service learning, I felt that I needed something new to energize me and my classroom

experience. Service learning has done that and much more. It opened up the classroom to the community, allowed me to be a more involved citizen, and gave me the opportunity to spread the word nationally about service learning and civic responsibility.

Richard Faircloth
Professor, Biology
Anne Arundel Community College, Maryland

I'd love to share how profound this experience has been for me, my students, and the writers at Passion Works [where creative-writing students write poetry collaboratively with adults with developmental disabilities]. One of the unexpected joys of this course is that anything can happen and it's all real life. Students go into this thinking it's just about writing poems—which it is—but

the best poems are grounded in life as well as language and that's the bigger lesson here (one I can't really teach in a classroom).

Deni Nafziger
Instructor, Creative Writing
Hocking College, Ohio

Service learning drives the vigor and passion informing my classes, be they composition or literature, and now my leadership as department head of English. I am also optimistic that the journey remains unfinished and fantastic, with breathtaking vistas and epiphanies along the way. Not only has service learning instructed me how to facilitate teaching, it has also shown me how to be a teacher and student. To my students, service learning has provided insights into being a teacher, learner, and engaged citizen in a democracy.

When I employed service learning in freshman English for the first time, I observed improved

attendance, enthusiasm, focus, interpersonal skills, and analysis. I felt more like a participant in a community of teachers and learners than an instructor . . . Though now in the penultimate years of my profession, my greatest passion remains the desire to help my colleagues and students extract from every moment and experience the interconnectivity among experience, knowledge, learning, community, civic engagement, and democracy.

Floyd Ogburn

Associate Professor/Department Head, English
St. Augustine's College, North Carolina
(previously at University College, Ohio)

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SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Two hundred faculty from the following colleges participated in the faculty motivations study.

Anne Arundel Community College Arnold, MD	Johnson County Community College Overland Park, KS
Bellevue Community College Bellevue, WA	Kapi`olani Community College Honolulu, HI
Brevard Community College Cocoa, FL	Kirtland Community College Roscommon, MI
Community College of Aurora Aurora, CO	Mesa Community College Mesa, AZ
Dona Ana Branch Community College Las Cruces, NM	Miami Dade College Miami, FL
Gadsden State Community College Gadsden, AL	Oakton Community College Des Plaines, IL
GateWay Community College Phoenix, AZ	Santa Fe Community College Santa Fe, NM
Glendale Community College Glendale, CA	Sinclair Community College Dayton, OH
Hillsborough Community College Tampa, FL	Southern Maine Community College South Portland, ME
Hocking College Nelsonville, OH	Southwestern College Chula Vista, CA

WEB RESOURCES

American Association for Higher Education
www.aahе.org/service

American Association of Community Colleges
www.aacc.nche.edu/servicelearning

Campus Compact
www.compact.org

Campus Outreach Opportunity League/Idealist on Campus
www.idealіst.org/ioc

Center for Information and Research on
Civic Learning and Engagement
www.civicyouth.org

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health
www.cсph.info

Community College National Center for
Community Engagement
www.mc.maricopa.edu/engagement

Corporation for National and Community Service
www.nationalservice.org

Educators for Community Engagement
www.e4ce.org

Effective Practices Information Center
www.nationalserviceresources.org/epicenter

International Partnership for Service-Learning
www.ipsl.org

National Service Inclusion Project
www.serviceandinclusion.org

National Service-Learning Clearinghouse
www.servicelearning.org

Pew Partnership for Civic Change
www.pew-partnership.org

Points of Light Foundation
www.pointsoflight.org

Service-Learning and Engaged Scholarship
www.engaged-learning.net

About the Authors

Rudy M. Garcia is director of experiential learning at Albuquerque TVI Community College in New Mexico. This research was the basis for his doctoral dissertation in the community college leadership program at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. Gail Robinson is manager of service learning for the American Association of Community Colleges.

For more information on AACC's Horizons project, or to order more copies of this Horizons research brief (#1558), contact:

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