

# **If You Build It, Will They Come? Perspectives on Institutionalizing Service-Learning in the CSU**

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## **Abstract**

*This article will interweave a history of service-learning and civic engagement in the California State University system with profiles of campuses that have enjoyed significant success in developing their programs. In this paper, the disengagement between the Institutional Culture Cluster and three other clusters and/or indicators of engagement will be examined as they pertain to the California State University system. The authors will present examples of success, explore the challenges that remain, and conclude with some recommendations for future directions.*

The California State University (CSU) is the largest system of higher education in the nation, with 23 campuses, 409,000 students, and 44,000 faculty and staff. Twenty-two of the 23 campuses are comprehensive universities offering a range of study and research from liberal arts to professional degrees. In total, the CSU offers 1,800 bachelor's and master's degree programs. Campuses are located in both urban and rural settings, vary greatly in size from small (Maritime Academy with 700 students) to large (Long Beach with 34,700 students), from older (San Jose State, founded in 1857) to newer (Channel Islands, founded in 2002), and stretch from the northern California border with Oregon (Humboldt State) to the southern border with Mexico (San Diego State).

The institutionalization of service-learning in the CSU may be traced back to 1995 when then Chancellor Barry Munitz appointed Dr. Tom Ehrlich as the CSU Distinguished Scholar. Dr. Ehrlich began working with system leaders on a new strategic planning initiative, The Cornerstone Report, as CSU embraced the changing educational needs of California and emphasized the need for service-learning and civic education as part of students' educational experiences. Two years later, community service-learning began to emerge as a central vehicle to attaining the goals of community responsibility as laid out in The Cornerstone Report and led to the development of the first system-wide Strategic Plan for Community Service Learning at CSU (1997). The plan stated, as a primary objective, offering service-learning and community service opportunities for each CSU student prior to graduation. To support the achievement of the implementation of this bold aim, the Strategic Plan is organized into three campus goals and three system-wide goals. The concrete benchmarks outlined in the Plan have been used as ways to measure the level of institutionalization on CSU campuses. In 1998, a major milestone was achieved with the creation of the

Office of Community Service Learning in the Chancellor's Office, the first of its kind in the nation. The system-wide office staff, currently 3.5 full-time employees, provides leadership and coordination for CSU campuses as they develop and implement community service-learning initiatives.

In the years that followed these early successes, faculty enthusiastically embraced the service-learning pedagogy and students positively responded to this hands-on and meaningful educational experience. The interest and innovation demonstrated by these and other stakeholders gave the initiative momentum. And in March 2000, the CSU Board of Trustees passed a landmark resolution that moved service-learning from the periphery into the mainstream of the CSU's culture. The resolution called for the chancellor and each CSU campus president to "ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate in community service, service learning, or both" (2000). Since the passage of the resolution, the CSU has received \$7.7 million supplemental funding (ranging from \$40K to \$100K for each campus each year) from the State of California legislature to support service-learning at the campus level, and the number of service-learning opportunities has more than doubled to its current level of approximately 65,000 opportunities offered each year.

Thus, the CSU system provides a unique opportunity to examine the interplay of the Campus Compact Indicators of Engagement in measuring the institutionalization of service-learning on a campus. The CSU represents a collection of campuses within a single state with a shared history, similar missions, student populations, legislative and administrative environments, faculty and program objectives, and equitable baseline funding. Yet disparities exist in the level of institutionalization of service-learning on different campuses. Why should this be the case? Certainly many factors come into play—dynamic leadership may vary with individuals, turnover in administration and service-learning personnel may make continuity difficult to maintain, unpredictable events may derail productive efforts, etc.—but there are constants in the CSU that help a campus program stay on track. For several years service-learning has enjoyed extraordinary support from the CSU Board, the statewide Academic Senate, the Office of the Chancellor, and from many campus presidents.

In this paper, we will examine the Institutional Culture Cluster and its disengagement from three other clusters and/or indicators of engagement as they pertain to the California State University system. The authors will present examples of success, explore the challenges that remain, and conclude with some recommendations for future directions. It is our contention that the fundamental means for institutionalizing a successful program lies in the alignment of service-learning with the other priorities of the system and the campus.

## **Civic Mission of Education**

In June 2002, Learn and Serve America awarded the CSU a \$1.2 million three-year grant for “Realizing the Civic Mission of Education [CME] in the California State University.” The central objective of the CME program is to advance academic culture and civic engagement on each campus as measured by 14 indicators. In fall 2003, each campus within the CSU was required to perform a self-assessment of their achievements to date against each of the indicators which, though not identical with the Campus Compact Indicators, are quite similar and can be aligned with the five Compact clusters of indicators in a meaningful way.

Table 1 below summarizes the categorization of the CME indicators within the Compact Clusters. For each indicator, campuses were asked to assess their current status as either undeveloped (0), emerging (1), or transforming (2). Though these assessments were made independently—most frequently, the campus service-learning directors were responsible for completing the assessment—the total score of indicators in each cluster provides a fairly reliable quantitative assessment of campus achievement that can be used as a measure of correlation between achievement in one cluster and achievement in another. Moreover, the overall total is a good indicator of the current state of the service-learning program on each campus. The highest overall score was 22 out of 28 (California State University Monterey Bay n.d.), followed by a range of other scores from 13 down to 2.

**Table 1****Campus Compact Indicators of Engagement and Civic Mission of Education Areas**

Indicator Cluster	Characteristics	CME Area(s)	Questions for Self-Assessment (sample)
Institutional Culture (IC)	Mission explicitly articulates commitment. Leadership in forefront of transformation.	Leadership Strategic Plan Accreditation Standards	How often does leadership voice support? Is SL integrated into strategic plan? Is SL part of accreditation review?
Curriculum and Pedagogy (CP)	Disciplines incorporate community-based education. Pedagogy incorporates public problem-solving.	Engaged Departments Curricular Sequences Civic Engagement objectives	Part of new faculty orientation? Regular trainings? Incentives at department level? Is SL integrated into GE?
Faculty Roles and Rewards (FR)	Opportunities for faculty to retool. Rewards reflect scholarship of engagement.	Curriculum development workshops RTP policies Hiring, workload policies Scholarship of engagement	Support for faculty publications/ research? Workload issue studied? Hiring policies modified? RTP documentation guidelines? RTP policies recognize engaged scholarship?
Mechanisms and Resources (MR)	Adequate internal resource allocation. Visible centers. Community service activities. Students as key partners.	Student policies	Is SL indicated on transcripts? Are co-curricular activities supported? Do students organize forums?
Community Campus Exchange (CC)	Resources available for community partners. Community voice and multiple stakeholders.	Community partnerships Institutional vision	Have partners role been defined as co-educators? Is there assessment of community outcomes? Are there established partnership development guidelines? Are resources and/or facilities made available to community?

Placing CSU Monterey Bay aside as an outlier, we do find some meaningful statistics. The Curriculum and Pedagogy (CP) Cluster and the Institutional Culture (IC) Cluster provide a high correlation with the total self-assessment ( $x = \text{CP}$ ,  $y = \text{total}$ , or  $x = \text{IC}$ ,  $y = \text{total}$ ). Moreover IC and CP were highly correlated with each other at the 99% confidence level. Thus, in an environment where institutional leadership supports engagement, curriculum development in service-learning tends to flourish. On the other hand, Faculty Roles and Rewards (FR), Mechanisms and Resources (MR) and Community Campus Exchange (CC) produced no significant correlation with Institutional Culture. Because of the nature of our scoring (sample size, self-assessments, assigned weights, integer values, etc.), we are reluctant to perform a more detailed statistical analysis.

In the next sections we examine four of the Indicator Clusters, in turn highlighting our success in Institutional Culture and exploring our challenges with three other clusters.

## **Success in Institutional Culture**

A key reason for the success of service-learning in the CSU is the exemplary best practices at both the system and campus levels in the areas characterized by the Institutional Culture cluster of indicators, i.e., in mission and purpose and in administrative and academic leadership. At the system level, CSU Chancellor Dr. Charles B. Reed, continues to demonstrate significant leadership and commitment to promoting community service-learning in a number of internal and external ways. Dr. Reed integrates community service-learning stories and data into speeches, such as recent remarks he delivered to members of the House of Representatives on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (2004). At less formal occasions, he frequently speaks about the pride he has for community-involved CSU students, who manage to serve even with considerable family and work commitments. His clear enthusiasm sends a powerful message to CSU presidents that community service-learning is a priority for the system, a message that is reflected by many new campus presidents taking up the call to support their campus programs. Dr. Reed's support extends into the financial realm as well recognizing that this work does not move forward without sufficient resources, and even during the recent fiscal crisis in California, he has continued to support the system-wide office and the allocation of resources to campuses.

At the campus level, best practices in the Institutional Culture theme complement system-wide efforts. Five CSU presidents serve on boards of national and state organizations that promote meaningful service and civic engagement experiences for college students. Convocation speeches and opinion editorials by presidents frequently invoke the theme of community responsibility. This visible indication of interest does typically translate into greater institutionalization of service-learning programs. Moreover, the CME assessment ratings illustrate the success in this cluster. When asked about leadership from influential groups, 19 of 23 campuses report that they have attained emerging (equivalent to intermediate) or transforming (equivalent to accomplished) status.

In addition to leadership, campus strategic plans and university-wide accreditation efforts embody campus values and outline future directions. These comprehensive frameworks have had a significant influence on the distribution of resources, academic planning, and faculty culture—all elements that intersect with service-learning. A recent practice is the effort to include service-learning into campus accreditation reviews. Currently, ten campuses are in some phase of the process, and many are choosing to utilize service-learning as a way to evaluate impact on student learning or the community. The recommendations from the accreditation visiting teams are proving to be leveraging opportunities for service-learning programs to become further institutionalized. For example, a new tenure track faculty service-learning position has been approved for CSU Monterey Bay and the endorsement of a new physical structure that would house all community service-learning programs has occurred at CSU Fresno.

## **Convergence of History, Mission and Leadership — Service-Learning at San Francisco State**

Even on older campuses, programs have created success by building upon campus mission and history. One notable example is San Francisco State University (SFSU), one of the oldest campuses in the system having celebrated its centennial in 1999. The story of the success of its service-learning program highlights the convergence of administrative leadership with campus history and culture.

In 1988 Robert A. Corrigan assumed the SFSU presidency and brought a vision of leadership that embraced diversity in education as well as the service-learning pedagogy. President Corrigan initiated several efforts to support these goals. He established the San Francisco Urban Institute, a nonprofit research and action center whose purpose is to bring together resources from both the university and the community to address the most critical issues confronting the Bay Area. He arranged for California Campus Compact to locate its offices on the campus and brought the National Director of the America Reads Challenge to SFSU. In 1995, he invited Dr. Ehrlich to campus to host a year-long seminar on community engagement with faculty representatives from each of the eight colleges of the university. In 1996, the report from this seminar merged with the emerging campus strategic plan for the millennium and authorized the establishment of the SFSU, Office of Community Service Learning.

Campus culture contributed equally to the success of the program. SFSU is located in one of the most politically progressive cities in the country, and through much of its history it has enjoyed a reputation for innovation in teaching and curriculum. In fall 1969, following a four month student/faculty strike in the spring semester in protest to the policies around civil rights and involvement in the Vietnam War, SFSU became the first school in the country to establish a College of Ethnic Studies which today includes four departments: American Indian Studies, Asian American Studies, Black Studies, and Raza Studies. The College today has become a campus leader in service-learning, with opportunities provided in virtually every course in Raza studies and in

many courses in its other departments, as well as to select a 1-unit or 2-unit service-learning option. Campus-wide, SFSU now offers more than 170 service-learning courses in 42 departments. Moreover, through a policy adopted last year by its campus Academic Senate, service-learning hours are now being reported each semester on student transcripts.

### **Faculty Roles and Rewards**

In their essay on pedagogical innovations, Lazerson, Wagener, and Shumanis (2000), recognize that despite the widespread effort to utilize new teaching methodologies, real reform within the academy remains elusive because of the lack of recognition of innovative techniques within traditional retention, tenure, and promotion (RTP) policies. “With few exceptions, teaching changes have not been tied to higher education’s incentive and reward system. Research remains the primary avenue to individual and institutional prestige” (Lazerson, Wagener, and Shumanis 2000, 12).

Within the CSU, this is borne out to some degree in the resistance by many traditional faculty to change campus RTP policies. Despite the general success at instituting service-learning programs, there is still evidence of hurdles within faculty culture. A study of service-learning faculty attitudes by Jennifer Romack and Maureen Rubin (2002) provides a picture of this disparity. Their survey of 172 service-learning faculty on 21 CSU campuses found that “...there are multi-dimensional discrepancies between the rhetoric of University missions applauding community responsiveness and the reality of lackluster support for service-learning faculty during the RTP process” (Romack and Rubin 2002, 17). The study also found other discouraging trends. “Twenty-one percent of faculty reported they were actually discouraged from engaging in service-learning ... not only did faculty perceive RTP reviewers to be discouraging, 50% also believe that department faculty who evaluated them were not knowledgeable about service-learning” (Romack and Rubin 2002, 16).

A second report on faculty service and RTP issues, conducted the same year by the statewide Academic Senat, was more heartening. Their study noted several positive developments in the effort to bring about changes in RTP policy and procedures—for example, a statewide working group (Eisman 1999) had been formed to study the issue and had proposed to campus senates a guideline for more prominently recognizing service-learning activities of faculty. Most notably, at CSU Sacramento, faculty senate policy has subsequently been modified so that service-learning is now mentioned in each of the three areas of faculty activity.

**CSU Sacramento’s service-learning and retention, tenure and promotion policy**

Area of evaluation	Statement on criteria
Competent Teaching Performance	“...materials pertaining to methods and results of non-traditional pedagogy as for example ... service-learning or inquiry-based learning ...”.
Scholarly or Creative Achievements	“Creative activity culminating in innovative programs, service-learning experiences or policy proposals, programs or materials pertaining to issues of public concern...”
Contributions to the Community	“Participation in community outreach activities, including educational equity, service-learning and other professional activities. Such activities may include but need not be limited to those activities that produce ascertainable effects on a community.”

An additional notable effort at improving the recognition of faculty involvement in service- learning was developed at CSU Long Beach where a document entitled “Service Learning and RTP Guide” is disseminated widely to faculty providing specific advice on how candidates can document their activities in community service-learning in their RTP files (McKay 2002).

As significant as these accomplishments are, policy changes and guidelines for documentation will not constitute a meaningful institutional change until faculty culture embraces these changes at the department level. In the CME assessment, in the RTP policies area, the majority of campuses (14) are “undeveloped” in this area, followed by eight campuses in the middle stage, and one campus at the “transforming” category. Other factors of faculty culture affirm the need for changes. Twenty campuses rate workload issues as undeveloped, and a comparable number of campuses (18) rate hiring practices as undeveloped. On the other hand, throughout the system, most notably at CSU Chico, Fresno and Northridge, over 40 departments have participated (or are currently participating) in Engaged Department Institutes on their campuses or at system-wide workshops. In many cases these efforts have focused on the development of curricular sequences, freshmen year experiences, and/or capstone courses that center on community-based learning, but discussions do occur around the Boyer model of scholarship. It may be some time before we can measure the impact of these activities on RTP policy.

## **Mechanisms and Resources**

In the CSU, we are learning that a strong Institutional Culture does not guarantee appropriate levels of Internal Resource Allocation. For example, two of the indicators in the Mechanisms and Resources cluster illustrate this mixed success.

Almost every campus has a service-learning office, and that visible structure is a critical first step in establishing a program. But an office requires staffing and other resources, and so securing sufficient internal resources is imperative. In the attempt to make progress in this area, several questions are raised. Is a staff of one person adequate for the service-learning office? Service-learning directors appropriately protest when they hear this staffing suggestion because the work is tremendously complex and requires more than just one leader. Furthermore, what level of resources ensures that a program is not merely surviving but has the means to thrive? More importantly, how do we leverage the commitment found within the Institutional Culture to garner more support?

## **Successful Navigation of Campus Priorities, Institutionalization Occurs at CSU Fullerton**

The service-learning center at CSU Fullerton provides an enlightening case study on navigating the issue of internal resource allocation. In 1995, a pivotal conversation occurred among several faculty, student affairs staff, and community organization representatives, which affirmed the importance of providing students a number of diverse community-based learning opportunities, including practicum, internships, service-learning courses, and student-driven service projects. Each community-based learning experience, regardless of whether or not it was grounded in the curriculum, served a purpose for the student's educational experience. By embracing a broad definition of community-based learning, the campus gave each learning experience a place in the continuum of experiential education. However, this created a dynamic tension in attempts to institutionalize the service-learning office. As efforts were made to develop a permanent office with staff, there were comments from educators such as "Service-learning pedagogy is faculty driven. Is there a need to have a director? It belongs in the department," and "Internships, in comparison to service-learning, give our students a richer career preparation experience because students do intensive work at the latter end of their academic career."

With these conflicting sentiments on campus, it was difficult to make progress in maintaining a viable office—until the decision was made to combine the offices of internships and service-learning into one! Now, the Center for Internships and Service Learning at CSU Fullerton works with students, faculty and community partners in identifying and developing community partnerships that fit the needs of the community and provide support to the variety of community-based learning experiences for students among other responsibilities. As a result of this merger, the service-learning program has been institutionalized. Staff in the office, who are funded from state support, have responsibilities for both service-learning and internships. The stability of

a long-standing office, and the additional resources that came with the merger, have given the service-learning program “a metaphorical space” to deepen the pedagogy. According to Jeannie Kim-Han, Acting Director of the Center, discovering the procedural similarities that can be done simultaneously while respecting the philosophical differences of the different models has proven to be fruitful in advancing the service-learning program (J. Kim-Han, pers. comm.).

## **Community Campus Exchange—An Overview and Profile of Cal Poly, Pomona**

In the area of Community Campus Exchange, there are several activities underway to promote the participation of community partners as co-educators. Cal Poly Pomona offers a case in point. In summer 2004 they offered a 3-day workshop that was designed to bring together faculty and community partners to brainstorm and organize specific projects and course assignments. The workshop was held at a community site and provided the faculty and community partners with an opportunity to build a sense of mutual understanding (between themselves and their organizations) and help them to think about the connection between the academic and service components of courses. By the end of the workshop, at least a dozen new opportunities had been identified that had not been discussed before the session. Faculty were identifying projects that their colleagues could be pursuing, and a few community partners left with multiple projects. The service-learning center has also sponsored a grant writing workshop for community representatives and faculty. Some of the groups are continuing to meet to actively pursue funding for the proposal concepts they created. Both gatherings have worked towards the goals of increasing awareness for faculty about community issues, including debunking myths about the Pomona community, and empowering community partners with information and networking opportunities so that they feel more comfortable in approaching the university (H. Lund, pers. comm.).

In the CME assessments, many of the campuses rated themselves positively on the indicators of community partnerships and institutional vision (the CC cluster); each area had approximately 15 campuses rating themselves as “emerging.”

## **Institutional Culture and the other Indicators of Engagement**

To summarize, there is tremendous support for service-learning at the top of the academy, and yet as discussed there are significant barriers that still exist—RTP issues, internal resource allocation, and community campus exchange. The interplay between these strengths and challenges leads to a pressing question: What can be done to capitalize on the commitment of academic leaders and the institutionalization that has occurred thus far with service-learning programs, to result in deep institutionalization of service-learning?

## Future Directions

Within the CSU, the well-regarded service-learning program at Monterey Bay (CSUMB) serves as a light on the hill in terms of institutionalization. At CSUMB, the requirement for all students to participate in service-learning is two-fold—one as a lower division course and the other as an upper division course in the major. The CSU Monterey Bay program provides leveraging opportunities to address hindrances since service-learning is a core component of the academic curriculum. For most other campuses, service-learning has not been the centerpiece of curricular design, and though mission statements and campus presidents routinely speak of the commitment to community involvement, it is not always the case that support for service-learning at the highest institutional level automatically extends to programs below.

For service-learning program directors, the challenge remains as to how to gain the leadership and support of other campus leaders, such as provosts and vice presidents for student affairs, college deans, department chairs, and RTP and academic senate committees. Even with presidential blessing, with only pockets of faculty and student support across campus, the service-learning program will never achieve widespread institutionalization. In *Public Work & the Academy* (Langseth and Plater 2004), academic and administrative leaders address this challenge. One theme emerges consistently—that to move forward there needs to be an alignment of service-learning to broader campus priorities. By building a clear rationale on how service-learning is interwoven into the concerns and priorities of the university, there is a great opportunity to ask these leaders to take on concrete and meaningful roles in supporting the expansion of service-learning to all parts of the university. Consequently, given that these leaders play an integral role with the faculty recruitment process, RTP decisions, workload issues, academic curriculum, and budget decisions, there is great optimism that their leadership will advance service-learning programs by addressing some of the key challenges.

In the CSU, the opportunity to demonstrate this alignment occurs in several ways. First, a major component of the CSU mission is to provide access to quality higher education to the diverse citizenry of California. Educational leaders throughout the system are deeply concerned with the disparities in college attendance of different ethnic groups. Recently at a town hall meeting with African American leaders, Chancellor Reed spoke about the alarming number of high school dropout rates for African American and Latino students. He urged the collective involvement of the African American community and the CSU to address the crisis (2005). In this call for action, service-learning, and the broader civic engagement movement, can have a profound impact. Mentoring programs and outreach to parents to work with them on the college financial aid process are two examples that work well with service-learning courses in creating a college-going culture.

Of equal importance to enrolling in the university is the retention of students, and again service-learning has shown to strengthen retention rates. Research has shown that integrating in-depth service-learning or civic engagement experiences into first-

year seminars or learning communities positively impacts retention (Gallini and Moely 2003; Bringle 2004). Evaluating this practice in the CSU would affirm the effect service-learning has on retention, an issue that has caught the attention of policymakers, think tanks and educators.

And finally, service-learning and other campus engagement activities can be shown to have a significant economic impact on surrounding communities. The recently released CSU Impact Report (2004) quantifies the economic and social impact of the 23 campuses on the State of California. The report has been widely distributed to elected officials, business leaders and the media. Powerful vignettes and effective data about the impact service-learning has on the community were showcased in this report, underscoring the broad role civic engagement has in serving the public good.

Until recently, it was common for reports to campus administrators on service-learning to provide definitions, course examples, and vignettes and testimonials from students and community members involved in the program. This information served a purpose in raising awareness of the values related to service. However, as the service-learning field has become more sophisticated, there is a need to shift the communication approach with campus leaders. Highlighting assessment results of student learning outcomes, research findings about retention of students who are involved in service-learning, matching service-learning outcomes with accreditation standards, and demonstrating the economic impact of campus engagement while continuing to honor the fundamental values of service-learning will serve to bring attention to the centrality of our collective efforts to the public mission of our institutions. Once this new way of thinking takes hold, the service-learning field will be able to trumpet that institutionalization has been realized, and a new era of sustainability will begin.

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