

Call for Proposals

Submission Title: Location, location, location: How local research at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand was used to make service-learning a graduation requirement

Reference ID: 0590-000013

Proposal

Proposal Title*	Location, location, location: How local research at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand was used to make service-learning a graduation requirement
Presentation Format*	Scholarly Paper Presentation
Presentation Track*	Campus-Community Partnerships, Program Development and Sustainability
Abstract*	Despite over 40 years of service-learning research that demonstrates positive impacts on students' learning and civic engagement at university, its institutional adoption as a graduation requirement is rare . A case study of the University of Canterbury suggests that credible, local research is the most effective argument for institutional change.
AV Needs	Projector and Screen
AV Needs - Other	

Narrative

- Please enter your research proposal narrative in 1000 words or less.
- Conference Proceedings will be developed from accepted research narratives.

Data Developed* Yes

Draft Paper by October 23* Yes

Proposal Narrative* **Significance of the Topic**

Despite over 40 years of research on service-learning that demonstrates positive impacts on students' learning and civic engagement at university (e.g., Sigmon, 1970; Eyler and Giles, 1999; Astin et al., 2000; Moely et al., 2002; Gallini and Moely, 2003; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Watts, 2005; Simons and Cleary, 2006; Kuh, 2009; Stanton, 2009; Perry, 2011), requiring it for graduation is rare. A non-exhaustive search of universities in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States revealed few that require students to complete service-learning experiences to graduate (the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, Florida Gulf Coast University, Lipscomb University, Tulane University, Warren Wilson College, and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire). No Ivy League or "flagship" public university has such a requirement. Why has the overall research not led to more significant institutional adoption of service-learning?

Analytical Argument

A five year case study of the University of Canterbury (UC) in Christchurch, New Zealand suggests that credible, local research is an effective strategy for universities to fully integrate service-learning into their core missions through a graduation requirement. This is not to dismiss the robust body of knowledge that has been developed over the last 40 years. To the contrary, the local research stands on the shoulders of those who have come before. However, because of the autonomous and localized nature of academia, it is often easy to bat away suggestions based on research conducted elsewhere with arguments about not being applicable to one's context.

The milestones of UC's case study are: 1) research conducted in 2009-2010 on two service-learning courses (O'Steen et al., 2010, Perry, 2011), 2) the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes that destroyed 80% of downtown Christchurch, displaced over 40,000 people, and closed the university several times, 3) research conducted in

2011-2015 on an earthquake-related service-learning course, and 4) the new UC Graduate Profile that was approved by University Council in December, 2014 and consists of five attributes with community engagement as one.

Without the credible, local research both from before and after the earthquakes, the requirement that all UC students have a community engagement experience within their academic studies would not have survived the three years of committees, faculty meetings, and, ultimately, the University Council. For UC, and most other universities, there is a belief that it is idiosyncratic and has contextual and cultural mores that are unique. Thus, any educational practices or research on them that is not rooted in the UC environment leave themselves vulnerable to dismissal in an academic version of NIMBY.

Relevance of Conclusions

While the proximity of the research on service-learning appears to be a factor in its adoption within a university, its credibility is just as important, particularly if the methodologies are varied enough to warrant consideration by colleagues from the qualitative and quantitative camps. This case study provides examples of how the use of externally validated instruments administered locally (e.g., the National Survey of Student Engagement, Kember's Critical Thinking Questionnaire, and civic engagement inventories) convinced skeptical colleagues that service-learning was a rigorous and effective teaching practice in their context. Further, the case study includes examples of qualitative research that substantiate the quantitative findings and are equally, or more, meaningful to colleagues from other parts of campus.

Implications for Research

The implications of this case study for further research are important in establishing that the existing canon of service-learning research is a good base upon which credible, local research must build in order to make the case that this teaching practice is effective in that particular context. This case study suggests that a more exhaustive search of universities' graduation requirements would yield a profile of institutions that have service-learning as part of them and the reasons why they have chosen that could be examined. From that research, it is believed that a bevy of research methodologies would be discovered that other institutions could use in their own contexts. The overall take-away from the UC case study is that the existing, general research base for service-learning is important but that credible, local research may often be more effective in institutional adoption of service-learning.

Potential Audience Appeal

It is believed that the interactive and conversational presentation of the UC case study will appeal to a wide audience of any service-learning teachers who are interested in taking their practice from the margins and into the boardrooms or council chambers where the strategic directions of institutions are determined. While the UC case study was conducted at a university, the lessons learned are transferable to any educational context.

Supplemental Files

Osteen, References.docx

[View](#)

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