ABSTRACT

This mixed-method study explores faculty perceptions of service-learning (S-L) at a large U.S. Research I university. A campus-wide survey was conducted to better understand faculty beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to S-L across disciplines. The survey attempted to uncover faculty beliefs about S-L, and to assess faculty perceptions of student learning outcomes. Results indicate that faculty believe S-L develops practical skills, interpersonal skills, citizenship, and personal responsibility in students. In addition, faculty perceive lack of university support and negative impact on tenure and promotion decisions as challenges to implementing S-L.

PURPOSE & CONTEXT

The increasing demand for institutions of higher education to demonstrate their contribution to society has led many universities to make community engagement through S-L a strategic priority.

Service-learning is "a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities designed to promote student learning and development."

Service-learning is an innovative instructional model that involves integration of course material with community service and some form of reflection on or reporting of the outcomes. As a pedagogical process, service-learning is not new; however, its use in higher education is increasingly common. "Many colleges and universities recognize the benefits of being engaged in the community and have attempted to integrate the university into the community. This may be because it benefits multiple stakeholders, including students, faculty, organizations served, and the community."

To be successfully institutionalized, service-learning requires faculty motivation to participate. This study was conducted by a Faculty Learning Community established to gain understanding of faculty perceptions of service-learning across disciplines. Results will be used to make recommendations for increasing awareness and use of service-learning among faculty through strategic communication management.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: To what extent do faculty use service-learning as an instructional model? 
RQ2: What are faculty perceptions of service-learning? 
RQ3: How can the university facilitate use of service-learning among faculty?

METHODOLOGY

Data collection: • Online survey (N=100) administered by USF Academy for Teaching and Learning Excellence in Dec. 2013 • Email request to department heads to forward to faculty in all departments • Qualitative data collected through open-ended items

Data analysis: • Quantitative analysis using SPSS • Qualitative thematic analysis of open-ended items

RESULTS

Faculty participation in service-learning

Faculty perceptions of service-learning

“Community service is linked to course learning objectives, planned mutually by faculty member and community entity, with clear student reflection relating community experience to course content and objectives.”

“Anything that helps students acquire skills and knowledge while benefiting the community.”

Faculty attitude toward service-learning

Faculty had predominantly positive views of service-learning.

280 adjectives with positive connotations: hands-on, symbiotic, community-engaged, collaboration, helpful, inclusive, involved, and win-win

Four adjectives with negative connotations: cumbersome, make-work, irrelevant, and difficult

CONCLUSION

Results of this study suggest the need for a strategic communication campaign to:

1) Increase faculty awareness of the benefits of service-learning.
2) Increase faculty awareness of university resources to support service-learning; and
3) Create motivation to adopt service-learning as an instructional model.