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Campus Compact Assessment (Selected Chapters)

Sherril B. Gelmon

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Assessment Principles and Strategies: An Overview

Institutions committed to civic engagement and service-learning must be able to demonstrate the impact of these initiatives to ensure quality for student and community participants, to justify resource investments, and to inform the improvement and expansion of such programs. Understanding and articulating "impact" requires knowledge and expertise in the design and application of assessment methods.

This handbook provides basic information on practical methods and tools for assessment planning, design, and implementation. The material can be used for a campus-wide service-learning initiative, for individual courses, or for other activities related to civic engagement and community involvement. Since, throughout the text, the primary focus is on developing a comprehensive assessment strategy on the institutional or programmatic level, the word "program" occurs often. Nevertheless, as has just been noted, these materials can also be adapted for individual faculty use in freestanding courses.

Context for Assessment

Increasingly, higher education is experiencing a shift away from a traditional emphasis on teaching to a new emphasis on learning. Barr and Tagg (1995) have described this as a movement from seeing colleges as institutions whose function it is to provide instruction to seeing them as institutions designed to produce learning. If one thinks of the core concepts that attend teaching and learning—for example, knowledge, focus, the curriculum, instruction, design strategies, student roles, and organizational change—a framework such as Table 1 can be used to illustrate the transition from the "old" to the "new." Note that service-learning and other forms of community-based education all demonstrate characteristics of the new—emphasizing the application of knowledge, a team and community focus for learning, collective instruction and collective curriculum definition, an integrated sequencing of courses, and active student learning. These concerns are all important to keep in mind as one begins to consider how one can best assess the impact of such programs.

Note: The text for this chapter is adapted from "How Do We Know That Our Work Makes a Difference?" Sherril B. Gelmon, *Metropolitan Universities*, Vol. 11, No. 2, fall 2000, pp. 28–39. Permission granted by the editor.

Table 1: Moving From Teaching to Learning

"Old Way"	Issue	"New Way"
Acquisition →	Knowledge →	Application
Individual →	Focus →	Team/Community
By faculty →	Curriculum definition →	By faculty, community, students
Banking →	Instruction →	Collective
Prescribed courses →	Design →	Integrated sequence
Passive →	Student learning →	Active
Sporadic reform →	Change →	Continuous improvement

The language of "civic engagement" and community participation is increasingly evident in discussions of trends in higher education. Ehrlich (2000, p. vi) describes civic engagement as "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities." Such an enterprise changes the function of the institution, creates new challenges for faculty roles, offers opportunities for new collaborations with community partners, and affects not only what students learn but also what should be taught. These changes inevitably lead to questions such as "what impact is engagement having on the institution and its component parts?" To answer questions like this one, carefully constructed assessments must be created—assessments that ask clear questions, collect appropriate data, and analyze and report results in a meaningful way.

Why Do Assessments?

Why do we do assessments? Many say that universities have to prepare better-educated students; therefore, the primary reason for assessments is to improve student learning. Others believe that a key reason to conduct assessments is to provide immediate feedback to enable program leaders to make incremental changes, responding to identified needs and concerns. Over the long term, assessment data can provide the basis for program planning and for redesign and substantive improvement.

Why is assessment currently so important? Across the United States, there is an increasing interest in assessment due to regulatory requirements, public demands for educational accountability, and administrative concerns about resource utilization—not to mention the growing interest in assessment for program improvement (Gelmon, 1997). With ever-increasing calls for accountability from funding agencies and accreditors, particularly with regard to resource accountability, there exists a regular demand for clear assessment data.

At the same time, many campuses find it difficult to articulate how a service-learning program should be assessed, let alone how the results of such an assessment can contribute to an understanding of civic engagement. But as we learn more about the institutional impact of a commitment to engagement, the main reason for documenting that impact reveals itself as essential to ensuring sustained, high quality relationships among all participants. Faculty, students, community partners and institutional participants all come to a partnership with different concerns and expectations; these demand a complex and intentional assessment strategy (Holland, 2001). Furthermore, although interest in service-learning and engagement continues to grow, some faculty remain cool to these new endeavours and remain sceptical, demanding strong evidence for the value of this work. Assessment can produce the evidence of impact many faculty require and, thus, can lead to broader participation.

Service-Learning and the Engaged Campus

As institutions explore and discuss the concept of an "engaged campus," some faculty demand to know what exactly engagement is in relation to academic work and whether such a focus represents a true descriptor or key trait of their institution's missions and actions. What does an engaged campus look like? How does it result in different faculty work and expectations? What are the characteristics of engaged students and the nature of their learning experiences? What can be observed about community-campus partnerships? All of these questions can begin to frame a campus-based assessment of engagement.

Since studies show that an institutional commitment to engagement is strongly linked to the inclusion of community-based learning experiences in an institution's curricula (Holland, 2001), service-learning can be viewed as an instructional strategy appropriate for increasing civic engagement (Hollander & Hartley, 2000; Gelmon, 2000a). This monograph is intended to help fill a void in the published literature about assessing the impact of service-learning across a broad range of constituencies.

Engagement and partnerships represent a new dimension of academic work. The multidimensional nature of partnerships and engagement is reflected in several recent publications. For example, the 1999 report of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities, *The Engaged Institution*, offers a set of characteristics that form a seven-part "test" of engagement (Kellogg Commission, 1999):

- RESPONSIVENESS: are we really listening to the communities we serve?
- RESPECT FOR PARTNERS: do we genuinely respect the skills and capacities of our partners in collaborative projects?
- ACADEMIC NEUTRALITY: do partnerships maintain the university in the role of neutral facilitator despite the existence of potentially contentious issues?
- ACCESSIBILITY: is our expertise equally accessible to all the constituencies of concern within our communities?
- INTEGRATION: does the institutional climate offer new opportunities for integrating institutional scholarship with the service and teaching missions of the university?

- **COORDINATION:** are academic units, institutional support offices, and groups of faculty, staff, and students dealing with others productively and sharing/translating their knowledge into something the public can appreciate?

- **RESOURCE PARTNERSHIPS:** are resources committed to the task sufficient?

Each of these characteristics offers a potential focus for planning and assessment. Similarly, the *1999 Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education* (Campus Compact, 1999) includes the "Campus Assessment of Civic Responsibility," which provides a framework for institutions to conduct a baseline self-assessment of their readiness for civic engagement by involving administrators, trustees, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners in a deliberative process of describing institutional commitment and conditions. The questions included in the Compact's assessment framework address topics such as leadership, curriculum, involvement in community public policy development, campus and faculty culture, diversity, community-campus partnerships, communication, and community improvement.

Analogously, Holland (1997) has created a matrix of key organizational factors that can guide campus explorations of commitment to engagement based on the degree to which engagement is seen as an element of campus mission. For each level of commitment, the matrix provides measures and features associated with successful and sustained engagement programs.

Furco (2000) has developed still another guide for assessing the institutionalization of service-learning. He proposes five dimensions for such an assessment: 1) philosophy and mission of service-learning, 2) faculty support/involvement in service-learning, 3) student support/involvement in service-learning, 4) community participation and partnerships, and 5) institutional support. Multiple categories are then articulated for each dimension. A team involved in self-assessment would consider each criterion and determine its school's place according to three levels of institutionalization: 1) critical mass building, 2) quality building, and 3) sustained institutionalization.

The "engaged campus" is also being discussed in many higher education forums, and one of the key areas that emerges here as vital for any assessment effort is an analysis of community-university partnerships. Such partnerships are an essential component of engagement and form the basis for service-learning activities. A review of lessons learned through projects related to service-learning and other forms of community-based learning (Holland & Gelmon, 1998) suggests that some of the key areas in need of assessment include the nature of relevant partnerships; understanding the needs and assets of both the educational institution and the community; defining community; leadership roles; curricular placement and emphasis; the nature of learning; and partnership sustainability.

Beginning the Assessment Process

Assessment serves a useful purpose as a mechanism to tell the story of what one has learned from one's work—articulating that learning for oneself as well as for others. In beginning any assessment process, one should ask a series of key questions. The answers to these questions will frame the design of the assessment process:

- What is the aim of the assessment?
- Who wants or needs the assessment information?
- What resources are available to support the assessment?
- Who will conduct the assessment?
- How can one ensure the results are used?

These questions are important for a number of reasons. Every assessment process should have an aim and stated purpose. Without them, there may seem to be little reason to carry forward the required work. Furthermore, the person or agency wanting or needing the assessment may dictate the nature of the actual work to be carried out—is it mandated by a funder, is it part of an accreditation or other regulatory review, is it part of an individual's personal performance review? To ensure implementation and follow-through, an assessment plan must identify the resources that will support the assessment and the person or persons who will do the work.

Too often, assessments are designed without a clear understanding of their resource implications, with frustration resulting from the fact that the plans drawn up do not correspond to the realities of available resources and expertise. Finally, it is important to be able to ensure that the results of an assessment process will be attended to and used. Designing and conducting a comprehensive program assessment, only to see the results of that process ignored, can leave those involved with a deep sense of futility.

As suggested above, assessment is important, first, to articulate what has been learned for oneself. Many professionals in higher education today have little time to stop, reflect, and consider the impact of their work. Articulating the implications of that work can help to delineate issues, describe strategies, and highlight areas where further work is needed. Assessment can also provide an opportunity to stop and celebrate successes that have been achieved—something rarely done. Finally, assessment can help us to focus our thinking in ways that result in new insights and identify opportunities for improvement.

Second, assessment helps us to articulate our learning for others. It can facilitate our sharing lessons we have learned and can transmit knowledge essential to others' learning. In particular, a strategic assessment plan can identify factors of import to others conducting similar or parallel work.

Finally, we should note that assessment can vary in its scope depending upon its constituencies and purpose. In the context of an institutional review for regional accreditation, an assessment plan might be university-wide. On the other hand, a department or program might undertake assessment for internal review purposes, for professional review (by a state governmental entity or a specialized/professional accreditor), or as one aspect of a departmental/program plan. Campus-wide general education programs are often the focus of assessment efforts aimed at gaining greater understanding of how such programs affect multiple student populations. New service-learning initiatives are often the focus of intensive assessment efforts as institutional leaders seek to determine the comparative value and expense of service-learning as compared with other pedagogical approaches. Since assessment of service-learning and civic engagement demands that one understand multiple areas of impact, this handbook presents detailed discussions of how one can understand their impact on students, faculty, community partners, and the institution as a whole.

Who Should Be Involved in Assessment?

Successful assessment requires bringing together players central to the activity being assessed, and helping them to step outside their normal roles and to create a new culture—one that facilitates pooling their collective interests to focus on the program, service, department, or other activity being assessed. For this reason, assessment can have a transformational impact on the unit or activity in question (Magruder et al., 1997).

In the context of service-learning assessment, multiple players are essential to provide a broad perspective on program impact. Students, faculty, community partners, and institutional leaders all have a distinctive role to play as key informants. In addition, faculty may be involved in the design and administration of assessment activities related directly to their classes. Community partners may wish to play a similar role in the design and administration of assessment procedures related to their responsibilities. Graduate students may also represent a valuable resource in helping with assessment design, administration, and analysis, for such work may have bearing on their own programs of study. Finally, institutional centers for teaching and learning, community outreach, institutional research and assessment, and/or service-learning can play important roles in various aspects of the assessment process.

Considerable debate exists regarding the merits of centralized versus decentralized responsibility for assessment. In some institutions, a central office has been developed to provide a focus within the institution's administrative structure and to serve as a campus-wide resource (see, for example, Palomba, 1997). While establishment of such an office is often viewed as evidence of an institution's commitment to assessment, one liability of such an approach is that faculty and/or departments may come to view assessment as solely the responsibility of that office, and as something about which they need not be concerned. Furthermore, results may be viewed with suspicion, since they derive not from the faculty but from a central administrative structure. One way to avoid problems like these could involve using a central office merely as the resource that supports, encourages, and facilitates faculty and/or departmental activities by encouraging, for example, buy-in to institution-wide assessment activities and by disseminating assessment results. Such buy-in is invariably enhanced by investing in faculty and staff development of assessment skills and by involving as many people as is feasible in the assessment process.

Common Themes and Concerns in Beginning Assessment

Several concerns frequently arise at the beginning of the assessment process. One has to do with identifying appropriate and affordable expertise. At academic institutions, despite the presence of a number of disciplines where one might expect to find assessment expertise, one often can find few if any individuals who have the particular expertise needed to design, lead, and manage this work. At some institutions such expertise may indeed be found, but the individuals who possess it may already be over-committed to other projects and/or scholarly activities. If obtaining the necessary expertise represents a financial investment, it will be especially important to determine accurately what resources are available to support that investment.

A second concern relates to conceptualizing the focus of the assessment process; i.e., what precisely is to be assessed? When? For whom and for what purposes? The key questions identified in an earlier section can help to answer these questions and to frame the project, but considerable discussion may be needed to reach agreement on how best to frame the assessment plan.

Once the focus of the assessment has been conceptualized, another concern has to do with implementation—who is responsible? What resources do they have? What leverage exists to encourage people to participate in assessment activities and to co-operate in meeting data needs in a timely manner?

Still another concern relates to the selection of assessment methods. Those selected must take into account the purpose of the assessment and anticipated uses of the information collected as well as the potential burden the assessment activities will impose. When plans and needs are clearly set out and agreed upon, agreement upon methods may exist. However, it is not unusual to find participants who feel they themselves are the experts who should dictate specific assessment methods, particularly for use in their own classroom. In this regard, one especially common source of contention involves the ongoing debate between qualitative and quantitative data—a debate that includes questions of appropriateness, validity of results, generalizability, and other challenges. These questions, in turn, lead to discussions of rigor, specification of methodological needs, and ultimately to design issues that may go well beyond the resources available to support the assessment process.

A final concern revolves around the uses of assessment findings. Once again, problems can sometimes be avoided if there is discussion and agreement from early on as to what will be done with the data. Perceptions of a "closed" process or one intended to justify program closure or termination of faculty/staff positions will compromise the assessment process. Measures designed to guarantee an open process with agreed upon uses of the data obtained will assist greatly in facilitating assessment activities.

However, even a well-designed plan and emphatically open process may still encounter resistance—whether the threat the findings represent is real or perceived. If outside experts are brought in (either to provide an alternative to or to supplement internal experts), these outsiders may be intrinsically intimidating (the fear of airing "dirty laundry" in public). Sceptics will then question the rigor of the assessment plan and its methods, and may not be willing to accept that compromises in "scientific method" are sometimes necessary to meet deadlines. Other issues that may be raised include training to develop the internal capacity to conduct and manage the various components of the assessment as well as questions related to supervision, data collection, confidentiality, and data management. Finally, resistance is almost a certainty when the environment is already politically charged; for example, where there exists fierce competition for resources assessment data may help decide allocations.

While each assessment situation is unique, there nevertheless exist several responses that may help to overcome any resistance. Agreement upon the purposes of the assessment, public sharing of these purposes and careful adherence to the assessment's purposes and scope will help to establish the authenticity and legitimacy of the effort. Energy should also be deliberately invested in building buy-in for its value. Confidentiality of the respondents must be assured. Roles and tasks must be defined early in the process, and mechanisms for regular reporting, sharing of findings, updates, and airing of concerns must be clearly established.

Assessment as an Improvement Strategy

Assessment can be viewed as a strategy for improvement—an integrated set of activities designed to identify strengths and areas for improvement, and capable of providing evidence to support future program planning. Assessment can be a useful mechanism to tell a program's story, but becomes most useful only when it is viewed as a value-added, routine undertaking—not as a burdensome add-on or species of "busy work." Assessment gives program managers, administrators, and other leaders a mechanism to identify what they have learned that is useful—both to articulate it internally and to share it with others.

Such an approach to assessment builds upon the "Model for Improvement" (Langley, Nolan, et al., 1998) that has been used widely throughout many sectors including higher education and health care. The core assumption here is that work/situations can usually be improved upon—or conversely that one needs to develop evidence to know that change is not needed. This model consists of three basic elements:

- STATEMENT OF THE AIM: "What are we trying to accomplish?" This clarifies the purpose of the assessment and makes it explicit to all those participating.
- CLARIFICATION OF CURRENT KNOWLEDGE: "How will we know that a change is an improvement, or if no change is needed?" This sets out what is known, and what the new knowledge will make possible once the assessment has been completed.
- TESTING OF VARIOUS IMPROVEMENTS: "What changes can be tried that will result in improvement?" Based on what has been learned, this will help to define what might be implemented as initial improvement strategies.

When one applies this model to higher education, the following questions help frame the assessment process (Gelmon, Holland, Shinnamon, & Morris, 1998; Gelmon, White, et al., 2000):

- HOW IS LEARNING CONDUCTED (e.g., service-learning or learning grounded in community-university partnerships)?
- HOW DOES THIS PEDAGOGICAL METHOD BECOME PART OF THE CURRICULUM (how is it introduced, how is it developed, how is it integrated)?
- HOW CAN THIS EDUCATIONAL METHOD BE IMPROVED?

- **HOW DO INDIVIDUALS USING THIS METHOD KNOW THAT A CHANGE IS AN IMPROVEMENT** (e.g., what comparisons can be made using pre- and post-data)?

In thinking of assessment as an improvement effort, one can focus on delineating issues that otherwise might not be obvious; describing strategies for future replication; highlighting areas for further work; and/or focusing thinking. Sharing the results of this effort through internal communications and/or through broader external dissemination via presentations at professional meetings, publications in professional literature, and postings on websites will also facilitate others' learning.

Using such an approach to assessment may well result in the identification of many opportunities for improvement. For example, curricular strengths may be clarified, validating existing knowledge and providing data to support the continuation of current activities. Or, conversely, deficiencies may be uncovered, thus providing the evidence and justification needed for making changes. Assessment may also serve to identify areas where faculty resources should be reallocated, and where faculty should be recognized for excellence or assisted in correcting deficiencies. In an institutional context, such activities are vital in order to consider broader issues of resource allocation (human, fiscal, physical, information, technological, and other resources), to inform public relations and marketing strategies, and to consider possible changes or realignments in organizational relationships and strategies.

A Multi-Constituency Approach to Assessment

Over the past five years, the authors have developed a multi-constituency approach to assessment—initially, for use in assessing service-learning and now for use in a wider range of community-based learning situations. This approach began at Portland State University as part of an explicit effort to assess the impact of service-learning on students, faculty, the institution, and the community (Driscoll, Holland, et al., 1996). At that time, considerable effort was being invested in developing undergraduate and graduate service-learning courses, as well as in community-university partnerships, and the institution needed to understand the impact of these efforts. At this time, the university was also implementing a new general education program, and was attempting to create opportunities for service-learning experiences throughout that program, particularly in community-based senior capstone courses.

This approach was then greatly expanded and revised to assess the impact of service-learning in health professions education for the Health Professions Schools in Service to the Nation (HPSISN) program, a national service-learning demonstration program (Gelmon, Holland & Shinnamon, 1998; Gelmon, Holland, Shinnamon & Morris, 1998; Gelmon, Holland, Seifer, et al., 1998). This expansion added community partnerships as a fifth area of assessment focus. In both the PSU and HPSISN cases, the goal of the assessment effort was to explore implementation of service-learning and its differential impact on various constituencies, and to identify lessons learned for future service-learning programming. The HPSISN project was one of the first efforts to study the disciplinary implications of service-learning.

Subsequently, the model has been applied in other attempts to assess the impact of learning in the community. In two of these projects, students, faculty, and community partners worked together on community health improvement as part of their academic course-based work. These were:

- **AN ASSESSMENT OF THE COMMUNITY-BASED QUALITY IMPROVEMENT** in Education for the Health Professions (CBQIE-HP) program where interdisciplinary teams of health professions students worked on specific community health improvement projects using the Model for Improvement methodology (Gelmon & Barnett, 1998; Gelmon, White, Carlson, & Norman, 2000), and

- **AN EVALUATION OF THE PORTLAND TRI-COUNTY HEALTHY COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE,** a cross-sectoral community development approach to building community collaborations to address specific community health problems (Gelmon, McBride, Hill, et al., 1998).

Another example of the adaptability of this approach to assessment design was demonstrated in 1998 when the goal-concept-indicator-method approach was used to create a matrix and methods for assessing the impact of a new Masters in Public Administration degree with a concentration in Tribal Administration, a program delivered to students using distance learning technology (administered from Portland State University, Mark O. Hatfield School of Government). This unique project, funded by a U.S. Department of Education FIPSE grant, called for an assessment model that tracked the effectiveness of program strategies and campus-tribal partnerships in meeting specific program goals and in creating satisfactory learning experiences for students in multiple locations (Holland, 2000a).

The design was adapted again in 1999 to create a unique assessment plan for a national project involving many types of civic engagement activities. The Council of Independent Colleges, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, awarded grants to eight private, urban liberal arts colleges to facilitate their exploration and implementation of an urban mission defined primarily in terms of civic engagement and partnerships. This effort resulted in interesting lessons about the unique challenges faced by smaller private colleges when they seek to enhance their civic engagement programs (Holland, 1999b; Holland, 2001).

All these projects have confirmed the utility of this multi-constituency approach for assessment of a broad array of partnership activities including but also transcending service-learning.

The Assessment Matrix

The approach presented here is based on the development of a conceptual matrix, which is derived from project goals, that frames the assessment plan, guides the development of assessment instruments, and structures the data analysis and reporting. At PSU, it initially served as a framework to predict outcomes anticipated as a result of early anecdotal data available at that time. The approach was then refined, and began to be referred to as the "Goal-Concept-Indicator-Method" approach (Gelmon, Holland, & Shinnamon, 1998; Shinnamon, Gelmon, & Holland, 1999). It involves four primary questions:

- **WHAT DO WE WANT TO KNOW?** This helps the evaluator to articulate the aim of the assessment, based upon the project goals.

- **WHAT WILL WE LOOK FOR?** This leads the evaluator to identify core concepts that are derived from the project goals and the aim of the assessment.

- WHAT WILL WE MEASURE? For each core concept, relevant measurable/observable indicators are specified which will enable the evaluator to measure or observe change or status.

- HOW WILL WE GATHER THE EVIDENCE NEEDED TO DEMONSTRATE WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW? At this stage, the evaluator identifies or develops appropriate methods and tools by which he/she can collect the information for each indicator, and identifies sources of the data.

Such an assessment framework thus provides a structure to guide evaluation; enables program administrators and evaluators to articulate clearly the framework for evaluation; and facilitates data collection, analysis, and reporting in a way that is true to the aims and goals of the assessment. In addition, this framework overcomes many of the sources of resistance to assessment previously described. It is illustrated in each of the following four sections in the context of a conceptual matrix for assessing impact on students, faculty, community and institution (see Tables 5, 6, 7, and 9). It strongly links assessment to program goals, and in this way increases the effectiveness of the assessment effort and the relevance of its findings.

The assessment framework is a tool that helps guide the thinking process in the design phase, serves as an important framework for implementation, and aids in defining and focusing the analysis. In its skeletal form, it appears as the matrix presented in Table 2. It has four main components: core concepts, key indicators, methods, and sources of information (Gelmon & Connell, 2000).

Table 2: The Matrix Framework

Core Concepts	Key Indicators	Methods	Source

Core concepts are broad topic areas. To identify these, ask the question: 'What are the possible areas of impact that can be observed from courses, programs, or activities?" The definition of a concept is written in neutral language to provide a basic foundation for continued discussion and elaboration as to how the program may affect such a concept. Stating a concept in language such as "increase in _____" or "change in _____" introduces a bias into the assessment and compromises objective data collection. Refer to Tables 5, 6, 7 and 9 for examples of core concepts for each of the constituencies.

Key indicators are key evidence of impact, and are usually stated as the specific measurable or observable factors related to each core concept. To develop these, ask the question: "What might we look for to show that the concepts are being addressed?" What measures can we study to gain evidence of how the core concepts are being affected? As with the concepts, these should be stated in neutral rather than directional terms to avoid bias. There should be multiple key indicators for each core concept. Wherever possible, avoid defining indicators such as "number of," "increase in," "improved," etc., as this may limit the range of available data collection methods. For example, by stating "number of ____," one is directed to quantitative methods, whereas by avoiding this terminology one can use quantitative or qualitative methods. (Again, refer to Tables 5, 6, 7 and 9 for examples of suitable key indicators.)

Methods indicate the actual instrumentation or strategy to be used for gathering evidence through measurement or observation. In selecting appropriate methods, ask the question: "How will we look for it?" This refers to the instrument(s) one selects and, if applicable, to the way one will use it (them). The most commonly used instruments include:

- Surveys (self-administered or administered by another person)
- Interviews (in person or telephone)
- Focus groups
- Document reviews
- Observations
- Journals
- Critical incident reports

Each matrix in Tables 5, 6, 7 and 9 lists a variety of methods. A more detailed discussion of methods for each constituency is presented as those methods are introduced.

Sources of information may be a specific person, a group of people, a database, or a report. A source may be internal or external to an organization, and may be people who have had some personal contact or experience with the activity being assessed, or documentation containing relevant information.

In reality, different methods may be used for each indicator, and each source may provide data for many methods, but not all sources will be involved in each method, and not all methods will address each indicator. While there is a direct linear relationship between a concept and its related indicators, there is no such relationship between methods and sources.

Using the Assessment Matrix

The completed matrix should be reviewed to ensure that the concepts are clear and distinct. Indicators should be verified to ensure that they are measurable or provide opportunities to collect evidence. If it is not possible to determine how an indicator will be measured or observed, it should be restated to enhance specificity. Program goals should be reviewed to ensure that the concepts and indicators reflect those goals, that all information included in the matrix is necessary to assess their accomplishment, and that no goal or major activity has been overlooked. Finally, it is important to ascertain that what has been set out for assessment is practical and feasible within the context of a specific organization; i.e., with reference to the resources available and the population(s) being served.

The matrix will be very useful in focusing the analysis of data. Key indicators of a program's success as listed on the matrix provide a critical point of reference that, although flexible, hold the evaluators accountable to the program's goals and objectives. Since the matrix will have been used in determining what information should be gathered and in developing the appropriate evaluation instruments, the data gathered should relate directly back to the key indicators and core concepts. In analyzing the data, one should focus on how the key indicators are reflected and to what extent they have been achieved.

Issues in Instrument Selection

The key issue in selecting appropriate instruments is determining what will provide the best information to help accomplish the goals of the assessment. Selection of relevant assessment instruments involves evaluating their relative merits and determining which are best suited to specific needs (Gelmon & Connell, 2000[1]). Primary considerations in selecting specific instruments include:

- Design issues: time, expertise, resources available
- Data collection: ease, time, expertise needed
- Data analysis: skills needed, time, level of detail
- Response content: limited versus expansive
- Flexibility and accuracy of instrument
- Bias introduced by method
- Nature of questions: open-ended, closed-ended
- Side benefits or disadvantages

Each of these key considerations is illustrated in Table 3 for a variety of assessment methods.

Each assessment instrument also raises issues with respect to the trade-off between resources required to administer and analyze an instrument, and the value of the information that will be collected. Resources include money, equipment, expertise, and time for design, set-up, administration, analysis, and reporting. Key issues to consider in measuring the trade-off include:

- Set-up time
- Administration time
- Analysis time

1. This section is adapted from *Program Evaluation Principles and Practices: A Handbook for Northwest Health Foundation* (2000) by Sherril B. Gelmon and Amy Connell, with permission from the Northwest Health Foundation.

- Other issues requiring resources (that may outweigh the potential value of the data)
- Nature of output

An approximation of the costs associated with each of these issues for each method is illustrated in Table 4. Again, in selecting instruments, one must determine what can be afforded that will provide the best information. Frequently, trade-offs of costs against potential data are necessary but ultimately do not compromise the overall quality of the assessment.

Completing the Assessment Cycle

Once the necessary data has been collected, assessment leaders must be prepared to engage in extensive data analysis, synthesis, discussion, and report-writing. As mentioned previously, there are often lengthy debates on campuses about the relative merits of quantitative versus qualitative methods. Our own experiences show that a mixed methodology is most useful. Methods should be selected based on the kind of data that will be gathered as well as issues such as ease of data collection, ease of data analysis, and time and costs involved in both collection and analysis. However, consideration must also be given to the richness of the data that can be derived from various methods. Interviews, focus groups, observations, and reflective journals provide extensive and detailed information that necessitate a major time commitment to transcribe and analyze. In contrast, surveys provide less individual detail, but are relatively easy, inexpensive, and time-efficient to administer and analyze. Assessment leaders who do not have familiarity and expertise with various assessment methods should ensure they engage an expert to advise them during instrument development as well as data analysis. In each of the following sections, there appears information on the various assessment methods proposed, as well as the advantages and limitations of each.

A final step in the assessment process is reporting the results. A fairly typical method involves writing assessment report that describes 1) project goals, 2) what was done (programmatically), 3) what was measured, 4) the results, and 5) implications and/or recommendations. Reporting results should be guided explicitly by the matrix (using the concepts as major headings and the indicators as sub-headings); this will facilitate a synthesis of the findings and their presentation in a report. Assessment results can also form the basis for scholarly presentations and publications. However, care should be given to ensure that no confidential information is disclosed and that participants have given permission for the assessment findings to be released in a public forum.

Consideration should also be given to alternative forms of reporting to ensure wider and more rapid dissemination. For example, summaries of key findings can be presented in poster format and displayed in a campus cafeteria, at the library, student union, or other central location. Selected results and participant stories can be integrated into a university website. Other forms of reporting through annual reports, community updates, or focused brochures can also be used.

Table 3: Comparison of Assessment Methods

Instrument	Design Issues	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Response Content	Flexibility/ Accuracy	Bias	Nature of Questions	Side Benefits/ Disadvantages
Survey	Relatively complex and labor intensive Requires expertise in survey design Resources printing, mailing, responses	Effort to ensure participation Sample or whole population Use existing lists to recruit	Requires knowledge of statistics Hand analysis or by computer	Limited Must use simple words Less detail	Accurate if questions valid Little flexibility once designed	Little (controlled by question design)	Closed primarily	Generalizable if validated Easy to report to different audiences Results may be used for public relations and/or promotion
In-Person Interview	Relatively easy for expert to design Sampling for subjects Interviewer training	Selection of subjects important to ensure representation Time intensive (one on one) Permission necessary	Lengthy Need qualitative skills	Own words Range of opinions Detailed Reflective	High flexibility within protocol Use of probes	Potential for high interviewer introduced bias Nonverbal issues	Open-ended Conver-sational	Rich input Comparability requires large number of interviewees Labor intensive and time consuming
Focus Group	Relatively easy for expert to design Selection of participants Interviewer training	Ensure range of representatives Time intensive Expertise to facilitate Agreement necessary	Lengthy Need qualitative skills	Highly detailed Dynamic	High flexibility within protocol	High potential to derail Potential among participants Nonverbal issues	Open-ended Conver-sational	Participants can build upon each other and interact and therefore generate more ideas than an individual alone
Telephone Interview	Relatively easy for expert to design Sampling for subjects Interviewer training	Less time than in person Potential for increased number of rejections	Lengthy Need qualitative and quantitative skills	Own words Range of opinions Detailed	High flexibility within protocol	Eliminates nonverbal issues	Open-ended Conver-sational or survey-type	High potential for early termination Potential for fabrication of answers Blend of strengths of surveys and interviews

Table 3: Comparison of Assessment Methods (cont.)

Instrument	Design Issues	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Response Content	Flexibility/ Accuracy	Bias	Nature of Questions	Side Benefits/ Disadvantages
Observation	Relatively easy for expert to design	Training of observers Time intensive to observe Permission necessary	Lengthy Need qualitative skills	Varied (fixed vs. open) Words of observer and quotes from participants	High flexibility	High because of observer Presence of observer may bias behavior	Open or closed	Can view "real" interactions Bias of observer's presence Opportunity for additional problem solving or consultation Augments primary data Generates lists of uncertain value
Documentation	Relatively easy for expert to design	Can be very time consuming to locate and review Initial access may take time Completeness, comparability and accuracy of records may be variable	Variable (depends on kinds of data collected) Analysis may already be available	Limited or extensive	Depends upon protocol and report style and format	Could be high from collection Bias of what is recorded	Open or closed	Augments primary data Could inspire improved record keeping Could raise issues not previously thought of Generate lots of information but of uncertain value
Journals or Critical Incident Reports	Relatively easy for expert to design	Highly dependent on willingness of participant to give the time	Lengthy if lots of content Analysis may already be available	Varies but should be detailed and in own words Highly personal	High flexibility	Respondent chooses to include or not include	Open within general guidelines	Augments primary data Reveal information not otherwise provided May generate lots of information with little context for evaluation

Table 4: General Guidelines on Time versus Value

Instrument	Setup Time	Administration Time	Analysis	Other Issues	Outputs
Survey	1–4 days	Variable with survey length (5 minutes to one hour per survey)	Variable depending on question design and automated analysis	Need database and/or statistical expertise	Lots of data Little measurable variation Numerical reports Generalizable in most cases
Interview	1/2 day	1.5 hours per interview	3 hours per interview plus synthesis	Need qualitative data experience	Reams of paper/tapes Individual stories Personal words and anecdotes Cannot quantify Draw generalizations only after multiple interviews
Focus Group	1/2 day	1.5 hours per focus group	3 hours per focus group plus synthesis	Need qualitative data experience	Reams of paper/tapes Individual stories and words Dynamic interactions within group Peer dialogue Cannot quantify Can highlight new questions Generalizable with sufficient replication
Observation	1/2 day	As long as it takes to observe	Can be very lengthy or very brief	Time to observe Access	Thin data Useful to back up other sources and provide additional insights
Documentation	Time to get access	Lengthy	Lengthy	Access	Richness depends on quality Complements narrative or numerical data Capitalize on existing information
Critical Incident or Journal	1–2 hours	Lots of individual time (not evaluator time)	Lengthy	Willingness of participants to give time and to respect the method or format	Rich stories, variable focus Not generalizable Promotes reflection Backs up other methods/insights

Student Impact

Why Assess the Impact of Service-Learning on Students?

The impetus for assessing the impact on students emerges from several constituencies. First, institutions of higher education are advocating for all courses to be rigorously assessed as institutions are constantly being held accountable for their graduates' level of preparedness upon entering the workforce. New programs and pedagogies such as service-learning must endure institutional examination to prove their value to the institution and their contribution toward student learning.

In addition to institutional demand for assessment, faculty members advocate for assessment in order to understand the impact of courses and pedagogies on student learning. Faculty who have a data-driven understanding of the impact of service-learning often utilize the data to continuously improve their teaching and the use of this pedagogy. Assessment also aids faculty who must demonstrate the rigor of this method of teaching among their colleagues.

Assessment provides a means for educators to respond to students' questions of "why?" they need to engage in this form of learning. Similar to the other constituents of service-learning, students seek to understand the effectiveness of service-learning as a component of their learning experience. As with the other constituents, the answer to these questions emerges from assessment data. Community members seek assessment data about students' learning and experiences in order to help them better understand how they contribute to the student learning activities. They may play an important role in evaluating the work of the students, and in understanding student development in terms of knowledge of community factors and social responsibility. Finally, service-learning practitioners advocate for assessment of impact in order to document the advantages and challenges of this work. Practitioners also utilize assessment data to document the innovative techniques faculty and students of various disciplinary backgrounds employ to achieve their student learning outcomes. Dissemination of these assessment results helps practitioners to improve the quality of student learning and contributes to the growth of the field of service-learning.

The need for and importance of increased assessment of service-learning was evidenced in 1991 when forty educational leaders were convened by the (then-named) National Society for Internships and Experiential Education at a Wingspread conference. Those involved in these initial discussions noted the growing number of students engaged in service each year (Giles et al., 1991). They identified lack of documentation of the students' experiences in service-learning courses. They found a paucity of data on the impact that this educational pedagogy had on students, and suggested that this was a national problem. These experts in the field felt that it was imperative to study specific areas of potential impact on students, including the following:

- What knowledge do students gain from participating in service-learning?
- Does service-learning affect students' perception of self and others?
- Does service-learning promote pro-social attitudes and behaviors?
- Does service-learning influence the development of effective citizens?
- How do factors of age, socioeconomic status, developmental stage, and background of students affect the outcomes of service-learning?

Conference participants encouraged colleagues across the nation to join with practitioners and students to conduct research in this field and to disseminate the findings. Since the Wingspread conference the urgency and importance of student assessment has increased as institutions of higher education place an increasing number of students in the community and sometimes do so without fully understanding the impact that this pedagogy has on student learning. To ensure quality of service and the best possible outcomes for learning, student service-learning experiences must be assessed systematically.

Understanding the Impact of Service-Learning on Students

Since the 1991 Wingspread conference, researchers have worked to document the impact service-learning has on students (Alt & Medrich, 1994; Anderson, 1998; Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, Giles & Gray, 1999; Gray, Ondaatje, et al., 1999). In Assessment for Excellence (1993), Astin presented a useful taxonomy that reflects the different types of college student outcomes assessed and the different forms of data collected. Student outcomes are described as either cognitive or affective. Examples of cognitive outcomes include theoretical knowledge and critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. Affective outcomes include changes in attitudes toward community issues, populations served, community service, and personal values. The type of data collected is described as either psychological or behavioral. Psychological data refers to the internal state of the student, and behavioral data refers to the "student's observable activities" (p. 44). Finally, the time dimension of the study can focus on short-term (during college) or long-term (beyond college) time frames.

Most of the service-learning research to date has collected psychological data about student outcomes. Many of the studies measure a change either in students' attitudes towards others (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Myers-Lipton, 1996; Battistoni, 1997) or towards service itself (Buchanan, 1997; Gilbert, Holdt and Christophersen, 1998; Astin & Sax, 1998, Astin et. al., 2000). It is rare to find studies collecting data based on observable student actions. Battistoni's (1997) study included observations of student behaviors in the classroom, where principles of democracy were modeled. In addition, some studies ask students to report on their own behaviors. Astin and Sax (1998), Sax and Astin (1996), and Astin et al. (2000) include students' responses regarding their behavior while volunteering. While many of the studies are considered affective in nature (asking students to report on their attitudes), there is a growing body of literature focused on cognitive outcomes including critical thinking and decision-making skills (Wechsler & Fogel, 1995; Berson, 1998; Battistoni, 1997; Gilbert et al., 1998; Batchelder & Root, 1999).

Another methodological issue raised by Astin (1993) was the time dimension involved in each study. Most of the studies could be categorized as assessing short-term outcomes, or outcomes measured while the student is still in college. The study reported by Sax and Astin (1996) is the only one to collect data over time from students after graduation. Even within the short-term studies, researchers assessed students over different lengths of time. Jordan (1994) collected data from students engaged in a six-week service-learning experience and found suggestions that longer experiences may prove more productive. Substantial findings from Myers-Lipton (1996) and Astin et al. (2000) provide a rationale for studying the longer-term effects of service-learning on students.

These researchers have responded to the National Society for Experiential Education's call for research on service-learning (Giles et al., 1991). The Wingspread conference framed primary questions revolving around the issue of the impact this form of teaching and learning has on students. Since that time, researchers, practitioners, and doctoral students have attempted to bridge the gaps in the literature. The authors of this monograph have defined potential variables to be studied and suggested a mix of methods (Driscoll, Gelmon, et al., 1998). Others have used purely qualitative methods to study the students in their own service-learning courses (Battistoni, 1997; Gilbert et al., 1998). Universities such as the University of Utah (Buchanan, 1997) have gathered institution-wide data on the impact of service, while additional researchers have used larger national samples to gather quantitative data (Sax & Astin, 1996; Astin & Sax, 1998) on the effects of service.

In the special issue of the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* on strategic directions for service-learning research, Eyler (2000) notes that most of the research of the past decade gives us adequate evidence of the impact service-learning has on student's personal and social development, yet there is little evidence of the cognitive impact this pedagogy has on student learning. The Portland State approach has provided the field with a set of research concepts and measurement strategies to mitigate this gap in the research (Driscoll, Holland, et al., 1996). The comprehensive set of techniques set forth in this monograph can be useful in assisting researchers with understanding and documenting student cognitive development documentation, as well as personal and social development.

Our assessment project began as a means to learn about and document the impact service-learning was having on students. To do this, we chose to employ a variety of different data gathering methods with the intent of determining the nature and variety of information each of the tools would uncover about the impact on students. As a result of testing various measurement methods, we now understand which strategies are most likely to aid us in documenting intellectual outcomes, problem-solving skills, and level of commitment among those students involved in service-learning.

Assessment Matrix for Students

In the initial phase of our work at PSU we chose not to limit our investigation of possible areas of impact by having only one broad hypothesis. This was an exploratory study, and was comprehensive in its approach. Therefore, one of our original hypotheses was that service-learning would have an impact on students. We looked to the literature and early institutional observations to guide us in defining key concepts (variables) that would help us to understand the impact on students. The concepts are listed in Table 5. This list of concepts serves as the framework for defining focus and specific measurement for the assessment of the impact on students involved in service-learning. Once this list of concepts was identified, we identified measurable indicators for each concept that would demonstrate the presence (or absence) of the concept. Multiple indicators are needed for each concept in order to tease out the various ways in which students may experience a particular concept.

One of the challenges in developing a process to assess the impact of service-learning on students is the lack of proven effective methods available to evaluate this form of learning. Eyler and Giles (1994) claim that the lack of assessment instruments is due to the fact that the purpose of service-learning is not always delineated which results in ambiguous student variables, indicators, and outcomes. Universities define their service-learning programs with very different goals. Some are curricular based while others are strictly co-curricular. Some are concerned with social justice and citizenship development, while others are focused on using service-learning as a pedagogy directed to disciplinary course content. This diversity of programmatic goals makes the uniform assessment of service-learning outcomes very difficult if not impossible. As a result, educators have produced very few instruments that measure the impact that service has on students.

The authors of this monograph were faced with the challenge of assessing the impact service-learning was having on faculty, students, community partners, and the institutional culture. More specifically, we wanted to measure the impact of curricular based service-learning that is focused on enhancing classroom learning. Therefore, we developed a set of variables that described the impact on students and relevant indicators to measure this impact on students involved in service-learning projects connected to course content.

Awareness of Community, Involvement in Community, Commitment to Service, and Sensitivity to Diversity are all concepts that measure impact on students' psychological change. These psychological changes are indicated by students' increased knowledge of community issues and strengths, increased understanding of the role they play in addressing community concerns, and an increased sensitivity to working with communities that they have not previously been a part of. Although extremely important impact variables, these are all what Astin (1993) would call an affective student outcome.

- AWARENESS OF COMMUNITY seeks to determine if students had or developed a heightened awareness and understanding of community issues, needs, strengths, problems and resources.

- INVOLVEMENT WITH COMMUNITY describes the quality and quantity of interactions with the community, their positive or negative attitude about working with the community partner, a desire or importance of getting feedback from their community partner, and or a recognition about the benefits they gain and the community partner gain through their relationship.

- **COMMITMENT TO SERVICE** is measured by looking at students' attitudes toward their current service and their plans or barriers for future service.

- **SENSITIVITY TO DIVERSITY** is measured by students' expressed attitudes about working with communities with which they were not familiar, an increased comfort and confidence working within these communities, and a recognition that they gained knowledge of a new community.

Concepts such as *career development, understanding of course content,* and *communication* serve as measures of impact on students' cognitive development. As Eyler (2000) points out, it is extremely important to measure the impact on students' cognitive development because this is at the heart of most college and university missions. These concepts are indicated by students' ability to utilize the service-learning experience to influence their career decisions or give them the opportunity to develop skills that relate to those they will need in their intended career. Because the Portland State service-learning program is one that is primarily curricular-based, a particularly important concept to the Portland State research team was *understanding of course content.* This concept is indicated by students' ability to apply what they are learning in the class to their community setting and their ability to understand how the service experience is relevant to the topic and learning goals of the class. One of the indicators for the *communication* variable is students' increased skill development with the multiple communication demands of working within community settings. When students were able to demonstrate impact on any of these three concepts, clear cognitive change and growth could be documented.

- **CAREER DEVELOPMENT** is measured in terms of the development of professional skills and increased student awareness of the skills needed for a person working in the field in which they were doing their service project. This variable is also measured by students' increased knowledge about their career of interest (both positive and negative), as well as their understanding of the professional directions they might pursue.

- **UNDERSTANDING OF COURSE CONTENT** is measured by students' ability to make clear connections between the course goals and community based project.

- **COMMUNICATION** is measured by students' recognition that they may have gained new communication skills as well as the importance communication plays in the complex relationships presenting in these community based learning experiences.

Self-awareness, sense of ownership, and *valuing of multiple teachers* are concepts that measure students' understanding of themselves as part of a learning community, and the skills and perspectives they themselves and their colleagues contribute to the community project and the class. The *self-awareness* concept identifies when students recognize their own contributions, strengths and limitations regarding the community project in which they are engaged, as well as when they acknowledge that they have rethought and possibly modified previously held beliefs. *Sense of ownership* measures students' recognition of themselves as contributors to a community of learners. Students may come to recognize that the community partner is a valuable source of knowledge, and that the partner looks to the students to contribute a high quality, valuable product at the conclusion of the course.

Valuing of multiple teachers addresses the fact that service-learning courses offer a different teaching modality than traditional classrooms, and students may recognize that student colleagues, community partners and their faculty play different and important roles in their learning in these experiences.

- **SELF AWARENESS** is measured by students' recognition and awareness of their own personal strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the completion of the course and their engagement in the community. This variable is also measured by the indication that a student changes his or her previously held beliefs due to his or her engagement in the community.

- **SENSE OF OWNERSHIP** is measured by students' expressed autonomy and independence from the faculty member. The student's ability to see his or her community partner as a source of knowledge and that student's increased investment in the class by taking responsibility to provide the community partner with high quality outcomes are all indicators of this variable.

- **VALUING OF MULTIPLE TEACHERS** is measured by students' descriptions of the changing roles among faculty, students, and community partners, as well as students' recognition that student peers and community partners may at times shift into teaching roles, while the faculty may occupy the role of learner.

Strategies for Assessing Impact on Students

We articulated and designed measurement strategies most likely to gather useful and relevant data. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were necessary to learn about the different types of learning that was taking place. Creswell (1994) has advocated using an approach that incorporates multiple methods. Our approach to assessing service-learning has shown that combining methods proved to be useful as a strategy for enhancing validity of findings. We were able to triangulate the data by confirming findings from the student interview transcripts with observations in the classroom and the student survey. In addition, we were able to complement the data found in the surveys regarding students' perceptions about the impact of service-learning on future participation in the community with interviews from students. The interviews allowed students to describe various aspects of the data gathered in the survey in more depth. This was especially helpful when the information was personal, such as students becoming more aware of their own biases and prejudice. The interview quotes from the students made the statistical data more rich and descriptive of how these experiences affect students. In this process, researchers used the qualitative and quantitative approaches to expand the study to be inclusive of new concepts which students may have discovered through their service-learning experiences.

In addition to these stated purposes, the use of multiple data gathering methods allowed the Portland State research team to understand which of the methods would most likely provide useful and relevant data on the various concepts. With the less quantifiable psychological concepts, interviews and focus groups were methods by which students would explore perceptions of personal growth as it related to the service-learning course. Classroom observations, community observations, and surveys have the potential to capture the impact the service-learning experience had on students' cognitive skill development. As is the case with all of the data collected, in-person observations and individual and group interviews provide the researchers with the specific indicators of impact on students' cognitive growth that a survey may not capture. Given the chance to discuss and reflect on their skill development resulting from their involvement in the community, students provide a number of varied and specific examples.

Surveys

ADVANTAGES OF SURVEYS: One of the greatest advantages to utilizing surveys as an assessment tool is the ease of analysis. Most institutions of higher education have an office of institutional research, or qualified faculty and staff trained to enter and analyze statistical data. This allows for the analysis of a wide range of courses, and also detailed analysis of data for specific research questions.

Surveys developed from this research are now used to collect data from more than 3,000 students per year at Portland State University. We are able to make substantive observations about the quality of service-learning courses, students' attitudes toward this pedagogy, students' perceptions of their learning, and their growth in each of the student concepts. We are also able to compare the impact that these courses have on students throughout the various levels of their education. For example, does participation in service-learning courses during the first year influence students in a different way than these types of courses in their senior year? Surveys also give us the ability to compare various forms of service-learning. Are students who engage in courses which contain direct contact with the community partner affected differently from those who do not come in direct contact with the community partner (perhaps by doing some form of indirect research project)? Finally, the surveys allow institutions to compare various populations, addressing such questions as: are non-traditional students affected in similar or different ways from traditional college age students? Do men and women respond differently to these courses? Surveys provide institutions the opportunity to analyze data from a large population and understand the impact of service-learning on the different types of students engaged in service.

LIMITATIONS OF SURVEYS: There are a few limitations to this method of data collection. First, the limitation of using the survey method alone is that it limits the amount of "student voice" in the assessment. Students are not given the opportunity to share their success, their personal struggles, or their own learning. Second, surveys frequently do not capture personal struggles and challenges faced in their community setting. Students often respond affirmatively to many of the questions, but when interviewed more fully describe an experience that often includes satisfactory and unsatisfactory encounters. Third, surveys do not allow students to describe the multiple factors that contribute to their evaluation of their learning experience. Fourth, surveys given too close to the end of a short-term service-learning experience may not fully capture the various impacts or changes in students' self-awareness. Therefore, we suggest using a blend of interviews and focus groups to add in depth understanding of the student experience.

Interviews

ADVANTAGES OF INTERVIEWS: One advantage of the interview method is that it provides data regarding the context in which the student experience is taking place. For example students discuss how the community participation takes place in the context of their busy lives sometimes involving juggling multiple jobs and family responsibilities. In addition, interviews promote reflection—the hallmark of service-learning—and provide in-depth accounts of transformational events in the students' learning. Frequently these events take place as students encounter issues of race, class, gender, and difference in their communities. Interviews allow researchers to gain insights into the interactions that take place in these courses, the process of engaging with the community through the voices of students. Finally, the interview method provides solid and specific recommendations for improving the quality of service-learning courses. For example, the student interview protocol included in this monograph specifically introduces the notion of students' perceptions regarding their level of preparedness for the service experience they encountered. This information assisted administrators and faculty in planning ways to better prepare students for this type of work in the community. For example, as a result of data gathered through this method, administrators were able to identify the need for increased diversity training for students as they enter increasingly more ethnically and economically diverse communities.

LIMITATIONS OF INTERVIEWS: The primary limitation associated with the interview method is the labor-intensive task of analysis. Researchers can become bogged down in hundreds of pages of interview transcriptions and be faced with insufficient time, resources, and qualified staff to analyze the data. Institutions committed to learning about the student experience in service-learning courses need to allocate the proper level of resources to transcribe, analyze and write up the findings from the data. Designing interview protocols to focus on specific research variables and indicators provides a natural plan for analysis, and helps overcome this potential limitation.

Focus Groups

ADVANTAGES OF FOCUS GROUPS: One major advantage of using focus groups is that they provide an opportunity for groups of students to reflect upon lessons learned in their experience and share this learning with others. Students gain new insights from hearing their peers share significant insights and struggles, and build connections between various ideas expressed by other students. Focus groups also allow researchers to capture student voices. As with student interview data, focus groups capture students' individualized experiences in the community. The researcher is able to ask probing questions that capture how the service-learning experience affected the student's learning. In addition, focus groups serve as a powerful way to reaffirm the learning that has taken place and to document the progress that has been accomplished in the course. They also serve as a means in which students can directly offer suggestions for improvement of the quality of the service-learning courses. Here, students are given the opportunity to demonstrate critical thinking skills as they offer constructive criticism and conceptualize programmatic improvements.

LIMITATIONS OF FOCUS GROUPS: There are a few disadvantages with the use of focus group data collection. 1) Focus groups require that students convene in one location, at a specified time, for a defined period. These logistical requirements can be difficult to organize since it is likely students will only be able to convene during the scheduled meeting time. Because of limited class time, giving up a class session to facilitate a focus group is not always possible. 2) Audio recording best captures focus group data. Having effective audio equipment that will uniformly capture the many voices of those participating in the focus group is an important, but often difficult technical challenge. 3) Like student interview data, analysis of focus group data can be a labor-intensive task that can easily burden researchers with many pages of transcriptions. 4) In classes where students do not have adequate time to reflect on their experience in the community, and do not have ample opportunity to discuss their community experience as it relates to the course content, focus groups provide an environment for students to discuss the logistical challenges of working in community-based settings. In a group setting like that of a focus group, once students begin discussing the logistical barriers to working in community settings turning the discussion to deeper analysis of learning can be very difficult.

Concluding Thoughts

We have learned that collecting data through all of these methods allowed us to truly understand the dynamics of these complex courses. It gave us the means to triangulate data and to develop a solid sense of the impact on students (as well as on faculty, community partners, and the institution, as will be discussed in the subsequent sections). We are now able to utilize end-of-course surveys as a single proxy measure to understand impact when resources do not permit using other more labor-intensive methods (such as interviews and focus groups), and have developed the language to describe and effectively analyze the data from surveys.

Table 5: Matrix for Student Assessment

What do we want to know? (concepts)	How will we know it? (indicators)	How will we measure it? (methods)	Who/what will provide the data? (sources)
Awareness of community	Knowledge of community issues Ability to identify community assets and needs Understanding of community strengths, problems, resources	Interviews Focus groups Classroom observations	Students Faculty Community partners
Involvement with community	Quantity/quality of interactions Attitude toward involvement Interdependence among community partners and students Feedback from community	Interviews Focus groups Classroom observations Community observations	Students Faculty Community partners
Commitment to service	Attitude toward current service experience(s) Plans for, and barriers to, future service Reaction to demands/challenges of the service	Interviews Focus groups Surveys	Students Faculty Community partners
Career development	Career decisions/opportunities Development of professional skills related to career Opportunities for career preparation related to service experience	Surveys Interviews Focus groups	Students Faculty Community partners
Self-awareness	Awareness of personal strengths, limits, goals and fears Changes in preconceived understandings/ability to articulate beliefs	Interviews Surveys Classroom observations	Students Faculty Community partners
Understanding of course content	Role of community experience in understanding and applying content Perceived relevance of community experience to course content	Interviews Surveys Classroom observations	Students Faculty Community partners
Sensitivity to diversity	Attitudes about and understanding of diversity Knowledge of new communities Self-confidence and comfort in community settings	Interviews Surveys Community observations	Students Faculty Community partners
Sense of ownership	Autonomy and independence from faculty Sense of role as learner and provider in partnership Responsibility for community project	Focus groups Classroom observations Interviews	Students Faculty Community partners
Communication	Perceived skill development Recognition of importance of communication Demonstrated abilities (verbal and written)	Interviews Classroom observations Community observations	Students Faculty Community partners
Valuing of pedagogy of multiple teachers	Role of student peers in learning Perception and role of community partners in learning Role of faculty in learning	Focus groups Classroom observations Community observations	Students Faculty Community partners

Strategies and Methods: Students

Student Survey

Purpose

The student survey is intended to describe students' perspectives and attitudes on issues related to their experience in a service-learning course. The survey is based on a five point Likert scale where students report their level of agreement regarding their service-learning experience. The scale range includes "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neutral," "agree," and "strongly agree." Topics assessed through the survey include students' views or attitudes about service, the impact of the service on their choice of major/career and their understanding of the course material, their views on diversity issues, their perception of self-awareness, and the role other student colleagues and their community partner have in their learning. In addition, the survey provides demographic data, which profiles students' racial background, age, gender, class level, and employment.

The survey instrument is useful in describing students' perspectives and demographics that exist within one course and across courses in a university. With this standardized survey format, institutions are able to administer this survey to all service-learning courses. The data collected can be used by an individual faculty member to understand his or her student's perception about the impact that service-learning has on them. The data can also be collated to provide information that describes and measures the impact of service-learning institution-wide. Institutionally, surveys are one of the most efficient ways to collect information from a large number of students. Therefore, it is the one means that allows institutions to make claims about broad representation from the student body. This is useful for universities with diverse populations, especially those with a non-traditional student body. By utilizing this survey, faculty members and administrators will gain a profile of the student body they are serving.

Note that two survey instruments are included. One is a longer survey that was used initially in our work. Following the pilot testing, the survey was streamlined for administration and analysis through our institutional research office, and this scan-ready version is the second survey presented.

Preparation

In preparation for using this instrument the following steps are recommended.

1. Faculty should determine if they are going to use this survey to assess change in students' perceptions and attitudes before and after the course, or if they are going to use the survey only to assess the general attitudes of the students after they have taken the course. The survey is meant to compliment other data-gathering strategies to develop a clearer picture of the students' perspectives and attitudes toward this form of learning.

2. Faculty should determine the most appropriate time to administer the survey. Pre-tests should be given in the first week of the academic term and post-tests in the last week.

3. Informed consent procedures should be initiated and completed prior to survey administration.

Administration

1. Faculty should stress the importance of the instrument so the students take the time to respond to the survey with honesty and integrity.
2. Faculty and the researchers should also assure students that their response will not negatively or positively affect the faculty or community partner, or the students' grades.
3. Student confidentiality should be assured and maintained throughout the collection of data.
4. The survey should be handed out to students during a scheduled class time.
5. Students should be given 15–20 minutes to complete the form.
6. Forms should be collected before students leave the classroom.
7. Results should immediately be shared with the participating faculty member.

Analysis

Data analysis can be conducted through utilization of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. In the case of assessing and comparing pre- and post-service-learning experiences, the analysis could include frequencies and other descriptive statistics, Chi-squares, ANOVA, and factor analysis. Descriptive statistics can serve as a database, providing mean, mode, and standard deviation between items. Second, Chi-squares correlate demographic data between student groups. Third, Factor Analysis reduces items into categories that are closely related. Finally, Analyses of Variance or ANOVA's are useful to explore the existence of variation within and between groups on either single items or groups of items that may arise from the factor analysis. The descriptive data that provide a rich profile of the sample both in terms of demographics and responses to individual items are particularly useful.

The survey may be used in a pre/post format to measure change in the individual student. However, there are a few difficulties with the use of the pre/post surveys. First, it is difficult to measure significant change within a 10-week (quarter system) or 15-week (semester system) course. Few students will demonstrate dramatic changes in the concepts being assessed in one quarter or semester. Changes in attitudes about diversity, students' role as learners, and successful community development skills frequently take a full academic year to show significant movement. In addition to the short time frame, surveys have limited success in capturing individualized and personal student learning. Classroom observations, focus groups, and/or interviews with individual students may reveal significant change in student perceptions about their understanding of course content, awareness of their own personal development and strengths, and their choice of major/career. The pre/post survey does not reflect this change. As noted earlier, the survey data is most useful in collecting descriptive data from students.

Community-Based Learning—Student Survey (longer version)

We would like to better understand the impact that community-based learning has on students. We particularly want to know how this experience has influenced your perspective on learning, your view of service, your choice of major/career, and your perspective of working in a diverse community.

I. First, we would like to know some information about you.

1. What is your racial background?

   ❑ Caucasian/White ❑ African American ❑ Asian/Asian American
   ❑ Hispanic ❑ Native American ❑ Other

2. What is your age group?

   ❑ Under 25 ❑ 25–34 ❑ 35–44 ❑ 45–54 ❑ Over 55

3. What is your gender? ❑ Male ❑ Female

4. What is your class level? ❑ Freshman ❑ Sophomore ❑ Junior ❑ Senior ❑ Graduate Student ❑ Other

5. I have a job that requires me to work… ❑ 1–10 hrs/wk ❑ 11–20 hrs/wk ❑ 21–30 hrs/wk ❑ 31–40 hrs/wk ❑ 41+ hrs/wk ❑ I do not have a job.

6. Name of the community-based learning course you enrolled in:____________________

7. The course number:______________________________________

8. Name of community partner/agency you worked with:____________________

II. Next, we would like to gain your perspective about this community-based learning course.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. The community participation aspect of this course helped me to see how the subject matter I learned can be used in everyday life.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
10. The community work I did through this course helped me to better understand the lectures and readings in this course.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
11. I feel I would have learned more from this course if more time was spent in the classroom instead of doing community work.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
12. The idea of combining work in the community with university coursework should be practiced in more classes at this university.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
13. I was responsible for the quantity and the quality of knowledge that I obtained from this course.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

III. The next set of questions relates to your attitude toward community involvement.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
14. I was already volunteering in my community before taking this course.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
15. The community participation aspect of this course showed me how I can become more involved in my community.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
16. I feel that the community work I did through this course benefited the community.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
17. I probably won't volunteer or participate in the community after this course.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
18. The community work involved in this course helped me to become more aware of the needs in my community.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
19. I have a responsibility to serve my community.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

IV. Next, we would like to know the influence of your service on your choice of major and profession.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
20. Doing work in the community helped me to define my personal strengths and weaknesses.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
21. Performing work in the community helped me clarify which major I will pursue.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
22. The community work in this course assisted me in defining which profession I want to enter.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
23. The work I accomplished in this course has made me more marketable in my chosen profession when I graduate.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

V. Finally, we would like some of your personal reflections on this experience.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
24. Most people can make a difference in their community.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
25. I developed a good relationship with the instructor of this course because of the community work we performed.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
26. I was comfortable working with cultures other than my own.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
27. The community work involved in this course made me aware of some of my own biases and prejudices.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
28. The work I performed in this course helped me learn how to plan and complete a project.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
29. Participating in the community helped me enhance my leadership skills.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
30. The work I performed in the community enhanced my ability to communicate my ideas in a real world context.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
31. I can make a difference in my community.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Finally, please add any other comments you have about courses where learning takes place in a community setting. (Please use the back of this piece of paper or attach an additional sheet of paper.)

Thank you for your insights regarding community-based learning!

Community-Based Learning—Student Survey (streamlined version)

We would like to better understand the impact that community-based learning has on students. We particularly want to know how this experience has influenced your perspective on learning, your view of service, your choice of career, and your perspectives on working with diverse communities. Please take 5–10 minutes to complete this survey, and return it before you leave class today.

I. First we would like some information about you.

1. What is your ethnic background?

   ❑ Caucasian/White ❑ African American ❑ Asian/Asian American
   ❑ Hispanic ❑ Native American ❑ Other

2. What is your age group?

   ❑ Under 25 ❑ 25–34 ❑ 35–44 ❑ 45–54 ❑ Over 55

3. What is your gender? ❑ Male ❑ Female

4. What is your class level? ❑ Freshman ❑ Sophomore ❑ Junior ❑ Senior ❑ Graduate Student ❑ Other

5. I have a job that requires me to work… ❑ 1–10 hrs/wk ❑ 11–20 hrs/wk ❑ 21–30 hrs/wk ❑ 31–40 hrs/wk ❑41+ hrs/wk ❑ I do not have a job.

6. Name of the agency/community organization with which you worked during this class: __________

II. Next we would like to gain your perspective about this course. Please mark your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7. The community participation aspect of this course helped me to see how the subject matter I learned can be used in everyday life.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
8. The community work I did helped me to better understand the lectures and readings in this course.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
9. The idea of combining work in the community with university course work should be practiced in more courses at this university.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

III. The next set of questions relates to your attitude toward community involvement. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10. I was already volunteering in the community before taking this course.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
11. I feel that the community work I did through this course benefited the community.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12. I was able to work directly with a community partner through this course.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
13. I felt a personal responsibility to meet the needs of the community partner of this course.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
14. I probably won't volunteer or participate in the community after this course.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
15. My interactions with the community partner enhanced my learning in this course.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

IV. Next we would like to know about the influence of your service on your choice of major and profession. *Please indicate your level of agreement with each of these statements.*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
16. Doing work in the community helped me to become aware of my personal strengths and weaknesses.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
17. The community work in this course assisted me in clarifying my career plans.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
18. The community work I performed in this class enhanced my relationship with the faculty member.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
19. The community work involved in this course made me more aware of my own biases and prejudices.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
20. The work I performed in the community enhanced my ability to communicate in a "real world" setting.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
21. The community aspect of this course helped me to develop my problem-solving skills.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

V. Finally, we would like some of your personal reflections on this experience.

22. The syllabus provided for this course outlined the objectives of the community work in relation to the course objectives.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
23. The other students in this class played an important role in my learning.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
24. I had the opportunity in this course to periodically discuss my community work and its relationship to the course content.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Thank you for your comments. Please return the completed form to [personalize information].

Student Interviews

Purpose

Student interviews are intended to foster a one-on-one conversation with students to explore their experiences of working with the community in connection with an academic course. Interviews capture students' voices as they describe their experience of the service-learning course. This assessment method provides a deeper understanding of the nature of students' daily experiences in service-learning courses. Students state their own perception of the situations that they encountered and the meaning of these events in their lives.

The interview approach can be used to assess a wide range of effects of service-learning. Specifically, the interview protocol provided in this handbook is designed to gather data from students about the nature of their service-learning involvement, the student's role in these courses, their understanding about linkages between course content and the community, and the challenges of engaging in service-learning courses. Furthermore, it probes students' fears and concerns related to participation in the community, and assesses the self-awareness that emerges as a result of the experience.

Preparation

Faculty should be asked to provide a class roster so the researcher may select a set of students to interview. If the students are doing different projects, faculty should be asked to help to identify students who are engaged in a range of varying projects. Informed consent procedures should be initiated and completing prior to beginning to arrange interviews. Schedule interviews with students who represent the diversity of community experience and background that make up the class. Begin contacting students and schedule a 1-hour interview with each in a location and at a time that is convenient to the student. In advance, describe the purpose of the interview so that the student may be prepared for the interview.

Administration

The administration of interviews should be consistent across all interview subjects. The following guidelines will be useful for conducting interviews:

- Begin on time, introduce yourself and your role in the project, and explain the purposes of the interview
- Assure confidentiality and stress the importance of candor
- Assure the student that their faculty member or community partner will not be affected (negatively or positively) by their remarks.
- Take notes or ask permission to tape record (assure the student that names will not appear on transcriptions)
- Follow the interview protocol carefully and keep probes neutral

If in the course of the interview you sense there are difficulties and challenges, encourage the student to discuss them by moving question 9 to the beginning of the interview.

Analysis

Data analysis begins with transcription of interview tapes immediately after the interview. These transcriptions should be double-spaced for reading ease. An initial reading of the transcripts by several people will allow the analysis team to come up with a list of key words and themes that appear in the text, each of which may be coded with their own individual color or symbol. The key words and themes are compared and matched to the research variables. The research team should then read each of the transcribed interviews again to code each interview according to the agreed upon list of key words and themes. It is helpful to have multiple people independently reading, analyzing, and coding the interview data, so that these separate sources can be compared for consistency and accuracy. Once the data is coded, the individual interviews can be combined into research variable categories. This provides the researcher with a group of student quotes for each of the research variables. This data can be used to assess the level to which students have been affected according to each of the research variables.

Data analysis may also be completed by utilizing a qualitative data analysis package such as Ethnograph. Analysis may also be done by coding the interview data and categorizing transcribed text according to the set of research variables.

Student Interview Protocol

(Provide introduction to set context.)

1. Describe the work you did in the community for this community-based learning course.
2. Describe your relationship with the community partner and the project.
3. What did you learn about the community through this experience? What did you learn in the community that connected to the content of this course? How was that connection made?
4. Did you have any fears or concerns about working in the community as part of this class? What were those concerns?
5. Do you think you will do anything differently as a result of your experience in this course? (Probe: volunteering, career choices, activism/advocacy, etc.?) Has this created any new opportunities for you?
6. What did you learn about yourself as a result of your experiences in this community-based course? (Probe: Did you become aware of biases or fears? What did this teach you about your interaction with people different than yourself?)
7. In your community-based leaming course did you learn from anyone other than your faculty instructor? (Probe for: community partner, peers, other examples.)
8. Did you feel prepared to perform the work required of you? If not, what would have made you feel more prepared?
9. What did you find most challenging in your community service experience?
10. What did you find the most rewarding in your community service experience?
11. What would you change about this community-based course?

Student Focus Groups

Purpose

"Focus groups are fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them" (Morgan, 1998, p. 9). Focus groups can be used to stimulate an interactive discussion about service-learning experiences among students in a particular course. Data can be gathered regarding several student variables by discovering patterns of students' experiences. Students are queried through the focus group to learn how they define a successful service-learning experience and to gain insights about student interactions and relationships with community partners. The focus group should be structured with the intent of listening to suggestions for improvement in organizing and supporting students throughout their service-learning courses.

Students in focus groups will be able to provide feedback on various concepts by informing the researcher if certain variables were influenced through this experience. Secondly, data gathered from focus groups can improve planning for a service-learning program. Through focus groups, students can inform faculty and administrators about pitfalls in logistics, scheduling, and transportation necessary for effective planning in service programs. Thirdly, students can give feedback about the implementation of the course. Frequently students compare how this course was taught in relation to previous courses. They are able to discuss the different types of learning that took place. Finally, Morgan (1998) states that focus groups are effective for the purpose of final assessment, where data is used for quality improvement and students provide insights about "how and why" certain outcomes were achieved in the course. Students are able to utilize the focus group time to share with one another their final assessment of their service experience, and reflect on their varying community experiences and related learning outcomes with the researchers and their student colleagues.

Preparation

Arrange with the course professor early in the quarter/semester for a one-hour session near the end of the term to conduct the focus group. The focus group should be scheduled during the usual class time and should take place after students have completed any final projects, papers, or tests to minimize distraction or frustration. Focus groups should be facilitated by independent researchers or experts. The faculty member should not be present.

Arrange for a quality tape recorder, preferably one with multiple omni-directional microphones. One facilitator will be needed for each 8–12 students. If the course is large, it may be necessary to divide the group, obtain a second room, get a second facilitator, and conduct two simultaneous focus groups. Each focus group should have a note-taker to accompany the facilitator. The note-taker should take responsibility for ensuring that the equipment is working continuously, turn the tape over when necessary, and take detailed notes about the conversation and non-verbal communication. In the event that the recording fails, the note-taker will be able to provide backup documentation of the focus group conversation.

Administration

The introductory message on the following page should be read to the students prior to beginning the focus group questions. Some specific guidelines include:

- Remind students of the introductory guidelines as needed.
- Begin and end on time.
- Introduce facilitators and note-takers.
- Arrange the group in a circular form.
- The facilitator guides the discussion and is not a participant.
- Make sure all probing questions are neutral.
- Ensure that all students participate, no one dominates, and no one holds back.
- Remind students of the guidelines throughout the focus group discussion as necessary.

For more information on the administration of focus groups, see the citations for the work of David Morgan (1993, 1997, 1998) in the reference list.

Analysis

Data analysis can be completed by utilizing a qualitative data analysis package such as Ethnograph or NUDIST (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Analysis may also be done by coding the focus group data by categorizing transcribed text according to the set of research variables.

Data analysis begins with transcription of interview tapes immediately after the interview. These transcriptions should be double-spaced for reading ease. An initial reading of the transcripts by several people will allow the analysis team to come up with a list of key words and themes that appear in the text, each of which may be coded with their own individual color or symbol. The key words and themes are compared and matched to the research variables. The research team should then read each of the transcribed focus group discussions again to code each according to the agreed upon list of key words and themes. It is helpful to have multiple people independently reading, analyzing, and coding the data, so that these separate sources can compare findings for consistency and accuracy. Once the data is coded, the individually coded focus group discussions can be combined into research variable categories. This provides the researcher with a group of student quotes for each of the key concepts. This data can be used to assess the extent to which students have been affected according to each of the concepts.

Student Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

Our goal for this focus group is to have an open and interactive discussion. Focus groups are a guided conversation in which everyone participates. We want to learn more about how you felt about your community-based leaming experience and will ask you a few questions that will focus on aspects of the experience and its affect on you as a learner. As facilitator, I will be asking questions to guide the discussion, but will not be participating or offering my own comments or reactions.

The purpose of the focus group is to hear everyone's ideas and impressions. Generally, in a focus group, hearing what others say may stimulate your own thinking and reflection on your experience. You do not need to repeat what others have said, but rather offer your own unique view or expand, clarify, or elaborate on what others have said. If you hear comments or ideas with which you disagree, do not hesitate to describe your perspective or contradictory view. A focus group, however, is not meant to resolve those differences or to press for consensus. The idea is to hear everyone's thoughts, not to reach agreement. There are no right or wrong answers. The purpose is to capture a wide array of comments, opinions, ideas, and suggestions.

This discussion will be tape-recorded. Your faculty instructor will not hear the recording. Only the person transcribing the tape will hear it. The summary reports or transcripts will not identify speakers so what you say will be kept confidential. To ensure a quality transcription, it will be helpful if you speak one person at a time, and try to speak clearly and with more volume than usual so your comments are captured on tape.

Questions

1. What were your own personal learning goals for this community-based learning experience? What were the learning goals of the class? (10 min.)
2. How would you assess your experience? Was it a success? Why? What factors contributed to the success? What obstacles did you encounter and how did you overcome them? (5 min.)
3. Describe your interactions with the community partner. What role did your community partner have in your learning? (10 min.)
4. What did you learn about the community or society in general from this experience? (10 min.)
5. Did this community experience leave you with new questions or concerns? (5 min.)
6. What connections can you describe between the community service work and the classroom discussions, required readings, assignments? Was there a good balance of course time and community activity? (10 min.)
7. What role did your instructor play in your community service work? (5 min.)

8. What recommendations do you have for future community-based learning courses? (5 min.)
9. Do you have any other comments you would like to share?

Thank participants.

Community Impact

Why Assess Impact on the Community?

Service-learning is impossible without community involvement. Effective and sustainable service-learning depends on mutually-beneficial partnerships between campus and community (Holland & Gelmon, 1998). Yet much assessment work, prior to our initial work at Portland State University, focused almost exclusively on assessment of impact on students. The goals of our assessment project included understanding multiple impacts and gathering information to improve service-learning. Thus, it was essential to assess community as a distinct constituency. But how does one define community? There is no one "community." In fact, early on in our work we asked faculty to define their perceptions of "who is the community" and we received a wide variety of answers. Developing an understanding of perceptions of community and what that means to students, faculty, and the institution, let alone the community partner, is therefore essential.

For our work we focused primarily on the community partner organization that participated in the service-learning experience for each individual course (recognizing that in some courses there were multiple community partners). Given the importance of the partner organization to the service-learning opportunity and experience, the focus of assessment was on impacts on their organization and their perception of the service-learning project. We looked to the partner organization to give us feedback regarding any impact on clients, not being so presumptuous as to try to make causal relationships between the work students did and changes in, for example, clients' health status, emotional well-being, job security, or housing stability. Clearly these indicators might be valuable information for the partner to have, but we did not feel they were relevant measures to focus on, given our goal of understanding the community-university collaboration and partnership that underlies service-learning programs.

Service-learning is intensive and demanding work for community partners. Most important to our assessment was to understand partner perceptions of the impact of service-learning on their operations so we could identify needed improvements and ensure reciprocity.

Understanding Assessment of Impact on Community

Talking about "community" implies that the community is a single entity, a unitary concept, and a definable organization. In fact, issues addressed by students through a community-based learning experience are part of a much larger system that includes residents, government, law enforcement, business, housing, schools, health and social services, and economic development (Scholtes, 1997). Individuals who work in, interact with, or produce materials for these various sectors bring different perspectives and varying views of the sources of problems and potential solutions (Knapp et al., 2000). Efforts to take all of these perspectives into account in trying to assess impact on community may be formidable, and might create overwhelming barriers to completion of assessment.

In a review of research on community as a key factor in service-learning, Cruz and Giles (2000) identify political, intellectual, and practical dimensions as obstacles to research on the community focus in the service-learning literature. The political concern relates to questions about academic rigor in studying the community; the intellectual focuses on an inability to define community and therefore to define appropriate methodologies to study it; and the practical addresses the lack of resources and knowledge to pursue this line of inquiry. They reach three conclusions about community and service-learning as supported by the literature:

- service-learning contributes to community development
- service-learning bridges town-gown gaps
- service-learning offers benefits to community partners

In addition to these conclusions, there is also the issue of community interests in student preparation. Partners see service-learning as a tool to attract students to civic service or to non-profit careers—or at least to help students become "citizen professionals." Understanding this interest of the community partners is another important element of assessing impact from a community perspective.

One of the challenges faced by universities when working with communities is that there is often a chasm between the (unrealized) expectations and (mis)understandings of the community partners and the services/resources the university can provide (Wealthall et al., 1998). A significant area of focus, therefore, for the university is to pay special attention to clarifying abilities and expectations, and to ensure that students and faculty work closely with community liaisons to develop genuine understandings of each other's context and perspectives, and the ability to respond to assets and needs. Inevitably, community need is far greater than the capacity of the campus service-learning effort (Gelmon, Holland, et al., 1998b). The assessment challenge lies in clarifying what is reasonable to expect and accomplish within the service-learning activity, determining to what extent this has been accomplished, and gaining understanding of the barriers and facilitators of these accomplishments. Thus the unit of analysis is the partnership relationship itself, as well as the partner organization's perceptions of impact.

Assessment of community involvement in service-learning raises issues about methodologies that have not been answered to date (Gelmon, 2000a). Is there a difference in assessing the impact on the community as compared to the impact on the community-university partnership? One must be able to define the community component relevant to the assessment, and then describe the elements of the partnership. One useful approach from which to build assessment of partnership relationships could be to rely upon the "Principles of Partnership" articulated by Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH). These principles are one of the few examples in the public domain today, and they work well for partnerships across the higher education spectrum, even though they were initially articulated in the context of health professions education (Seifer & Maurana, 2000). These principles are:

1. Partners have agreed upon mission, values, goals, and measurable outcomes for the partnership.
2. The relationship between partners is characterized by mutual trust, respect, genuineness, and commitment.
3. The partnership builds upon identified strengths and assets, but also addresses areas that need improvement.
4. The partnership balances the power among partners and enables resources among partners to be shared.
5. There is clear, open, and accessible communication between partners, making it an on-going priority to listen to each need, develop a common language, and validate/clarify the meaning of terms.
6. Roles, norms, and processes for the partnership are established with the input and agreement of all partners.
7. There is feedback to, among, and from all stakeholders in the partnership, with the goal of continuously improving the partnership and its outcomes.
8. Partners share the credit for the partnership's accomplishments.
9. Partnerships take time to develop and evolve over time.

A set of key factors for successful student/community partnership projects, identified through an educational collaborative addressing community health improvement (Knapp et al., 2000), offers another useful approach for thinking about assessment of community impact. The original factors, which focused specifically on health issues, have been edited to have broader relevance for a number of disciplines in higher education:

- All members of the partnership must understand the community issues and ensure there is relevant community data available prior to student involvement.
- Connect the institution and the community, so that faculty have knowledge of the community and the issues being addressed, and can facilitate the connections between the students and the community, and so that community representatives have knowledge of the academic institution and the issues being addressed in the service-learning activity.

- Jointly define target populations so that student projects focus on specific groups rather than the entire community.
- Members of the partnership understand the people to be served, and design and implement appropriate, client-sensitive approaches.
- Partners work together to identify appropriate, short-term projects that are doable in the time students have and contribute to the knowledge base of both the community organization and the students.
- The partnership members practice and model interdisciplinary teamwork, since community issues and actions are intrinsically interdisciplinary.

These factors clearly would contribute to design of service-learning experiences, but could also then form the basis for articulating the focus of the assessment. While the emphasis here is on understanding community impact, the focus of each factor shows the inter-relationship of student, faculty, and institutional perspectives with those of the community. These factors can in turn be linked to core concepts for understanding impact of service-learning on the community, and impact of the community on service-learning.

Another approach that includes attention to learning is offered by Holland (2000b). She offers the following characteristics of sustainable partnerships that could serve as a framework for assessment:

- joint exploration of separate and common goals and interests
- creation of a mutually rewarding shared agenda
- articulation of clear consequences for each partner
- success measured in both institutional and community terms
- shared control of partnership directions and/or resources
- effective use and enhancement of community capacity
- identification of opportunities for early success and regular celebration
- focus on knowledge exchange, shared two-way learning and capacity building
- attention to communication and open cultivation of trust
- commitment to continuous assessment of the partnership itself, as well as to outcomes

Assessment of community impact can also develop from theories and concepts of community development and community-building. In addition to adopting an "assets" rather than "needs" approach (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993), community-building frameworks may offer insights into leadership, knowledge, creativity, and problem-solving capacities (Keith, 1998). There is little, if any, documented assessment literature using such frameworks, suggesting an opportunity for service-learning educators to team up with their colleagues in community development to more explicitly articulate methods for this area of assessment.

Some examples of models of assessment of community impact exist in the literature. The assessment of the impact of service-learning in health professions education, through a national demonstration program known as Health Professions Schools in Service to the Nation, incorporated one research question addressing impact on community-university partnerships, and another question addressing impact on the partners themselves (Gelmon, Holland et al., 1998a and 1998b). Some foundations have reported assessments aimed at understanding the impact of social intervention programs on community change (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1999; Connell et al., 1995; Petersen, 1998). Early evidence about the use of a model being referred to as the "3-I Model" (initiator, initiative, impact) suggests potential assessment applications for understanding community change (Clarke, 2000).

Future work on assessment of community impact may be aided by the approach recommended by Cruz and Giles (2000). They suggest 1) using the community-university partnership as the unit of analysis (Seifer & Maurana, 2000); 2) giving serious attention to the principles of good practice for service-learning (Sigmon, 1979; Honnet & Poulsen, 1989) regarding community input, reciprocity, and partnership; 3) using action research (Harkavy, Puckett, & Romer, 2000); and 4) focusing on an assets-based approach (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). The assessment model presented here incorporates elements of all four strategies. It is unique in terms of the deference it gives to the community partners and the importance of their articulation and interpretation of any impact. Partnerships must be assessed as part of the overall assessment of the impact of service-learning.

Assessment Matrix for Community

An assessment matrix for understanding the community constituency is presented in Table 7. This matrix is based upon experiences in several programs and is presented as a synthesis of best practices based upon those evaluations (Driscoll et al., 1998; Shinnamon, Gelmon, & Holland, 1999; Gelmon, McBride, et al., 1999). The concepts (variables) are presented in two sections: those most applicable to the community partner organization itself, and those related to the community-university partnership.

In considering those concepts related to the community partner organization, individuals designing the assessment must be cautious to avoid identifying concepts that might be interpreted as part of a performance review of the organization. Such a review must not be the focus in assessing impact of service-learning, but there may be concepts that are appealing to the university participants but would be viewed as threatening or intrusive by the community partner. Thus, the three concepts presented focus explicitly on how the participation of the partner organization in the academic activity affects the partner. Based upon our experiences, there are three main areas on which to focus:

CAPACITY TO FULFILL ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION: The service-learning activity may affect the types of services offered, the number of clients served, and the variety of activities offered. The number of students who can be accommodated by the organization might also change, and have a relationship to capacity. Organizations that are primarily volunteer-driven are able to increase their organizational capacity significantly through service-learning partnerships. Finally, through its interaction with university representatives, the organization may gain insights into assets and needs (of itself, its clients, or the university) that may affect organizational capacity or program strategies.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS: Through the participation of faculty and students in the service-learning interaction, organizations may derive economic benefits or cost burdens in terms of resource utilization (human, fiscal, information, or physical resources). Sometimes organizations identify new staff (generally from among the student participants), and are spared the time and expense of a costly search process. The community-university collaboration may also facilitate identification of new funding opportunities for which the community organization may apply (with or without the participation of the university), thus again contributing to economic benefits. Another benefit is the completion of projects with the addition of new expertise that the organization might not normally have readily available (e.g., graphic design, diversity training, development of marketing materials). Such benefits are often one of the motivators for community organizations to partner with academic institutions.

SOCIAL BENEFITS: Through the collaboration with the university, the community organization may identify new connections or networks—sometimes with individuals, and sometimes with other community organizations (particularly if the university brings together multiple community partners in community advisory committees or through other cross-organization collaborations). Organizations also often report an increase in number of volunteers, when students continue their involvement after the academic project (and often bring their friends and families to the volunteer experience). There may also be an impact on community issues (such as neighborhood policing, improved lighting, lead abatement, accessible immunization clinics) as a result of the service-learning activity, again offering social benefit for the organization and its community. Assessment can help community partners to think about new and sometimes better ways to work with volunteers in general (not just students).

The second set of concepts relates to the community-university partnership itself. There are challenges to this aspect of assessment because of the somewhat intangible nature of partnerships, and the difficulties in defining what can be assessed. As a result, some of these concepts reflect documentable indicators, and others relate to the processes that support and contribute to the partnership.

NATURE OF COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY RELATIONSHIP (PARTNERSHIP): The core of this concept is a description of the process by which partnerships are established. This is illustrated by gaining the partners' perspectives on the kinds of activities conducted, and of the barriers and facilitators to both establishing the partnership and engaging in these activities. Investigation of the nature of partnerships can reveal important insights about mutual respect and common goals, and can highlight many of the components cited in the various principles/characteristics of partnerships (Seifer & Maurana, 2000; Knapp et al., 2000; Holland, 2000b).

NATURE OF COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY INTERACTION: A core element of partnerships is the nature and kind of interactions that take place—and ideally there are multiple interactions, rather than simply the act of students going to the partner organization and working on a specific activity. Interactions may be seen where community partners go to campus to participate (in classroom-based reflection sessions, or in program planning activities for example), and where campus representatives go to the community organization (to attend community advisory group meetings, to volunteer, or to participate in community activities). The partnership might also focus on very specific work, such as web design, multi-media presentation development, or brochure production. Communication is an essential element of the partnership, and attention should be given to the methods and patterns of communication. Finally, interactions can be understood through description of levels of awareness the partners have about each other's programs and activities.

SATISFACTION WITH PARTNERSHIP: Satisfaction is essential to the development, implementation, and maintenance of a partnership. The key elements here are the perceptions of mutuality of effort and reciprocity in activity (Gelmon, Holland, and Shinnamon, 1998). The assessment of this concept requires creation of a safe environment in which participants in the partnership can offer praise as well as express concerns without fear of reprisal. Cultural norms regarding expression of satisfaction must be taken into account when attempting to collect data on this concept. Another element of satisfaction can be assessed through understanding of responsiveness to concerns—again, responsiveness by all participants in the partnership. Assessments must be designed to take into account these multiple perspectives (and avoid falling into the trap of only considering the university's perspective). This concept offers considerable opportunity for unanticipated findings regarding sources of satisfaction.

SUSTAINABILITY OF PARTNERSHIP: Significant effort is invested in creating partnerships and, if they are successful, there is usually a desire to sustain these efforts. Sustainability can be understood through gaining insights into the duration of partnerships and the evolution they go through. In particular, identification of key events throughout the partnership that created barriers to collaboration or accelerated collaborative efforts can provide useful insights into the strengths and benefits of the partnership. In assessing sustainability, it is essential to try to understand the partners' intention in sustaining a relationship, and to investigate both the time invested to build the partnership and to maintain it over time. As well, insights can be gathered into how the partners recognize if the partnership is not meeting their goals.

Strategies for Assessing Impact on Community

A key issue in engaging the community partner in assessment is to be respectful of their time, obligations, and resources. Students can be required to spend a substantial amount of time writing a reflective journal, but one cannot expect that commitment of community partners. Similarly, faculty can be expected to convene at the researcher's convenience for interviews or focus groups, but the researcher must go to the community partner for an interview (at the partner's convenience). There must also be sufficient benefits offered for community partners to come together at a central location during peak working hours for a focus group. Careful attention must be given to selecting methods for assessment of community impact that create the least burden of evaluation and provide the most benefit for the university and the community partner. This may result in some compromises in terms of the kinds of data that can be collected, but this will be offset by the increased responsiveness and enhanced quality of data contributed.

Community partners value the opportunity to provide feedback, and often report that the invitations to participate in assessment activities help them to feel that their role in the university's activities is a valued one. Partners are sometimes intimidated by participating in university discussions if they themselves do not have the academic credentials evident among faculty and institutional administrators. Such concerns need to be carefully addressed, so that partners do feel welcome and appreciated.

A distinct challenge is to create the appropriate communication environment where community partners feel able to speak candidly about experiences, offering praise but also sharing critical and/or reflective observations. Partners are usually eager to praise, in particular because they are often grateful for the service provided and the benefits they derive from the partnership. Some partners, however, are reluctant to be critical for fear of "retribution" and potentially losing the partnership or jeopardizing their relationship with the faculty member. There may also be cultural norms about not criticizing someone who is helping you. Attention must be given to encouraging candid feedback from the partners with the emphasis on improving the work done together, and with adequate assurances that criticism will not lead to any negative actions.

One of the particular benefits accrued from incorporating a community voice is to gain an additional perspective from outside the university. Community partners can offer incredibly valuable insights about, for example, student preparation for the service experience that may either validate or obviate what the faculty member has reported about how they have prepared the students. Similarly, students may report their perceptions about the value of their service, and these may again be similar or opposite to the perceptions the community partner has of the value of their contribution. This should not be interpreted as suggesting that the students and faculty are always positive, and the community partner opinion is always contradictory; sometimes the community partner expresses much greater satisfaction than either students or faculty have observed! Observations of students in community settings help to highlight the benefits and challenges present in these relationships, and may also highlight areas where changes are needed in activity design, communications, or other areas of interaction.

Specific comments regarding the various methods offered for assessment of community impact are similar to those found in preceding sections for the specific techniques. Thus the reader is referred to the previous discussions of strategies for assessment to gain insights regarding methods such as surveys, focus groups, and interviews. A few particular observations are noted below.

COMMUNITY PARTNER SURVEY: Faculty need to be contacted early in the academic term in order for the researcher to obtain the contact information for each partner. Faculty must also be assured that their community partner information is confidential and will not be shared (unless they have no objections); some faculty are concerned about "losing" their partner. A copy of the survey should be shared with the faculty so they know what questions are being asked of the partner.

COMMUNITY OBSERVATION: While this can provide rich data, it may be logistically difficult to organize. Sometimes observations are viewed as intrusive, and care should be taken to avoid this. Such difficulties are offset, however, by the opportunity to better understand the context in which students are working, in particular with respect to logistics, communication, and the relevance of the course project to agency activities. The contact made during an observation may also facilitate community partner responsiveness to a subsequent survey or a request for an interview or focus group participation.

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP: Focus groups of community partners can be difficult to organize in terms of finding a time that is convenient. Convening the focus group over a meal and on campus—perhaps in conjunction with a campus tour if these are new partners—can help to entice partners to attend.

One of the side benefits of a focus group of partners is the additional networking that may occur among the partners—those who already have relationships, and those who are meeting other community members for the first time. Hosting a focus group on campus helps the university to convey its appreciation to the partners, particularly if the group meets in an environment that is welcoming.

COMMUNITY PARTNER INTERVIEW: Interviews of community partners may be threatening to faculty, so care should be taken to ensure that faculty understand the content of the interview protocol and the purpose of the interview itself. Interviews also take time, which is a commodity that many partners feel is lacking; however, some partners may prefer an interview at their site rather than having to travel to participate in a focus group. Thus the interview must be very focused in order to obtain maximum benefit for the institution, the faculty member, and the partner. The interview can provide valuable information to understand the complexity of partnerships, and allows the community partner to express the extent to which they feel a part of the educational process. A benefit of the interview can be to convey to the partner that their relationship with the university has the potential to go beyond one course and one faculty member, if they wish and it is appropriate. They may identify other opportunities for student and faculty involvement in their organization as a result of the interview.

Concluding Thoughts

The community presents perhaps the most challenging aspect of assessment of the impact of service-learning for two main reasons. First, as described previously, it is difficult to define what we mean by "community" and researchers must clearly embrace a definition that articulates what aspects of organization, clients, and larger social systems will be included in the assessment. Second, the community is its own agent, and not under the oversight of the university, so the ability to require participation in assessment and link it to any sort of rewards or punishments is negligible. Thus the researchers face the challenge of creating an assessment plan which will get community partner buy-in—in terms of methods, time commitment, and potential benefit of the results.

Despite these two challenges, insights from the community partners and about community-university partnerships provide rich and essential information for understanding the overall impact of service-learning. The next pages present examples of assessment methods for understanding community impact.

Table 7: Matrix for Community Assessment

What do we want to know? (concepts)	How will we know it? (indicators)	How will we measure it? (methods)	Who/what will provide the data? (sources)
Variables about community partner organization			
Capacity to fulfill organizational mission	Types of services provided Number of clients served Number of students involved Variety of activities offered Insights into assets and needs	Survey Interview Focus groups Documentation review Critical incident review	Community partner Students Faculty Advisory committees Governing board
Economic benefits	Identification of new staff Impact on resource utilization through services provided by faculty/students Identification of funding opportunities	Interview Focus groups Documentation review	Community partner Students Faculty Governing board
Social benefits	New connections or networks Number of volunteers Impact on community issues	Interview Focus groups Documentation review	Community partner Students Faculty Governing board
Variables about community-university partnership			
Nature of community-university relationship (partnership)	Creation of partnerships Kinds of activities conducted Barriers/facilitators	Interview Critical incident review Documentation review	Community partner Faculty Governing board
Nature of community-university interaction	Involvement in each others' activities Communication patterns Community awareness of university programs and activities University awareness of community programs and activities	Interview Focus groups Documentation review	Community partner Faculty Students Advisory committees
Satisfaction with partnership	Perception of mutuality and reciprocity Responsiveness to concerns Willingness to provide feedback	Interview Survey Focus group	Community partner Faculty Governing board
Sustainability of partnership	Duration Evolution	Interview Survey Critical incident review	Community partner Faculty Governing board

Strategies and Methods: Community

Community Observation

Purpose

The community observation protocol offers a set of guiding questions and focus areas for observing faculty and students working in the community as part of a service- or community-based learning course. The purposes of such observations are as follows:

- To describe the character and content of interactions between students/faculty and the community partner.
- To capture the dynamics of the community service experience, that is, the roles of students, faculty, and community partners.
- To document student learning in the community.
- To gather data on services rendered to the community (number of students, hours spent, kinds of services, clients served, etc.).
- To provide descriptive documentation of the partnership.

Preparation

In preparation for observing in community settings, the following sequence is recommended:

1. Train and orient observers with practice observations in pairs to establish reliability.
2. Schedule time for introduction of assessment to students and community partners, introduction of observers and their roles, and completion of human subjects review protocols.
3. Involve faculty in determining which community settings and which days and times are most appropriate for observation. Observations should be planned with the faculty and the community partner.

Administration

Observations should be conducted infrequently (once or twice during an academic quarter/semester) and be well coordinated with both the faculty and the community partner. Using the community observation protocol the observer will collect information about the following:

- Setting
- Roles of students, faculty, and community partners
- Interactions, communication, and activities taking place during community service
- Concerns expressed by students, faculty, and community partners
- Accomplishments, tasks, or service activities
- The climate (mood, affect)

The community observation protocol provides questions to be answered by the observer and focus areas for the observer to notice. It does not provide a format for recording observations. The intent is for observers to record narrative data in a journal or notebook. The narrative data should include direct quotations, specific examples, and (as much as possible) a record of what happens during the observation period. During actual recordings, the observer should maintain a neutral stance and try to avoid interpretation and critique. After writing a description of what was observed, the observer may write a summary of the observation. In the summary, it is appropriate to offer interpretation, raise questions, relate the observation to other information, and link observations to key study concepts.

Analysis

Community observations contain rich data. Analysis of observational data is a complex process that requires a series of readings. The first reading is done to gain an overview of the data. The second reading is intended to surface themes or patterns in the data. The third and fourth readings are intended to confirm the themes or patterns, identify additional ones, and to begin to organize the data within the themes or patterns. The protocol questions and foci will emerge from the observational data as themes or patterns along with additional unanticipated ones. A format similar to that for reviewing and coding focus groups or interviews (see previous sections) can be used.

Community Observation Protocol

1. Describe the setting: date of observation, location, arrangement of space, environment, mood, pace, and other factors.
2. Describe who is present and their apparent roles.
3. What actions are students taking (observer, leader, participant)? What actions are faculty taking? What actions are the community partners taking?
4. Describe the communications/interactions, and indicate the categories of individuals involved (e.g., students, partners, clients, etc.).
5. How does the community activity end? What sort of summation occurs ("next time, we will do some . . ." "good-bye," or nothing)?
6. What accomplishment(s), task(s), or service did you observe?
7. Were concerns expressed by students? By faculty? By community partner? What were they (provide descriptions of situations)?
8. Please add any other relevant observations.

Community Focus Group

Purpose

The purpose of a focus group with community partners is to use a facilitated group discussion to learn more about the experience of the partnership from the perspective of the community and to encourage reflection on ways to improve partnerships. Focus groups may also introduce community partners to each other and contribute to building social networks. A focus group usually lasts between one and one and a half hours, and provides rich and specific information for analysis of research themes.

Preparation

In preparation for conducting a focus group, the following sequence is recommended:

- Identify a trained focus group facilitator and at least one observer/note-taker. This note-taker is responsible for ensuring equipment works throughout the focus group and for taking notes of non-verbal communication.
- Recruit 5–8 community partners to attend a focus group, working through faculty teaching service-learning classes.
- Establish a time and place convenient for the partners.
- The setting must offer a quiet room suitable for a circular seating layout.
- Ensure the availability of a good quality tape recorder.
- Arrange for parking for partners, and provide maps of the campus.
- Send a letter of instruction to partners and stress on-time arrival.

Administration

It is essential that the facilitator be trained in focus group methods. Try to have the person arranging the focus group present at it, either as the note-taker or facilitator. This helps provide a personal connection for the partners. Logistical matters such as the following can contribute to a successful focus group:

- provide name tags for the partners (unless anonymity is critical)
- arrange participants in a circle or semi-circle
- facilitator opens session, describes purpose and gives ground rules using established script
- the role of the note-taker should be described, emphasizing that they are there to provide a back-up record should the tape recording not be audible
- participants should introduce themselves
- the introductory message on the following page should be read to the community partners prior to beginning the focus group questions

Analysis

Tapes and notes from focus groups must be transcribed as soon as possible after the session. Focus groups generate a large body of rich, textual data. Analysis consists of organizing the data into meaningful subsections, initially according to the questions posed. Interpretation involves coding the data (identifying meaningful phrases and quotes) and searching for patterns within and across subsections. For a detailed discussion of analysis of focus group data, see Morgan (1993, 1997, 1998).

Community Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

The purposes of the focus group are twofold: to understand the impact of the partnership on the community-based organization, and to collect feedback, positive and negative, that will assist the university in improving partnership activities in the future. The discussion is recorded for the purpose of capturing detail, but all comments are confidential and never attributed to individual participants. As participants you can make the focus group successful by being both candid and as specific as possible when discussing different issues. A candid focus group will help the university document the effects of its efforts, recognize strengths and weaknesses of its outreach efforts, and identify areas where it can improve. As facilitator, I will offer no opinions; my role is to guide you through a conversation based on a set of relevant questions. I will try to make sure that everyone participates and that no one dominates the discussion. Please be sure to speak one at a time so the tape will be clear. During this discussion, please be brief and specific. Where there is disagreement, you should talk about your different perspective, but we will not spend time pressing for consensus or reaching agreement. The purpose is not to reach a common view, but to learn about all the possible views.

Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and briefly describe the nature of your partnership with the university. (10 minutes)
2. What went well? What factors contributed to successful outcomes? What was the most important factor in achieving success? (10 minutes)
3. How would you describe the benefits of the partnership from your perspective? Any economic benefits? What was the value of the outcome? Any new insights into operations? Was there any impact on capacity to serve clients? (10 minutes)
4. How would you describe the burdens (if any) of the partnership? [Probe: Demands on time or staff.] (10 minutes)
5. What obstacles or barriers affected the partnership? [Probe: How did you cope with these?] (5 minutes)
6. What would you do differently next time? What one thing would you change? (5 minutes)
7. What might the university do differently next time? What would you change about the university if you could? (10 minutes)
8. What do you know about the university that you didn't know before? What do you wish you knew more about? (10 minutes)
9. How would you describe this experience to a colleague in another community organization or agency? What would you emphasize? (10 minutes)

10. The final thing we will do is to encourage you to reflect again on your experience of working with the university. Reflect back over the project period and over this discussion. What's the most important thing you'd like the university to hear from you? What have we not discussed? (10 minutes)

11. Are there any other comments you would like to share?

Total time: 1 hour, 30 minutes

Thank participants.

Community Partner Interview

Purpose

Community partner interviews are intended to foster a one-on-one conversation with a community partner to explore their perspectives on the experience of working with the university. This instrument could be used to assess a wide variety of community-university interactions.

Preparation

Schedule one-hour interviews in locations and at times convenient to the community partner. In advance, describe the purpose of the interview so the partner may reflect on issues of impact prior to the interview session.

Administration

The administration of interviews should be consistent across all interview subjects. Following are some guidelines:

- start on time
- introduce yourself and your role in the project
- explain the purpose of the interview
- assure confidentiality
- stress the importance of candor
- take notes or ask permission to tape record
- follow protocol carefully and keep probes neutral

Analysis

Transcribe notes and/or tapes immediately. Code transcripts for key words and themes. Organize these into patterns and compare to research variables.

Community Partner Interview Protocol

Let's begin with some basic information:

1. Please provide a brief overview, from your own perspective, of the partnership project in which your organization participated.

2. Why did you get involved in this partnership? How did it come about?

Let's talk about the outcomes of the project:

3. What were your expectations? Did you have specific goals? Were your expectations met?

4. What would you say was the key to success? What went particularly well, and why?

5. What obstacles/barriers did you encounter and how did you deal with them?

We're interested in the impact of the project on your organization:

6. What were the benefits to your organization (social, economic, impacts on staff, insights about operations, capacity to serve clients)?

7. Knowing what you know now, what would you do differently that would make the partnership go better?

Thinking about the university's role in the partnership:

8. What should the university do differently next time?

The final thing we will do is to encourage you to reflect again on your experience of working with the university. Reflect back over the project period and over this discussion:

9. What is the most important thing you'd like the university to hear from you?

10. What relationship, if any, do you anticipate you will develop/maintain with the university in the future?

Thank participant.

Community Survey

Purpose

The community survey is intended to describe community partners' perspectives, motivations, concerns, and attitudes on issues related to their experience with students through a service-learning course. The survey is based on a five point Likert scale where partners report their level of agreement regarding their experience with students and faculty. The scale range includes "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neutral," "agree," and "strongly agree." Topics assessed by the survey include community partner's observations about their interactions with the university, the challenges they encountered, the effects of the interactions, their influence on the university, and their overall satisfaction with their connection to the university. The community survey was developed through a process of literature review, survey of existing instruments, and discussions with community partners and faculty.

The information gained through the community partner survey is useful for purposes of planning programs to orient community partners, faculty, and students to working together on service-learning or community-based learning courses.

Preparation

Before administering the community partner survey the following preparation steps are recommended.

1. Determine the purpose of instrument use. The decisions include determining if the instrument is to be used in a pre-post assessment of change or in a post-test only approach to describe the general attitudes and perceptions of community partners after they have participated in a service-learning course.

2. Consider using other data-gathering strategies to complement use of the community partner survey to develop a more complete and useful profile of partner perspectives. This instrument is ideally used prior to conducting community partner interviews or focus groups. To gain a full picture of a course, the community partner survey will complement data yielded by the student and faculty surveys.

3. Determine appropriate scheduling of the instrument use. Usually the best time is soon after the course has ended.

4. Solicit partner consent and support for the instrument use. Well in advance of sending out the community partner survey, partners should be informed of its purpose and their consent established, preferably in writing.

Administration

Once the preparation steps are complete, the following administration procedures are recommended for use of the community partner survey.

1. Partner anonymity should be assured and maintained throughout the collection of data from the survey.

2. Partners should be informed that the instrument will take 15–20 minutes to complete.
3. Clear information should be included about returning the survey (timing and where to return the form).

Analysis

Data analysis can be conducted through utilization of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. In the case of assessing and comparing pre- and post-service-learning experiences, the analysis could include frequencies, descriptive statistics, Chi-squares, Analyses of Variance (ANOVA), and factor analysis. First, descriptive statistics and frequencies serve as a database, providing mean, mode, and standard deviation between items. Second, Chi-squares correlate descriptive data among partners. Third, Factor Analysis reduces items into categories that are closely related. Finally, ANOVA's are useful to explore the existence of variation among partners on either single items or groups of items that may arise from the factor analysis.

Community-Based Learning—Community Partner Survey

We would like to better understand the impact that community-based learning has on our community partners. Please assist us by taking 5–10 minutes to complete this survey, and return it to [directions personalized to institution].

I. First we would like some information about you.

1. How long have you been working with our university?

   ❑ Less than one year ❑ 1–3 years ❑ More than 3 years

2. What is your organizational status?

   ❑ Public OR ❑ Private
   ❑ For-profit OR ❑ Nonprofit

3. What are the benchmark areas addressed by your organization? (check all appropriate)

   ❑ Education ❑ Housing ❑ Safety
   ❑ Health ❑ Environment ❑ Public Services

II. The next set of questions relates to your most recent experiences with our university.

4. How did your interactions with the university influence your capacity to fulfil the mission of your organization? *Mark any that apply.*

   ❑ New insights about the organization/its operation
   ❑ Increase in number of clients served
   ❑ Enhanced offerings of services
   ❑ Increased leverage of financial/other resources
   ❑ New connections/networks with other community groups
   ❑ Changes in organizational direction
   ❑ Increases in number of services offered
   ❑ No influence
   ❑ Other influences (specify) __________

5. What are some of the challenges you encountered? *Mark any that apply.*

   ❑ Demands upon staff time
   ❑ Project time period insufficient
   ❑ Students not well prepared
   ❑ Number of students inappropriate for size of organization
   ❑ Other (please specify) ______________________
   ❑ Mismatch between course goals and organization
   ❑ Little contact/interaction with faculty
   ❑ Students did not perform as expected

6. What were some of the economic effects of your work with the university? *Mark any that apply.*

   ❑ Increased value of services
   ❑ Increased organizational resources
   ❑ Completion of projects
   ❑ Access to university technology and expertise
   ❑ New products, services, materials generated
   ❑ Increased funding opportunities
   ❑ Identification of new staff
   ❑ Identification of additional volunteers
   ❑ Other (please specify) ______________________

7. In what ways do you believe that you are able to influence the university as a result of your connection with one of our courses? *Mark any that apply.*

   ❑ Influence on course content
   ❑ Influence on university policies
   ❑ Other (please specify) ______________________
   ❑ Influence on faculty awareness of community
   ❑ Influence on student learning experience

8. As a result of your connection to this university course, how has your awareness of the university changed? *Mark any that apply.*

   ❑ I learned more about university programs & services
   ❑ I know whom to call upon for information and assistance
   ❑ I am more involved with activities on campus
   ❑ I have an increased knowledge of university resources
   ❑ I have more interactions with faculty and administrators
   ❑ I have taken or plan to take classes at the university
   ❑ Other (please specify) ________________________

9. Do you plan to continue working with the university in this or another activity?

   ❑ Yes ❑ No

III. Please rate your level of satisfaction with your connection to a university course in the following areas.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10. Overall communication with students and faculty.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
11. Level and quality of interaction with students/faculty.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
12. Quality of student work.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
13. Feedback and input into planning of experiences.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
14. Scope and timing of activity.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
15. Level of trust with faculty and students.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

16. How did you handle the logistics of your community-based learning course? *Please mark the one most accurate response.*

   ❑ I made the arrangements and placements.
   ❑ The faculty member made the arrangements and placements.
   ❑ A graduate student made the arrangements and placements.
   ❑ We handled the arrangements and placements collaboratively.
   ❑ Students handled their own placements.

17. What was the best aspect of this experience for you?

18. What aspects of the experience would you change?

19. Please add any other additional comments.

Thank you for your comments.
Please return this by [insert date] to [insert relevant mailing address].