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Preparing Future Faculty as Service-Learning Instructors: A Proposal to Integrate Instruction in Service-Learning Pedagogy into the VCU Preparing Future Faculty Program

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Hall, A. & Pelco, L. (2015). Preparing future faculty as service-learning instructors: A proposal to integrate instruction in service-learning pedagogy into the VCU Preparing Future Faculty Program. Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Retrieved from Virginia Commonwealth University, Division of Community Engagement website: www.community.vcu.edu

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Preparing Future Faculty as Service-Learning Instructors: A Proposal to Integrate Instruction in Service-Learning Pedagogy into the VCU Preparing Future Faculty Program

Abstract

This proposal provides a detailed plan for incorporating service-learning pedagogy into the VCU Preparing Future Faculty Program (<http://graduate.vcu.edu/development/faculty.html>). The VCU Preparing Future Faculty Program (PFF Program) is an optional training program offered by the VCU Graduate School to all graduate students enrolled at the university. The PFF Program involves a series of courses and professional development opportunities aimed at preparing doctoral students for the professoriate.

Keywords

service-learning, faculty, VCU, service, learning, community engagement, community, engagement, instructors, future faculty

Disciplines

Higher Education

Virginia Commonwealth University

Preparing Future Faculty as Service-Learning Instructors: A Proposal to Integrate Instruction in Service-Learning Pedagogy into the VCU Preparing Future Faculty Program

February 2015

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The VCU PFF Advisory Council approved this proposal on February 11, 2015

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Colleges and universities across the country are redoubling their efforts to increase the quality of higher education within an ever-tightening fiscal landscape. Educational research has led to the identification of key high-impact educational practices, and these practices appear to play a critical role in improving the academic success of diverse groups of students (Kuh, et al., 2010). One such high-impact educational practice is service-learning. Service-learning (SL) in higher education has been defined as,

A credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs [and] reflects on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 222).

Based on this definition, the benefits and value of what service-learning brings to an institution of higher learning are numerous. The University of Minnesota Service- Learning Center, as well as multiple other service-learning programs within a variety of institutions of higher learning (including Virginia Commonwealth University), has outlined the many benefits of service-learning for students, faculty, and the community. For students, service-learning promotes flexibility, increased understanding of core concepts, enhanced skills in leadership, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking, improved problem-solving ability, and a deeper, more meaningful understanding of diverse cultures and communities which may contribute to higher levels of student success and greater retention rates. For faculty, service-learning methods can lead to increased student-teacher reciprocity, address a variety of student learning styles, promote community-engaged research and lead to new collaborations for research and publication, provide students with real-world experiences, and enhance course discussions and scholarly discourse by connecting theory and practice in a meaningful, relevant way. For the community partners, service-learning courses help prepare future leaders, bring awareness to local issues, provide

resources to sustain organizational goals through student volunteers and university supports, and foster strong connections and networking between the university and the community stakeholder that may lead to additional support for the university through funding and/or other valuable resources (Community Service Learning Center, 2014).

Service-learning has been identified as a key component of Virginia Commonwealth University's strategic plan, *Quest for Distinction*, with a focus on increasing the number of students enrolled in high-quality service-learning courses. The most recent VCU Division of Community Engagement Impact Report shows that for the 2013-2014 academic year there were 3,388 students enrolled in SL courses, 398 SL designated courses offered by 87 faculty, over 130 community partnerships, 41 service-learning conference presentations, and nine published journal articles by service-learning students and faculty members (Division of Community Engagement, 2014).

An emphasis on service-learning is not unique to VCU, as colleges and universities across the country are embracing the benefits of service-learning for faculty, students, and community. A 2013 survey report published by Campus-Compact notes that 62% of the 557 institutions surveyed required service-learning courses as a key component of the curriculum in at least one major. Sixty eight percent of campuses surveyed reward faculty for teaching with service-learning and for conducting community-based research (Campus-Compact, 2013). As service-learning continues to develop as an integral component of college and university curricula and as higher education administrators realize the positive impact that service-learning can have on the student, the community, and the institution (Klentzin, 2013), the need for *future* faculty members to demonstrate competence in service-learning pedagogy becomes evident.

This proposal provides a detailed plan for incorporating service-learning pedagogy into the VCU Preparing Future Faculty Program (<http://graduate.vcu.edu/development/faculty.html>). The VCU Preparing

Future Faculty Program (PFF Program) is an optional training program offered by the VCU Graduate School to all graduate students enrolled at the university. The PFF Program involves a series of courses and professional development opportunities aimed at preparing doctoral students for the professoriate. PFF is comprised of five core classes that “introduce graduate students to the roles and responsibilities of higher education and address teaching and learning issues in the college classroom” (PFF, 2014).

We propose to develop a Service-Learning Training Option within the PFF Program using the VCU Division of Community Engagement’s (DCE) Model of Excellence framework. The DCE Model of Excellence framework promotes the development of community engagement knowledge, skills, values and beliefs through the provision of learning opportunities situated along a continuum that spans from “Exposure” to “Experience” to “Expertise” (Division of Community Engagement, 2013). Exposure-level learning opportunities target beginners and focus on the introduction of key concepts and strategies. Experience-level learning opportunities provide support to individuals who have gained a foundational knowledge of community engagement concepts and would like to deepen and expand their understanding and skills. Finally, expertise-level learning opportunities target individuals who have a solid knowledge and skill base and would like to develop an expertise within a community engagement practice (such as service-learning pedagogy).

The VCU PFF Program Service-Learning Option involves a series of interconnected service-learning training and support activities that will be seamlessly dovetailed into the current VCU PFF Program and that will move future faculty members through the Exposure-Experience-Expertise Continuum. The VCU PFF Program Service-Learning Option will develop a cadre of future faculty members that is equipped to address critical community issues through learning, teaching, research, and service (Division of Community Engagement, 2013).

Exposure-Level PFF Program Service-Learning Activities

Exposure-level learning opportunities within the VCU PFF Program Service-Learning Option will include a review of the VCU service-learning website materials (www.servicelearning.vcu.edu) and the addition of an introductory lecture on service-learning pedagogy into the core PFF academic class, GRAD 602: *Teaching, Learning, and Technology in Higher Education*. The addition of this lecture will provide PFF cohort students with a basic introduction to service-learning pedagogy and an overview of the benefits of service-learning pedagogy for higher education students, faculty, and off-campus community members. PFF cohort students will also learn how to use service-learning as an effective methodology in the higher education classroom and the impacts of service-learning for student achievement and community-engaged research. This introduction will consist of one class lecture, a guided tour of the VCU service-learning website, one collaborative in-class activity, and one reflection assignment.

Experience-Level PFF Program Service-Learning Activities

Experience-level learning opportunities within the VCU PFF Program Service-Learning Option will be available to all PFF cohort students who have completed GRAD 602. To further prepare VCU graduate students as future service-learning instructors, we will offer an optional Service-Learning Endorsement Certificate of Completion for any PFF cohort student who wishes to deepen their service-learning knowledge and skills. This endorsement certificate of completion option will consist of a series of four online, self-guided modules that PFF students must pass prior to the completion of their PFF program. The endorsement certificate of completion option also requires the completion of the VCU Service-Learning Institute¹. Additional experience-level learning opportunities include optional co-curricular activities as described below.

The four online, self-guided modules will address topics relevant to teaching a service-learning course at a higher-education institution. The modules are:

- ◆ *Module 1: SL Course Design* – In this module, PFF cohort students will learn how to

¹ <http://community.vcu.edu/resources-toolkit/training-development/>

design a service-learning course and syllabus and/or adapt a non-service-learning course and syllabus to meet the service-learning requirements of the institution.

- ◆ *Module 2: Student Assessment and Measurable Outcomes for Service-Learning Courses* – In this module, PFF cohort students will gain an understanding of relevant learning objectives and measurable outcomes associated with a service-learning course. Students will also learn how to create an assessment strategy that reflects student learning and community engagement.
- ◆ *Module 3: Forming Community Partnerships for SL Course Objectives* – In this module, PFF cohort students will learn how to build and sustain community partnerships that reinforce the course learning objectives. Students will also learn how to effectively communicate and collaborate with community stakeholders to ensure a mutually beneficial and reciprocal community-university relationship.
- ◆ *Module 4: Reflection and Evaluation* – In this module, PFF cohort students will gain an understanding of the importance of reflection for student growth and learning as well as for formative and summative course evaluation. Students will also learn how to use reflective practice to guide evaluation, thus enabling the adjustment of the service-learning course throughout the semester to meet the needs of both students and community partners.

Once PFF cohort students complete the online modules and attend the VCU Service-Learning Institute, they will receive a PFF Program Service-Learning Endorsement Certificate of Completion, issued by the VCU Division of Community Engagement Office of Service Learning in collaboration with the VCU Graduate School.

In addition to the service-learning component of GRAD 602 (Exposure) and the PFF Program Service-Learning Endorsement Certificate of Completion (Experience), students in the PFF Program who have completed

GRAD 602 and the endorsement certificate will also have opportunities to complete service-learning co-curricular activities (Experience). The VCU Division of Community Engagement Service-Learning Office, in collaboration with the VCU Graduate School and the academic unit in which the student is enrolled, will provide these service-learning co-curricular activities. Options will include, but are not limited to, (a) shadowing or interviewing a current VCU service-learning faculty member, (b) attending a VCU Service-Learning Advisory Committee meeting, (c) conducting a site visit at a VCU service-learning community partner site, (d) participating in (or assisting with) a service-learning course service project, (e) assisting a VCU service-learning faculty member with a service-learning research project, (f) attending or presenting at a service-learning academic conference, and/or (g) participating in the VCU community engagement reading group².

Expertise-Level PFF Program Service-Learning Activities

Expertise-level learning opportunities will be made available to VCU graduate students who have completed the VCU PFF Program Service-Learning Endorsement Certificate of Completion and a minimum of two experience-level co-curricular activities. These individually-tailored, expertise-level learning opportunities will be developed in collaboration with the student, the VCU Graduate School, the DCE Service-Learning Office, and the student's academic unit. Expertise-level opportunities will be available only to graduate students who show a strong degree of competency for and interest in service-learning pedagogy and community-engaged research. Expertise-level opportunities may include, but are not limited to, activities such as (a) teaching or co-teaching a VCU service-learning class, (b) collaborating as an investigator on a service-learning research project, (c) co-authoring a service-learning academic paper or conference presentation.

² <http://community.vcu.edu/resources-toolkit/training-development/>

Conclusion

This proposal provides a comprehensive plan for preparing future higher education faculty members who can competently and enthusiastically incorporate high-impact educational practices, such as service learning, into higher education curricula across the disciplines. By providing VCU graduate students with self-directed, flexible learning options, we hope to create a program that prepares graduate students as future service-learning higher education instructors while also addressing VCU's *Quest for Distinction* goals within the DCE's Model of Excellence framework. This new program, when successfully implemented, will serve as a national model for developing community-engaged faculty members for the 21st century academy.

As we move forward towards the implementation of this program, we will continue to be informed by future faculty model programs at other universities, including the University of Michigan, University of Vermont, Portland State University, Duke University, University of North Carolina Greensboro, and the University of Georgia. The VCU PFF Program Service-Learning Option will be implemented and maintained by the VCU Division of Community Engagement Service Learning Office in partnership with the VCU Graduate School. The goal for pilot implementation is Fall 2015.

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