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Different Tools for Different Tasks: Strategies for Assessing Student Learning from Civic Engagement at the Student, Program, and Institutional Levels

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Abstract

This presentation was given at the SCHEV Civic Engagement Education and Assessment meeting on June 9, 2017.

Keywords

assessment, higher education, community engagement, student learning, Virginia Commonwealth University, VCU, service-learning, civic engagement, service, community, education

Disciplines

Higher Education

Different Tools for Different Tasks: Strategies for Assessing Student Learning from Civic Engagement at the Student, Program, and Institutional Levels

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SCHEV Civic Engagement Education & Assessment

June 9, 2017

SCHEV's Civic Engagement Learning Outcome

Civic engagement... [is] an array of **knowledge, abilities, values, attitudes, and behaviors** that in combination allow individuals to contribute to the civic life of their communities. It may include, among other things, exploration of one's role and responsibilities in society; knowledge of and ability to engage with political systems and processes; and/or course-based or extra-curricular efforts to identify and address issues of public or community concern.

Outcomes for civic engagement **may address dimensions other than student learning** (e.g., student attitudes, voting behavior, participation in civic engagement activities). However, when institutions provide learning experiences specifically designed to enhance students' capacity for civic engagement, the assessment of this competency should address the quality of student learning. As with the other competency areas, institutions may tailor the description of civic engagement provided above to align more closely with the mission and curriculum of the institution.

Expectations for achievement in all six competencies shall be articulated as institution-level outcomes (for competencies developed through general education or across departments) or as program-level outcomes (for competencies developed primarily through students' majors or other defined curricular and co-curricular programs).

~ Policy on Student Learning Assessment and Quality in Undergraduate Education, SCHEV 2017.

VCU Ad Hoc Civic Engagement Assessment Work Group

Could we develop and pilot a civic engagement assessment framework for <u>course-based experiences</u> that addresses a variety of civic engagement student outcomes of interest to different stakeholders?

- 2015-2016 academic year

- Six-member ad hoc work group composed of members from the Service-Learning Office, ASPiRE: A Community-Engagement Focused Certificate (Living-Learning) Program, and the VCU Office of Institutional Research.

- Pilot the model in 2015-2016 with data from Service-Learning and ASPiRE undergraduate students.

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Defining course-based* civic engagement:

Defining civic engagement is a critical first step that will be different on each campus

Service-Learning: At VCU, an academic class section is designated with a "service-learning" attribute in the Banner course maintenance system if it engages every enrolled student in **(a)** at least 20 hours of service that meets a community-identified need and **(b)** reflection activities that are designed to increase students' understanding and application of course content and to enhance their sense of civic responsibility. The VCU Service-Learning Office monitors the integrity of these designations. In 2016-2017, more than 4,000 students participated in VCU service-learning classes.

ASPiRE: At VCU, ASPiRE is a 2-year, 4-semester undergraduate living-learning program that promotes community engagement through academic coursework and co-curricular experiences. Students enter as a cohort beginning each academic year in the fall semester, live in the same residence hall, enroll in 9 credit hours of coursework related to civic engagement, and complete 100 hours of co-curricular service. Students who Successfully complete the ASPiRE program requirements earn a Certificate of Completion.
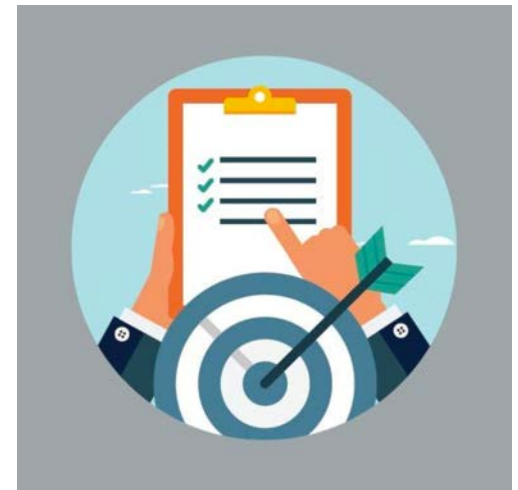
*We chose to focus exclusively on <u>course-based</u> civic engagement.

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Our <u>institution</u> level questions:

To what degree is course-based civic engagement institutionalized at our university? (How many students are participating?)

Which students are participating?
(Is our institutional objective of inclusive excellence being met?)

Does participation impact students' retention & graduation?
(Is our institutional objective of increasing degree completion rates being met through course-based civic engagement?)

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Our <u>program</u> level questions:

How are participating **students' attitudes and beliefs** about civic engagement impacted by their participation in course-based civic engagement (i.e., service-learning)?

How do participating students describe the **quality of their learning** in course-based civic engagement (i.e., service-learning)?

How can we **improve the quality** of course-based civic engagement (i.e., service-learning)?

Our **student** level questions:

- What **civic learning has taken place across time** for students who participate in a civic engagement focused certificate (living-learning) program?

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Data we used to answer...

Institution level questions

Banner data comparison of service-learning & ASPiRE participants vs. non-participants.

◇ number of participants and percent of total student population (How many?).

◇ demographics of the participants compared with non-participants (Inclusive excellence?) such as gender, ethnicity, full-time v. part-time, Pell v. non-Pell, high-school GPA, and SAT scores.

◇ retention and graduation percentages for participants vs. non-participants by matriculating cohorts (Degree completion?).

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Data we used to answer

Program level questions

◇ *Service-Learning Impact Measure* (Pelco, 2017).
On-line, end-of-semester course evaluation sent
to all students enrolled in service-learning classes.
Used to assess service-learning students' attitudes
about civic engagement and their beliefs about
the quality of their civic engagement
learning experiences.

◇ *National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE).
National survey used by VCU to assess first-year
students' and senior students' engagement in
activities that support student learning and
development. Using responses from seniors, we
compared responses of service-learning participants vs.
non-participants on student engagement indicators
(e.g., reflective & integrative learning; student-faculty
interaction).

http://bit.ly/2rXffzy

http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/about.cfm

Data we used to answer

Student level questions

◇ *Civic Minded Graduate Narrative Prompt 2.0* (CMG 2.0; Hahn, Norris & Weiss, 2017)
A direct assessment of civic mindedness, including the dimensions of (a) civic identity, (b) orientation social change, (c) understanding social issues, (d) working with others, and (e) active participation to address social issues.

> **CMG Narrative Prompt 2.0**
> **The following is the prompt to which students respond.**
>
> *I have a <u>responsibility</u> and a <u>commitment</u> to use the <u>knowledge and skills</u>*
> *I have gained as a college student to <u>collaborate with others</u>, who may*
> *be <u>different</u> from me, to help address issues in society.*
>
> 1. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with this statement by circling the appropriate number using the scale of 1=Strongly Disagree to 6=Strongly Agree.
> 2. Considering your education and experiences as a college student, explain in 1 – 2 typewritten pages the ways in which you agree or disagree with this statement and provide personal examples when relevant.

◇ We used the CMG 2.0 to directly assess ASPiRE students' growth in civic mindedness from their first to fourth (i.e., final) semester in the ASPiRE certificate program.
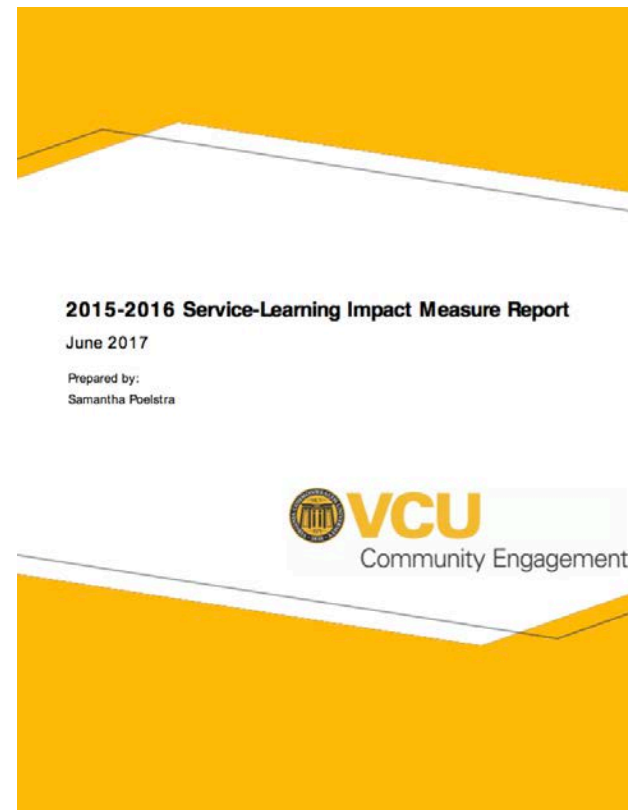
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Our results

http://bit.ly/2cd4DSM

http://bit.ly/2rXffzy
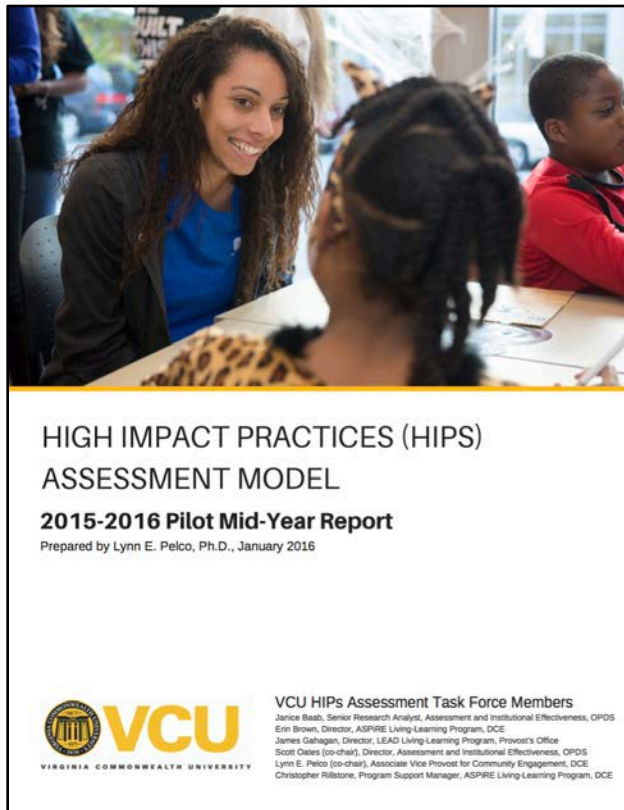
Implementing these approaches on your campus

First steps

☛ Clearly identify which community engagement activities on your campus you want to assess. Pick only a small number at the start.

☛ Create a way to reliably and validly identify all students who have/have not participated in these activities (e.g., participants are tagged in Banner), hopefully in a way that automatically generates within a data tracking software system.

☛ Select or create assessment instruments (e.g., CMG 2.0; SLIM; AAC&U LEAP Rubric).

☛ Build relationships with key collaborators on campus (Registrar's Office, Institutional Research) and create a work group/steering committee/implementation committee to oversee the work.

☛ Remember to ask *'how can this [civic engagement program/activity] be improved?'.*

Next steps

☛ Start small. Pilot the assessment model with a small number of students or limited number of civic engagement programs/activities.

☛ Revise and improve the assessment process based on your pilot experiences.