Multi-Method Approaches to Assessing Civic Engagement Outcomes

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Discussion Outline

- Community Service Learning in the CSU
  - Historic Milestones
  - Students in Action (SIA) Program
- How have we evolved in our assessment approach
  - From our initial service-learning (SL) assessment approach to our existing approach with SIA
- What have we learned
  - SL Research Findings
  - SIA Project Impacts (Content Perspective & Process Perspective)
- Where are we now
  - New instruments
- Q & A Session

Community Service Learning in the CSU:
Community Service Learning in the CSU: Historic Milestones

- In 1997, the Community Service Learning Strategic Plan was developed and focused on expanding service learning throughout the system.
- In 1998, the Office of Community Service Learning in the Chancellor’s Office was created to provide leadership and coordination for CSU campuses as they develop and implement community service-learning initiatives.
- In March 2000, the Board of Trustees passed a landmark resolution, requiring that each CSU president ensure all students have opportunities to participate in community service, service learning, or both.

- In 2004-05, our campuses offered more than 1,800 courses with service-learning components in which more than 65,000 students participated.
- Our students provide over 30 million hours of service, on an annual basis.
- SL courses extend from first year experience through senior capstones and even extend to some graduate programs.

The Students in Action Program

- Student teams from Humboldt, Monterey Bay, San Luis Obispo and San Jose State lead the Students in Action Program (SIA)
The California State University
COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING

The Students in Action GOALS:

- CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
- SKILL DEVELOPMENT
- MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES and HIGHER EDUCATION
- ROLE MODELING

SL/SIA Research Goal

Assess the impact of service learning experiences and participation in community action programs on student learning outcomes: attitudes, interests, skills, knowledge.

Research Studies

- **Quantitative**: two studies focusing on attitude change among students taking service learning courses
- **Qualitative**: one study expanding our research to include interests, skills, and knowledge outcomes for students engaged in SIA projects
SIA Assessment Approach

- Research findings from both types of studies
- Why we moved from quantitative to qualitative assessment
- Two instruments we developed to assess the impact of community service experiences

Quantitative Research on Service Learning Courses

- Two studies:
  - Spring 2002: 700 students in 85 SL courses on 7 campuses
  - Spring 2003: 2800 students in 135 SL courses on 12 campuses
- 18 item questionnaire administered at beginning and end of course
- Measures (item clusters):
  - Community Involvement (5 items)
  - Community Awareness (3 items)
  - Self-Awareness (4 items)
  - Career Identity (4 items)
  - Experiential Learning (2 items)

Results of Research on Service Learning Courses

- Community Involvement: more favorable attitudes toward community service and increased personal commitment to solving community problems
- Community Awareness: increased awareness and engagement in learning about community issues
- Self-Awareness: increased self-confidence in having a positive impact on the community
- Career Identity: no change in career direction or intention to pursue a career that serves others in need
- Experiential Learning: no change in one’s opinion about the learning value of connecting course content to real-life situations
However…

- Observed outcomes were statistically significant but further tests showed they were not large enough to be meaningful.
- Observed outcomes could not be causally linked to the service learning experience per se.

Why didn’t we get stronger results?

- Students already possessed positive attitudes toward civic engagement
- Pre-formed, socialized attitudes may be resistant to significant change
- Wrong things or not enough of the right things were assessed
- Possible disconnect exists between instructional priorities (learning subject matter) of faculty and program goals (promoting positive attitudes toward civic engagement/solving community problems)
- Impact measures (regressed gain scores) were probably unreliable
- Course start-up problems (e.g., student placements, special requirements, schedule conflicts) limited exposure time to the experience

Re-thinking our Research Approach: Quantitative to Qualitative

- Define/explore broader range of outcomes
- Achieve more depth and detail from subject perspective
- Focus on process as well as outcomes
- Develop a more informed causal analysis of program outcomes
- Create a research framework for assessing diverse community action projects
Qualitative Research on SIA Projects

- Subjects: 22 students on 4 campuses
- Pre-SIA video-conference group interviews and post-SIA personal interview with brief questionnaire
- Areas assessed: Knowledge, Skills/Abilities, Interests, Attitudes/Feelings
- Analysis: descriptive/qualitative

SIA Project Impacts: Personal Growth

Knowledge
- General understanding
- Complexity/scope of issue

Skills/Abilities
- Organization/management
- Communication

Interests
- Career
- Social advocacy

Attitudes/Feelings
- Self-awareness
- Compassion/empathy
- Tolerance
- Self-confidence and optimism

SIA Project Impacts: Change Process

- Reinforcement ("I am still basically the same person I was when I started the project, but in certain ways I have become both deepened and broadened.")
- Developmental ("Through the experience I have discovered something new and different about myself.")
- Transitional ("I am in transition, moving from one phase of my life to another.")
- Transformative ("I consider the impact of this experience to be a turning point in my life.")
**In Conclusion…**

- Development of two new assessment tools
  - Interview Guide
  - Questionnaire

- As we strive to assess the civic engagement outcomes of our students over time, the inherent variances in projects may result in cyclical assessment approach.
  - From Quantitative to Qualitative and back to Quantitative

- Previous assessments have revealed the changes that students have experienced in their knowledge, skills, interests and attitudes. New results describe the nature of the change process.

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**Q & A**

- How do the outcomes that have come out of our research relate to the notions of civic engagement?
- What issues have you faced in doing assessment on your campus?
- Have you utilized quantitative or qualitative methods?
- What kind of information did you find most helpful?
- Did you use comparison groups in doing your assessment? What was your methodology?

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For more information about community service learning in the CSU visit: www.calstate.edu/csl