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## Service-Learning Program Institutionalization, Success, and Possible Alternative Futures: A Scholarly Perspective

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# Service-Learning Program Institutionalization, Success, and Possible Alternative Futures: A Scholarly Perspective

Jacqueline C. Klontzin and April Wierzbowski-Kwiatkowski

## Abstract

Service-learning continues to develop as an integral component of higher education curricula, with administrators embracing the positive impact that it can have on the communities involved. The higher education environment, however, has changed in recent years. The global economic downturn of 2007–2008 decreased university endowments and has made funding more difficult to obtain and education more financially prohibitive. Simultaneously, an increased scrutiny of the value of a college education by the federal government, accrediting agencies, and the general public has driven institutions to focus efforts on learning outcomes. This investigative study of five universities with established SL programs is a first attempt to update SL theory and practice in light of the current academic climate. The results indicate that while the literature appears to maintain a general relevance, specific “twist” themes also emerged that might better describe SL administration in the second decade of the 21st century. Based on the literature, current publications engaging higher education trends, and study results, the researchers put forth a scholarly perspective they hope will create a context for SL in the future, spark conversations about the success of SL programs in the current environment, provide evidence that SL administration is continually evolving, and encourage additional work in this area.

## Introduction

Service-learning (SL) 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).

SL continues to develop as an integral component of college and university curricula with higher education administrators embracing the positive impact that it can have on the student, the community, and the institution. The higher education environment, however, has changed in recent years. The global economic downturn of 2007–2008 decreased university endowments (de Vise, 2010), adversely impacted other sources of higher education revenue (Weisbrod & Asch, 2010), and made external funding more difficult to obtain in general. At the same time, an increased scrutiny of the value of higher education by the federal government, accrediting agencies, and the general public has driven institutions to prove their worth by focusing their efforts on learning outcomes assessment (Pomerantz, 2006; Holberg & Taylor, 2007). This begs the question,

How do these external forces impact SL program administration?

While a wealth of literature regarding SL program operations in higher education is available, most of this research was conducted prior to the economic decline and at the very beginning of higher education’s call to accountability. As a result, continued research needs to be conducted in order to understand how the centralized administration of SL initiatives evolves as higher education moves into the second decade of the 21st century. This investigative study of five universities with established SL programs and corresponding interpretation by the researchers is a first attempt to contextualize SL, spark conversations about its success in the current environment, provide evidence that SL administration is a continually evolving practice that responds to external factors, and encourage additional work in this area.

## SL in Higher Education Today

Support for SL has been traced to the early 20th century work of John Dewey (Giles & Eyler, 1994) and has continued throughout the late 20th century with the notable establishment of Campus Compact in 1985 (Morton & Troppe, 1996). Today, SL has entered into what is referred to in the literature as a “fourth wave” (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2008), the distinguishing factor of which is the shift from individual faculty working with specific classes to formal, university-wide programs overseen by

administrative directors, a concept often referred to in the literature as “institutionalization.”

### **Indicators of Institutionalization and Success**

Andrew Furco and Barbara Holland (2004) describe SL institutionalization as follows:

Like most educational initiatives, service-learning achieves institutionalization when it becomes an ongoing, expected, valued, and legitimate part of the institution’s intellectual core and organizational culture. However, in comparison to other educational initiatives, service-learning presents some unique features that challenge traditional conceptions of what “institutionalization” means. Specifically, service-learning’s multifaceted structure, multi-disciplinary philosophical framework, and broad organizational impacts require institutional leaders to think differently about why and how to institutionalize this educational initiative (p. 24).

Many scholars have attempted to address the administrative processes and resources needed to support SL in these terms and have generated research-based indicators/models that serve as de facto best practices that describe what are thought to be the most effective methods for successful SL programs. Prior to data gathering, the authors conducted a content analysis of relevant literature using a variety of research resources including, but not limited to, the following databases: EBSCO’s Academic Search Premier, EBSCO’s Professional Development Collection, ERIC, ProQuest Research Library, ProQuest Education Journals, Sage Journals Online, and Wilson’s Education Full Text as well as Google Scholar and various library catalogs. The resulting journal articles, books, and book chapters were analyzed and synthesized by the authors resulting in the following list of eight common administrative elements found in successful SL institutionalization:

1. Inclusion of SL language in the institutional mission statement (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989; Morton & Troppe, 1996; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Furco & Holland, 2004; Schaffer, 2004; Zlotkowski, Duffy, Franco, Gelmon, Norvell, Meeropol, & James, 2004).
2. A centralized SL office (Honnet &

Poulsen, 1989; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Zlotkowski et al., 2004).

3. A dedicated staff (Morton & Troppe, 1996; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Furco & Holland, 2004; Schaffer, 2004; Zlotkowski et al., 2004).
4. Internal hard funding and supplied physical resources, including space (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989; Morton & Troppe, 1996; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Furco & Holland, 2004; Schaffer, 2004; Zlotkowski et al., 2004).
5. Training/development opportunities, including active organizational membership (Morton & Troppe, 1996; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Prentice, 2002; Schaffer, 2004; Zlotkowski et al., 2004).
6. Faculty rewards, including release time (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989; Morton & Troppe, 1996; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Zlotkowski et al., 2004).
7. Program assessment (Prentice, 2002; Furco & Holland, 2004; Schaffer, 2004).
8. An SL advisory board comprised of multiple stakeholders (Morton & Troppe, 1996; Prentice, 2002; Furco & Holland, 2004).

These common elements, which will be referred to as best practices throughout this document, are limited to those items that can easily be documented by SL administrators and are similar to what Zlotkowski et al. (2004) refer to as “Mechanisms and Resources.” More abstract components of institutionalization like “culture” and “faculty buy-in” are important but not as easily quantified and, therefore, not included in this listing. However, the concepts of “culture” and “buy-in” and their impact on SL administration and institutionalization are discussed in context as part of the results section in this study.

Despite the existence of SL best practices exemplified by those cited above, the continued success of an SL program is not assured, especially in this new world of economic uncertainty and higher education reform. It should be noted here that recently SL scholars have begun to question whether SL can and should be institutionalized (Butin, 2006b; Egger, 2008). While experts have studied the institutionalization and sustainability of SL programs in the past, a continuing examination of active SL initiatives needs to be conducted to fully understand how SL programs function in the current higher education climate and whether past indicators of success are still relevant. This study

aims to assist in engaging this disconnect.

### **Brave New World**

The past decade has proved to be an interesting one for postsecondary education. The 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act took the scrutiny off elementary and secondary teaching as an indicator of educational quality and put it squarely on the shoulders of student learning with schools now having to demonstrate that their students are academically achieving at acceptable levels in order to secure funding. While NCLB is thought of as a K–12 development, it represents a general paradigm shift in educational quality assurance that has also impacted college and universities through both the federal government’s call for reform, specifically with the publication of what is commonly referred to as The Spellings Report (United States Department of Education, 2006), and the various accrediting bodies placing more emphasis on educational accountability and the achievement of student learning outcomes during the accreditation review process (Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2001; Beno, 2004; Pomerantz, 2006; Holberg & Taylor, 2007).

Additionally, the U.S. economy is still immersed in what economists have referred to as the “worst economic downturn since the Great Depression” (Mishel & Shierholz, 2009; Romer, 2009). In a nutshell, unemployment was high (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011), housing prices were low, and consumer spending was weak (Chappell, 2011). Many feared a double-dip recession scenario as a distinct possibility, and job creation became the battle cry in the 2012 U.S. presidential race. This new economic reality had a direct and adverse impact on college students and their families (United States Department of Education, 2006) where college debt is sometimes viewed as an “anti-dowry” (Lewin, 2011) that delays the college student’s transition to adulthood, which includes marriage, children, and homeownership. The economic downturn also had negative effects on university endowments (de Vise, 2010) and other sources of higher education revenue (Weisbrod & Asch; 2010). Taken together, the movement towards educational accountability and the continuing aftershocks of a global recession led many to question the value of a college degree, especially after the notable publication of *Academically Adrift* (Arum, R., & Roska, J., 2011), in which the authors assessed higher education’s ability to positively

impact certain student skill sets, including critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and writing and found it wanting. The authors cited the lack of traditional academic rigor as one of the main causes for this intellectual stagnation and described an everyday 2009 student’s academic college experience in the following manner:

The typical student meets with faculty outside of the classroom only once per month, with 9 percent of students never meeting with faculty outside the classroom during the previous semester. Although 85 percent of students have achieved a B-minus grade point average or higher and 55 percent have attained a B-plus grade point average or higher, the average student studies less than two hours per day. Moreover, half of the students have not taken a single course that required more than twenty pages of writing, and approximately one-third have not taken any courses that required more than forty pages of reading per week during the prior semester (p. 88).

The anonymous academic known as Professor X (2008) also writes candidly about his/her experiences as a part-time faculty member in “colleges of last resort,” where students are doomed to academic failure:

There seems, as is often the case in colleges, to be a huge gulf between academia and reality. No one is thinking about the larger implications, let alone the morality, of admitting so many students to classes they cannot possibly pass. The colleges and the students and I are bobbing up and down in a great wave of societal forces—social optimism on a large scale, the sense of college as both a universal right and a need, financial necessity on the part of the colleges and the students alike, the desire to maintain high academic standards while admitting marginal students—that have coalesced into a mini-tsunami of difficulty. No one has drawn up the flowchart and seen that, although more-widespread college admission is a bonanza for the colleges and nice for the students and makes the entire United States of America feel rather pleased with itself, there is one

point of irreconcilable conflict in the system, and that is the moment when the adjunct instructor, who by the nature of his job teaches the worst students, must ink the F on that first writing assignment (p. 70–71).

Three years later, Professor X was surprised to find that he/she was not a “lone crank,” but, rather, “a voice in a growing movement” whose experience so resonated with readers it was the most visited article on the magazine’s website in 2008 (Professor X, 2011).

These recent publications that speak to the less desirable aspects of higher education have resulted in a heated discourse among educators, sociologists, economists, and the general public. News articles that engage the topic offer up descriptive titles like “Is College Overrated?” (Kaufman, 2010), “Plan B: Skip College” (Steinberg, 2010), and “The University Has No Clothes” (Smith, 2011). Combine these findings, personal narratives, and reports with the growing ambiguity surrounding the university’s purpose (Pew Research Center, 2011), the push for education and training alternatives (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2011), and the financial hardships incurred by students and their families because of increasing tuition costs in the current economy (United States Department of Education, 2006), What is left is an unstable stew of circumstances where the future of a post-secondary degree is decidedly uncertain. Within that uncertainty resides the current administration and future of SL programs.

**Methodology**

This investigative study of five institutions of higher education addresses the following research question: Are past indicators of service-learning program institutionalization and success still relevant, or have they changed so significantly that the existing literature is no longer an accurate representation of current service-learning program administrative practice?

In order to begin addressing the research question, the authors spoke with individuals charged with managing/coordinating SL programs in order to gain a global perspective of SL program history and functionality. They found that while many different types of people participate in specific SL initiatives (faculty, students, community members), most

of the general SL administrative duties fell upon small departments or individuals. Additionally, they found that the programs vary widely in scale depending on the institution.

In the interest of equality, five SL program administrators from five different higher institution types with established SL programs were interviewed in December 2009 and January 2010. The sample included representation by a Christian university, a Catholic University, a non-religious affiliated Private University, a Research University, and a State University. (The term “university” is used to describe all participating institutions of higher education, including colleges. This was done to enhance readability and further assure participant anonymity.) SL administrators at each site were self-identified. After providing informed consent, the participants were interviewed by the researchers using a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of open-ended questions based on the content analysis of the existing literature exhibited in the previous section and the results of a small pilot study, which consisted of an interview with an educational expert in order to pre-test the interview questions for clarity. The interview transcripts were then coded using the 6-step coding process as recommended by Creswell, Tesch, and Creswell (Creswell, 2005). This process advocates a “lean coding” method thereby allowing researchers to generate broad themes based upon fewer codes than a traditional line-by-line coding system.

**Table 1.** Shared Elements of Service-Learning Program

	Ch	R	Ca	P	S
Mission statement reflects commitment to service/engagement	√	√	√	√	√
Centralized service-learning office	√		√		√
Dedicated staff	√	√	√	√	√
Supported through internal funding	√	√	√	√	
Membership in Campus Compact or other support organization	√	√	√	√	
Rewards for faculty (course release, grants, etc.)	√	√		√	√
Program assessment			√	√	√
Service-learning advisory board	√		√	√	

Ch: Christian University; R: Research University; Ca: Catholic University; P: Private University; S: State University

## Results

Data analysis of the interview text confirmed that the eight common SL indicators of institutionalization and success continue to be relevant. Table 1 illustrates which participants responded positively to incorporating each indicator in their administration of SL.

While the researchers confirmed that the past indicators of SL institutionalization appear to maintain relevance, new twists on the established best practices emerged. The researchers uncovered five such “twist” themes that differed significantly enough from the literature to warrant further examination.

**Theme #1 – Emphasis on Student Learning:** The participants indicated that student learning was a driving force of their SL programs.

**Theme #2 – Mission Statement Lip Service:** While SL language still appears in the institutional mission statements of all participants, those participants affiliated with the most institutionalized programs felt that this language had little or no impact.

**Theme #3 – Funding in the Current Economic Environment:** Economic conditions have made external funding sources scarce, which places an even greater emphasis on securing internal operating monies.

**Theme #4 – The Barrier of the Individual:** Institutionalized programs have de-emphasized the individual SL “champion” in favor of a more hands-off management approach.

**Theme #5 – Future Assessment Practices:** Participants are using or planning to use a variety of assessment methods in order to better capture program data.

For each of the above “twist” themes, the researchers interpreted the results and related them to previous findings in the literature in order to provide context and illustrate trending differences as part of the Discussion section that follows.

The interview analysis also uncovered two trends that speak to the future of SL program administration that, when examined together, point to two very different futures for the pedagogy.

**Possible Future #1 – SL as an Academic Discipline:** In this case, SL evolves into an academic department, which is administered as such.

**Possible Future #2 – The Student Engagement Model:** Here SL is absorbed into the growing student engagement movement and administered as one type of initiative among many.

Like the “twist” themes,” further discussion

surrounding these two possible futures is included in the Discussion section of this document.

Additionally, it was discovered during the interview process that the SL program at the State University, which had a rich SL culture in the past, was in rapid decline. Textual data from the State University interview are included in the results section when appropriate because, when combined with the information from other participants, they create a sharp contrast that bring the themes into a stark relief and better illustrate their meaning.

## Discussion

The following is an interpretation of the five “twist” themes and two possible futures of SL that emerged from the study’s data set and their relation to the literature and current economic and academic climates. While the study described here is not extensive enough to generate theory, the authors present the following information with the intention of setting a contextual stage for scholarly discussion and future research.

### *Theme #1: Emphasis on Student-Learning*

The emphasis on student learning that emerged as a result of the data analysis can be interpreted as a shift in preferred SL programming type. In 1994, Robert Sigmon developed the Service and Learning Typology in order to describe the four variations of service learning programs he encountered based upon his extensive experience in the field:

1. **Service-LEARNING:** Service goals are secondary and learning goals are primary.
2. **SERVICE-learning:** Service outcomes are primary and learning goals are secondary.
3. **service-learning:** Service outcomes and learning goals are separate.
4. **SERVICE-LEARNING:** Service outcomes and learning goals are given equal weight and enhance one another.

While the typology was intended to be solely descriptive in nature, Sigmon did admit that SERVICE-LEARNING was his “preferred choice” for designing future SL programs.

The results of the small study revealed that definitions of SL and its relation to the institutional mission varied among the participants in keeping with Sigmon’s typology. The participating Research University and Private University both espouse a Service-LEARNING model where the goal of learning comes first. While “mutual benefit” is also an objective of the Research University, this institution holds the view

that “service should enhance and connect to our teaching—not necessarily be a part of it.” Here, service played a supporting role to the University’s primary missions of education and research. In addition to the educational benefits for students, service learning at this institution was also framed as a method to encourage faculty research and publication. The same description could be easily applied on a much smaller scale to the Private University where the “focus is on the learning and the service is very much an added bonus.”

The underlying philosophies of the religious institutions differ. SL at the Christian University was one of SERVICE-learning where Christian service within higher education is meant to benefit society first and foremost while learning is secondary. Here SL “has been very well-received and very much supported by the faculty and administration, which is a major strength. The students understand the importance [of SL] as a Christian institution.” However, the participant noted that the extreme emphasis on service only is a potential “downfall” of the program and that a shift to more learning-focused SL pedagogy (SERVICE-LEARNING) is on the horizon.

On the other hand, primary focus for the Catholic University was already equally targeted on learning and, in effect, a working SERVICE-LEARNING model:

Our definition is that service learning is a methodology that combines academic instruction, meaningful service, and critical reflective thinking to promote student learning and student responsibility. Very much the idea that discipline-specific content is acquired.

What is most striking about these descriptions is the emphasis on the “learning” aspect of SL. This might not appear extraordinary at first because, after all, these are universities where learning is their “business.” What is interesting, however, is that instead of the Research and Private universities working to transition from service-LEARNING to SERVICE-LEARNING, which could be perceived as the most actualized of the typologies, only the religious institutions are pursuing the SERVICE-LEARNING model where the level of “learning” is brought up to the level of “service.” The Research and Private universities were comfortable with their service-LEARNING model and showed no intention of varying from it. The focus was not on the “service” aspect of SL

but, rather, the “learning” aspect, which is keeping with calls for higher education accountability and proof of student learning.

A different view of SL was held by the State University participant, who argued that:

SL is a vehicle that leads to social justice... educational needs have to be secondary. That’s why it’s service-learning and not the other way around.

This perspective is in keeping with Sigmon’s (1994) SERVICE-learning definition. One wonders if this conception of SL, which opposes the trend, played any role in the administration’s decision to shrink the SL program, especially in this era of higher education accountability.

In an environment where researchers and the general public are questioning the value of a college degree (Professor X, 2008, 2011), college presidents are split on the mission of post-secondary education (Pew, 2011), and the Harvard Graduate School of Education is advocating for alternative/career-focused educational pathways (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2011), it’s no wonder that the LEARNING component of SL has been brought more clearly into focus and that, possibly, the concept of SL as a vehicle for social justice is now taking a backseat.

The question then becomes, Where is the concept of social justice, which had been a driving force of SL, in this new career-based, post-secondary reality? According to sociologist Steven Brint (2009), “non-scholarly” norms of practice that emphasize active learning and social service goals may be partially responsible for “low levels of student effort and limited student learning in college” (p. 1). Social justice, therefore, can be potentially positioned as an obstacle to student learning. If a social justice mission is no longer part of an institution’s goals for student development, especially in a secular institution, there are numerous potential community ramifications including interpreting the goodness of SL projects with only students’ future career prospects in mind. This mindset could prove detrimental to existing and future SL projects if those associated cannot directly link their SL missions to concrete student learning goals and then prove project value through an accepted outcomes assessment measure. Personal characteristics like empathy, fairness, leadership, and sense of community, admirable traits in a human being, are not easily computed and then mapped back to national

standards or accrediting agency criteria. In a world where the value of a college degree must be explicitly identifiable, character-building might not be enough of a reason to convince administrators focusing on the bottom line that a particular SL project is worthy of funding.

### *Theme #2: Mission Statement Lip Service*

SL experts have argued that one physical, easily identifiable indicator of SL institutionalization is a reflection of a commitment to service in the language of the institutional mission statement. Weigert (1998) describes a “manifestation of uniqueness” where “each institution spells out the key elements of its identity, goals, and aspirations.” While mission statements are “important in themselves,” they “only become real in the students, faculty, staff, and administrators who comprise the institution” (p. 4).

All five participants in this study agreed that SL or service-related language is included in their respective mission statements, which is in keeping with SL best practices. However, mission statement content was viewed as less important by the religious-affiliated institutions where SL was the most institutionalized. The Catholic University participant related that service has always been part of the mission statement and asserted that while the institution has “never had to amend it, however, I think how we have operationalized it over the years has changed,” thereby indicating an inherent fluidity of intent that potentially devalues mission statement language as an indicator of successful SL institutionalization. Additionally, the participant of the Christian University placed the least amount of importance upon the inclusion of SL in the mission statement by stating: “It might be in the mission statement but is anyone really doing it?” indicating that the inclusion of SL language in and of itself is meaningless because the mission statement does not necessarily accurately depict reality. This leads the researchers to posit that as the SL program becomes more institutionalized, the less impactful a role the mission statement language plays for SL stakeholders, which is a finding that contradicts past literature (Ottenritter & Lisman, 1998; Weigert, 1998).

### *Theme #3: Funding in the Current Economic Environment*

SL programs often straddle the funding issue by collecting monies from various external sources like grants, donors, and foundations in addition to internal hard line funding from the institution.

Undoubtedly, the safest and most sustainable source of income comes from the inside as indicated by the previous detailed best practices and optimistically expressed by the Christian University:

Everything (about 95%) is funded internally through the University’s budget as a full department within the University.... Since it is funded by hard funds from the institution and does not rely on grants, it will be sustainable for many decades to come.

Internal funding has taken on even greater importance in the current environment, where the effect of the economic downturn on external monies is already being felt. The State University SL program was in funding jeopardy because the vast majority of its funds came from the outside. As a result, the participant expressed great uncertainty about the sustainability of the SL program:

It will be interesting to see what this looks like in a year. We’re told [SL] is going to be drastically reduced because the funding is not there.

However, even internal funding has the potential of being adversely impacted by the recent economic downturn, a situation the participants are well aware of:

In the economic climate that we’re in, often times SL programs are the first things cut. They are nice programs to have when times are good but when times are tough, often they are the first to go. They are the easiest things to cut. They are the low-hanging fruit (Private University).

This new funding reality is then coupled with student demographic trends, which creates a more complicated financial picture for all involved:

Service learning is premised on full-time, single, non-indebted, and childless students pursuing a “liberal arts education.” Yet a large proportion of the post-secondary population today, and increasingly of the future, views higher education as a part-time, instrumental, and pre-professional endeavor that must be juggled with children, family time, and



earning a living wage. Service-learning may be a luxury that many students cannot afford, whether in terms of time, finances, or job future (Butin, 2006b).

For these programs to succeed in the current educational and economic climates, they must be funded primarily through internal, hard-line funding from the university's administration. While this fits with SL best practices, the solidifying of these monies now is in no way a guarantee of program sustainability. SL program administrators must always be conscious of their tenuous position as "low-hanging fruit" and sympathetic to the economic lives of their students in order to safely navigate the treacherous funding waters.

#### *Theme #4: The Barrier of the Individual*

Three participants spoke about the role of the individual in their respective SL programs as being both a positive and a negative force depending upon the status of the SL program. The participants agree that SL champions are needed, especially at the implementation stage:

I think that if you are going to build a really effective SL program, you have to have a champion. Somebody who eats, breathes, and sleeps SL. Somebody that's going to say, "Ok, I can't get through the door so I'm going through the windows" (State University).

However, the SL champion can later be perceived as an individual pushing a personal agenda and act as a potential barrier to SL program institutionalization:

When I learned that after I left [a previous position] and SL stopped [there], I said, "The idea is more important than the person leading the idea. Somehow I have to make sure it's not personal. It's not about the person leading. It's about the idea (State University).

Despite this intention, the State University participant still struggled with the role of the individual in the decline of the SL program. When asked "What do you think would have improved the program?" the participant responded:

I have searched my brain, my soul, my heart and I don't know. I must have pissed

someone off.... I was very careful about language. I used words like "we," "our," and "us"—not "me," "mine" or "I." I gave people credit for stuff they never did. So I tried to create that kind of culture. I made sure. I have a whole drawer of accolades from the President. I'm not sure where this came from.

It appears that if the initial SL champion, who is necessary for the implementation of the SL program, does not somehow de-personalize their involvement, they run the risk of adversely impacting the program, especially if they leave the position.

To counter the effect of the individual, the Catholic University, arguably one of the more institutionalized of the group, has strictly limited the individual program director's job to one that "monitors mutuality and reciprocity" as well as student experience. In terms of specific SL course implementation, the SL program director and staff partner "exit the picture" at a certain stage allowing the faculty member to take complete control of a course, which is a "very intentional move." Self-described as a "hands-off relationship builder," the participant depicts his/her current role in the following manner: "My ethos about the work I do is that if I should leave tomorrow, this needs to continue. That means building faculty leadership."

Additionally, SL course planning at the Catholic University is a topic addressed by a faculty committee representing different disciplines where members serve specified terms and are then replaced, which, again, limits the roles specific individuals play. Despite these enforced limitations, the participant acknowledges that "the community-university relationship is a very funny thing that's often dependent on the personalities involved."

While this positive and negative dynamic of the individual is mentioned in the literature (Furco & Holland, 2004, 2009), it has not been given enough attention by SL scholars to make the best practices list. However, based upon the information provided by the participants in this study and its centrality to SL program administration, this potential indicator should be given careful consideration by SL administrators.

#### *Theme #5: Future Assessment Practices*

Butin (2006b) asserts that most SL assessments are quantitative in nature and may not accurately capture the assessment data needed to

institutionalize programs and cites the annotated bibliography of Eyler, Giles, Stenson, and Gray (2001) as evidence for this claim. Butin posits that SL scholars' inclination to use quantitative measures is based on the desire to "prove" SL program value and show legitimacy using the same methodological language favored by others measuring learning outcomes. However, this is misguided because quantifying the value-added of service-learning is methodologically impossible. There are simply too many variables commingling and interacting with each other to allow for valid and reliable conclusions. The number of variables, from type of sites to types of interactions to types of reflection to types of teaching styles becomes too unmanageable to accurately quantify and measure. In this way service-learning is analogous to teaching and other "wickedly" complex problems defying quantitative solutions (Butin, 2006b).

During the interviews, both the Catholic and Private University participants discussed a modification trend in regard to their program assessments. The Catholic University addressed the Butin disconnect by utilizing a variety of methodologies in order to provide insight into the program through a variety of perspectives, including a survey and periodic focus groups. The Private University is currently using traditional quantitative input/output indicators to assess program quality but explains that this methodology will change and that "over time we will evolve and the measure will be more qualitative and less quantitative." While program assessment continues to be a relevant indicator of SL best practices, its form continues to change. As SL programs become more established, administrators are coming to realize the inadequacy of limiting assessment to only quantitative measures and are now opting to conduct qualitative assessments as well.

### **The Future of SL**

In addition to the confirmation of published SL indicators and the uncovering of five "twist" themes, data analysis of the interview transcripts also describes two possible futures for SL programs in higher education. The first elevates SL from a secondary program into an academic discipline while the second de-emphasizes the role of SL by incorporating it into a Student Engagement Model.

#### *Possible Future #1: SL as an Academic Discipline*

All five SL program directors represented originally reported to or were affiliated with

an academic area, which was most commonly Academic Affairs. This positioning within university administration was considered a very important component of program success because it legitimized SL as an academic activity of equal value to other academic activities and not simply community service:

People were saying "How is it that you're getting all this stuff? How is it that you're rolling out all of these SL courses?" Well, it was because I was on the academic side, which was my peers (State University).

As previously mentioned, the State University SL program is facing a sharp decline in funds and its future is uncertain. Additionally, the program has recently been moved from an office on the "academic side," with program officers, clerical staff, and graduate assistants, to a new office with one staff member in Student Life. This, in effect, removed "learning" from the program's mission almost entirely and reduces what was once a vibrant program to, simply, community service.

For its part, the Christian University was administered in a very progressive fashion. The participant described the program as a "loose" academic department consisting of over 10 instructors (faculty and administrators) who use a common syllabus, which they have the flexibility to modify. This model speaks to Butin's (2006a) concerns about the future of SL institutionalization and his position that SL would be best served by its evolution into an academic discipline called Community Studies. Butin contends that SL can only find true legitimacy in academe if it no longer operates as an add-on program from a single office somewhere on campus but becomes a fully fledged discipline akin to other academic departments. While the Christian University appeared to function in a way keeping with SL best practices, one can easily imagine a future transition from "loose" to full academic department.

Additionally, both the Catholic and Research University also commented on a future SL goal of faculty scholarship with an emphasis on publication, which is very similar to traditional academic departments:

We could do more in terms of inspiring our faculty members to do research on service-learning. The scholarship of teaching and learning is something that we do not tap into a lot. Surprisingly,

for a private, Catholic university, we are very research focused and I think this is an opportunity for us to impact the field. We are doing great service-learning. We obviously have a good program. But we should be putting more information out in terms of examining our own teaching-our own scholarship related to teaching. I think that's one thing that could be done that would be a high impact activity. (Catholic University)

While an office under Academic Affairs might be an effective place in the institutional hierarchy for now, fully fledged departments under the name Community Studies might very well be the next step in SL evolution and usher in an SL "5th wave," which would elevate SL from a pedagogical practice to an academic discipline. While this scenario provides academic validation for SL and ensures internal funding for projects, it could deprive SL of its inclusiveness and flexibility. Instructors who are not members of a Community Studies Department might feel less confident about or even discouraged from developing SL projects for their classes because this activity is the official purview of a specific set of academics. SL might then become the domain of a select group of students and faculty, which would deprive others of rich life experiences and community organizations of needed assistance.

#### *Possible Future #2: The Student Engagement Model*

During the interview transcript analysis, another possible future for SL emerged. The Private University was a recent entrant into the world of SL and approached its program administration very differently than the other universities with more established programs. While the four other universities have stand-alone SL departments/centers/offices, the Private University bundled SL into the overall campus initiative of student engagement.

Dating back to the 1980s (Zepke & Leach, 2010) the Student Engagement Model (Pomerantz, 2006) can be quickly defined as a movement to intellectually and emotionally connect students with the campus in order to increase student learning and student persistence/retention (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonwea, 2008). The benefit to student engagement is, therefore, two-fold as it enhances both the students' experiences at the university as well as the university's bottom line. Engagement on campus can take many

forms including active learning projects, learning communities, community service initiatives, and social activities. The popularity of the Student Engagement Model has exploded in recent years as evidenced by the over 1,000 institutions that have participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement, a nationally normalized survey instrument, since its inception in 1999 (National Survey of Student Engagement, n.d.).

The Private University is one of these institutions that had embraced the Student Engagement Model. Undergraduate students are required to complete a certain amount of engagement-related activities in order to satisfy graduation requirements. These activities include holding a campus leadership position, participating in a study abroad program, attending cultural events, and taking part in an SL program. Because students are provided so many possible engagement options, they could easily satisfy the engagement requirements without taking part in an SL activity. In this model, SL is not the primary focus of the program director at the Private University. Rather, it is one of the director's many responsibilities and plays a supporting role in the student engagement process. In essence, SL has been absorbed into the larger movement toward student engagement.

This difference in perspective is worth mentioning because of the possibility that the model utilized here will be adopted in the future by other institutions, especially those concerned with increasing student achievement and maintaining student enrollment. In this scenario, any social justice goals from SL administration disappear completely because the focus is solely on the student. Here SL administration is firmly cemented in either the Service-LEARNING or service-learning definitions and would be programmatically unable to reach Sigmon's (1994) desired level of SERVICE-LEARNING. (Individual SL projects may be able to achieve social justice goals depending upon the faculty involved.) Additionally, if student engagement becomes required, there will likely be some pushback from participants if SL is perceived as simply one more logistical hoop to jump through. This is not to say that students would not benefit from their participation in an SL program administered in this manner, but categorizing SL as a diploma requirement sets a very specific tone and might undermine the authenticity of the work.

#### **Suspicious Absence: Online SL**

Interestingly, none of the participants discussed SL in the virtual learning environment. The rise of distance education is an educational trend that cannot be ignored (Parsad & Lewis, 2008); yet no participant mentioned the extension of the SL pedagogy to their distance learners despite examples of such programs existing in the literature (Bennett, 2001; Burton, 2003; Killian, 2004; Guthrie & McCracken, 2010; Waldner, McGorry, & Widener, 2010). The conclusion reached here is that while online SL “innovators” and “early adopters” are experimenting in the environment by reaching out to distance learners and involving them in SL activities, this phase of SL development is still in its infancy and has yet to be accepted by the general SL “majority” (Rogers, 1962).

## Conclusion

The research question for this study examined whether previously published SL best practices continue to be relevant as we enter the second decade of the 21st century. Analysis of the small, purposive sample of interview transcripts from a cross-section of institution types provided evidence that this was the case. However, a number of “twist” themes emerged that help place these indicators of success in the context of the current economic and educational environments. The subsequent interpretation and grounding of themes by the authors included a conscious focus on the “learning” aspect of SL, the true meaning of the mission statement, funding concerns, the impact of the individual on SL institutionalization, and SL program assessment trends. Additionally, the analysis uncovered evidence pointing to two possible futures for SL programming. The first posits the evolution of SL from a supplemental pedagogy into a fully fledged academic department. The second imagines a de-emphasizing of SL in favor of the broader Student Engagement Model.

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