Changing Pedagogy: Faculty Adoption of Service-Learning: Motivations, Barriers, and Strategies Among Service-Learning Faculty at a Public Research Institution

Su-I Hou and Shannon Wilder

Abstract
This study conducted inductive analyses on faculty motivations, barriers, and strategies for service-learning (SL) adoption in a major public research university in the Southeast United States. Data found faculty members with prior SL experience were often motivated by intrinsic personal values, yet external barriers need to be addressed to increase morale. An overwhelming lack of recognition and rewards was perceived, despite the institutional policy set to formally recognize SL. The policy–practice gap and issues compounding the implementation in a research institution context were highlighted. Results provide insights to better institutionalize policy and support to encourage faculty SL adoption.

Keywords
service-learning, faculty, research institution, barrier, strategy

Introduction
The continued integration of service-learning (SL) in higher education has led SL administrators and researchers to question what motivates or prevents faculty from adopting this engaged pedagogy, and how institutions might better support faculty and increase satisfaction for those who are in various stages of changing pedagogy. Arguments for the importance of engagement in higher education have been directed at campus leadership and have focused primarily on the benefits for institutions as a means of communicating the credibility and usefulness of universities as important institutions in civic life (Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, 2004; Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 1999; TRUCEN: The Research University Civic Engagement Network, 2008). While this call for higher education to return to its civic mission is critical for supporting and advancing SL pedagogy, many questions remain about the role faculty play as catalysts for the ongoing cultural and pedagogical shift toward engagement.

Over the last 30 years, adoption of SL pedagogy in U.S. higher education has grown as colleges and universities explore ways to increase experiential learning opportunities for students to apply what they are learning to local and global issues (Campus Compact, 2012). In SL courses, students engage in meaningful service activities and critical reflection on the service experience to enhance academic learning, deepen civic understanding, and provide some mutual benefit to the community through their work (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). SL is a form of community and civic engagement; however, it differs from volunteerism or philanthropy by making relevant service a critical component of the teaching and learning activities in a course. SL best practices encourage faculty to consider the following when designing SL courses: develop academic learning goals that are connected to and reinforced by the SL activity, establish relationships with community partners that are mutually beneficial, and integrate critical reflection throughout the course to connect the service with the learning goals.

Bringle and Hatcher (1995) assert that the faculty role in institutionalizing SL should not be underestimated as faculty are primarily responsible for the direction and design of curriculum and are therefore gatekeepers for the adoption and promotion of innovative pedagogies such as SL. However, according to Tierney and Bensimon (1996), faculty socialization through the organizational structure of departments

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reinforces faculty perceptions of which activities colleagues value and which activities are discouraged. As such, there seems to be a gap between institutional policies that explicitly provide support for engagement activities such as SL and how such policies are actually applied in different disciplines and departmental cultures. A “top-down” approach to recognizing SL as valuable scholarly work is not sufficient for institutionalizing SL. Perceptions of “what counts” toward advancement and promotion have great implications for SL’s adoption among faculty at different career stages (Jaeger & Thornton, 2009). Research has shown that early career faculty are particularly motivated by extrinsic factors such as promotion and tenure for involvement in SL and other activities outside of traditionally valued scholarly work (O’Meara, 2003). At research institutions, this gap between institutional policies supporting engagement work and faculty perceptions of localized acceptance from colleagues engaged in peer review and evaluation of one another’s work is also compounded because research institutions privilege scholarly work over teaching and service activities.

To further understand the influence faculty has on the institutionalization of SL, Driscoll (2000) proposed some broad areas for ongoing research including motivation, support required, impact of SL on faculty, reported satisfaction, and obstacles and challenge. While a few recent studies have looked at faculty motivation, satisfaction, and barriers to adoption of SL (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002; Bulot & Johnson, 2006; Hammond, 1994; Hou & Wilder, 2009; Pribbenow, 2005), the faculty role in SL’s advancement is still in great need of research. Furco (2001) writes that for SL to be fully institutionalized at research universities “faculty must be made aware of how it is tied directly not only to their teaching and service activities, but also to their research.” Integrating SL into the three spheres of traditional faculty work at research institutions—teaching, research, and service (institutional and public service)—requires understanding the culture and context of a particular institution.

The purpose of this study is to examine faculty motivations, barriers, and strategies toward SL adoption at a major public research university in the Southeast. The mission of the current study institution includes engagement (service) and its promotion and tenure policy specifically mentions SL as a scholarly activity that can be included in promotion dossiers. The current research aims to examine how faculty members view SL in a university that has set a policy to formally recognize it and the possible gaps between policy and practice. It serves as an example of how to conduct an internal study of faculty member perceptions of motivating and inhibiting factors, in the context of a large research university. A recent article compared faculty SL perceptions among SL faculty versus non-SL faculty and found that the perceived institutional barriers are high regardless of faculty’s previous SL involvement (Hou, 2010) and explored ways to encourage culture change at an institution that has already taken steps to enact policies for faculty rewards, recognition, and support for SL. Therefore, a closer investigation of motivations and suggested strategies among faculty who have been engaged in SL could provide some insights on the tensions between faculty motivations, values, and norms at research university environment, and practice of engagement. Results have implication on adding new understanding of community engagement in higher education among SL engaged faculty for identifying supportive strategies to better encourage SL adoption, while addressing faculty perceptions of institutional barriers.

Method

Study Participants and Data Collection

A representative sample of 1,200 faculty members from a major research university in the Southeastern United States was identified. This research institution has an established Office of Service-Learning (OSL) to promote and support the development of quality academic SL experiences through a range of faculty development programs and funding opportunities. Faculty members who have instructional responsibility or who had taught a course in the previous academic year were eligible to participate in this institutional-wide survey.

An administrative memo was sent out to deans, directors, and chairs informing them of the upcoming survey, followed by an invitation email sent directly to faculty members. Participants had a 3.5-week window to respond to the online survey. The first email reminder was sent out a week after the invitation email, and the 2nd email reminder was sent out a week before the survey was due. A total of 449 faculty members participated in the online survey. This study was conducted with the approval of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at the researcher’s institution.

Measurement

An online Faculty SL Benchmark Study Survey was developed. Online surveys have been utilized commonly as one of the effective ways to gather campus-wide information by the study institution. This survey was developed by reviewing existing literature, seeking feedback and input from key stakeholder groups including the institution’s Office of SL, a campus-wide SL Curriculum Committee, and an SL Interest Group (SLIG), which was a campus-wide network consisting of faculty, staff, and community partners. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered. Survey questions were generally stated in a way that all faculty members, regardless of their prior experience with SL, would be able to respond. However, to gain better understanding of reasons and motivations driving SL faculty to continue to engage in SL, and to explore continued barriers faced and recommended strategies, the current analysis zoomed in on SL
faculty and their qualitative responses. This study focused on identifying and examining themes from the following three open-ended questions:

- What do you think motivates faculty involvement in SL? Or what factors encourage and hinder faculty to be engaged scholars?
- What are some barriers you anticipate experiencing when (or if) you become more involved in SL?
- What are some strategies you would recommend to address some of the barriers or challenges related to faculty involvement in SL?

**Data Analysis**

The inductive, descriptive analyses were conducted using an iterative, analytical approach. Survey responses from the above three structured open-ended questions were compiled and analyzed individually by two trained researchers, generating semantic codes pertaining to the issue (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once codes were agreed on at the individual level, the compiled responses were cross-analyzed to identify categories and patterns. The analyses were carried out through several readings and interpretation of the raw data. Researchers identified codes via open-coding, and major thematic areas that inductively characterized faculty motivation, barriers, and strategies were derived.

**Results**

A total of 449 faculty participated in the study; about 60% were males and 80% were tenure(d)-track faculty. The proportions of faculty from each college/school participating in the survey are representative to the overall institutional sample. Among these participants, 22.7% had prior SL experience (n = 102) and were included in the current analyses. Data showed that the SL faculty group were more likely to be females, more likely to be at associate professor rank, less likely to come from the arts and sciences college, and more likely to be faculty from education- or social-science-related colleges (Table 1).

Overall, our data showed that the SL faculty was mostly internally motivated or connected to personal commitments, as well as rewards from student appreciation of active learning strategies and opportunities. Barriers included lack of time, recognition or rewards, and logistical support. Participants suggested providing release time, recognition in the promotion and tenure process, training/mentoring, and funding opportunities. Key themes identified below were discussed by the order of their importance in each of the three category areas (motivations, barriers, and strategies), with more frequently mentioned themes discussed first. Selected quotes were also provided to illustrate key themes identified.

| Table 1. Demographic and Background Information of Study Participants. |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Service-learning faculty participants | All faculty participants |
| N | Percent | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Overall | 102 | 100.0 | 449 | 100.0 |
| Gender | | | | |
| Men | 46 | 45.1 | 273 | 60.8 |
| Women | 56 | 54.9 | 176 | 39.2 |
| Age | | | | |
| <40 years | 17 | 16.3 | 105 | 33.4 |
| 40–50 years | 37 | 36.3 | 143 | 31.8 |
| 50–60 years | 37 | 36.3 | 150 | 23.4 |
| >60 years | 11 | 10.8 | 51 | 11.4 |
| Tenure status | | | | |
| Tenured/tenure track | 77 | 75.5 | 356 | 79.3 |
| Non tenure track | 25 | 24.5 | 93 | 20.7 |
| Rank | | | | |
| Assistant | 18 | 17.6 | 105 | 33.4 |
| Associate | 42 | 41.2 | 143 | 31.8 |
| Full | 29 | 28.4 | 150 | 23.4 |
| Other | 13 | 12.7 | 51 | 11.4 |
| College | | | | |
| Art/science | 15 | 14.7 | 153 | 34.1 |
| Ag/environ (forest/eco) | 14 | 13.7 | 54 | 12.0 |
| Pharmacy/vet | 7 | 6.9 | 60 | 13.3 |
| Education | 28 | 27.5 | 71 | 15.8 |
| Law/business | 7 | 6.9 | 30 | 6.7 |
| Social science | 31 | 30.4 | 81 | 18.4 |

**Faculty Motivations-Key Themes**

**Passion and personal interests.** A majority of the SL faculty in the study expressed an intrinsic passion for better student learning outcomes as the most important motivational factor. This was an important finding as intrinsic motivation is usually stronger, which could last longer compared with external incentives. “Personal interest, desire to provide students with realistic work experience, and adding new challenges to teaching” were some of the reasons mentioned. These faculty members reported that they “embraced SL as a preferred pedagogical strategy due to a desire to communicate the professional and personal challenges involved in service,” “a genuine interest in holistic student development,” “the opportunity to provide students with real world application,” and “value towards experiential learning.” Data showed that personal values guided their commitment to SL and was a strong motivating factor evident throughout responses. One faculty member provided this perspective:

In my case the motivation to establish a service-learning course has been to give undergraduate students career exploration opportunities and to give graduate students applied experience needed to advance their training and careers.
Of particular interest, however, was that very few faculty reported external, tangible rewards as primary reasons. Intrinsic motivation was the most important driving force. In fact, several noted, “I got involved despite colleagues’ advice against it.”

**Social commitment.** Social commitment was the second salient motivating factor. Social commitment reflects personal values and is a more intrinsic force. Many faculty members indicated a true desire to connect with the community through their discipline. “Passion for community engagement,” “desire to give back and contribute to community improvement,” and a “commitment to supporting the land-grant university mission” were all important reasons of social commitment. To summarize, internal motivations or commitment, pure passion for it, and a desire to be connected with community were found to be salient among most SL faculty members.

**Rewards.** The intangible rewards of seeing students gaining self-confidence and engage in active learning were the third most frequently mentioned motivational factors. The intangible rewards received from seeing positive student learning outcomes can bring faculty longer-lasting joy and satisfaction. “Student enthusiasm and appreciation” can be powerful motivators for continuing an SL course, noted by one faculty respondent. “The learning outcome observed in students,” “the increased learning and discussion that took place in a service-learning class,” “satisfaction in helping the community while providing an engaging learning environment,” “resolving real life problems,” and “community relationship building” were all important intangible rewards.

**Faculty Barriers-Key Themes**

**Lack of (external) reward or recognition.** Although many faculty experienced satisfying intangible rewards from students, the lack of external reward or recognition discouraged many SL faculty members. Many SL faculty commented, “such work is not rewarded or recognized” and “service-learning is viewed as less academic.” Several faculty even stated that “tenured faculty are HOSTILE to the idea of service-learning,” “such activities are not counted or are counted less for promotion and tenure,” or “felt they were being penalized or devalued for pursuing such activities.” One participant stated, “... the only aspect of my work that is recognized in my department is standard academic publishing. Anything else—including community projects—is looked down upon.”

Others stated,

> It’s something “extra” that is incredibly time intensive with little professional pay-off. Currently, it feels that college administrators are giving it a lot of lip service and saying how much they value it, but in the end it is just a pat on the back if you do it.

I have a full research agenda and teaching load and I don’t have time to do extra activities that are not recognized by my department... I publish a great deal, but BECAUSE of my community service I am perceived as less scholarly. I am actively DISCOURAGED from working in the community. Such work needs to be rewarded but it is not.

The fact that non-SL faculty members discounted the efforts needed for developing such courses was very discouraging. Many SL faculty members voiced their frustrations that colleagues should “reward community service rather than penalize me for it.”

Other faculty members commented,

Most barriers I have experienced have come from traditional tenure track faculty members who have not participated in such activities and have no appreciation for it. They want it to be provided by non-tenure track faculty.

The investments in time and energy in SL activities can be significant and can be devoted to those activities that are “valued” by the department and colleagues.

Our data clearly showed that although recognition of SL work was not even among the top three most important motivators for adoption of SL pedagogy among SL faculty members, it was indeed one of the most significant barriers identified for continuing the work with positive morale.

**Time, time, and more time.** Lack of time was the second most significant barrier. The need for time and energy to establish partnerships and coordinate logistics and the lack of release time from other responsibilities posed significant barriers. Faculty participants commented,

> Time, lack of logistical support from staff, liability issues, the greater emphasis given to research over teaching in tenure decisions. You will get tenure by being an outstanding researcher and an average teacher. You will not get tenure by being an outstanding teacher and an average researcher.

We, the already overworked faculty members, cannot do everything, and the time it takes to conduct a SL course or project takes away much needed time for writing research articles and grant proposals. Research productivity leads to tenure and promotion and raises—not service-learning courses.

Our data showed that lack of time was the reality, and analyses suggested that this barrier was still closely linked with the lack of recognition, particularly during the tenure and promotion process described above.

**Logistics and funding.** These included identification of sites, transportation, and scheduling issues, assessment procedures at placement sites, coordination with community partners, and risk management issues. In addition, funding for SL projects was often limited and hard to find. Faculty members commented,
Faculty Recommended Strategies—Key Themes

**Reward/incentives.** The most important strategy overwhelmingly pointed to establishing more tangible rewards. This highlighted again the barriers identified above needed to be addressed. These ranged from release time, reduced course loads, providing assistants to help with coordination and communication, and limiting enrollment for SL courses. Also, participants argued the pressure to produce more credit hours runs contrary to best practices in quality SL courses and suggested a need to develop institutional policies to limit enrollment.

**Promotion and tenure recognition.** This is certainly among a significant concern among faculty especially in a research-focused university. Faculty suggested recognition strategies such as to “show faculty how they could use service-learning to enhance promotion and tenure so they don’t feel like it is going to contribute negatively.” Some commented on the need to change policy so service—broadly defined—is recognized and counted toward tenure. Furthermore, demonstrating that “administrative faculty across the institution value tenure track faculty participation in service-learning” was viewed as critical to increase the morale of SL faculty.

**Training/mentoring and funding.** Suggestions included providing workshops and assistance for faculty to incorporate SL into existing courses, and educate not only faculty but also administrators on SL pedagogy:

Training—More mentoring and workshops to explain what SL is . . . benefits associated with SL . . . how to begin . . . how can someone incorporate SL in more classes; logistical work and who to contact in the community; where to find support and the like; experiences from a more supportive and engaged department. More visibility and publicity about what’s going on in those types of course.

Providing more funding opportunities was also suggested, such as mini-grants to add SL into existing courses, faculty grants for SL projects, and student SL grants or stipends to do more in-depth projects. In addition, “opportunities to showcase student service-learning projects,” “venues to recognize faculty efforts,” and “a focus on scholarship that can emerge from service-learning courses” were suggested.

**Discussion**

Our data clearly showed that intrinsic motivation to improve student learning and development was the most important driving force for faculty adopting SL pedagogy despite discouragement from colleagues or their departments. This finding was consistent with existing studies (Abes et al., 2002; Bringle, Hatcher, & Games, 1997; Hammond, 1994; Vogelgesang, Denson, & Jayakumar, 2010). Although service and outreach is part of the core mission in a public research university, when it comes to promotion and tenure, the three areas are usually not weighted equally, with research activity clearly privileged (Furco, 2001). Our current data strongly suggest that perceived external barriers were high even among faculty members who have overcome obstacles and already actively engaged in SL in the study research institution. These institutional culture and values toward SL need to be addressed to increase morale and encourage further faculty adoption of this pedagogy. Institutions should also explore ways to provide tangible rewards and recognition as important strategies to increase faculty morale and promote policy implementation to support community engagement.

Although it is no surprise that SL is not a top priority within research institutions for promotion, our data provide important insights from the perspectives of SL faculty at a large research institution regarding the tensions between intrinsic motivations and the extent to which institutional or cultural norm barriers affecting faculty were willing and able to engage in the SL project. The current study shows that the issues of lack of recognition or rewards were overwhelmingly prominent. Although recognition of SL work was not among top motivators for faculty SL engagement, it was indeed one of the most significant barriers identified for continuing the work. The tensions between the intrinsic motivations toward experiential learning from faculty members and the non-conductive reward system exist in research university environment were high. Despite its explicit service and outreach mission, the recent establishment of the OSL, and the promotion and tenure policy support for SL; faculty in the current study perceived significant gaps between institutional policy and the actual practice norms at their most immediate unit (department) levels. This widespread perception that SL involvement damages advancement opportunities must be taken into account when providing extrinsic support for faculty adopting SL. The fact that the SL faculty at the study institution was more likely to be at the associate professor rank indicates their proven success and survival in the tenure and promotion process or their adoption of SL after successful achieving tenure. A significant number of the SL faculty actually indicated having adopted this approach for years and in more than one course (80+%). These were likely outstanding faculty with scholarly activities meeting the more “traditional” promotion criteria while at the same time adopting SL approach, with or without the support of institutional policy.

The significant gaps between institutional policy and unit practice on SL may be compounded with the emphasis on traditional research in promotion and...
tenure criteria, which commonly exist in research-focused institutions. Hlengwa (2010) provides some theoretical perspective on why certain disciplines might be more likely than others to adopt SL pedagogy and provides some insights on the possibilities and constraints of infusing SL into the curriculum. Research universities in particular are encouraged to consider ways to support forms of engaged scholarship such as SL and community-based participatory research not only in their promotion and tenure guidelines but also through faculty development programs focused on engaged scholarship. In addition to institutional administrative support, strategies also need to be strengthened and targeted at the unit levels to value the important role tenure track faculty play in SL involvement. Special efforts are also needed to gain buy-in and support among the unit administrative leaders. Identifying ways to re-frame SL as a form of valued scholarship and approach that could facilitate deeper integration of all the three faculty responsibilities warrants attention. There is continued need to examine further the enabling and constraining factors, both from structure (discipline) level and faculty perspective.

The study is limited in its shorter quotes due to the nature of online surveys. Additional insights might be emerged from more in-depth interviews, particularly with those who chose to engage in SL despite the potential risks to their tenure and promotion process, and who eventually earned tenure. Future research could further examine these areas to learn perspectives from this special group of faculty members.

In summary, the study provides insightful comments from SL faculty in a large research institution and opportunity of a more representative sample to voice their concerns in depicting a better understanding on the issue. Results provide understanding of SL within a research institution context, as well as insights to help universities better institutionalize policy, provide support to address unit culture, and institute recognition systems to encourage faculty SL adoption.

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Shannon Wilder is the founding director of the OSL at UGA. As Director of the OSL, she oversees the expansion of academic SL opportunities through a range of faculty development and instructional programs, services, and funding opportunities. She promotes the development of academic SL courses in both residential and study abroad programs, as well as SL course tracking and assessment projects. She developed UGA’s Service-Learning Faculty Fellows program as well as the Senior Scholars Leadership program. Both programs provide opportunities for faculty to develop projects related to SL and become institutional leaders for promoting engaged teaching, learning, and scholarship. She is an adjunct faculty member in the University’s Lamar Dodd School of Art, and serves on the executive committee of the Gulf-South Summit on Service-Learning and Civic Engagement Through Higher Education and served as the 2010 conference chair. In 2008, she was selected as an inaugural member of the Georgia Education Policy Fellows Program through the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. She holds a PhD in art education (2006) and an MEd in Instructional Technology (2001) from University of Georgia, and earned a BFA in Studio Art from Baylor University (1995).