



*From Assessing Service-Learning and Civic Engagement:
Principles and Techniques*

By Sherril B. Gelmon, Barbara A. Holland, Amy Spring
With Seanna Kerrigan, Amy Driscoll

The following is an excerpt from the unedited manuscript.

PREFACE

Service-learning is an educational methodology that combines community-based experiences with explicit academic learning objectives and deliberate reflection. These learning experiences require a partnership between the community (nonprofit, schools, government, business, human services organizations, or other entities) and the institution or academic unit/program and are characterized by a focus on mutual benefit. Improvement and sustainability of the experiences and the partnerships are enhanced through formal assessment activities that involve community, faculty, student and institutional voices and perspectives. This handbook presents a set of well-tested strategies and techniques for gathering data about the impact of service-learning and similar programs.

THE EVOLUTION OF THIS MONOGRAPH

This handbook was first published by Campus Compact in 2001, and remains one of the Compact's "best-sellers." The third reprint of the original book was published in 2009 and has long been sold out. The ongoing demand for copies of this handbook signals that the core

material of the original publication is still relevant. Now, 16 years after it first appeared, and on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of Campus Compact, the original author team has developed an updated introduction that brings the handbook into this new and dynamic time of innovation, progress and growth in the work of community and civic engagement in higher education.

We considered rewriting the entire work to create a new edition, but as we talked with others who have found the book useful and reviewed the content in detail, we concluded that the original text continues to have utility for practitioners in the field. It is a clear and straightforward description of the “basics” of how to design and implement a comprehensive data collection plan including the development of instruments and tools for capturing data from the diverse constituencies involved in community engagement, service-learning and related activities. The handbook offers guidance on how to clarify measurement goals and objectives; select and develop the best instruments and tools most relevant to specific goals for assessment and evaluation; craft clear questions that help respondents give accurate and relevant responses; and focus on the diverse perspectives of each constituency involved in engaged activities: students, faculty, community partners, and institutional voices.

The creation of the core content that became this handbook began with an internal research project at Portland State University (PSU) in 1994. The 1990s were a decade of major institutional transformation at PSU. Campus leadership and a large and diverse group of faculty, staff, students, and community partners were involved in participatory planning and visioning that led to a new identity as an engaged urban research university with the focus that continues today: “Let Knowledge Serve the City.” Completely new models were developed for general education and the undergraduate experience, teaching improvement infrastructure and other faculty development support, an innovative faculty promotion and tenure policy that

incorporated Boyer's vision of multiple forms of scholarship, and a research agenda that incorporated an emphasis on community-relevant research issues, among other changes. Service-learning (often referred to at PSU and other institutions as community-based learning) was a prominent strategy, emphasized throughout undergraduate learning and culminating in a final year community-based capstone for all undergraduate students. Engaged learning was also integrated into graduate and professional education. With such a sweeping commitment to engagement strategies as a core of the institution's plan and identity, leaders and scholars worked together to develop a comprehensive agenda of evaluation and research on the effects of community-based learning and engagement on the participating constituencies.

This monograph emerged from various projects, first at PSU and then through national and regional research initiatives and at other institutions. Our goal in 1995 when we began this work was to develop an assessment model that responded to the complexity of service-learning and other strategies for community engagement in higher education. When we began, a literature review revealed there was little available in terms of relevant models, approaches and instruments. We used a case study method to test multiple assessment strategies at Portland State that would give value to both our service-learning and other community activities. Over four years (1994-1998), the research team (composed of the authors with other occasional participants and graduate assistants) conducted an extensive series of studies using multiple methods to develop questions, instruments and an understanding of which approaches generated the most accurate and useful data for each constituent group. From the beginning, there was an intentional focus on understanding how to hear the voices of students, community, faculty, and campus leaders, build knowledge of the kind of infrastructure, staffing, and funding needed both for

start-up and for ongoing sustainability, and investigate how to measure impacts and benefits and then apply that information for program improvement and support.

USING MULTIPLE METHODS WITH MULTIPLE CONSTITUENTS

Early on in our development and testing of our conceptual framework and approach, we learned that an intentional examination and testing of diverse methods was necessary, and it ultimately led to the structure that became this handbook (Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, and Kerrigan, 1996). We observed that approaches to data collection had to be specifically tailored for students, faculty, community partners, and institutions. By testing a range of methods, we concluded that diverse methods offered different value and purposes in the context of the unique constituents and individual purposes. We also found that multiple methods of data collection were important for each constituent group in order to gain a full perspective on activities and outcomes. We relied upon existing literature of the field to draft instruments that would be relevant to any institution or community setting. We observed that practitioners in the field needed advice on planning and sustaining strategies for data collection, selection of methods, design of tools, methods of data analysis and reporting, so we also included guidance for methods and implementation in the original handbook.

We began presenting our conceptual model in various venues in 1995. We immediately received many requests for copies of our assessment methods and instruments, and decided to prepare a handbook that could be widely available. We published a first edition of this handbook in June 1997 through the Center for Academic Excellence at Portland State University (Driscoll, Gelmon, et al., 1997). That edition was based on development of a large number of different assessment instruments, and our experiences pilot-testing those instruments in ten service-learning courses at PSU. We quickly learned from our analysis of those results that we could

make refinements in the conceptual matrices that guided our assessment activities, and that many of the instruments could benefit from further refinement. These refinements were made, and a second edition was published, again by PSU, in April 1998 (Driscoll, Gelmon, et al., 1998). Over 2,000 copies were printed and distributed nationally and internationally through PSU.

Campus Compact then invited us to expand the handbook and provided us with support, made possible by the Corporation for National Service, to prepare the 2001 edition and publish it. The 2001 edition, while grounded in the earlier PSU versions, offered a much broader perspective on assessment strategies as the authors had worked with this conceptual material in various projects at multiple higher education institutions across the country and with multiple community organizations. This provided broader insights into background, supporting literature, advantages and limitations, and practical guidance on use of the various instruments. Well over 2,000 copies have been sold through Campus Compact. This handbook's popularity reflects awareness of the need for quality tools to gather even basic information about service-learning and engagement activities.

In PSU's planning environment that emphasized evidence-based decisions and attention to the corollary impacts of those decisions, and in the context of rapid implementation, we had a unique opportunity to focus on measurement at the same time that engagement programs were being launched. We realized that the core focus was on partnerships and the reality that each participating constituent comes to a partnership with their own goals (and some shared ones as well) meant that any plan to describe, measure, or analyze activity design and outcomes would have to be organized by the constituent group to reflect their unique goals, aims and roles. This understanding continues to shape approaches to data collection for this field today (such as the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification application, described in the next section).

Much like the original publication, this new edition relies heavily on examples and practices employed at PSU. The original work, the associated instruments and practices were developed, tested, and revised in PSU classrooms, with faculty and institutional systems. Over the years Portland State has continued to use many of the assessment techniques that were born out of this work. Other institutions and organizations have also built upon our work and contributed to our learning, understanding and examples.

FOCUS ON SERVICE-LEARNING

The primary focus of our assessment efforts has been on curricular-based service-learning (which today is often called community-based learning, community-engaged learning and other titles). In each section, we also provide illustrations of other applications of this material, such as in other kinds of experiential education, co-curricular activities, institutional change processes, partnerships, or other kinds of faculty development initiatives. While we recognize that there are many potential applications of this material, and encourage such use, nonetheless the primary focus and therefore most of the illustrations relate to service-learning. A reader can take these illustrations and apply them as a helpful resource in other contexts as well.

This handbook is not intended to be the ultimate guide to service-learning. For resource materials on service-learning, the reader is referred to the many resources available through Campus Compact's website.

ORGANIZATION OF THE HANDBOOK AND FRAMING OF THE 2017

INTRODUCTION

When this volume was originally produced, the unit of analysis was primarily the individual, and thus the focus was on the impact of an individual course, or the involvement of a faculty member or community partner organization in a specific activity, with some attention to how these

findings could be aggregated to understand broader impact. We articulated four constituencies (students, faculty, institution, and community), and believe that the four constituency approach still works and much of the initial content is relevant.

The original framework of the handbook focused on fundamental decisions such as: What do I want to know? What would I look for? How will I measure or observe this? From whom or where can I collect this evidence? This approach has reportedly helped many practitioners and leaders advance and inform their approach to measurement and evaluation. The sample tools for each constituent group were designed to address the basic and commonly understood characteristics of good practices as well as the common goals widely shared as desirable outcomes of effective service-learning and engagement. These basic practices and goals are still at the core of the field's aims and values, though intervening years have produced new insights regarding purposes, objectives, outcomes, and policies.

We have not undertaken a systematic literature review in preparing the 2017 edition, and this update should not be read as a scholarly summary of the state of the field. Rather, we draw upon our collective experiences at Portland State University (where three of us continue to work) and with multiple other institutions and organizations, and reflect upon those experiences. We cite some examples from other institutions that we know and that have materials readily accessible on websites, and recognize that there are many other institutions doing excellent work (that may be accessed via their websites).

We begin with a new section "Reflections on the Progress of Measurement of Community Engagement, 2001-2017." This section starts with a review of issues related to measurement of engagement. Readers have asked for this foundational content to help understand the general context for using this handbook. We then present updates on progress in

measurement for each of the four constituencies framed in the original text. We have ordered the discussions of the four constituencies to start with the institutional perspective – this is where the major work is occurring today, and the primary questions often asked about the impact of engagement-related activities are “Engagement - to what end”, and “How can we develop a more focused agenda of engagement informed by integrated measures?” As a result, we begin with a focus on understanding institutional mission and purpose; then we discuss the community perspective and progress on gathering the evidence of that work; then we address the development and recognition of engaged faculty; and then focus on developments and trends in measuring the impact of engagement on students. A bibliography specific to this new section is included.

This 2017 reflection is followed by the original handbook content. The content of the original handbook is retained, and is presented in three main sections. The first is an overview of assessment philosophy and methods. While many resources exist on assessment, we have included an overview of assessment strategies in this edition of the handbook as a resource for framing our approach to assessment. As well, this section will ensure that users of this handbook have ready access to basic information about assessment.

The second section presents each of the four assessment constituencies in a separate chapter (students, faculty, community, and institution). Each of these chapters includes:

- a brief review of the literature,
- discussion of issues in assessing impact on that constituency,
- the assessment matrix,
- strategies for assessment of that particular constituency (including advantages and limitations of particular instruments), and

- examples of assessment instruments we have used in various settings.

Each instrument is introduced by a discussion of purpose, preparation, administration, and analysis, specific to that instrument.

The final section focuses on using the methods and analysis of data. Again, we offer best practices and suggestions for use based on our collective experiences. This section incorporates discussion on strategies for making assessment work.

CONCLUSIONS

We have learned that systematic attention to measurement and assessment is important for improving outcomes as well as communicating the value of service-learning to many audiences. Developing a “culture of evidence” to describe and document the impact of service-learning supports its institutionalization, facilitates the ability of course-based learning to be translated into scholarship, and fosters trust and communication among the various involved constituencies. Engagement in measurement and assessment is a valued element of the service-learning experience for each constituent group as it articulates its unique perspective and learns from and appreciates the perspectives of the other constituent groups. Ongoing attention to measurement and assessment warrants our investment of time, our expenditure of resources, and our commitment.

There is tremendous diversity across the field regarding expertise and capacity to design, implement, analyze and interpret data on community engagement. Whether one is a faculty member with advanced research skills in a particular discipline, a staff person working in a program or unit supporting engagement, a coordinator responsible for an AmeriCorps program or a volunteer center, or an academic administrator overseeing for institutional assessment, the design of research, evaluation and assessment of service-learning and community engagement is

a challenge. Why? The language is contested, activity and program designs are diverse within and across institutions, the intended outcomes and goals are often fuzzy, and the impacts on and expectations of different participants (students, faculty, institutional leaders, community partners) are inevitably different. For these and many other reasons, Campus Compact recognized the need for an updated handbook that would continue to encourage attention to rigor, good practice and consistency to methods and approaches used to gathering evidence of impact.

Over the past decade it has become clear that the field was better at creating service-learning and community engagement programs than it was at assessing, evaluating or even describing them in any systematic way. This leads us to where we are today -- a dynamic and exciting era where the focus of this work is now on gathering quality descriptive and analytical evidence about activities. Increasingly this information is used to inform improvement strategies and redesign curricula to enhance community-based learning opportunities. Higher education institutions are developing more focused agendas of work with articulated outcomes, recognizing and rewarding rigorous community-engaged scholarship, and developing systematic data collection methods that provide actionable information.