

**INTEGRATING INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY TO  
ANALYZE INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COMPARISONS OF  
SERVICE-LEARNING WITHIN THE  
CARNEGIE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CLASSIFICATION FRAMEWORK**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Service-learning has a longstanding history in higher education in and includes three main tenets: academic learning, meaningful community service, and civic learning. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching created an elective classification system called the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification for higher education institutions to demonstrate the depth and breadth of student learning and involvement through partnerships and engagement in the community. This study examines data from qualitative interviews key administrators from three different institutions to understand the institutionalization of service-learning at three different institution types – a Private Liberal Arts College, a Private Teaching University, and a Public Research University located in the same metropolitan area. Using comparative analysis, this study highlights emerging concepts to inform higher education institutions seeking to increase service-learning opportunities that benefit higher education practitioners as well as community leaders.*

**INTRODUCTION**

“Besides enrolling for classes, getting involved is the single most important thing one can do as a student...” (Plante, Currie, & Olson, 2014, p. 89). According to Astin (1999), involvement is an investment of energy yielding positive student learning outcomes. Student involvement occurs along a continuum and can be measured quantitatively and qualitatively. Student development and learning gains are associated with the quantity and quality of student involvement with the effectiveness of educational policy being reflected by the capacity of a practice or policy that increases student involvement (Astin, 1999).

In a quantitative study, Preston (2014) at the University of Central Florida’s Office of Student Involvement, using NSSE data, surveyed 370 students who had completed at least 30 credit hours participated in a survey on how involvement may play a role in the linkage between class-

room learning and activities for future employment. Preston’s study concluded that *involved* students outscored uninvolved students in several key areas: socializing on campus (80%), a sense of belonging (78%), supplemental instruction (68%), and career plans (70%). Results established that, among other student engagement activities, utilizing service-learning, provides an enriching educational experience as well as supports academic scholarship (Preston, 2014).

The service-learning principles of instruction, curriculum, and developing community provide lenses through which one can understand the overlap between educational and service experiences that are cross-cultural, while offering an opportunity to build relationships that create a community of support (Keith, 1997).

Service-learning has a longstanding history in American higher education (Burkhardt & Pasque, 2005). College

campuses are regarded as catalysts for community change, and college students remain crucial contributors of community engagement for their campuses (“History of Service-Learning in Higher Education,” n.d.). Butin (2012) states that the majority of faculty members believe that working in and with the community is an important component of the undergraduate educational experience. According to McGoldrick and Ziegert (2002), there are three key principles of academic service-learning: enhanced academic learning, relevant and meaningful service, as well as purposeful civic learning. Therefore, service-learning can be a conduit for community engagement (CE). Measuring student engagement, service-learning, and student experience are critical to understanding how institutions impact community engagement.

Active participation in service-learning has been shown to increase grades/GPA (Astin et al., 2000) and retention rates (Hara, 2010b) while exposing students to real world experiences (Nicoterea et al., 2011), and provides opportunities to work with a diverse group of people (Cox, Murray, & Plante, 2014). For anything to become institutionalized, including service-learning activities, it goes through bureaucratization – an ideal for maximizing characteristics of rationality (Bolman & Deal, 2008). A designation capturing the characteristics, culture and approaches of service-learning, the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification (CCEC) is being institutionalized at participating higher learning institutions. The CCEC is the first-of-its-kind elective classification system distinguishes higher education institutions by their level of community engagement. Beginning in 2006, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching sought to recognize institutions that are committed to their communities, encouraging collaboration among institutions for a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and research. There were three categories of recognition for the classification in the initial application process of 2006. Curricular Engagement are schools that use teaching, learning and scholarship to connect faculty, students, and community partners to address needs in the community. This broadens students’ academic and civic learning and enriches institutional scholarship. Outreach and Partnerships are applied to community engagement – “Outreach” being the resource for the community to use and “Partnerships” referencing the collaborative interactions between institution and community for a common purpose, such as capacity building, research, and economic development. In both the 2006 and 2008 classifications, institutions were classified for either or both categories, Outreach and Partnerships. In the 2010 application and 2015 reclassification procedures, however, Carnegie combined the two categories. Data sought by the CCEC application can serve as a resource for institutions seeking

to increase prestige and can also offer guidance to those seeking to institutionalize engagement, and enhance student experience. In 2006, 56 institutions received the community engagement classification and those institutions allowed their data to be used for research offered benchmarks of innovative activities and institutionalization of community engagement using the best practices of service-learning (Sandmann, Thornton, & Jaeger, 2009).

**PURPOSE STATEMENT**

The purpose of this study was to compare data from qualitative interviews of representatives from three different institution types within the same metropolitan area to better understand the institutionalization of service-learning in the respective institutions.

**RESEARCH QUESTION**

What are the differences regarding inter-institutional comparisons of service-learning across three institution types within the same metropolitan area?

**METHOD**

To answer the research question, qualitative analysis of the 2008 and 2015 applications across institution types were conducted to identify emerging themes. The results of the qualitative interviews were compared to the results of the secondary data analysis for further insight. Qualitative interviews of the coordinators of the CCEC application process were used to explore three higher education institutions in order to understand the similarities and differences of the institutionalization of service-learning at each of the three institution types. These data provided the researcher the opportunity to review and compare relationships of social structures across institution types. The study was conducted through qualitative interviews because it was determined that the key players in the process would be able to articulate best what service learning and community engagement in their institution is. Further, the most common sources of data collection in qualitative research are interviews, observations, and review of documents (Creswell, 2009b). The use of interview for this study is an effective methodology for service-learning research as it is supported by measures four constituencies: faculty, students, institutions, and communities, to assess impact and include feedback for continuous improvement (Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996).

**DATA COLLECTION**

Data were collected via the qualitative interviews from the coordinators of the three different institution types: a

Private Liberal Arts College (PLAC), a Private Teaching University (PTU), and a large Public Research University (PRU) within the same metropolitan area. Table 1 reflects the distinct institutional profiles based on *US News and World Report 2013*.

The Private Liberal Arts College (PLAC) was ranked number two among southern regional universities. Both in-state and out-of-state tuition was \$43,080. Undergraduate enrollment was 1,890 with the acceptance rate of 47.22 percent. The average GPA was 3.2 with SAT of 1290 and ACT of 29 in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile for prospective students. The Private Teaching University (PTU) was ranked number 6 among southern regional universities. Both in-state and out-of-state tuition was \$22,467. Undergraduate enrollment was 2,729 with the acceptance rate of 59.25 percent. The average GPA was 3.9 with SAT of 1270 and ACT of 28 in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile for prospective students. The Public Research University (PRU) was ranked number 173 among national universities. The in-state tuition was \$6,368 and out-of-state tuition was \$22,467. Undergraduate enrollment was 51,269 with the acceptance rate of 48.94%. The average GPA was 3.8 with SAT of 1270 and ACT of 28 in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile for prospective students.

Data collection included qualitative interviews with lead authors of the 2015 reapplication process. Questions were asked of one key administrator of each of the three institutions. The three individuals were instrumental in preparing the 2015 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification reapplication and provided the researchers insight on the process, approaches, and changes she/he observed. The interview protocol was developed after an exhaustive review of the literature and Carnegie applications. Each interview lasted approximately 45-minutes, was conducted in-person with follow-up questions and requests for the interviewee to elaborate on their answers. Interviews were transcribed by the first author with member checks performed by the second author. Each interviewee was given a pseudonym for this study – Melinda at PLAC, Patrick at PTU, and Rose at PRU. Interviews were recorded and transcribed then analyzed as part of following “standard

procedures that are used from one interview to another” (Creswell, 2014, p. 194).

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Qualitative analysis included data from qualitative interviews at each of the three higher education institutions in the same metropolitan area. Part one of the analysis was coding the data. “All qualitative methods employ coding techniques to help organize and analyze the overwhelming amount of data” (Hahn, 2008, para. 1). Data coding process consisted of four levels. The first level, or, open coding, took the raw qualitative data and assigned labels. The second, or, categorical coding, reexamined level one data to focus the data, and ascertain a foundation for identifying themes. The third level, called either axial or thematic coding, built upon the previous two levels of coding to develop refined themes. From the first three levels, themes emerged from previous levels’ categories and themes. Lastly, examination of the data through an independent lens provided deep insight into each question answered and the purpose behind the questions (Creswell, 2014).

Part two of the process analyzed interview data of the three individuals from each of the three institutions. Procedures for interview analysis, according to Agar (1996), included “data organized categorically and chronologically reviewed and coded” (Creswell, 2014, p. 210). The three interviews were coded then compared to identify emerging concepts that will possibly elucidate the secondary data analysis from the CCEC applications and strengthen the study.

**RESULTS**

All three institutions examined in this study earned the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification designation in 2008 and reclassification in 2015 for active community engagement. As a qualitative research study design, the results and interpretations impart subjectivity due to the nature of the “data were derived mainly

Inst	Inst Type	Pub/Pri	Rank Type	Rank #	In-State \$	O-O-S \$	Enroll	Accept	GPA	SAT	ACT
PLAC	Lib Arts	Pri	Reg U	2	\$43,080	\$43,080	1,890	47.22%	3.2	1290	29
PTU	Teach	Pri	S. Reg U	6	\$40,040	\$40,040	2,729	59.25%	3.9	1270	28
PRU	Res	Pub	S. Nat U	173	\$6,368	\$22,467	51,269	48.94%	3.8	1270	28

through...overall impressions of particular phenomena” (Schwartz, 2013). The coded results of the interviews (personal communications) can be found in Tables 2-4.

Two main themes were extracted from the data regarding the reasons for why each institution applied and re-applied for the CCEC in 2008 and 2015: ‘institutionalization of community engagement at their campus’ and ‘Carnegie as a premier standard their institution measures itself against.’ Melinda from Private Liberal Arts College reported that the classification is a higher education best practice and the institution and community feel that it is important, and provides PLAC clout for what they are doing with community engagement which “lends credibility to institutionalization of service-learning” (Melinda, personal communication, April 24, 2015). This information can be found in Table 2.

Carnegie is the gold standard to measure effectiveness of community engagement, according to Patrick from the Private Teaching University. PTU has valued community engagement for the past 132 years in its school’s history, as it is embedded in their mission statement. PTU has allocated significant resources over the 20 years to institutionalize community engagement and remain an institution of distinction (Patrick, personal communication, April 27, 2015). This information can be found in Table 3.

Rose shared that many of the faculty, staff, and students at the Public Research University have been engaged with the community from the very beginning. She explained that PRU was the first university in the state to have both awards of community engagement; indicating Outreach

& Partnerships and Curricular Engagement in 2008 as they were separate during that classification period. “We were amazed they were giving the award and excited to receive one...we went at it heart and soul” (Rose, personal communication, April 16, 2015). This information can be found in Table 4.

Each of the three interviewees indicated that the preferred method of information gathering regarding tracking and assessment for the purposes of completing the CCEC application was through a committee. This purported to make the most difference in ease and when applying and receiving the elective designation. Melinda, who led the process in 2015, indicated that since the application process itself was so institutionalized, PLAC had many sources of information and support. From the president’s, provost’s, and deans’ offices, as well as marketing and communication, advancement and community relations, there were key individuals across campus and community partners that were involved in some way. “People were willing to come to the table because they recognized the importance to the mission of PLAC” (Melinda, personal communication, April 24, 2015). This information can be found in Table 2.

Patrick, who co-wrote the 2015 application, reported that PTU had multiple perspectives by individuals from across campuses that were able to bring both qualitative and quantitative information to the application, especially during the 2008 classification. PTU’s center expanded the depth of its relationships across campus and was less dependent on the outside individuals. With the assistance of the Institutional Review Office, Registrar’s Office, and

Theme	Questions	Codes	Quote
Institutionalization	1. Why did the institution apply for the CCEC application in 2008 and then reapplication in 2015?	Credibility Clout	“lends credibility to the institutionalization of service-learning”
	2. What areas of focus, data collection procedures, and resources made the most difference when applying and receiving the elective designation?	Process Institutionalized People willing to come to the table	“People were excited and willing to come to the table because they recognized the importance to the mission of the institution.”
	3. Identify the internal and external funding as well as the fundraising partnerships that pertain to service-learning	Guesstimate Unsure accuracy	“Internal and external would probably be more than half...and fundraising, close to 100% goes to support SL efforts.”

Theme	Questions	Codes	Quote
Institutionalization	1. Why did the institution apply for the CCEC application in 2008 and then reapplication in 2015?	Effectiveness Accreditation Gold standard	“to remain an institution of distinction when it comes to community engagement across this country”
	2. What areas of focus, data collection procedures, and resources made the most difference when applying and receiving the elective designation?	Committee Different perspective Relationships across campus	“In 2008 and 2015, we put together a committee of people from across campus with slightly different perspectives but who are able to bring quantitative and qualitative information to the table to put into the application”
	3. Identify the internal and external funding as well as the fundraising partnerships that pertain to service-learning	Ballpark Doesn’t break it down	“If you wanted to ballpark it and say 50/50, that wouldn’t be inaccurate.”

Theme	Questions	Codes	Quote
Institutionalization	1. Why did the institution apply for the CCEC application in 2008 and then reapplication in 2015?	Involved Engaged	“to show how totally engaged the institution was with community and how it always has been”
	2. What areas of focus, data collection procedures, and resources made the most difference when applying and receiving the elective designation?	Committees Thorough coverage Matrix Cooperative	“We would work individually and then come back as a committee to discuss every question providing thorough coverage”
	3. Identify the internal and external funding as well as the fundraising partnerships that pertain to service-learning	Can’t ID Can’t break it out	“We can talk about internal and external resources, but I can’t break that out for you to answer your question.”

three different online software programs, PTU was able to pull reports on total number of hours students volunteered through volunteering or Community Engaged Learning or Community Based Research courses offered and the amount of faculty teaching them, social topic they focused on, and agencies students worked with (Patrick, personal communication, April 27, 2015). This information can be found in Table 3.

PRU was very thorough and utilized a very large committee to complete the application. Rose, who was in charge of putting together the 2015 CCEC application, attempted to include representatives from across campus including Experiential Learning, Faculty Senate, Institutional Research Board, Undergraduate and Graduate Studies, and Student Development and Enrollment Services to assist in fielding questions in their area of expertise. Working as individuals to do the information gathering, the commit-

tee would regroup to assess the data from each question, load the data into a matrix, and revised until it was complete. "It was a great community effort, but it started with individuals...sometimes teams of individuals that would get together...but everyone was cooperative" (Rose, personal communication, April 16, 2015). This information can be found in Table 4.

While Rose at PRU was unable to identify the internal and external funding as well as the fundraising partnerships that pertain to service-learning specifically (Rose, personal communication, April 16, 2015), Melinda at PLAC (Melinda, personal communication, April 24, 2015) and Patrick at PTU (Patrick, personal communication, April 27, 2015) approximated that about 50% of their internal and external funding went toward service-learning/community engaged learning/community-based research activities. Patrick explained that approximately 100% of the Bonner program funding went toward community engaged learning and about half of the fundraising pertained to community engaged learning (Patrick, personal communication, April 27, 2015). Melinda reported that fundraising "is close to 100% because it goes to support service-learning efforts" (Melinda, personal communication, April 24, 2015). Information regarding funding for PLAC can be found in Table 2, for PTU in Table 3, and PRU in Table 4.

## DISCUSSION

### Emerging Concepts

As with many institutional initiatives, funding can make or break the progress and success of the process. All three institutions identified internal and external sources as well as fundraising for CE activities that promote service-learning. Patrick, at PTU, estimated that 50% of the needed resources came from all three areas – internal and external sources as well as fundraising; and Melinda at PLAC reported that 50% of internal and external funding provided resources for CE activities, but nearly 100% of support needed in service-learning efforts for the community was provided by fundraising. Rose, at PRU, was unable to identify the amount or percentage for each of the three pieces of funding, but suggested that it was a considerable amount based on the comprehensive list provided in their 2008 and 2015 CCEC applications as well as the considerable amount of funding for CE activities discussed from PLAC and PTU.

Although each institution places the personnel at different parts of their campus, all three institutions reported utilizing of AmeriCorps members to support service-learning programs. Each institution also reported track-

ing and assessing service-learning activities through at least one Web-based software program with all three institutions using the results from the data for various reports, community impact and accreditation purposes. Campus Compact was an essential source for securing grants so that faculty, staff, and administrators alike had the resources necessary for attending and/or presenting at various conferences.

Finally, although service-learning or community engaged learning activities are an active course component within the "soft" disciplines such as the social sciences; all three institution types continue working to improve its prioritization in all fields, especially within the STEM disciplines.

### Limitations

There were several limitations of the present study, including issues with the qualitative interviews. For example, the 2008 and 2015 CCEC applications both asked how many faculty members taught service-learning courses. However, the question posed a limitation because each institution may define the term "faculty" differently. Melinda indicated that the overall method by which PLAC defines "faculty" is through their yearly handbook, but is currently under review for development. Patrick indicated that PTU defined "faculty" as any employee teaching SL classes (community engaged learning) and engaged in this type of curriculum across the institution. This may include tenure-track, non-tenure track faculty on record, adjunct, and/or teaching assistants.

Representatives from each institution interviewed were integral to the authorship of the 2015 application process, and, while their expertise was informative, their close association presented limitations. None of the interviewees played a major part of the 2008 application process, but instead made inferences about the areas of focus during the original classification period whereby using their own institutional knowledge to answer the interview questions related to why the institution applied for the CCEC in 2008.

### Implications for Future Research

The current study conducted qualitative interviews with only one person at each institution; which may have provided a limited perspective and limited information. Interviewees, for example, indicated that they could not provide deeper knowledge of the original classification cycle. Rose, from PRU, was unable to provide any insight and suggested contacting individuals from other offices across campus. Additionally, the interviewees for this study represented different institutional administrative levels. This

may have influenced the type of information discriminated in the qualitative interview. Future researchers may consider conducting focus groups to gain broader perspectives of the institutionalization of service-learning.

Traditionally, the researchers of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification have focused exclusively on institutions that received the CCEC, overlooking those institutions that did not receive the classification. One final recommendation would be to develop a comparative analysis between like institutions, comparing those that *did* receive the classification and/or reclassification to those institutions that *did not* receive the CCEC designation. Researchers could examine application documents from similar institutions that did not classify for the CCEC to those who did receive the designation to examine emerging concepts of those who classified and compare those emerging patterns to the institutions who did not receive the classification. Additionally, researchers could interview CCEC committee members to elucidate the findings from the aforementioned secondary data analysis. A comparative analysis in this arena would be great value to the field to aid practitioners seeking to understand why some institutions did not received the classification while others did.

## CONCLUSION

In order for institutions to have impactful community engagement and service-learning, colleges and universities must surround these initiatives, programs, and reward systems with resources (Weerts & Hudson, 2009). Each institution adapted, modified, and enhanced their approach, policies and ethos with the institutionalization of service-learning. This was evident with the emphasis on quality over quantity when reporting, for example, their drop in the number and percentage of service-learning courses, faculty members, departments, and student participants due to recalibrating the depth of students' service-learning experience, moving from "surface level volunteering to deeper, more sustainable service-learning" (Melinda, personal communication, April 24, 2015).

The findings regarding PRU implied the institution experienced a more pervasive experience between the 2008 to 2015 CCEC application processes. PRU broadened their approach, including specifics from their offices, colleges, departments, and programs involved in community engagement and service-learning on campus. "Service-learning is more broadly incorporated into the university instead of just being put into a course. In other words, our students are so much more involved in service-learning and community service; we don't need to make a special thing sticking it into a course" (Rose, personal communication, April 16, 2015).

Research on PTU suggested the largest transformational change over the 2008 to 2015 timeframe. This change can be attributed to change in infrastructure and name change from Center for Service-Learning to Center for Community Engagement, the adoption of "community engaged learning" for service-learning as the development of a unified campus-wide definition, and the implementation of a community engagement minor. Since the changes within community engaged learning and its implementation throughout campus, the numbers and percentages for service-learning course, faculty teaching SL, departments housing SL, and student participants has steadily increased from the original classification cycle to the 2015 designation, while other two higher education institutions in the same geographical area steadily decreased. PTU was the only institution to increase in all four categories. Additionally, curricular engagement activities increased, and community engagement present on student co-curricular transcripts in 2015, both were absent from campus in 2008. It is evident in "how deep our infrastructure and institutionalization had become and how we had become responsible for doing this across the entire campus" (Patrick, personal communication, April 27, 2015).

This study considered the institutionalization of service-learning as a best practice in higher education using inter-institutional comparisons utilizing the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification framework. This study confers with and broadens the body of literature in the hopes that these qualitative findings will be of benefit to institutional and community. "It is one thing to study our community as academics, but we must also participate in serving our community as citizens and achieve participatory excellence" (Plante, 2015).

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