



AACC-RB-03-1



RESEARCH BRIEF

Service Learning in Community Colleges: 2003 National Survey Results

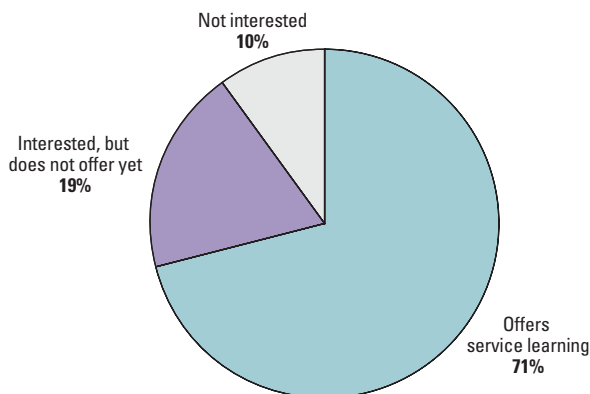
by Mary Prentice, Gail Robinson, and Sara McPhee

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) conducted a survey in 2003 to gauge the level of service learning involvement in community colleges across the nation. Service learning combines classroom instruction with community service, focusing on critical, reflective thinking as well as personal and civic responsibility. Service learning programs involve students in activities that address local, community-identified needs while developing their academic skills and commitment to their community.

This research brief summarizes the findings from that survey and reveals a snapshot of institutional and programmatic involvement during a time of state budget shortfalls and significant cutbacks in education programs. The 2003 survey included many of the same questions asked in 1995 and 1997 AACC national surveys, in an attempt to record the change or growth in service learning programs. The following highlights emerged from the survey responses:

- Nine out of 10 colleges responding to the survey either offer or are interested in service learning.
- Seventy-two percent of colleges that offer service learning include it in social science disciplines, and many colleges also include it in education, science, health, and languages. On average, colleges offer service learning in six different curricular areas.
- Seventy-six percent of colleges with service learning indicated that it is a course requirement, but usually for only a small number of courses.
- On average, colleges that provide service learning offer it in 18 different courses annually and involve 424 students in service learning projects.
- Colleges have an average of 14 full-time and six part-time faculty teaching courses with service learning components.
- Most faculty participate in service learning because of their personal commitment and mentoring by other faculty.
- Service learning programs are most often administered by a service learning director or coordinator or by individual faculty members in different disciplines.
- Most colleges rely on institutional funds to implement service learning initiatives. Other key areas of support come from the Corporation for National and Community Service and Federal Work-Study funds.

FIGURE 1 Community College Interest in Service Learning



Methodology and Response Analysis

In March 2003 AACC posted an online survey on its Web site and announced it via mail and e-mail to faculty, administrators, student services staff, and service learning coordinators at more than 1,300 community colleges in the U.S. Two hundred sixty-one institutions responded, for an overall response rate of 19 percent.

The overwhelming majority of respondents offer or are interested in service learning. However, it is possible that the respondents are not representative of community colleges as a whole. To determine whether this is the case, AACC used a variety of institutional characteristics—such as region, urbanicity, and college enrollment—to see how the responding institutions differed from the overall population of community colleges. In terms of regions of the country, the survey respondents are quite similar to the distribution of all community colleges. However, when looking at urbanicity and enrollment, some differences emerged.

Urban community colleges and colleges in the suburbs of large cities were more likely to have responded to this survey than colleges in small towns

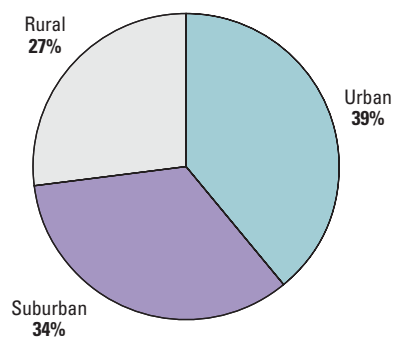
or rural areas (see figure 2). When looking at enrollment, it is apparent that a disproportionate share of larger colleges responded to the survey. Almost half of the community colleges nationwide have fewer than 3,000 students, but only a quarter of respondents have fewer than 3,000 students.

AACC assumed that colleges were more likely to respond if they offer service learning. In fact, 184 of the respondents (71 percent) indicated that they do offer service learning and, of the 29 percent that do not offer it, two-thirds stated that they are interested in service learning (see figure 1). Given that respondents were likely to have or be interested in service learning, urban, suburban, and larger colleges may be more likely to offer service learning than their counterparts at small colleges or in small towns and rural areas.

The analysis for this study is based solely on information provided by respondents. Since these respondents are not representative of the general population of community colleges, it is not possible to generalize the findings for all community colleges.

The balance of this research brief analyzes data for the 184 colleges that offered service learning at the time of the survey. For identification purposes, the 184 responding colleges will be referred to as “service learning colleges.” The final two sections of the brief compare these data to earlier AACC survey data and discuss policy implications for their use.

FIGURE 2 Urbanicity of Survey Respondents



Institutional Profile

Most colleges that reported offering service learning are from urban (42 percent) and suburban (37 percent) areas. Rural institutions account for only 21 percent of service learning colleges. Institutional size (i.e., fall 2002 headcount enrollment) ranges from less than 3,000 (20 percent) to greater than 11,000 (33 percent). Almost half of the service

learning colleges (47 percent) have enrollments between 3,000 and 11,000.

Course Offerings

While the average number of courses with service learning is 18, they range from one to 135 courses in the 2002-2003 academic year. Service learning is offered across the curriculum, from science and technical programs to health and business (see

figure 3). On average, colleges offer service learning in six different curricular areas.

Thirty percent of service learning colleges offer specific, stand-alone service learning courses. Seventy-six percent indicated that service learning is a requirement for at least one course at the college (see figure 4). While a majority of those indicated that the requirement is only in place for a small number of courses, one third reported that it is a requirement for most or all courses at the college.

FIGURE 3 Curricular Areas Offering Service Learning

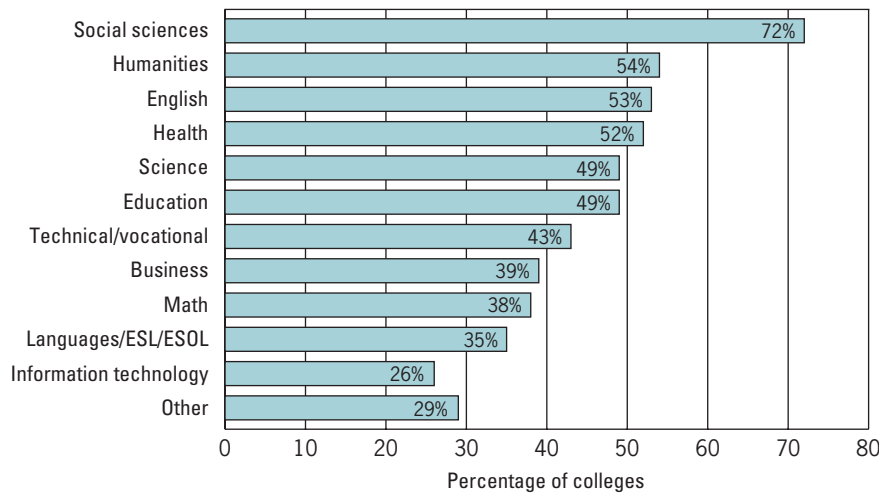
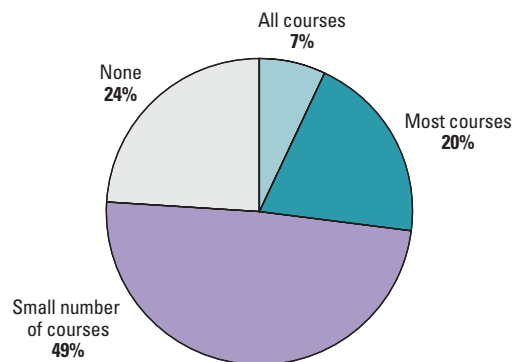


FIGURE 4 Courses Requiring Service Learning



Student Participation

Most service learning students provide 11 or more hours of service each academic term (see figure 5). Sixty-six percent of students are involved to a great extent in planning service learning activities (e.g., identifying community needs, selecting service sites, or designing service activities). An additional 27 percent are involved in planning to a moderate extent.

Students are involved in a wide array of service learning activities, from tutoring younger children to providing health care to clients; working with senior centers, animal shelters, or environmental groups; and using both technology and the arts (see figure 6). The types of organizations hosting students in these activities parallel the varied disciplines in which the students are enrolled.

FIGURE 5 Average Hours of Service Provided by Students

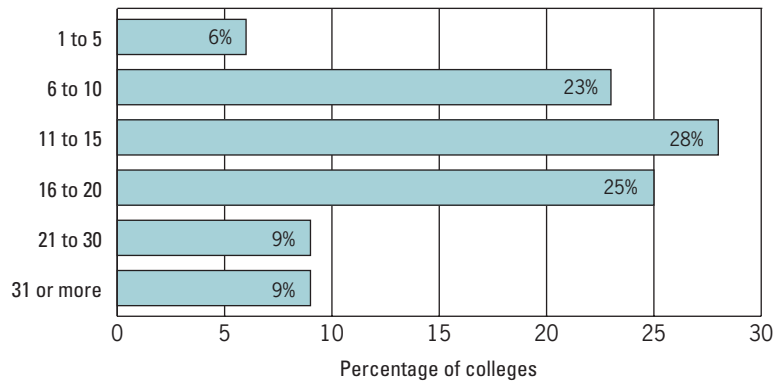
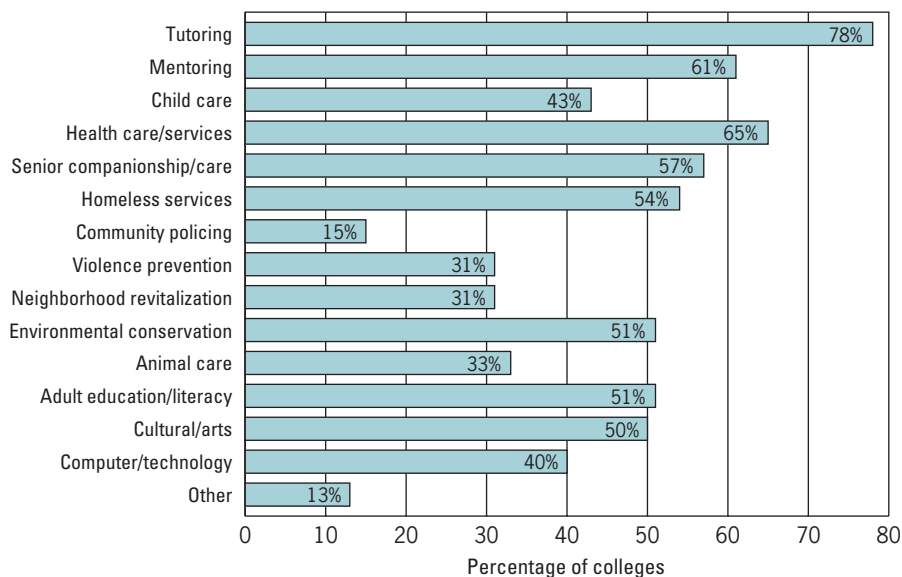


FIGURE 6 Types of Student Service Learning Activities



Students learn about courses that offer service learning from multiple sources, but most often from faculty members and other students (see figure 7).

About half of the colleges reported fewer than 250 students participating in service learning each year. The average number of service learners per college is 432, with a reported maximum of 5,000 students at one multi-campus institution.

Faculty Involvement

The average number of faculty members using service learning is 14 full-time and six part-time faculty per college (see figure 8).

Faculty members are encouraged or recruited to become involved in service learning for personal reasons, by their peers, in workshops, and by

FIGURE 7 How Students Learn about Courses with Service Learning

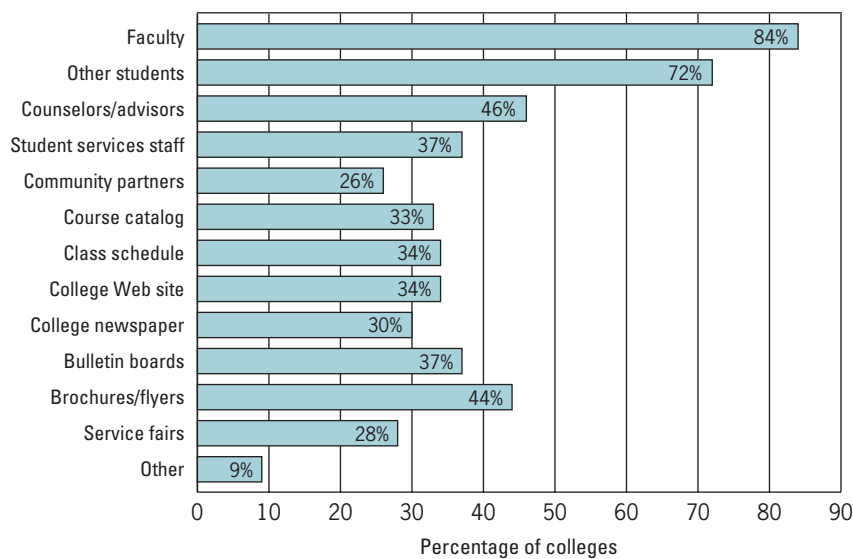


FIGURE 8 Service Learning Faculty per College by Employment Status

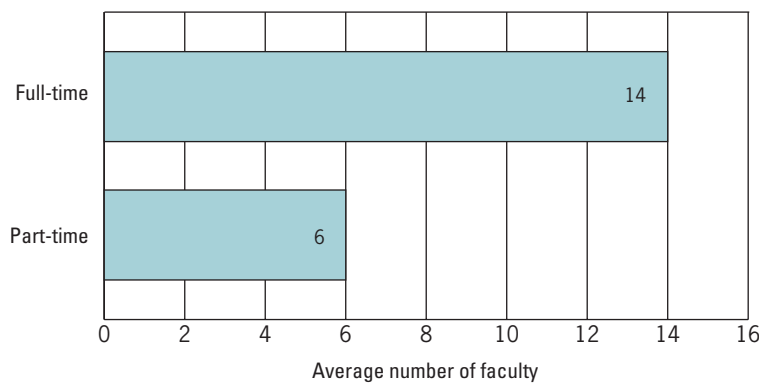
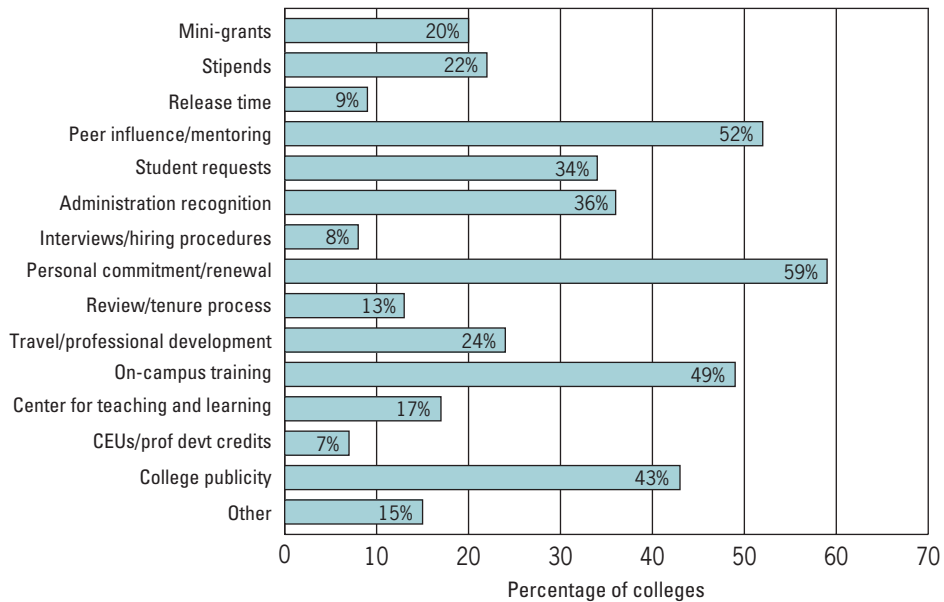


FIGURE 9 Incentives for Faculty Involvement in Service Learning



students and administrators (see figure 9). Peer influence or mentoring were reasons cited for faculty in 52 percent of colleges. On-campus training and workshops were reported by 49 percent of the service learning colleges as having a role in encouraging faculty participation.

Only 20 percent of colleges use mini-grants or stipends to stimulate faculty participation, and less than 10 percent offer release or re-assigned time. In most cases, neither money nor teaching load reductions were reported as being responsible for encouraging faculty to offer service learning in their classes. Faculty

FIGURE 10 Extent Faculty Participation in Service Is a Promotion or Tenure Factor

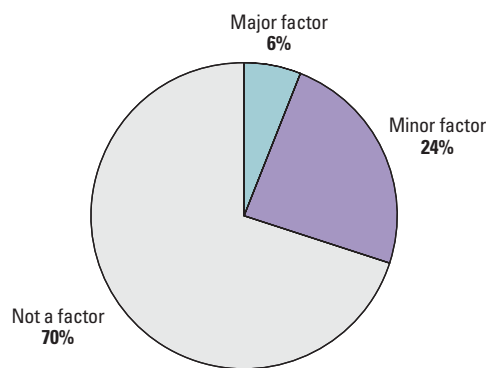
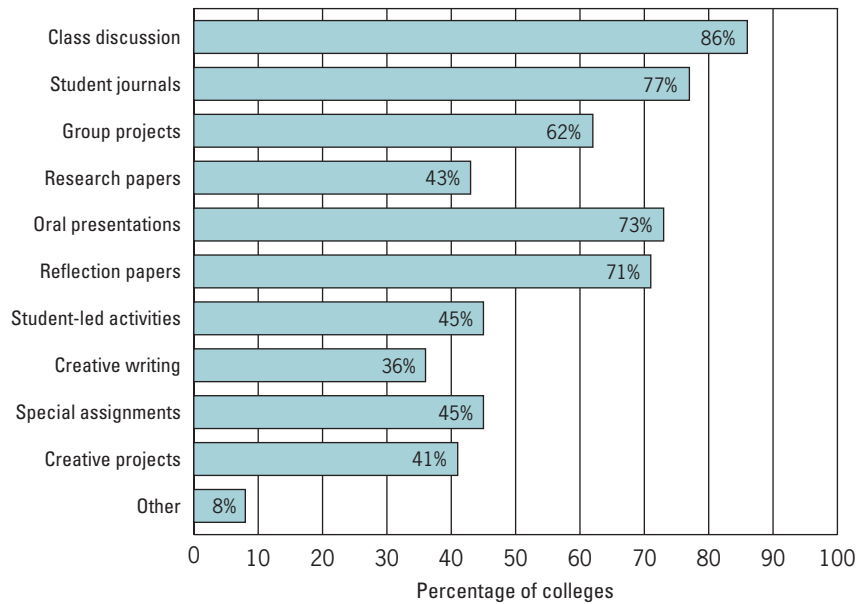


FIGURE 11 Types of Reflection Used in Service Learning

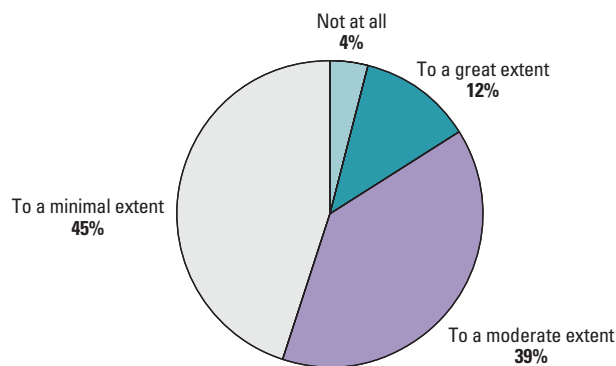


participation in community service or service learning is generally not a factor in promotion or tenure (see figure 10).

Class discussion and student-written journals continue to be the most popular types of reflection components used in service learning (see figure 11). Most faculty include civic

responsibility components as part of their curriculum, but only to a minimal or moderate extent (see figure 12). Civic responsibility means active participation in the public life of a community in an informed, committed, and constructive manner, with a focus on the common good.

FIGURE 12 Extent Civic Responsibility Components Are Integrated into Curriculum



Community Partnerships

On average, the service learning colleges indicated that they partner with a variety of local organizations at 54 different placement sites. The most common types of partners included social service agencies, K-12 schools, health

organizations, and senior citizen centers or elder care facilities (see figure 13).

Colleges also reported that they seek input about community needs and assets primarily through personal contacts with community members (see figure 14). Collaborative partnerships and advisory boards also provide input on community needs.

FIGURE 13 Types of Community Partner Organizations

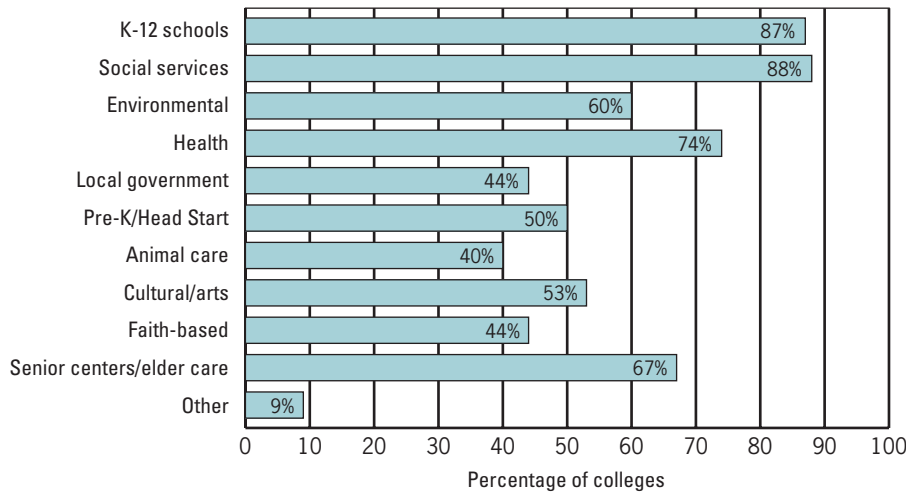
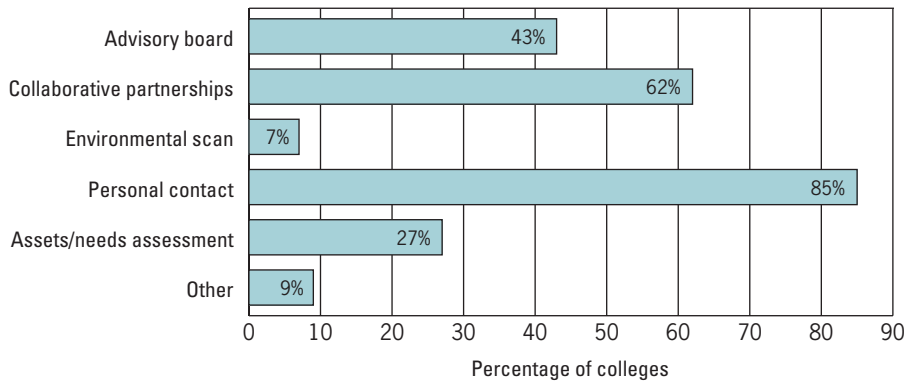


FIGURE 14 Community Input Mechanisms for Service Learning Initiatives



Program Administration

A large number of colleges have designated service learning coordinators or directors who organize their programs, and many also have service learning centers or offices (see figures 15 and 16). The majority of service learning staff report to an

academic vice president or dean, and others to a student services or student affairs administrator.

Colleges tend to rely on up to four different sources of funding. Most often these include the institution itself; the Corporation for National and Community Service (Learn and Serve America, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps); the Federal

FIGURE 15 Primary Person or Office Responsible for Coordinating Service Learning

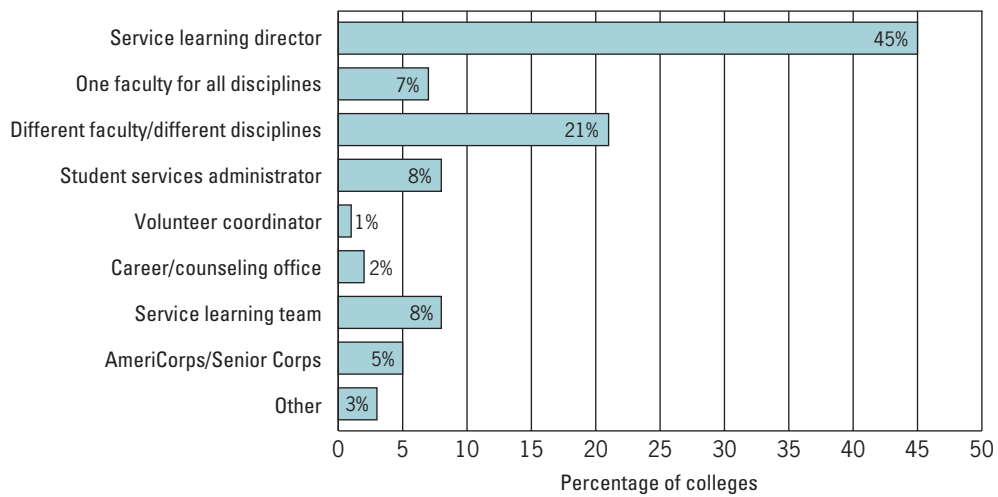
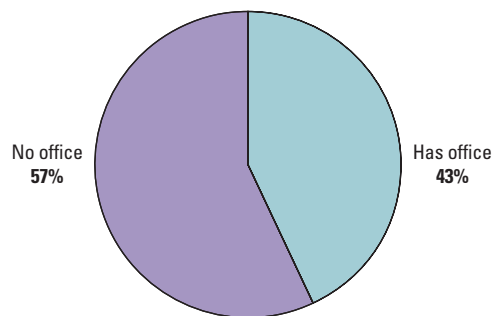


FIGURE 16 Separate Service Learning Center or Office



Work-Study program; and other national or state organizations (see figure 17).

Service learning is not a degree or certificate requirement in the majority of colleges, and is notated on transcripts at only 24 percent of colleges (see figures 18 and 19). Service learning is included in the strategic plans of a majority of colleges (58 percent) and in 50 percent of colleges' regional accreditation reports.

Program Evaluation

The majority of service learning colleges evaluate student outcomes, but far fewer colleges evaluate community partner organization, faculty, or other institutional outcomes (see figure 20). Only four percent of colleges assess outcomes associated directly with individual community members, while 20 percent indicated that no evaluation process is underway.

FIGURE 17 Funding Sources Used for Service Learning Initiatives

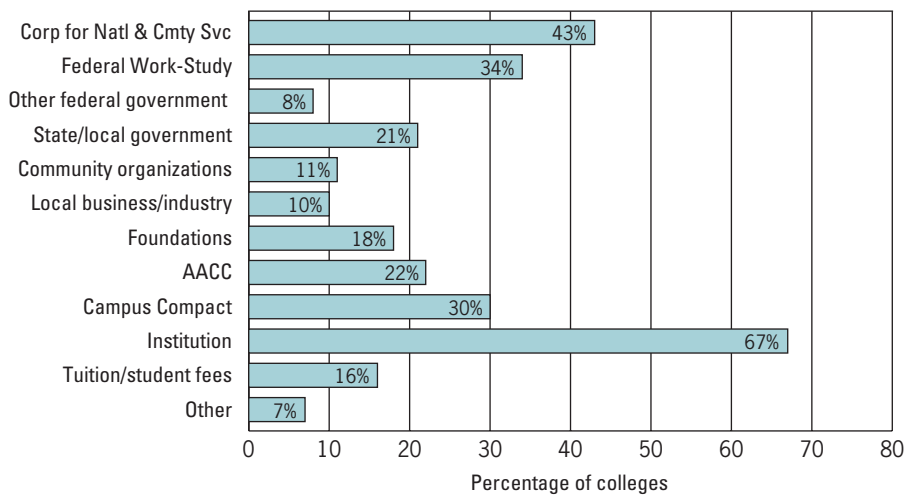


FIGURE 18 Service Learning Is a Degree or Certificate Requirement

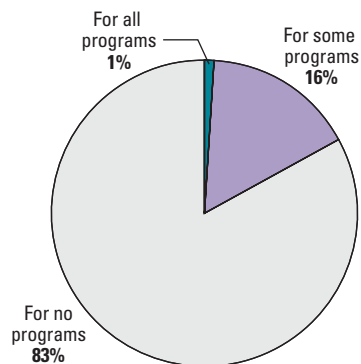


FIGURE 19 Service Learning Notation on Transcripts

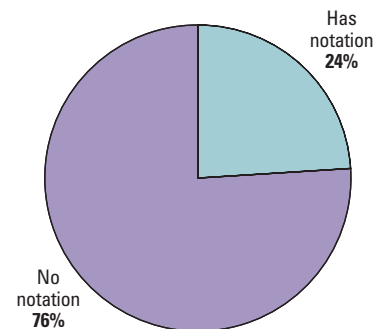
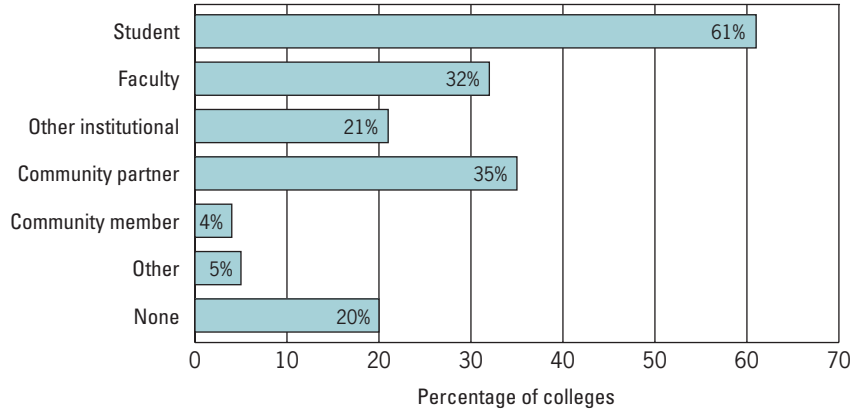


FIGURE 20 Types of Service Learning Outcomes Evaluation



While most service learning colleges track both student participation in service learning (58 percent) and student retention rates (68 percent), the majority did not know whether student retention data suggest that service learning increases student retention rates. Service learning was reported to increase retention at 18 percent of service learning colleges (see figure 21).

Comparison of 1995 and 2003 Surveys

AACC found that 173 institutions responded to both its 1995 and 2003 surveys. Sixty-two of these colleges reported in both years that they offered service learning. Sixty-nine colleges did not offer service learning in 1995 but do in 2003. Of responding institutions for both surveys, the number of colleges with service learning more than doubled from 62 to 131.

Of the 62 service learning colleges that responded in both 1995 and 2003, AACC noted several interesting comparisons that indicated service learning has grown within the institutions.

The first comparison revealed that the number of college courses offering service learning increased significantly from 1995 to 2003 (see figure 22). Fifty-four percent of the colleges offered six or more courses using service learning in 1995, whereas in 2003, 84 percent of the colleges offer six or more such courses.

FIGURE 21 Service Learning Increases Student Retention Rates

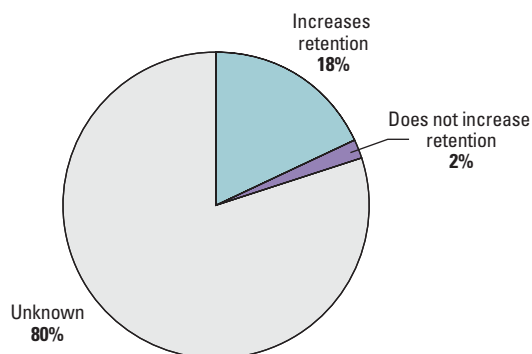
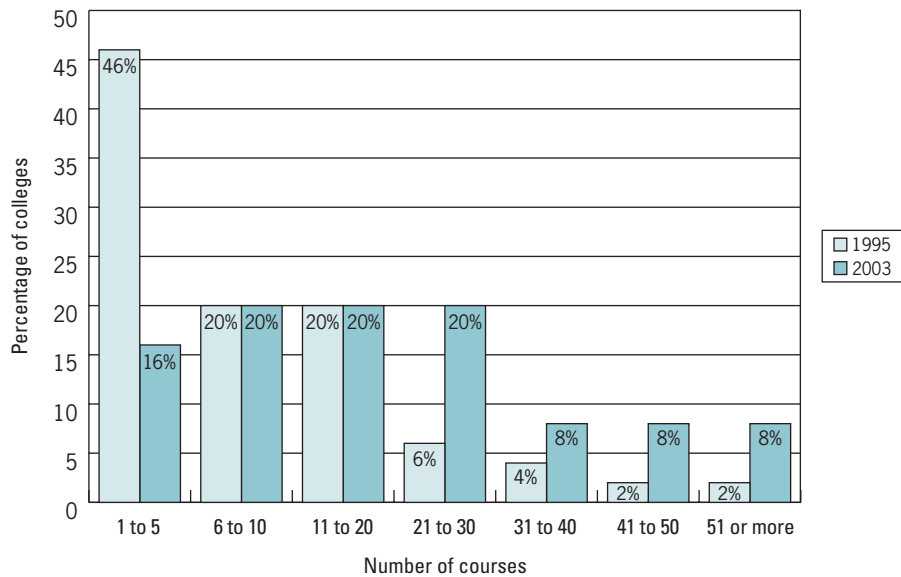


FIGURE 22 Courses Offering Service Learning: 1995 & 2003



The change in the number of courses suggested that student participation might have changed as well, and when the comparison was made, the number of service learners has indeed increased. Students are participating in larger numbers at the 62 colleges in 2003 than in 1995 (see figure 23).

The increases in courses and participating students can be linked to an increase in total participating faculty members. In the 1995 survey, 45 percent of colleges reported that five or fewer faculty taught courses with service learning components; in 2003, that figure decreased to 13 percent (see figure 24). From 1995 to 2003, the percentage of colleges reporting that 31 or more faculty taught with service learning grew from eight percent to 37 percent.

Two factors related to program institutionalization were measured in the 1995 and 2003 surveys. One factor is whether service learning is organized by a coordinator or director. For the 62 colleges reporting service learning in both surveys, only 31 percent reported that they had a service learning coordinator or director in 1995 (see figure 25). By 2003, this number jumped to 47 percent. Additionally, programs at colleges that have a separate service learning office tend to be more institutionalized than at colleges without an office. In 1995, 37 percent of colleges had such an office, but in 2003, this number increased to 60 percent (see figure 26).

These data strongly suggest that there is more commitment to and greater prevalence of service learning at the 62 institutions in 2003 than in 1995.

FIGURE 23 Students Participating in Service Learning: 1995 & 2003

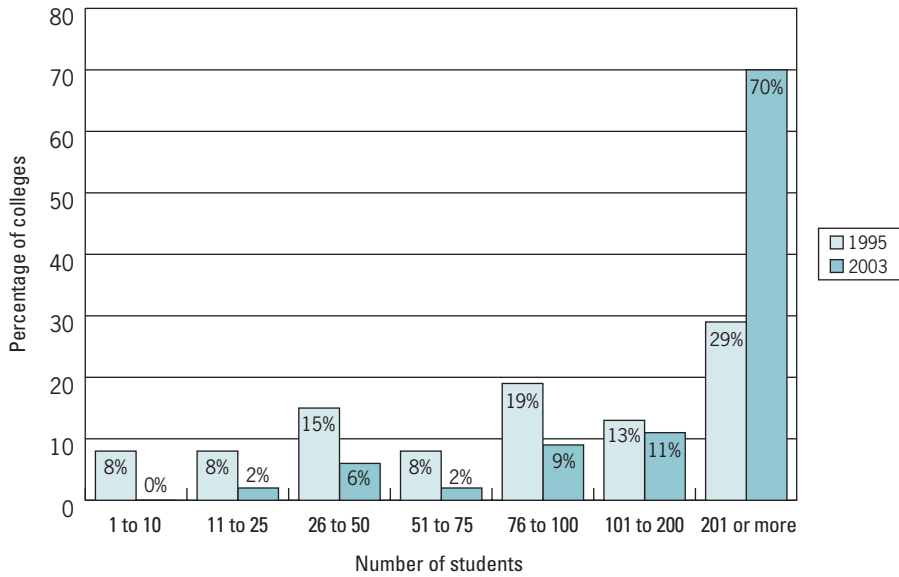


FIGURE 24 Faculty Participating in Service Learning: 1995 & 2003

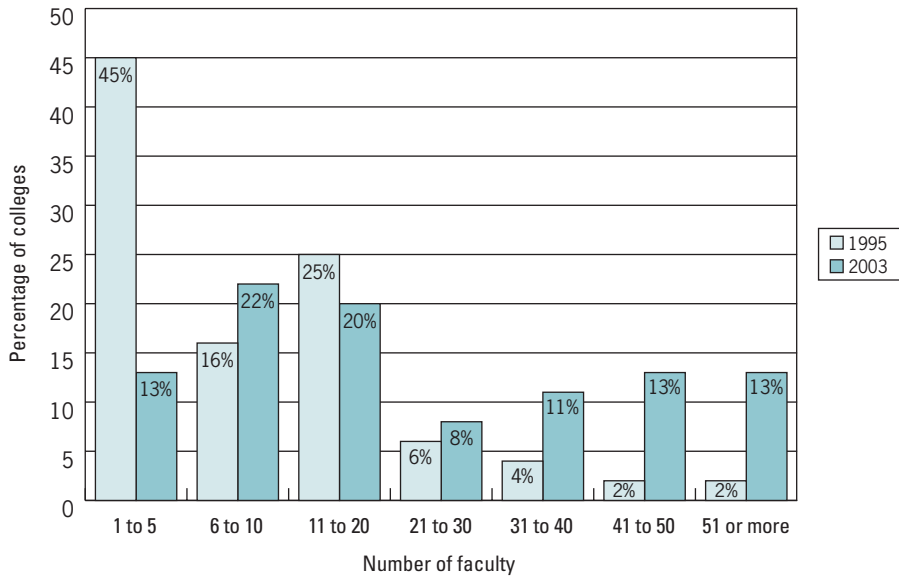
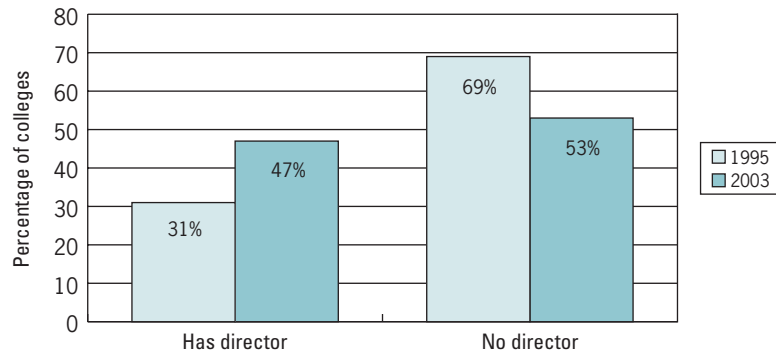
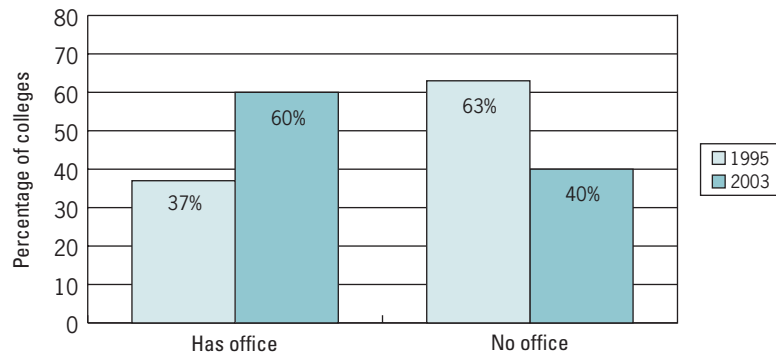


FIGURE 25**Colleges with Service Learning Directors or Coordinators: 1995 & 2003****FIGURE 26****Colleges with Service Learning Centers or Offices: 1995 & 2003**

Conclusion

The results of the 2003 survey suggest that there are more pervasive and stronger service learning programs in community colleges than existed in 1995. Course offerings have increased, student participation has increased, faculty involvement has increased, and more colleges now have a separate service learning office and director. While the picture of service learning in 2003 is encouraging, to maintain this growth and strengthen existing programs, the following recommendations emerged.

Ongoing evaluation of student, faculty, community partner, and individual community member out-

comes is a necessary part of growing a vibrant service learning initiative. Colleges that offer service learning might consider conducting an annual evaluation of programmatic impact on all constituents involved.

When identifying community needs, colleges may want to consider conducting a community assets and needs assessment in addition to using personal contacts and already established partnerships. A community needs assessment may allow for less visible areas of need to emerge and for all community members to have a voice in identifying local needs and assets.

In order to identify the positive effects that service learning may have on student retention and academic

performance, colleges may want to track student service learning participation and compare this with student retention. While 18 percent of service learning colleges indicated that service learning has a positive impact on retention at their institutions, 80 percent did not know if there is such a connection. If this information is known, it can be a powerful argument for increased institutional support of the program.

When asked how students learn about service learning, only 37 percent of service learning colleges reported that student services staff members provide such information. If service learning is to become institutionalized, all personnel at the college should be made aware of the program and their support sought. Student services personnel and counselors touch the

lives of thousands of students, and their alliance with service learning is important for its success.

Finally, because of the large numbers of part-time instructors on community college campuses, more of these faculty members could be invited to try service learning and supported in offering it to their students. While benefiting students, this may also link the part-time faculty more closely with the activities of the college and increase their sense of inclusion.

Service learning appears to be healthy, as reported by the respondents to this survey. Growth is being sustained, even in times of financial crisis. While areas for improvement will always remain, service learning seems to be an important part of the climate of the community colleges represented in this study.

Select Print Resources

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Select Web Resources

American Association for Higher Education
www.aabe.org/service/

American Association of Community Colleges
www.aacc.nche.edu/servicelearning

Campus Compact
www.compact.org

Campus Outreach Opportunity League
www.cool2serve.org

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health
www.futurehealth.ucsf.edu/ccpb.html

Community College National Center
for Community Engagement
www.mc.maricopa.edu/engagement

Corporation for National and Community Service
www.nationalservice.org

Educators for Community Engagement
www.e4ce.org

Effective Practices Information Center
www.nationalserviceresources.org/epicenter

International Partnership for Service-Learning
www.ipsl.org

National Service-Learning Clearinghouse
www.servicelearning.org

Points of Light Foundation
www.pointsoflight.org

Service-Learning on the World Wide Web
csf.colorado.edu/sl

UCLA Service-Learning Clearinghouse Project
www.gseis.ucla.edu/slc

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Thanks to Arnold Kee and Kent Phillippe for contributing to this publication.

This material is based upon work supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service under Learn and Serve America Grant Number 00LHEDC001. Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Corporation or the Learn and Serve America program.

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