

Motivation and Orientation: Faculty Perspectives on Development and Persistence in Service Learning and Community Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Quality service learning and community engagement (S-LCE) in higher education involves faculty and staff working alongside community members and students for mutual benefit. We investigate explanations, motivations, and intentions of faculty that contribute to the sustained commitment for S-LCE work. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews across two institutions of higher education. Results indicate that faculty rely on motives connected to student learning and community impact and that faculty approach S-LCE from a disciplinary or social change orientation.

Keywords: intrinsic motivation, professional identity, faculty development, civic engagement

Leaders in higher education are increasingly concerned about whether higher education is meeting its goals of educating college students for civic participation (Ehrlich, 1999; Saltmarsh, 2005). Moreover, scholars (e.g., Knefelkamp, 2008; Mitchell, 2015) are questioning whether service learning and community engagement in college results in citizens who are committed to civic participation and civic action for social good as part of their civic identity. If students are to develop a civic identity that leads to long-term commitment to civic action, educators question the most beneficial educational contexts within which these civic identities are most likely to develop.

Service learning and community engagement (S-LCE) represents a growing and dynamic set of practices that focus on curricular service learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995) and other educational practices that “build important collaborative partnerships, improve all forms of scholarship, nurture the support of stakeholders, and contribute to the common good” (Bringle et al., 1999, p. 12). Institutional priorities and

practices facilitate or inhibit the development of service-learning curricula and activities (Holland, 1997). In addition, faculty working within these institutions can feel a sense of agency or might feel constrained in their community-based work based on institutional policies and the prestige ascribed to community-engaged work (Baez, 2000; O’Meara & Niehaus, 2009; Wade & Demb, 2009). With these factors in mind, this project is an attempt to address the context within which faculty, leading and teaching at institutions of higher education, harness and develop the civic motives and identity that inspire their students to do the same.

Faculty Motivation, Identity, and Service Learning

Faculty likely become motivated to pursue service learning as a teaching strategy for a variety of reasons (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002; Hammond, 1994). O’Meara (2012) provides a framework for understanding the variety of individual, institutional, and environmental factors that influence the motivations of faculty who

engage in S-LCE. In the current study, we focus on the individual factors that influence faculty to develop a personal commitment to S-LCE (Daloz, et al., 1996; Holland, 1997) and to develop a professional identity and set of experiences that support these efforts (Janke, 2006). The framework of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) helps to guide understanding of these motivations more fully.

According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), people can be motivated by extrinsic and intrinsic factors. What determines the source of the motivation, whether extrinsic or intrinsic, is the amount of control or agency the individual experiences over the activity. Extrinsic motives are characterized by a low amount of control by the individual, and intrinsic motives are characterized by a high amount of control. Over time, and with increased amounts of control exerted over one's life, initial external influences can become internalized and seen as self-determined.

Numerous external factors influence faculty agency in pursuing service learning as a professional teaching or research strategy (Deci, Kasser, & Ryan, 1997). Scholars have routinely pointed toward institutional values as expressed in promotion and tenure criteria as key forces that can encourage or inhibit participation (Hou, 2010; O'Meara, 2008). Colleagues who are responsible for those guidelines and for evaluating the professional work of others, however, serve to internalize extrinsic standards for promotion and tenure, causing a resistance to change over time (Saltmarsh et al., 2009). Disciplines that have a tradition of service learning could provide motivation for faculty who are new to the discipline and field, and faculty who have internalized the values associated with service learning within those disciplines might adopt service learning and community engagement as a common practice in their professional work, encouraging greater amounts of service-learning work over time.

Intrinsic motivations for service learning can stem from a variety of sources.

Although faculty may not have received formal training in service learning, they might have numerous service experiences in the community prior to entering their higher education degree programs (Hammond, 1994). As such, they might have developed personal values and a civic identity that matches the perspectives of service-learning teaching and other forms of community engagement (Wade & Demb, 2009). Through a personal orientation toward community engagement, faculty might connect personally or deeply with a social issue and be drawn to the work of service-learning and community engagement because of this strongly held belief about an issue. In addition, faculty who have by their background, strong commitments to social justice would be drawn to use S-LCE as a professional practice that matches their strongly held beliefs (Butin, 2015; Yep & Mitchell, 2017).

Practical Service Learning and Community Engagement

Although some faculty pursue S-LCE because of external forces or deeply held internal motives, others might pursue S-LCE because of its practical effectiveness in helping students learn (Hesser, 1995). Teachers who recognize the power of experiential learning might find the deep levels of applied engagement characteristic of S-LCE particularly suited to constructing meaningful narratives and motivation for student experiential learning (Furco, 1996). Those who are oriented toward teaching innovation might see S-LCE as a creative way to provide project-based or innovative assignments for their students (Kezar & Rhoads, 2001). This is to say, faculty who appreciate and pursue S-LCE despite its challenges may do so because of the benefit to student learning specifically, as opposed to being primarily motivated by community need.

Research Questions

Studies addressing faculty motivations for engaging in S-LCE have focused on developing requisite skills and knowledge

about S-LCE (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002; O'Meara & Niehaus, 2009) and less often about dispositions that motivate and facilitate the work. In the current project, we wanted to focus on the motivations and dispositions of faculty who engage in S-LCE, as well as their primary orientation toward the work. Additionally, we focus on whether these motivations and orientations are static over time, or moveable based on learning, development, and context. Because these interests and dispositions are relevant to the faculty themselves, we were particularly interested in gaining understanding from a broad spectrum of those who are engaged in the work directly.

Informed by an adult learning perspective (Mezirow, 1991), we expected that motives and dispositions might change over one's career and experience with S-LCE. Likely, as faculty experience S-LCE over time, their perspectives might change because of interactions with others who are involved in the work, faculty development programming, or with experience working with community partners directly (Dorado & Giles, 2004).

To investigate these issues, we developed the following key research questions: 1) What are the motivations that community scholars in higher education identify (as they use their authentic voice to discuss their work) as relevant to their work? 2) Do community scholars in higher education express shifts or changes in their motivations over time, and what do they say prompts these changes? 3) What faculty development support structures are relevant for S-LCE faculty as informed by motives for and orientations toward their work?

METHOD

Scholarly Orientation and Timeline

The current project represents a collaboration between a large private institution of higher education in the northeast, Northeastern University (NU), and a mid-sized comprehensive undergraduate public institution in the southeast, the University of

North Florida (UNF). These institutions have different histories in relation to community engagement goals and practices. Importantly, these institutions take different approaches to engaging faculty with S-LCE. At NU, faculty work primarily with the service-learning program team to coordinate community-based projects that align with their course objectives and to participate in faculty development programming. Trained student leaders serve as Service-Learning Teaching Assistants, or as liaisons between the faculty members, students, and community agencies. At UNF, faculty members serve as the primary liaison between the university and the community agency. The service-learning center supports connections and partnerships between faculty and community agencies and supports faculty development. Service learning is not a graduation requirement at either institution, although in some majors participation in a course with this component is requisite.

In addition to these institutional differences, the principal investigators (PI) differed in their academic background and experiences with S-LCE. One PI from NU experienced S-LCE with a social justice focus as a college student and has continued that work into her professional and scholarly career. One PI from UNF had no prior experience with S-LCE as a tenured faculty member prior to joining an initiative started by his institution. Another PI from UNF had experience with S-LCE in her undergraduate program, not in her graduate program, but led an initiative for S-LCE in the Honors Program and was an assistant director in an SL center.

We received Institutional Review Board approval in early spring 2018. We then conducted three pilot interviews to refine our interview protocol/guide. We conducted interviews throughout spring 2018, and while we did this we utilized our pilot interviews to clarify our approach for identifying themes and codes. We completed interviews in May 2018 and transcribed interviews throughout summer and fall that year, in addition to utilizing our pilot interviews to practice developing units of general meaning. In July

2018, we presented some preliminary data at a roundtable at an international service-learning conference and engaged participants in meaning-making around some key quotations from the interviews.

By fall 2018, we identified units of general meaning from our target interviews. As a research team, we spent the entirety of 2019 going through major life changes, which slowed our progress. As we began the full coding process, COVID-19 shut everything down. These developments helped us question whether the best way to understand how faculty shift over time in relation to this work is by analyzing data collected years ago.

Participants

In total, 29 faculty from across two institutions participated in the interviews, 12 from NU and 17 from UNF. We categorized their experience level with S-LCE as New (1-3 semesters), Practiced (4-8 semesters), or Experienced (9 or more); within these there were 16 total 'Experienced,' 9 total 'Practiced,' and 4 total 'New.' Ten participants were non-tenure track, whereas the remainder were either tenured or tenure track. Participants' range of time at their institution ranged widely, from just one year to 36 years. Twenty of the 29 participants do some sort of community-engaged scholarship and/or scholarship about S-LCE, and 11 of them had experienced S-LCE themselves as students. They represented a wide range of 14 different disciplines/interdisciplinary areas (e.g., Art & Design, Biology, Communication, Education, Engineering, Math, Social Sciences, and Nursing).

Epistemological and Methodological Approach

To accomplish our phase one goals, we grounded our approach in phenomenological methodology. This "is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013), and this aligned well with

our research questions and goals. Within this, interviews are conducted with individuals who have direct experience with the subject of study (in this case faculty involved with S-LCE work) with questions aimed at unearthing what they have experienced in terms of the phenomenon and what contexts or situations have typically influenced their experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2013). Data were then transcribed, read, and culled for like phrases and themes that are then grouped to form clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013).

In our interview guide, we covered topics such as the nature and development of professional and personal identity in doing S-LCE work; benefits and challenges in integrating S-LCE into courses and research; the impact on pedagogical practices in and beyond S-LCE courses; the impact on attitudes toward and beliefs about one's commitment to community service; the role of serving as a civic mentor to students; S-LCE work as connected (or not) to social justice motivations; meaningful experiences with community partners that inform S-LCE work; and other experiences and connections they have in their community.

To analyze our data, we used the approach laid out in *Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data* (Hycner, 1985). We identified units of general meaning through a process that focused on naming the most prominent themes, moderately mentioned themes, and themes that were notable but mentioned infrequently. We developed our coding scheme from our units of general meaning and conducted a member check (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Koelsch, 2013; Cho & Trent, 2006) with three of the original interviewees from each of our two campuses (six total). We utilized this to structure and code our pilot interviews in Dedoose (2018), refined the coding scheme based on that, and then coded a few target interviews each. This iterative process allowed us to fully immerse ourselves in the data, but also to clarify our codes, what we each meant by them, and to categorize them in ways that

helped us better understand our research question. The codes presented here were derived meticulously from the original interviews and their units of general meaning, as well as our own reflections on our shifting perceptions of our own roles (and what we seek to understand) in light of the global pandemic.

RESULTS

After dividing up, reviewing, and chunking out sentence-by-sentence the 29 interview transcripts, we derived 10 main units of general meaning, each with subsequent subunits. These units of general meaning led to the development of codes, which were added along with each transcript file in

Dedoose. Through a process of applying and utilizing the codes in several of our interviews by having two of us on each interview with the other’s coding work hidden while coding, we were able to negotiate discrepancies in excerpt length, the application of one or multiple codes (to better see code co-occurrence), and the ways we were each applying the codes. After this process of refinement, our finalized codes fell into four main themes (as well as a miscellaneous category that included anything that seemed important but we were uncertain of, as well as the general timeframe of any excerpt—past, present, future): 1) Why do you S-LCE?, 2) How do you do S-LCE?, 3) Results of S-LCE, and 4) Obstacles. The relevant codes under each of these categories are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes, Codes, and Subcodes Identified in Interview Transcripts

Main Theme	Relevant Codes
Why do you S-LCE?	Motivations, Learning + Need Match, Personal-Community Connections, Past Experiences, Early Life Experiences
How do you do S-LCE?	Helpful Personal Qualities, Collaborative Support/Potential, Institutional Support
Results	Personal Impacts, Knowing It’s Working (Community Impacts, Student Reflections)
Obstacles	Time, Living up to ethical responsibility, “Content is King”, Logistics, Partnerships, University not recognizing S-LCE work as valuable

Most notably, these themes and codes resulted in a model that places into four possible relationships a faculty member's primary motivation for integrating S-LCE and their primary orientation to S-LCE in their teaching. The main relationship between their primary motivation and orientation (summarized in [Figure 1](#)) then has implications for how they integrate S-LCE and come to understand whether or not it's successful as well as the most useful forms of support/faculty development they need. The interrelationships among these motivations and orientations are labeled along relationship paths identified as 1 - Learning Focused, 2 - Meaning Making, 3 - Content-in-Context, 4 - Social Change Focused. Where faculty ultimately progress along these motivation-orientation relationship paths likely changes over time. Despite that, S-LCE professionals' ability to identify where individual faculty members fall is helpful in prioritizing the support and accountability structures necessary for them to thrive in this work, which, in turn, ultimately increases the potential for positive social impact.

DISCUSSION

The three research questions for this study centered on the motivations of faculty who engage in S-LCE and how understanding these motivations might inform faculty development support structures within higher education institutions. Understanding both the what (Orientation) and why (Motivation) that brings faculty to and keeps them engaged in S-LCE work is a useful anchor in designing and delivering faculty development programs.

Motivation Within the Complexity of Identity

Identity is not static. Simply asking faculty members why they are in their profession can elicit a multitude of responses. During the participant interviews, faculty were directly asked about their motivations and the results reinforced how varied faculty reasons can be for pursuing service learning (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002; Hammond, 1994).

Accordingly, a parent code for Motivations arose in the resulting units of general meaning. Their responses taken within the context of the entire interview revealed that faculty motivation is not the only important factor in S-LCE. Specifically, participants consistently shared narratives that suggested an important relationship between their Motivation (why) for and Orientation (how) to S-LCE work (see [Figure 1](#)).

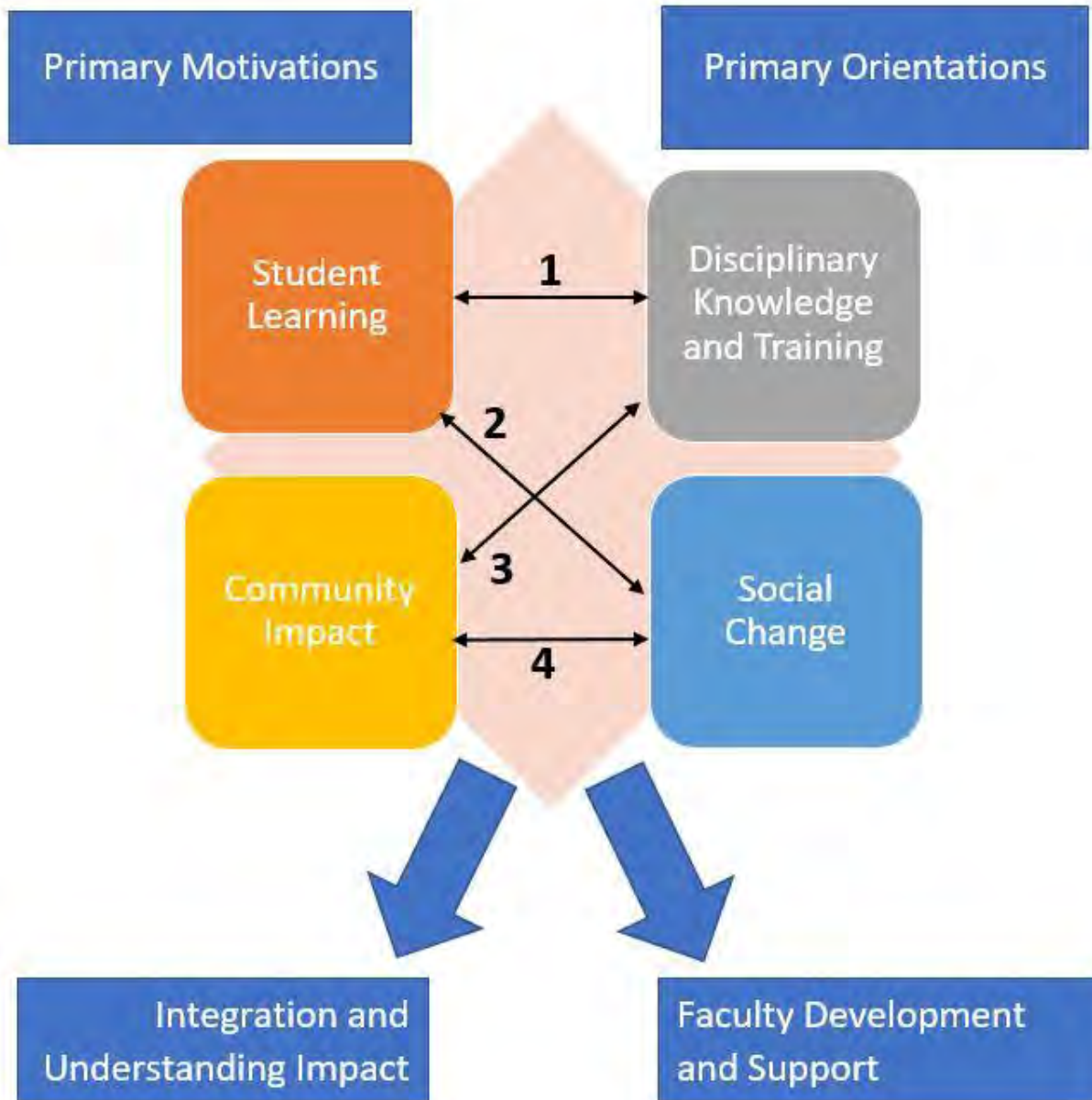
To illustrate this further, an examination of two participants' Motivation/Orientation relationship profiles is useful. Pseudonyms are used to represent faculty voice. For example, Frank, an English professor has a Social Change Orientation and Community Impact Motivation (see [Figure 1](#); Relationship Path 4 - Social Change Focused). His introduction into the world of S-LCE was through his lived experience of becoming a grassroots advocate for affordable housing after living in Chicago and having his living situation jeopardized by a condominium takeover. This moment in time influenced by an educational background where he took a course titled Human Experience at Valparaiso University in Indiana has shaped his approach to S-LCE. Frank stated, "[I] read books on birth and creation, citizenship, love and marriage, vocation, and loss and dying." This planted a seed for him to think about, "What is a community? What is our response? What are our responsibilities as citizens to that community?" In present time, Frank states,

I have very much shifted towards public writing, community-based writing. One of my approaches to community-based learning is to just help the students see themselves as authorities on the problems that they witness. [Identify] this is a problem in my community and I can be an authority on that problem and I can write about that in a way that can either get people to be more aware or to act.

Similarly, Nayiby, a Biology professor, has a Social Change Orientation but with a Student Learning Motivation (see [Figure 1](#);

Figure 1

*Dimensions of Faculty Development and Persistence with S-LCE**



*Conceptual Labels for Relationship Paths: 1- Learning Focused, 2 - Meaning Making, 3 - Content-in-Context, 4 - Social Change Focused.

Relationship Path 2 - Meaning Making). She identifies her childhood tenure as a Girl Scout as foundational to her attraction to S-LCE work. She states, "One of the things about Girl Scouts that really sticks with me besides camping skills is community service. Obviously, it wasn't service learning but community service and the importance of that. I learned that's just what you do. It's normal." She then proceeds to explain how life's journey can often derail us (through lack of time and conflicting priorities) from things that call to us. However, she follows up by stating,

Connecting it [community service] up to my professional identity which is in education in science just always that always seemed like the best fit. I mean I'm happy to go you know to a soup kitchen. That's great but it just seemed like since I don't have that much time, it just kind of makes sense to have the best and most impact that I can which is somewhere in the science education realm.

Clearly, Nayiby is called toward social change. However, her Orientation toward Social Change is more fully realized because she is able to help her students learn. It motivates her. Nayiby explains,

I feel more comfortable doing it [S-LCE work] knowing that my students are learning what they're supposed to be learning. I've also found that they learn more than I maybe thought they were going to and that's very much in the[ir] development of professional skills and what I like to call understanding the responsibility of scientists.

Both Frank's and Nayiby's statements indicate the importance of participants' experiences related to the primary Orientation and Motivation driving their S-LCE work. These two examples reinforce the significance of pre-developed personal values and a civic identity that complement the perspectives of service-learning teaching and other forms of community engagement (Wade & Demb,

2009), particularly when Social Change is the primary Orientation. However, though the model (Figure 1) suggests discreet relationships between the motivations and orientations, the dimensions are not independent. For example, there may be some interdependence between disciplinary focus and social change as an Orientation. It is also useful to revisit the framework of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012), as both intrinsic and extrinsic forces are influencing faculty in S-LCE work. Perhaps it is the nexus of these forces that is most influential.

Do Motivations Change?

Simply put the answer is yes. However, the journey for that change varies. Time, Experience, Exposure, Success, Failure, Constraints are just some factors that can influence motivation. In Figure 1, motivation and orientation are represented as binary. Perhaps there are moments in time where this is true; however, the reality often is that orientations or motivations are weighted given circumstances or capacities in each moment or circumstance. Service learning focuses on a balance between community impact and student learning outcomes. It stands to reason that faculty may be equally motivated by both ideals (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002) or that in some contexts, one or the other may be weighted more. Some disciplines, by their very nature, are rooted in social change or social justice. It is doubtful that faculty members drawn to such a discipline would be oriented to Disciplinary Knowledge-Making/Training versus Social Change exclusively. For all participants in this study, there was a timeline related to their relationship with S-LCE work. Most of them are not nearing the end of their career so there remains great potential to influence and support their understanding of and engagement with S-LCE.

S-LCE Motivation and Faculty Development

Although the model derived from this study represents the Motivation and Orientation dimensions as bidirectional, it is conceivable that one of these dimensions

might carry more weight in how a faculty member approaches S-LCE. Would the relative weight of a dimension be important to providing adequate faculty development programming? This study did not answer that concern but rather revealed it.

An important dimension in supporting faculty in S-LCE work is the impact of institutional priorities and practices to facilitate or inhibit the development of service-learning curricula and activities (Holland, 1997) to recognize that such institutions might foster a sense of agency or constraint for faculty in S-LCE (Wade & Demb, 2009). Reward structures for scholarship and teaching that focus on, even have their origin in, social-justice orientations or community-impact motivations likely are rare (Saltmarsh et al., 2009). Coupled with the evolving Motivations and Orientations that a faculty member may bring to S-LCE work, as well as the institutional policies and reward structures for scholarly work, how does a faculty development office or program proceed?

One logical starting point could be the use of learning communities, experiential learning, and transformational learning for faculty as opposed to skill training or orientation toward the work. Using faculty members' initial orientation and motivation as starting points for these dynamic learning spaces might provide the flexibility needed for faculty to find their true North in the work. Multidisciplinary learning communities might encourage innovation and collaboration; however, consideration could be given to the value that the culture of specific discipline or subdiscipline communities might nurture within each other. Frank mentioned in his interview that, "the public turn in composition studies has greatly affected my [most recent] direction. This is what the field has turned to and therefore, I as a member of that profession am following the impulse of my field."

Implications

The major contribution of the current study is highlighting possible new dimensions to explain the orientations and motivations

that undergird faculty S-LCE work. Researchers may find potential in building upon the Units of General Meaning identified in this study to develop a simple instrument or quick assessment that could be used to decipher a faculty member's current dimensions. Such information could be formative in an approach to a development cohort. Furthermore, an exploration of the nexus between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, as well as consideration of the interdependence between and within motivations and orientations could help identify a sweet spot for faculty development programs.

Lastly, we see that faculty experience over time impacts their motivations and orientations to S-LCE. It is important to consider how known circumstances, environmental changes, and or cultural shifts might impact faculty. However, in this moment, in the middle of an unanticipated global pandemic, we must find ways to support faculty through shifting and ever-changing orientations and motivations. A faculty member committed to community impact a year ago might be struggling just to help students learn right now. Those who are concerned for the growth of S-LCE work need to create space where dealing with current realities is acceptable and where faculty can rediscover their grounding in S-LCE work.

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