

**CASE STUDY**

**INSTRUCTORS PERSPECTIVES ON  
SERVICE-LEARNING ¶**



## **Executive Summary**

Every semester, hundreds of Binghamton University students and faculty from a variety of disciplines participate in service-learning projects. As a result of these efforts, new relationships have been created between the university and the organizations and individuals in the immediate area that have altered how each perceives and connects with the other. A growing number of

course content and specific learning outcomes with structured reflection during class time.

Also central to this study, the term sustainability has been used extensively within the literature on service-learning and community engagement, taking on a number of meanings and nuances. This study adopts the definition offered by Billig (2002):

their survey of Campus Compact members, Hinck and Brandell (2000) find that the value campus administrators place on service-learning is positively associated with the value faculty place on service-learning.

Researchers have also identified several factors hindering service-learning efforts. One of the most widely identified barriers in the service-learning literature is a lack of rewards and recognition for service-learning within personnel review processes (Abes et al., 2002; Banerjee







## Study Findings

According to our data sources, there have been minimal financial incentives and opportunities for course releases for instructors interested in service-learning. Perceptions regarding the level of support from other faculty, administrative support, and campus support services available to instructors interested in service-learning, however, were a bit more positive.<sup>1</sup> The value of service-learning in personnel review processes was perceived as mostly negative or neutral. This section begins by describing the institutional context for service-learning. Following this, the level of support for service-learning activities at Binghamton University is detailed in the following areas: i 397.279-9(t for)4( s( or )] TJs)-10(r-u-3(ve)9(a)4(r(vic)5(e)] TJE

The Institutional Context: As a publicly-

members (who joined in small but increasing numbers later in the history of these groups). Analysis of the minutes of these committees indicate that both were engaged in some activities and had functions related to service-learning. However, the committees did not appear to have clear missions, and there seemed to be some overlap in functions.

Based on the document analysis, there are no formal policies specific to service-learning or formalized plans for achieving campus-wide goals related to service-learning at Binghamton University. Also as evidenced by interviews and document analysis, there are no campus-wide mechanisms for monitoring the quality of service-learning activities.

Incentives for Using Service-Learning: The incentives for instructors to engage in service-



the opportunity to apply course knowledge in a real-life setting. As described by one interviewee:

I am completely committed that this [service-learning] is the best thing for their [student] development, that it is a safe way to grow and develop. Because all team interactions happen in front of me, conflicts, we are safe. And if I can help you make mistakes and learn from them, I'm so committed to that. I don't want you to make the same mistake in front of your boss. ..Outrageous things get said in team meetings and we learn from them. And nowhere else could you say that and still have a job. So those are the comments I need to say to people. I understand your frustration but you'd be fired right now. And it's a great safe place for them to learn, and I don't feel confident sending them out without the service learning.

Three interviewees also reported that instructors become engaged in service-learning activities in order to benefit the community. Consistent with these interview reports, survey findings indicate that:

- 97% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that service-learning is a valuable pedagogical tool;
- 92% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is important for students on this campus to participate in service-learning;
- 75% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is important for students in their

One interviewee indicated that having a mentor would be particularly va

I think they [support services at Binghamton University] are fragmented plus there's big gaps... For instance if you're a student and you want to do a service-learning course... where do you go? If you're a faculty and you want to do a service learning course... who do you go to? It's not outlined in a scheduled manner where... people know exactly what steps they have to take so it's very fragmented and... a lot of pieces are missing.

The support services available at Binghamton University, particularly those involving coordination of service-learning activities, could be expanded. Our survey results suggest that further investments in support services could help sustain service-learning efforts. Approximately 63% of survey respondents at Binghamton University indicated that availability of campus support services would encourage them to use service-learning in the future, as shown in Table 2.

Personnel Review Processes Instructor attitudes regarding the value placed on service-learning in personnel review processes were generally negative or neutral and suggest that service ethics compete with research ethics on the campus. More than two-fifths of the survey respondents were neutral regarding the value of service-learning in personnel review processes, while nearly 50% disagreed that service-learning activities are valued in these processes, as shown in Table 2. The negative attitudes that many survey respondents expressed may be related to the fact that Binghamton University has considerable research expectations for tenure-track and tenured faculty. Several interviewees indicated that the use of service-learning results in faculty having less time to spend on research, which may discourage them from getting involved in service-learning activities. When asked if Binghamton University rewards faculty for engaging in service-learning, the responses were:







Study findings reveal that many faculty do not believe service-learning is valued in personnel review processes. As stated earlier, this creates a perceived conflict between research and service ethics on campus. Given that Binghamton University is seeking more recognition as a research institution, one strategy to mitigate this conflict and sustain service-learning activities is to promote and support them within a research framework. As demonstrated in the literature, having instructors focus on service-learning and related experiences as part of their research agenda and writing about service-learning in a disciplinary monograph or journal helps increase the acceptance of service-learning by other faculty (Bringle et al., 1997). In addition, linking community-based projects with existing faculty research and teaching also increases the likelihood that faculty will sustain their involvement in their community activities (Bloomgarden and O'Meara, 2007). Binghamton University may want to consider providing university support and direct assistance to faculty to help them integrate community-based work and service-learning teaching with their research agenda, so that these activities ultimately lead to publication. This strategy could strengthen the cases of those faculty engaged in service-learning as they progress through personnel review processes at Binghamton University.

In conclusion, there is great potential at Binghamton University to expand service learning. Evidence suggests that at least 5% of instructors at Binghamton University have taught a service-learning course. According to this study's findings, support for service-learning could be strengthened in a variety of areas. Despite this, the vast majority of

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