

INSTITUTIONALISATION OF SERVICE-LEARNING



OUTCOMES

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- As a champion for service-learning, discuss and present institutionalisation initiatives of service-learning to the HEI's executive and public.
- Develop and facilitate the implementation of a strategic plan for institutionalisation of service-learning.
- Demonstrate ability to implement and monitor the various stages of institutionalisation.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Service-learning as a teaching methodology at HEIs can contribute to the realisation of the goals of the White Paper (1997) by providing socially responsible graduates who are competent in critical, analytical and communication skills to deal with change, diversity and tolerance to opposing views (Reddy, 2004: 38). As service-learning is a relatively new methodology its successful implementation is dependent on the support and commitment of academic staff. The goal of institutionalisation of service-learning would be to develop a common language and set of principles to guide practice, and to ensure the allocation of resources to facilitate this teaching methodology.

In order to ensure institutionalisation it is critical that there is authentic support and involvement of institutional staff. Furco (2001: 69) states that “one of the first steps to advancing Service-Learning on any campus is to develop a critical mass of faculty who support and promote its use”. Creating a context for institutionalisation of service-learning requires that a service-learning/ community engagement office or a person assigned to service-learning conduct an initial audit of existing community engagement initiatives at the HEI. This will provide an overview of what initiatives similar to service-learning are already in place, and allow for identification of existing pockets of potential support for growing service-learning in the institution. Such information as emerges from an audit of existing initiatives will provide the platform and context for carving a distinctive niche for service-learning – differentiating it from community service activities, internship programmes, co-operative education and other forms of experiential education, while also ensuring that it is fully integrated with both institutional mission and the curriculum.

8.2 MOTIVATION FOR INSTITUTIONALISATION

There are different possible reasons for the institutionalisation of service-learning, including that institutionalisation:

- Provides the academic context for service-learning;
- Attracts and supports advocates for service-learning;
- Develops support to sustain academics' service-learning practice;
- Expands the cadre of service-learning practitioners by expanding the service-learning network on campus;
- Enhances community engagement;
- Strengthens HEI – community relationships and improves the collaboration and partnerships between HEI, communities and service agencies;
- Improves undergraduate teaching through an effective approach to academic staff teaching and student learning;
- Promotes interdisciplinary teaching, learning and research and strengthens departmental collaboration;
- Assists the HEI with becoming socially relevant in teaching and research;
- Improves the scholarship and research of academics within the institution; and
- Provides the foundation for initiating and developing a service-learning office/ centre with staff, to support other staff engaged in service-learning.

8.2.1 Summary: Benefits of service-learning for the different participants

When motivating for the value of institutionalising service-learning, the following summarised benefits (for students, academic staff, community and service partners and the HEI) could be quoted to strengthen your argument:

Benefits of service-learning for students

- Students perform up to their potential in the module.
- They learn to apply principles from the module to new situations.
- Students develop a greater willingness to work towards the resolution of societal problems.
- Students develop problem-solving skills.
- They gain competence by practising social and professional skills.
- Students contribute to the community while broadening their understanding of community issues and populations that interest them.

Several studies have also established the outcomes for students engaged in service-learning activities (Cairn and Kielsmeier, 1991; Kraft, 1996; Daniels and Adonis, 2005; Eyler and Giles, 1994b and 1999):

- Personal growth: increase in self-esteem and confidence, increase in students' ability to engage in the community;
- Career development: active exploration of career interests, hiring advantage over others, greater confidence in their choice of career;
- Social development: increased interpersonal skills, indication of future community engagement; and

- Academic/ cognitive: better grades and higher throughput rate; engaging in service-learning is seen as a positive experience and students express the preference for all modules to incorporate a service-learning component.

Benefits of service-learning for academic staff

- The role of academic staff in the classroom is expanded from a provider of knowledge to a facilitator of critical synthesis and learning.
- Academic staff develop links with community members.

Benefits of service-learning for community and service partners and the HEI

- Students contribute to community development and renewal.
- Community and service agencies receive an infusion of creativity and enthusiasm from students.
- Students become more invested in the community.
- The community has increased access to institutional resources.
- The quality and efficiency of services offered to the community increase due to HEI assistance.
- The HEI and the community build links.
- The HEI is assisted with fulfilling its mission, because service-learning is a rich ground for renewing teaching, research and service activities.
- The HEI increases its access to community and service partners as co-teachers.
- The HEI gains additional experiential learning settings.

8.3 PROCESS OF INSTITUTIONALISATION

Boyer (cited in Brukardt *et al*, 2004: 1) writes:

I have this growing conviction that what is needed [for higher education] is not just more programs, but a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission, a larger clarity of direction in the nation's life.

Furco (2002) identifies four elements of institutionalisation, as follows:

- The relationship between institutional mission and the purposes and goals of service-learning;
- Community participation and partnerships;
- Academic issues pertaining to academic staff, departments and students; and
- Structural and programmatic issues necessary to advance and sustain service-learning policy, staff issues and recognition policy.

8.3.1 The relationship between institutional mission and the purposes and goals of service-learning

An important aspect of this stage is aligning the definition of service-learning with philosophy, mission and vision of your institution:

Identifying a common definition of Service-Learning will help create consistency across Service-Learning classes, encourage academic staff to provide a quality Service-Learning experience for students, and enable academic staff to compare the impact of their Service-Learning experiences with other academic staff adopting Service-Learning as a pedagogical approach. (Schaefer Hinck and Brandell, 2000: 878)

Such alignment also facilitates the adaptation of other forms of community engagement into service-learning programmes when deemed necessary. Sigmon (1994, in Schaefer Hinck and Brandell, 2000: 878) argues that a precise definition of service-learning will enable institutions to establish clear goals and then to work effectively and efficiently to accomplish these goals. Having a common definition (according to Bringle and Hatcher, 2002; and to Furco, 2003) also achieves the following:

- Avoids misconceptions;
- Provides continuity across programmes and academic units;
- Achieves academic goals (research); and
- Ensures quality of what takes place under this label.

If linked to the HEI's mission, the common definition is also a key element in the institutionalisation of service-learning on campus.

8.3.2 Community participation and partnerships

Zlotkowski (1999) asserts that HEIs are unable to institutionalise service-learning without the formation and sustaining of strong HEI – community partnerships. To ensure equity the partnership should reflect the different roles, the existing needs and incentives/ rewards for the community. (See more about designing collaborative partnerships in Chapter 5: *Partnership Development for Service-Learning*.)

8.3.3 Academic issues pertaining to academic staff, departments and students

For service-learning to have a future within higher education, staff, academic interest groups and individual disciplines need to see service-learning as a viable, intellectual and discipline-relevant pedagogy (Zlotkowski, 1995). Schaefer Hinck and Brandell (2000: 878) suggest three ways to convince HEI staff that service-learning is an important use of their time and energy, namely: 1) clearly situating service-learning within academic disciplines and interdisciplinary programmes; 2) providing development and ongoing support for staff to engage in service-learning; and 3) linking service-learning endeavours with academic staff reward structures.

8.3.4 *Structural and programmatic elements necessary to advance and sustain service-learning policy, staff issues and recognition policy*

There are structural and programmatic elements that are essential for advancing and sustaining service-learning:

- A centralised office needs to be in place, to perform a coordinating and facilitating function and thus ensure sustainability of the service-learning initiatives (Gray *et al*, 2000).
- Furco (2002: 57) states that an important facet of institutionalisation of service-learning is the establishment of staff performance review, appointment and promotion policies that support academic staff members' participation in service-learning.
- An alternative strategy to writing a separate policy for service-learning is to infuse service-learning into all the relevant existing policies and institutional strategic plans, to ensure the commitment and buy-in from all stakeholders at the HEI. In figure 8.1 (below) Daniels and Adonis (2005) visually represent an infused approach to institutionalisation of service-learning based on the HEI policies.

Figure 8.1: An Infused Approach to Institutionalisation of Service-Learning Based on the HEI Policies



(Daniels and Adonis, 2005)

Institutionalisation can be facilitated by the proposed audit of all existing community engagement activities (i.e. community outreach, community service, volunteerism, community-based education, work-integrated learning, field education, internships etc.) at the HEI. During such an audit, programmes would identify the experiential learning already occurring within the programmes – that is, learning that would lend itself to incorporating reflection, reciprocity, equity, development and diversity and could be modified into service-learning modules.

The process of service-learning institutionalisation as identified by Furco (2002) is aligned with the *Good Practice Guide* (HEQC/ JET, 2006) Recommended Indicators and Arrangements for Managing Quality, which stipulate responsiveness of mission and vision; policy, procedures and strategic planning; and commitment of leadership and management and organisational structure. (Refer also to Chapter 9: *Managing and Enhancing the Quality of Service-Learning*.)

8.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DIFFERENT STAGES IN THE PROCESS OF INSTITUTIONALISATION

Institutionalisation is a process; it is not something that will materialise overnight. The progress of this process is determined by various factors, such as HEI context, timing and management and leadership (to name a few). Allen (1999, cited in Randall, 2002) identifies a range and progression of characteristic staff responses during the process of institutionalisation:

- **Denial:** It's a fad. If we ignore it, it will go away.
- **Acceptance:** OK, I guess we have to do it.
- **Resistance:** I feel threatened. My department feels threatened. My school feels threatened. My campus feels threatened. Can I subvert it by not participating in the process or in some other way?
- **Understanding:** Maybe we can learn something useful. Can we use what we've already been doing?
- **Campaign:** We have a plan. Maybe it's not perfect, but let's get moving!
- **Collaboration:** We have a plan with long-range objectives that are clearly defined and, based on our experience with service-learning, we believe it works.
- **Institutionalisation:** We can't imagine our institution – our teaching, our scholarship – without service-learning. It's a permanent part of our institutional culture.

(Allen, 1999, as cited in Randall, 2002)

8.5 DIMENSIONS OF SERVICE-LEARNING INSTITUTIONALISATION

The following table highlights dimensions that could provide a checklist for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the institutionalisation process (Furco and Holland, 2004: 9-11).

Table 8.1: Dimensions of Service-Learning Institutionalisation

<i>DIMENSION</i>	<i>COMPONENTS</i>
Mission and Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a campus-wide definition of service-learning; • Completing a campus-wide strategic plan for advancing service-learning; • Aligning service-learning with the institution's mission; • Aligning service-learning with other education reform and civic engagement efforts.
Academic staff support for and involvement in service-learning development;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing staff knowledge and awareness of service-learning through staff development; • Cultivating staff interest in service-learning and providing opportunities for staff to tie service-learning to their scholarly work; • Creating adequate infrastructure to support staff in managing the logistics of service-learning; • Providing staff with incentives and rewards to engage in service-learning; • Encouraging influential staff members to assume leadership roles in advancing service-learning on the campus and (via partnerships) in the community.
Institutional support for service-learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a coordinating agency that facilitates the advancement of service-learning and community partnerships; • Establishing a policy-making entity for service-learning, which establishes standards of quality and criteria for evaluation; • Supporting an appropriate number of staff members to work on advancing and institutionalising service-learning; • Providing adequate funding resources for service-learning activities using both internal and external resources; • Ensuring campus leaders support and understand the goals and purposes of service-learning; • Ensuring that departments support and encourage staff who engage in service-learning; • Establishing an ongoing monitoring system that tracks service-learning activities, participation and partnerships; • Implementing an assessment plan for measuring impacts and identifying areas for improvement.
Student support and involvement in service-learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing coordinated mechanisms that foster students' awareness of campus service-learning opportunities; • Establishing formal incentives and rewards that encourage students to participate in service-learning; • Welcoming and encouraging student representatives to participate fully in official activities designed to advance service-learning on campus; • Maximising opportunities for students to participate in service-learning.
Community participation and partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building awareness among community partners of the full range of service-learning opportunities and possibilities; • Cultivating mutual understanding of needs and purposes between the campus and the community partners; • Welcoming and encouraging community agency representatives; • Having representatives participate fully in official activities designed to advance service-learning on campus; • Assessing and monitoring impacts of service-learning on partners.

8.6 CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF SERVICE-LEARNING, AND TIPS ON MEETING SUCH CHALLENGES

There are many challenges that could encumber the institutionalisation of service-learning. These include not only issues *unique to your institution* but also the following kinds of factors that could serve to prohibit the process of institutionalising service-learning:

- **Databases:** Adequate record keeping is essential for monitoring and evaluation purposes.
- **Communication process:** The foundation of any change process is sound communication, which thus needs to be in place.
- **Triad partnerships:** The CHESP model calls for the participation of three partners (academia, public service sector and the community). Building partnerships is a crucial aspect of the institutionalisation of service-learning (see Chapter 5).
- **Contractual agreements:** In order to ensure that service-learning occurs in a structured manner it is required that partners formalise relationships among sectors with memoranda of agreement (see Chapters 5 and 6).
- **Safety:** Service-learning occurs in the community setting and not on the campus. Risk issues are therefore inevitable. Safety of students, staff at service sites and clients needs to be ensured (see Chapter 6).
- **Funding:** Before service-learning can be institutionalised, there needs to be a source of funding to develop and implement service-learning modules. The effective implementation and subsequent evaluation of these modules should be used as case studies to present the argument for the institutionalisation of service-learning.
- **Sustainability:** This is related to the previous point; it is necessary to ensure that staff members and departments can sustain successful pilot service-learning modules.
- **Evaluation and monitoring:** Effective monitoring and evaluation processes need to be in place, to ensure that the service-learning modules are of a high quality. With the quality assurance trend in South African HEIs, this is an important factor that needs to be accommodated in the planning and development of the service-learning module (see Chapter 9).

8.7 STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING STRUCTURED INSTITUTIONALISATION OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Given the challenges that institutionalisation of service-learning presents, based on the dimensions outlined in table 8.1 we suggest various strategies to be employed – to ensure that the institutionalisation of service-learning occurs in a structured manner.

Strategies for institutionalising service-learning include:

- Conduct an institutional audit of existing community engagement activities.
- Establish a commonly accepted definition of service-learning.
- Set guidelines and standards for service-learning modules and programmes.
- Clarify the difference between service-learning and the various other forms of community engagement.
- Develop a strategic plan for service-learning.

- Develop a service-learning policy or guidelines.
- Link service-learning curricular activities with research and scholarship.
- Build capacity in service-learning pedagogy.
- Establish collaborative partnerships.
- Establish service-learning policies within the HEI to ensure monitoring at different levels.
- Identify academic staff support requirements and incentives.
- Establish an office and personnel for coordinating service-learning activities and supporting staff members engaged in service-learning.
- Gain visibility and establish an identity for service-learning.
- Secure resources and funding.
- Gain support of key administrators, academic staff, other staff, students and community and service agency members.

In sum, for an HEI to move towards service-learning and hence towards becoming an engaged institution, it is crucial to:

- Ensure that mechanisms are in place to extend existing modules into service-learning modules and to ensure their success.
- Develop and carry out strategies that will enable staff members to buy into the concept and the discourse of service-learning.



SELF-STUDY ACTIVITY

Assess the stages of institutionalisation at your institution or in your faculty/ department, conduct a Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats (S.C.O.T.) analysis, and develop a strategic plan to implement or fast-track institutionalisation of service-learning.