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Promoting Civic and Community-Based Teaching Practices: An Exploratory Study of Collaborations Between Faculty Development

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Abstract

The study discussed in this article explored collaborative efforts between faculty development centers and civic and community engagement centers related to the promotion of civic and community-based teaching practices. The authors surveyed chief academic officers of public institutions supportive of civic and community engagement and found initial evidence that such collaborations do exist and can be effective. However, the partnerships may often be episodic and informal. The authors also discuss implications for practice and future research.

Keywords: faculty, community engagement, institutionalization

A key recommendation of the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) outlined in *A Crucible Moment* nearly a decade ago centers on sustainably integrating civic learning into the academic curriculum of colleges and universities. Though there is mounting evidence of progress around this integration at various institutions (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2016; Campus Compact, 2014), there are grounds for doubt when considering whether democratic engagement and civic learning have moved from peripheral to pervasive across the broader landscape of higher education (Barnhardt, 2015). Despite the commitment of individual faculty members and supportive administrators, civic learning and democratic engagement are too often neither institutionalized nor sustainable. Consequently, activities associated with civic learning may become episodic and marginalized.

Faculty adoption on an individual level is imperative to the success of almost any higher education initiative (Kezar, 2013), including the integration of civic engagement within the academic curriculum (Cole et al., 2016). However, individuals are less likely to adopt an action they do not understand (Johnson-Laird, 2004; Kezar, 2013) and do not perceive as valued and rewarded by an organization (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Institutional environments best equipped to encourage faculty adoption clearly communicate the benefits of engagement while also removing common obstacles to participation, namely a lack of training in teaching political engagement and individual perceptions that institutional reward systems do not value civic engagement beyond the category of service (Bloomgarden & O'Meara, 2007; Bringle et al., 2006).

Many institutions have thus developed stand-alone workshops and dedicated centers for civic engagement to provide both professional development for faculty members and indicators of institutional support (Surak et al., 2017). A professional development-centered approach led by offices associated with civic engagement appears promising in encouraging both the frequency and effectiveness of faculty engagement in civically based teaching strategies. A similar approach has been utilized by centers for faculty development (e.g., centers for faculty excellence, centers for teaching and learning) in introducing and training faculty members during the rapid expansion of online and technology-enhanced learning (Lieberman, 2018). As centers for teaching and learning now transition toward the broader goal of enhancing student experiences and success through faculty innovation (Kelley et al., 2017), faculty development professionals are potential partners in efforts to promote faculty involvement in civic learning and democratic engagement.

Faculty development centers are often highly visible administrative units with broad areas of focus related to quality instruction (Kelley et al., 2017). In contrast to centers for civic engagement, which may potentially present an unfamiliar niche focus to many faculty members, the emphasis of faculty development centers provides a unique catalyst for promoting civic learning and democratic engagement as an example of innovative and effective teaching. Changing the understanding of civic learning and democratic engagement from the category of service to teaching excellence (Cress, 2012; Rowe et al., 2015; Simonet, 2008) in the minds of faculty members, especially those hesitant to adopt, is key to widespread integration of civic learning into the curriculum. Faculty development centers offer a visible platform for this effort.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine potential collaborations between community engagement structures and faculty development structures on campuses supportive of civic and community engagement. There is currently scarce literature discussing such an organizational effort, and this project comprises an initial exploration as part of an initiative supported by a national organization committed to facilitating civic and community engagement

in higher education. The aim of the study was to appropriately frame and further promote investigations into potential collaborative practices Findings and subsequent research could support the integration of civically based teaching practices into the scope of faculty development centers and, in turn, enhance the perception of civic and community engagement as exemplary teaching.

Theoretical Framework

Institutions provide indicators of importance to employees (i.e., faculty and staff) through processes, hierarchical structures, and various incentives to implement organizational initiatives (Birnbaum, 1988; Kezar, 2013). However, as stated previously, organizational change efforts that are inadequately understood and conceptualized by all parties are less likely to succeed. Therefore, two primary theoretical frameworks scaffolded this study: organizational support theory and signaling theory.

Organizational support theory (OST) holds that the relationship between an employee and the organization is based on reciprocity of value perception (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Shore & Shore, 1995). According to OST, employees are more likely to engage in practices they perceive as important to the organization when they also perceive that the organization supports their individual needs and values their professional contributions. Faculty members elect to adopt civic and community engagement due to a variety of individual factors, such as teaching goals (O'Meara & Niehaus, 2009; Parkins, 2008) and individual affinities to community engagement in general (Jaeger & Thornton, 2006; Lewing & York, 2017). However, the organizational value placed on civically based teaching practices, or simply the perception, serves as the limiting factor for engagement and can supersede individual motivations and deter participation (Colbeck & Weaver, 2008; Colbeck & Wharton-Michael, 2006; Jaeger & Thornton, 2006; O'Meara, 2003, 2013). Clearly framing and adequately recognizing civic and community-based teaching within the framework of teaching excellence can provide evident institutional support for faculty engagement.

Signaling theory centers on overcoming asymmetries of knowledge between constituencies via observable signals (Spence, 1973, 2002). For example, as Connelly et al. (2011) noted, organizations can demonstrate a commitment to diversity by ensuring a heterogenous board (Miller & Triana, 2009) or economic potential of their firms to prospective investors through financial statements (Zhang & Wiersema, 2009). Similarly, colleges and universities often demonstrate a commitment to civic and community engagement through the creation of professional development programs to support faculty understanding of appropriate implementation strategies (Chism et al., 2013; Lewing, 2020). Such programs may be administered by various organizational structures (e.g., center for service-learning), but intentionally incorporating the support of a larger faculty development structure (e.g., center for teaching excellence) could provide not only a source of professional development, but also a clear institutional signal of civic and community engagement as teaching excellence.

Methodology

Study Overview

This exploratory study utilized a mixed-methods, cross-sectional survey design to examine the presence of collaborations between civic and community engagement structures and faculty development centers at public institutions. The project was developed as part of an

initiative to expand faculty development opportunities within the American Association of State Colleges and Universities' American Democracy Project, and the survey was distributed to chief academic officers of member institutions. The instrument was developed in partnership with the association's leadership group and was piloted by a group of five nationally recognized scholars in the field.

Participants

The study utilized purposeful sampling, and chief academic officers of public institutions who were members of the American Democracy Project were invited to participate. Of the 293 invitations sent, seven did not have publicly accessible email addresses for the chief academic officer, and six were returned as undeliverable.

Fourteen participants fully completed the survey, and respondents represented a diverse range of enrollments and institutional classifications. Three participants reported that their respective institution's combined undergraduate and graduate enrollments was less than 5,000, five reported enrollments of between 5,000 and 10,000, one between 10,000 and 20,000, two between 20,000 and 30,000, and one greater than 40,000. Regarding institutional classifications, one administrator identified their institution as Doctoral-R1, two as Doctoral R-2, two as Doctoral-Doctoral/Professional, three as Masters-M1, one as Masters-M2, two as Masters-M3, and one as a Baccalaureate institution. Three institutions were identified as Minority Serving Institutions (Hispanic Serving Institution, Historically Black College or University, Tribal College or University, and Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institution). Two administrators self-identified their institution as a Hispanic Serving Institutions, and one identified as a Historically Black College or University. Seven participants indicated that their institutions had been awarded the Carnegie Foundation's Elective Community Engagement Classification during the 2015 and/or 2020 review cycle.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected via a confidential web-based survey using a secure online survey platform. Institutional Review Board approval was granted prior to starting the research, and participants gave informed consent prior to accessing the survey. The survey instrument was constructed within the Qualtrics survey platform and reviewed by a group of five nationally recognized scholars and the administrators of a national organization with a mission to support the civic and community engagement of higher education. The survey questions used for this project centered on (1) the presence and function of a faculty development center, (2) the presence and function of a civic and community engagement center, (3) any collaborations between the two units, and (4) institutional information. (The Appendix includes the survey questions.) The survey invitation and link were initially shared three times via the collaborating organization's regular newsletter. The invitation was then sent directly to the email address of the chief academic officer posted on the respective institutional website.

Limitations

The study's primary limitation was the low response rate. Aside from general commonality of an individual's decision not to participate in surveys, the researchers speculated that a contributing factor could have been administrators opting out if their institution did not house either a coordinating structure for faculty development or civic and community

engagement. Regardless, inferential statistics were not utilized in this exploratory study since the sample size would not have provided adequate statistical power.

Results

The overall completion rate for this survey was quite low, as was the total participant number. As a result, the data are not representative and cannot be used to draw any correlational inferences (Sivo et al., 2006). However, we did collect a set of 14 responses from a range of institutional types which provide insights into the presence of collaborations between civic and community engagement structures and faculty development structures at a variety of public institutions. The quantitative portion of this study, although brief, was straightforward and established that discrete structures are in place for each unit at most responding institutions. In addition, the responses indicate collaboration between the two units or some shared faculty development function (Table 1). The qualitative responses provided a more nuanced description of the degree and nature of the collaboration, revealing more informal co-development of resources and workshops than formal partnerships, and often work of a more limited scope or episodic timeframe than ongoing initiatives. Respondent comments also emphasized the desire for continued growth and development of collaborative efforts, increased funding to support the work, and recognition of the value of engaged scholarship (Table 2).

Table 1

Selected Results of the Presence and Function of Units

Unit Characteristics	Yes (*n*)	No (*n*)	Unsure (*n*)	Total Responses (*n*)
Teaching Excellence and Faculty Development				
Discrete structure	12	2	0	14
In place 5+ years	11	0	0	11
Promote civic and community engagement as examples of teaching excellence	8	2	1	11
Civic and Community Engagement				
Discrete structure	12	0	0	12
In place 5+ years	7	3	2	12
Provide professional development to faculty members	5	6	1	12

Note. There were 14 total responses to the survey (*n* = responses to individual questions). Due to the low response rate (5%) and low participant numbers, results are limited to total numbers rather than percentages or statistical analysis (Sivo et al., 2006).

Table 2

Integrated Results of the Collaboration of Units

Source	Results
Quantitative Summary	Respondents indicated discrete structures for teaching excellence and faculty development and for civic and community engagement at most reporting institutions.
	Respondents indicated some degree of shared focus among the units. Of 11 responses, eight reported that the faculty development unit promotes civic and community engagement as teaching excellence. Of the 12 responses focused on the civic and community engagement unit, five reported that it provides professional development for faculty.
Qualitative Summary	Respondents referenced informal and formal partnerships with the other unit, external partnerships (AAC&U), and institutional approaches (QEP and other limited-duration initiatives) to guide collaboration.
	When asked to describe collaborative efforts, respondents emphasized informal co-development of resources and workshops. They also described limited timeframe collaboration (e.g., election 2020) to develop curricular and co-curricular support materials.
Representative Samples	"Community based learning is rooted in faculty development practices."
	"We would be interested in doing more."
	"The Center [for Service Learning] offers a wide array of resources for faculty and staff related to curriculum development, civic learning, public scholarship, etc."
	"We have a small campus and there is a fair amount of informal interaction, but the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment does not have any formal connections to offices overseeing."

Note. We integrated quantitative data (i.e., responses to survey questions about the presence and function of centers) and qualitative data (i.e., open-text responses) to provide a more comprehensive description of the nature of the work and collaborations between the two units.

Three of the open-text questions provided opportunities for respondents to elaborate on collaborative efforts between the structures focused on teaching excellence and those for community engagement. Several themes emerged from the combined participant responses to those questions: the duration of the collaboration, the nature of the unit relationships, and concerns regarding collaborative activities (Table 3). Although the number of total responses limited our ability to draw conclusions, the participants provided insights that will be useful in developing future qualitative investigation.

Table 3

Qualitative Response Themes

Themes	Subthemes	Excerpted Exemplar Responses

Duration (15)	Episodic (8)	"Leading up to the 2020 election, the two groups worked together to provide support for faculty with curricular and co-curricular political topics."
	Ongoing (7)	"The CSL is part of the Institute for Engaged Learning, but works closely with the Division of Student Affairs, the Office of Community Engagement, and the Center for Teaching and Learning."
Nature (12)	Informal (7)	"The Center for Faculty Innovation has a range of workshops, trainings and other opportunities to support faculty. It works with the Center for Civic Engagement to develop some trainings."
	Formal (5)	"Our QEP was focused on Civic and Community Engagement. As such, the Center works directly with our Director for the project and assists in providing training on designing classes for CCE."
Concerns (3)	Financial (1)	"The Provost seeks funding to support this work and the university's Budget Team authorizes funding in line with strategic priorities."
	Faculty Impact (1)	"In regard to promotion and tenure, it is important for civically engaged scholarship to be respected and 'counted' toward scholarship and teaching excellence."
	Relationship Building (1)	"I have worked on connecting these two [units] at prior institutions and will do the same at my present institution."

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore collaborative efforts between faculty development centers and civic and community engagement centers at institutions supportive of civic and community engagement. The findings offer initial evidence that civic and community engagement represents a viable partner as faculty development centers reconceptualize their respective areas of emphasis. In addition, though contextualized through a small sample size, there was also evidence that faculty development centers may be best positioned to offer professional development for faculty in comparison to independent efforts of civic and community engagement centers, regardless of positioning within academic affairs.

Implications for Practice

One implication for academic administrators from the current study is that faculty development centers and civic and community engagement centers can collaboratively promote civically based teaching practices at institutions where both structures are present and effective. Eight of 11 chief academic officers affirmed that their faculty development structure promoted civic and community engagement as examples of teaching excellence, thus providing baseline evidence that civically based teaching is an appropriate area of emphasis for similar units.

However, the minority (five of 12) of chief academic officers affirmed that their civic and community engagement structures provided faculty development programming. Civically engaged teaching practices are counter-normative for many faculty members, and professional development is an important aspect of institutionalization (Chism et al., 2013; Lewing, 2020). Therefore, actionable steps for senior-level academic leadership could include facilitating regular interactions between the two parties as part of a long-term and deliberate process of developing jointly led faculty development initiatives. The partnerships from this study appeared to manifest through episodic and/or informal efforts; strategic action emphasizing faculty development (e.g., fellowships, course releases) may be more sustainable and effective with institutionalization efforts.

Most institutions in the study included both a faculty development center and a civic and community engagement center; however, this is not necessarily applicable for other institutions that value civic and community engagement as teaching yet lack dedicated resources. The institutionalization of civic and community engagement is often associated with the development of dedicated structures and processes such as service-learning coordinating centers and professional development programming (Furco & Holland, 2013; Jacoby, 2015), but in environments where human and fiscal resources are scarce, an integrative, rather than specified, approach may be the most efficient route to sustaining civically based teaching. An integrative approach could entail the establishment of a single support structure within academic affairs under the umbrella term of *integrative learning* (or another analogous title) to encourage the conceptualization of civic and community engagement explicitly within the scope of promoting exemplary instruction.

Implications for Future Research

As an exploratory project, this study raises several opportunities for future research. The survey could be refined and extended to validate concepts that emerged from the limited sample. For example, questions could include:

- Is there a statistical correlation between the size of an institution and the existence of formal collaboration on civically based teaching practice initiatives?

- Is there a statistical correlation between the reporting structure of unit leadership and the financial support for unit collaborations on civically based teaching practice initiatives?

In addition, a more intensive qualitative exploration of the practices of faculty development centers effectively integrating civically based teaching practices into their scope of work could add to the existing body of literature regarding the institutionalization of civic and community engagement. This approach offers the opportunity to further explore the themes that emerged in the limited sample data, as well as the potential for synthesizing strategies for effective practice, assessment, and sustainability of collaborative efforts between faculty development centers and civic and community engagement centers related to the promotion of civic and community-based teaching practices.

Conclusion

The institutionalization of civic and community engagement represents an organizational change process with the telos of more fully meeting the public mission of educating informed and engaged citizens. Faculty members are key constituents in related efforts, and promoting

their perception of civic and community-based teaching practices as exemplary instruction, rather than simply service, is critical to sustainably integrating the work within the curricular experiences of students. The results of the current study provided initial evidence that partnerships between faculty development centers and civic and community engagement centers can serve as a conduit for curricular integration of civic and community engagement. However, findings indicated that such partnerships may be more effective if they intentionally pool human, fiscal, and intellectual resources to provide faculty development and incentives.

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Appendix

Q1 Does your institution have a structure focused specifically on teaching excellence and faculty development (e.g., Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence, Office of Teaching & Learning)?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)
- o Unsure (3)

Q2 Does the structure report directly to the Chief Academic Officer?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)
- o Unsure (3)

Q3 Who does the structure report to?

To the best of your knowledge, has this structure been in existence for greater than five years?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)
- o Unsure (3)

Q4 Does the structure promote civic and community engagement as examples of teaching excellence?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)
- o Unsure (3)

Q5 Please elaborate.

Q6 Please elaborate.

Q7 Is it likely there will be such a structure developed in the next three years?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)

Q8 Does your institution have a structure focused specifically on supporting civic and community engagement?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)
- o Unsure (3)

Q9 Does the structure report within Academic Affairs or Student Affairs?

- o Academic Affairs (1)

o Student Affairs (2)

o Other (3)

Q10 Please elaborate.

Q11 To the best of your knowledge, has this structure been in existence for greater than five years?

o Yes (1)

o No (2)

o Unsure (3)

Q12 Does the structure provide professional development to faculty members?

o Yes (1)

o No (2)

o Unsure (3)

Q13 Please elaborate.

Q14 Is it likely there will be such a structure developed in the next three years?

o Yes (1)

o No (2)

o Unsure (3)

Q15 Please describe any collaborative efforts between the structures focused on teaching excellence and community engagement.

Q16 Has your institution received the Carnegie Foundation's Elective Classification for Community Engagement in the last two review cycles (2015, 2020)?

o Yes (1)

o No (2)

Q17 Approximate student enrollment (combined undergraduate and graduate headcount)

o Less than 5,000 (1)

o 5,000-10,000 (2)

o 10,000-20,000 (3)

o 20,000-30,000 (4)

o 30,000-40,000 (5)

o More than 40,000 (6)

Q18 Institutional classifications (check all that apply)

☐   Doctoral-R1 (1)

☐   Doctoral-R2 (2)

☐   Doctoral-Doctoral/Professional (3)

☐   Masters-M1 (4)

☐   Master-M2 (5)

☐   Masters-M3 (6)

☐   Baccalaureate (7)

☐   MSI- Hispanic Serving Institution (8)

☐   MSI- Historically Black College or University (9)

☐   MSI- Tribal College or University (10)

☐   MSI- Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institution (11)

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