What Influences the Long-Term Sustainability of Service-Learning? Lessons from Early Adopters

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As service-learning is adopted by growing numbers of higher education institutions, there is increasing interest in understanding the factors necessary to sustain service-learning for the long-term. Institutions that were early adopters of service-learning may offer important insights into what factors influence long-term sustainability. With this aim in mind, we conducted a retrospective, qualitative study of the ten-year sustainability of service-learning among a cohort of sixteen colleges and universities that participated in a national demonstration program of service-learning from 1995 to 1998. We assessed the extent to which service-learning was sustained at each institution, and explored the factors that influenced sustainability, including facilitators, challenges, and strategies for success.

In recent years, there have been increasing investments in service-learning by academic institutions, community partners, and funding agencies. The growing number of students participating in service-learning, the popularity of the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement Classification, and unprecedented federal support for service-learning through the 2009 Serve America Act all signify that these investments will likely continue to grow. As a result, it is critical to understand the factors necessary to sustain service-learning for the long-term.

Sustainability is important to the efficiency, quality, and impact of service-learning. It ensures that front-loaded investments—including developing community-academic partnerships, incorporating service-learning into the curriculum, and training faculty and staff in skills for service-learning—are not unnecessarily replicated. It prevents challenges that may be caused by interruptions in service-learning, including reductions in services or programs among community partners that have come to rely upon student and faculty participation (Cashman, Hale, Candib, Nimiroski, & Brookings, 2004; Kushto-Reese, Maguire, Silbert-Flagg, Immelt, & Shaefer, 2007), and reduced willingness among community partners to participate in community-academic partnerships (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). Moreover, long-term commitment and participation

may be required to achieve some of the most ambitious goals of service-learning, such as shifting the culture of academic institutions toward greater civic engagement, generating community-engaged scholarship, enhancing mutual understanding among academic institutions and communities, and building the capacity of academic and community partners to address community needs and work for social justice (Cashman & Seifer, 2008; Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, 2007; Gelmon, Holland, & Shinnamon, 1998; O'Toole & Freyder, 2000; Seifer, 1998).

A small but rich body of empirical research has documented many factors contributing to the sustainability of service-learning in higher education (Bell et al., 2000, as cited in Furco, 2001; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Gelmon & Agre-Kippenhan, 2002; Gelmon, Holland, & Shinnamon, 1998; Gray et al., 1998, as cited in Furco, 2002; Holland, 1997; Prentice, 2002; Young, Shinnar, Ackerman, Carruthers, & Young, 2007). From this body of literature, three groups of factors have emerged as key sources of support for institutionalization. The first of these is *institutional characteristics and policies*, including the centrality of service to an institution's mission (Gelmon et al., 1998; Holland) and recognition for service-learning (Holland; Prentice), teaching in general, and community-engaged research

(Bell et al., 2000, as cited in Furco, 2001) in faculty promotion, tenure, and hiring policies. Second is the creation of *resources and infrastructure* to support service-learning, including professional development opportunities and incentives to support faculty participation (Gelmon & Agre-Kippenhan; Gray et al. cited in Furco; Prentice), dedicated institutional funding for service-learning (Bringle & Hatcher; Holland), a coordinating center for service-learning that is centrally placed within the academic structure of the institution (Bringle & Hatcher; Gelmon et al.; Gray et al. as cited in Furco; Holland; Young et al.), and the integration of service-learning into the curriculum (Holland). Third are *strategic activities*, including strategic planning for the institutionalization of service-learning (Bringle & Hatcher; Gray et al. as cited in Furco, 2002), articulating how service-learning helps to advance broader institutional initiatives and priorities (Furco, 2002; Gray et al. as cited in Furco), and vocal support for service-learning among high-level administrators and faculty members (Bell et al. as cited in Furco; Prentice).

A challenge for research on sustaining service-learning is that evaluation studies tend to be funded concurrent with three-to-five year grants to support the implementation or institutionalization of service-learning (Gelmon, Holland, & Shinnamon, 1998; Gelmon, Holland, Shinnamon, & Morris, 1998; Holland, 1997; Gray et al., as cited in Furco, 2002). Yet Furco (2002) suggests that true institutionalization of service-learning may take five to ten years to occur. As such, studies that examine correlates of sustainability over five to ten years may identify additional factors influencing long-term sustainability that may not emerge during the first few years of program implementation or immediately after funding ends.

In the study we report in this paper, we had the unique opportunity to explore the experiences of a group of 16 institutions with sustaining service-learning over a ten-year period of time. We conducted a retrospective, interview-based study with leaders for service-learning at each of these institutions. We assessed the extent to which each institution had sustained service-learning ten years after grant support ended, and explored the factors that influenced sustainability, including facilitators, challenges, and strategies for success.

Methods

The HPSISN Cohort

This study was conducted with the cohort of schools that participated in the Health Professions Schools in Service to the Nation (HPSISN) program. HPSISN was a national demonstration program, funded from 1995 to 1998, to implement service-learning in U.S. health professions education.[1] It provided financial and technical support to 17 health professions schools across the country to integrate service-learning into their curricula. Each grantee institution provided matching support, in cash or in kind, over the three-year grant period. The HPSISN institutions represented the breadth of characteristics of U.S. health professions education. They included large research institutions and small teaching institutions, as well as public and private, faith-based and secular, and rural and urban institutions.[2] Detailed descriptions of the HPSISN program and its immediate outcomes can be found elsewhere (Connors, Seifer, Sebastian, Cora-Bramble, & Hart, 1996; Gelmon, Holland, Seifer, Shinnamon, & Connors, 1998; Gelmon, Holland, & Shinnamon, 1998; Gelmon, Holland, Shinnamon, & Morris, 1998; Seifer, Connors, & O'Neil, 1996; Seifer, Mutha, & Connors, 1996).

HPSISN received support from the newly-formed federal Corporation for National and Community Service in the Corporation's first funding cycle. It remains one of a small number of national demonstration programs of service-learning in a single discipline or set of disciplines. In addition, HPSISN was designed with common goals, components, and support across the grantee institutions. For all these reasons, the HPSISN cohort presents an ideal opportunity to explore site-specific factors influencing the long-term sustainability of service-learning.

Sampling Strategy

Our aim was to create a sample of participants who could reliably report on the sustainability of service-learning at each participating institution from 1998 to the time these interviews were conducted in 2007 and 2008. We used a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling (Mason, 1996). to achieve this aim. We first invited the 17 HPSISN principal investigators to participate in interviews. As a number of these individuals had moved on to other institutions or organizations, this involved first identifying their current institutional affiliations and contact information. In any instance where the original HPSISN principal investigator could not answer all of the study questions about his or her institution for the entire ten-year time period—for example, if the principal investigator had left the institution, or he or she no longer was closely involved with service-learning—we asked for referrals to additional individuals who could provide this information.

Data Collection

A semi-structured in-depth interview guide was developed and pilot-tested with service-learning directors at three health professions schools that did not participate in HPSISN, but had similar institu-

tional traits and also were early adopters of service-learning (Foddy, 1993).. This guide was revised and used with HPSISN grantees, who participated in one-on-one telephone interviews. Interviews, conducted between July 2007 and July 2008 and mostly lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, assessed the extent to which service-learning had been sustained at each institution and identified influences on the long-term sustainability of service-learning, including facilitators, challenges, and strategies for success. To prepare for the interviews, and to help inform the interpretation of interview findings, the lead investigator reviewed academic publications and gray literature (websites, newsletters, and newspaper articles) describing service-learning activities at each institution over the past ten years.

Analytic Approach

All participants agreed to have their interviews recorded, and all but one agreed to have their interviews transcribed. Transcripts were analyzed using an iterative process of thematic coding and memo-writing, which identified major themes in the data and the relationships among themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morse & Richards, 2002). A total of 42 thematic codes were developed as a result of this process, and these codes were applied to all of the transcripts. To analyze the interview that was not transcribed, the lead investigator listened to the recording and took notes on the major themes that emerged. These were analyzed along with the transcripts. This research was approved by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Institutional Review Board (IRB-1 Protocol #211).[3]

Findings

Sample Characteristics

Twenty-three individuals participated in interviews, representing 16 of the 17 HPSISN institutions.[4] They included 16 of the 17 HPSISN principal investigators and seven additional individuals identified through snowball sampling.[5] The sample included service-learning directors, faculty members, and high-level administrators such as department chairs and deans.

Degree of Sustainability

Of the 16 institutions participating in this study, 15 had sustained service-learning to some degree. As summarized in Table 1, we placed these 15 schools into three categories, defined by the degree to which they had sustained service-learning: low, moderate, or high.[6] Four features distinguished among these categories. These were: a) whether service-learning was integrated into the curriculum or not; b) the

extent of institutional resources provided to support service-learning activities; c) the location of these resources at the level of the course, department, school, college, or university; and d) the presence of institutional policies supporting service-learning.

Schools in the "low sustainability" category lacked all of these sources of support for sustainability. Two major factors distinguished this group of schools from the others: service-learning was not integrated into the curriculum, and there were no institutional resources invested in service-learning. Schools in the "moderate sustainability" category had integrated service-learning into required courses, providing a strong link to the curriculum. In addition, all of these schools had invested significant resources for service-learning at the departmental level. At a number of these schools, there was also support for service-learning in the institutional mission and among high level administrators.

Schools in the "high sustainability" category had all the same support for sustainability as those in the "moderate" category, as well as more substantial institutional support. At these schools, resources were invested in service-learning at the level of the school or college, and in some cases, at the level of the university. There was dedicated internal funding for a service-learning director, as well as funding or release time to support faculty participation. Finally, at some of these schools, there was a steering committee for service-learning in health professions education, and hiring, promotion and tenure policies recognizing faculty participation in service-learning.

Facilitating Factors

Participants described the key factors supporting or hindering the sustainability of service-learning at their institutions in the ten years since HPSISN grant support ended. These factors were typically complementary. For example, some participants described how strong leadership for service-learning had been a critical factor in sustaining service-learning at their schools, while others described how a vacuum of leadership for service-learning created a major challenge for sustainability. Overall, seven main facilitating factors emerged from the set of interviews, including three that were characteristics of the institutional environment and four that were aspects of how service-learning was designed and implemented. These are described below and summarized in Table 2.

Facilitating Factors in the Institutional Environment

Three main factors in the institutional environment were identified as key facilitators of service-learning sustainability: a) a supportive institutional culture; b) supportive high-level administrators; and c) a "criti-

Vogel, Seifer, & Gelmon

cal mass" of support for service-learning among all members of the institution.

A supportive institutional culture. Across the variety of institutional characteristics represented in the HPSISN cohort, participants frequently identified institutional culture as an important facilitator of sustainability. This was often, though not always, reflected in the institutional mission. Participants described three distinct institutional cultures that provided support for service-learning. Participants from public universities described how their institutions had a mission to serve the people of their region, and that this helped to sustain service-learning:

> There are a lot of expectations on the part of this campus to serve the people of [the state]

that come out of the governor's office, the legislature, and elsewhere. … It's a factor that influences our behavior as a campus.

Three Jesuit institutions were represented in this study, and participants from all three described how their institutions had a mission to serve society both through their institutional activities and by producing graduates who would be service-oriented. Participants explained that this mission promoted sustainability because service-learning was seen as a way to actualize the mission. One said, "I think there was institutional support [for service-learning from the very start]. … I think it was part of the overall university's philosophy that made it something that they were interested in pursuing and supporting." Another said,

Table 1
Three Levels of Sustainability

Level of Sustainability	Characteristics
Low (*n* = 3) Service-learning continues in some form, but is not a stable and regular activity, and is not supported by institutional resources.	Service-learning was included only in an elective course or co-curricular experience. It was maintained only through the independent efforts of a small number of faculty members. Service-learning received no additional support in the form of rhetoric, resources, or infrastructure at the level of the department, school, college, or university. All 3 institutions had a strong institutional focus on other specialized teaching methods.
Moderate (*n* = 5) Service-learning is a stable and regular activity, is integrated into institutional routines, and is supported by the investment of related resources. It may also be supported by institutional values.	Service-learning was integrated into required courses. At two of these institutions, service-learning was coordinated at the level of the course, by a faculty member or full-time service-learning director. At three of these institutions, service-learning was coordinated at the level of the department by a faculty member or full-time service-learning director. This involved related investments such as departmental planning processes, faculty time, and development of learning objectives for service-learning. At four of these institutions, the institutional mission provided support for service-learning, and at three, high-level administrators were supportive of service-learning.
High (*n* = 7)* Service-learning is a stable and regular activity, and is integrated into institutional routines. It is supported by the investment of related resources and by institutional values, as reflected in infrastructure and policies.	Service-learning was integrated into required courses, and centrally coordinated through a service-learning director and center at the level of the school or college. Five of these institutions also had a service-learning or civic engagement center at the level of the university that provided additional support for service-learning in health professions education. All of these institutions provided dedicated internal funding for a service-learning director and funding or release time to support faculty participation. At six of these institutions, the institutional mission provided support for service-learning, and at another six, high-level administrators were supportive of service-learning. A sub-group had additional institutional support for service-learning. At four of these institutions, a steering committee advised service-learning specifically in health professions education. At three of these four, hiring, promotion, and tenure policies recognized faculty participation in service-learning.

Note: * Sums to 15 because one participating institution did not sustain service-learning in health professions education to any degree.

The mission of [the University], and any Jesuit university, actually, is to develop leaders in the service of others. … And I would say that the university has been committed to finding ways to develop that sense of social responsibility in the students.

Finally, participants from institutions in urban centers described how the institutional culture included a strong identification with the local community, and a related responsibility to address local health concerns. One said, "the campus has a reputation of being the city's university." They described how service-learning was seen as a way to both solidify the institution's role in the community and address local health concerns, and explained how these priorities helped to sustain service-learning.

Supportive high level administrators. Participants from all 16 institutions described how support for service-learning among high-level administrators—including the university president and academic deans—was critically important to sustainability. This included support from administrators both at the level of the university and in health professions education. Participants described how these leaders could create an institutional culture of support for service-learning through supportive rhetoric and concrete expectations for community engagement:

When [the university president] is speaking about his priorities and strategies, service-learning, service to the community, [and] working closely with the community have been in just about every speech and every strategic plan. And so… it behooves the colleges to also have that be a priority.

One participant described how her university's president used his personal influence to encourage the dean of the health professions college to institute a college-wide service-learning requirement. Another described how her university president created benchmarks and reporting requirements to maintain a university-wide focus on community engagement, including service-learning:

Each school is responsible to identify and report on the ways in which the faculty and students are involved with the community. … I think the fact that it is something that is valued at the university level—the university puts scarce resources there and calls for reports, which is, ultimately, the reminder that people are focused on it—has really helped keep service-learning in the forefront for schools.

In addition, many participants described the important role of academic deans to sustain service-learning, because the deans were able to cultivate broader support for service-learning among decision-makers. A number of participants who were faculty champions for service-learning described how the support of their deans was also essential to sustain service-learning because it created an "environment that allowed people to be professionally successful doing this type of work." These participants described how this supportive environment, in turn, allowed them to invest their personal energies in developing and sustaining service-learning. In contrast, without exception, interview participants from institutions where service-learning was not sustained, or where it was sustained at the lowest level, described a leadership vacuum for service-learning:

I think there is no one [individual] or no one organization on campus that is focusing its efforts on promoting service-learning in health professions education. … It's a little bit disappointing that it's perfectly well accepted, and our dean talks about service, and talks about service-learning, but the money isn't where the mouth is.

A critical mass of support. Participants from institutions across the three levels of sustainability described how the sustainability of service-learning depended not only on the leadership of high-level administrators, but on the presence of a "critical mass" of support among administrators, faculty, and students. Just as participants described the unique role of senior leadership, they identified how faculty and students had unique roles to play in helping to sustain service-learning. Faculty support was seen as vital, because faculty members were ultimately responsible for delivering service-learning experiences through their courses. In addition, participants described how faculty champions for service-learning could be very influential to develop support for, or engagement in, service-learning among administrators, other faculty members, and students. In response to the question, "what do you think have been the most important factors to facilitate sustainability," one respondent said:

The most important [is]… the quality and doggedness of… many of the faculty who got engaged in service-learning a decade or so ago. These are people, for the most part, who are highly respected faculty members, junior faculty all the way up to some very, very senior people. … You get that core of people who just believe in the value of service-learning and they tend to influence others, particularly when they are not seen as outliers. They're seen as really solid, top-notch faculty types.

Other participants described a unique role for student leaders in sustaining service-learning. They described how students' personal testimony about the

unique contributions that service-learning had made to their education helped to convince administrators, faculty, other students, and community partners of the value of service-learning. Participants also identified how student demand was a major contributor to sustainability:

> I think the best [and] the most telling advocates [for service-learning] are the students themselves, because I think they find this incredibly valuable. … So certainly having them as promotional agents is a valuable thing to get [service-learning] sustained. And they might be the best advocates of demanding that this happen.

In addition, a number of participants described how students had helped to expand service-learning at their institutions, for example, by creating the university-wide service-learning center at one institution, and providing leadership to create new alternative spring break service-learning opportunities at a number of others.

Facilitating Factors in the Design and Implementation of Service-Learning

Four aspects of the design and implementation of service-learning emerged as important facilitating factors for sustainability. These were: a) integrating service-learning into the curriculum; b) infrastructure and resources to support participation in service-learning; c) appointing a service-learning director who is a strong leader for service-learning at the institution; and d) investing in creating stable, long-term community-academic partnerships.

Integrating service-learning into the curriculum. Institutions categorized as having moderate and high levels of sustainability uniformly had integrated service-learning into one or more required courses in their health professions core curricula. Many participants from these institutions described how service-learning was used to achieve specific learning objectives for these courses and the core curriculum. A number of participants also described how service-learning was widely understood to be more effective to teach these topics than classroom-based teaching methods alone.

Participants described how integrating service-learning into required courses and linking service-learning to the achievement of core learning objectives were key facilitators of sustainability. They described how, even without any funding to support a service-learning coordinator or incentivize faculty participation, these steps could sustain robust service-learning activities. To illustrate this point, in response to the question, "I'm interested in hearing more about how service-learning survived the [insti-

tution-wide] funding crunch that you described," one respondent answered, "The only way it survived was to integrate it into existing required courses."

Infrastructure and resources to support participation in service-learning. Participants from institutions with moderate and high levels of sustainability nearly uniformly identified infrastructure and resources for service-learning as important to sustainability. In particular, they identified two sources of support as critical: a coordinating center for service-learning and resources to support faculty participation in service-learning.

Participants from institutions with a service-learning center described how the center's role in maintaining community partnerships helped sustain the participation of everyone involved, including faculty members, community agencies, and students. They described how this function allowed faculty to focus on teaching, and not become "overwhelmed" or "burned out" from the additional responsibility of having to maintain community partnerships. They described how a service-learning center helped sustain community partners' engagement for the same reasons, and promoted students' continued interest by helping to craft high-quality service-learning experiences in the community and providing one-on-one attention to help students identify opportunities that suited their interests:

> Ultimately what they're responsible for is to keep those connections [between academic and community partners]. So they do a lot of the communication. If we need to have a meeting with the community partners, they coordinate that. And they communicate … to the partners to let them know what's happening at the college, [and] who the students are [that] they're going to have. They help work with the students to make sure that they get a community partner that they want to work with. … But they're there as supportive staff to take some of that burden off for the community partners. And the partners like it because they've got somebody they can call. … And I think that for sure helps with the sustainability of the [service-learning] courses.

Participants also described how service-learning centers provided the support that both new and seasoned faculty needed to participate in service-learning, including initial training, ongoing opportunities for professional development, and technical assistance. A number of participants described how university-level service-learning centers supported the sustainability of service-learning in health professions education in unique ways: creating quality standards for integrating service-learning into the curriculum, and providing an array of resources to build upon and

utilize, including existing community-academic partnerships and pedagogical resources, such as activities to frame preparation and reflective practice.

Incentives and recognition for faculty participation were also identified by many participants as critical to sustaining service-learning. These participants explained that their institutions provided compensation for faculty participation in service-learning to help offset the greater time commitment involved relative to traditional teaching methods. A number of participants said their institutions provided fellowships or stipends to support faculty who wished to incorporate service-learning into their curricula. Others said their institutions provided course release time for faculty who used service-learning in their courses. One participant described how her institution used these incentives to support faculty who wished to create new or enhanced service-learning experiences:

> [The university service-learning center offered] the opportunity for community fellowships, so if a faculty member wanted to use the vehicle of service-learning and add additional work [to integrate service-learning into their course], then they had the opportunity for a faculty grant to do that. That gave an extra bonus, as it were, to service-learning. … You could become a service-learning fellow and have the opportunity for some support of your work where you could have a course release, and spend some time with a community agency developing a more robust community service-learning experience. And [you could] then carry it back into your course after the fellowship ended.

A participant from another institution described how all faculty members who integrated service-learning into their classes had "an additional ten percent of their time acknowledged."

Appointing a service-learning director who is a strong leader for service-learning. Participants from institutions with a service-learning director in health professions education described how this individual could bring the spotlight to service-learning activities and cultivate support for service-learning among administrators, faculty members, and students. They also identified the value of a single individual who ultimately was responsible for championing service-learning:

> I think that one reason for our level of success would be that there's a warm body hovering over this, and showing up at meetings of course directors, and sending emails to all the faculty, and going to department meetings to show the dog and pony show and recruit people. One person, I think, needs to be responsible for that, not even

a team, because the buck has to stop at somebody's desk to be successful.

As a case in point, a number of participants who were HPSISN principal investigators described how they went to the senior administrators at their institutions and successfully advocated for full internal funding for service-learning when the HPSISN grant ended:

> I actually met with the deans of the school of medicine and the school of public health, and with the dean of the nurse practitioner program, and we got them to commit real dollars so that the [service-learning] program could continue after the grant funding ended. I remember, specifically, the meeting where we had all three deans in a room. We got them to agree to financially support the program.

Other interview participants emphasized how the creativity and skills of the service-learning director, especially his or her ability to provide leadership to maximize the quality of service-learning, were critical to sustainability. Some participants spoke about how their service-learning directors advanced service-learning by "pushing the limits" in terms of identifying creative ways to integrate high quality service-learning into the curriculum. Many participants stressed the importance of having a service-learning director with the skills to develop and maintain "personal relationships" with staff at community agencies. They described how these relationships could foster long-term commitments from community agencies. Others described how these qualities in the service-learning director helped to sustain faculty and student participation, by engaging them in dynamic learning processes and relationships.

Investing in creating stable, long-term community-academic partnerships. Stable, long-term community-academic partnerships were another aspect of program implementation identified as essential to sustain service-learning. Participants described how, by implementing principles of strong community-academic partnerships, such as open communication, reciprocal benefits, and equitable interactions, they were able to create stable, long-term partnerships. These principles were embodied by a number of participants who said they periodically asked community partners how service-learning could be more meaningful for them. Other participants described how they implemented principles of reciprocity and equity by using HPSISN grant funds to support community partners in ways that helped them fulfill their organizational missions and engage as equal members of the service-learning partnership. Participants described how interacting in these ways helped to sustain the service-learning partnerships. For example, one participant said,

Vogel, Seifer, & Gelmon

I think initially, with the grant, it was a won-
derful opportunity to offer services to the com-
munity agency, and to have them be part of this
partnership. I think somebody from hospice
went to one of the [HPSISN] conferences with
[the principal investigator]. I know we were
able to purchase a computer for the teenage
moms programs [at the community agency].
The initial grant funds were very helpful in
solidifying that [partnership].

Another participant explained,

I used a lot of our [HPSISN grant] resources to
support community partners to attend
[HPSISN] meetings. … I think that con-
tributed to agency buy-in. Because … not-for-
profit organizations are shorter on resources
than universities are. … And even for me to
cover airfare … showed that there was a com-
mitment on this end to try and continue that
partnership.

A stable, long-term commitment from the academ-
ic institution was also important to sustain service-
learning partnerships. Participants said that when
academic partners demonstrated their commitment
and reliability over time, it helped to maintain a wide
variety of community opportunities for service-learn-
ing partnerships:

The important thing with partners is showing
them our commitment and our stability. …
That we're not going to be there with one
group of students and then we're out of there.
You know, we'll have another group come, and
then another group, and that group builds on
what that group before them did, etcetera. And
I think that our reputation in communities is
based on that kind of commitment and stabili-
ty. So other agencies see what we've done and
the word's out. … [Our service-learning direc-
tor] probably gets called every day from agen-
cies saying, "We heard that your students are
doing this, this and this for this agency. Is there
any possibility of your doing that for us?" …
The community partners know and trust that
we're going to follow through on things.

In addition, participants described how their insti-
tutions took care to select community partners who
demonstrated the same kind of long-term commit-
ment to the service-learning partnership. They also
identified a variety of methods used to maintain com-
munity partnerships, including featuring community
partners as guest speakers in course sessions, involv-
ing them in end-of-year events, and other approaches
summarized by this participant:

We have memorandums (sic) of understanding
that solidify the relationship, we have multiple
workshops, professional development opportu-

nities. …We have regular site visits by the [ser-
vice-learning] director. The community part-
ner will come to the monthly [service-learning
program] meeting on campus, or they have it
out in the community.

Participants also described how a champion for ser-
vice-learning among the leadership of a community
partner agency could often be critical to maintaining
the service-learning partnership, even if there was
turnover in the staff position that was responsible for
the day-to-day maintenance of the partnership. They
described the important role that could be played by
service-learning directors to develop interpersonal
relationships that would help cultivate these champi-
ons for service-learning.

Challenges to Sustainability

Participants reported three major challenges to sus-
taining service-learning: a) turnover among faculty
members who used service-learning in their teach-
ing, b) turnover among champions for service-learn-
ing among high-level administrators and highly-
regarded faculty members, and c) competing educa-
tional priorities.

Turnover Among Faculty Members

Interview participants from institutions at every
level of sustainability described how turnover among
faculty participants in service-learning was a chal-
lenge. Participants from institutions where faculty
were assigned to teach core courses incorporating
service-learning described how new faculty who
lacked prior experienced with service-learning might
produce lower quality experiences, and this, in turn,
could threaten sustainability:

When we started [service-learning], we had a
cohort of faculty who were absolutely commit-
ted to community engagement in service-learn-
ing. And over time you have turnover. … Since
[service-learning experiences are] integrated
into the courses, people engage in service-learn-
ing. But because it's an assigned part of the
course doesn't mean that the faculty member
understands [its] philosophy or the community
partnership aspect. So perhaps the biggest strug-
gle is working with faculty to make sure that ser-
vice-learning is implemented not just as a course
assignment where students are in the communi-
ty, but in full partnership.

Interview participants from institutions where ser-
vice-learning was not intcluded in the curriculum,
but was instead included in courses at the discretion
of the faculty members who taught the courses,
described how faculty turnover could pose an even
greater threat—elimination of service-learning from
a department or school. A number of participants

described how, at their institutions, new faculty in particular had too many competing responsibilities to spend the time voluntarily "augmenting" their courses with service-learning. Other participants described how health professions faculty were often unfamiliar, and therefore uncomfortable, with community-engaged teaching methods, particularly if they were not trained recently. As a result, new faculty could be unsupportive of service-learning and choose to eliminate it from their courses. Alternatively, they could simply feel unable to maintain service-learning in a course they were assigned to teach. One participant explained,

> It's very difficult for some faculty to think about how to [integrate service-learning into their courses]; … and they do need support and training and mentorship in that particular role. You just can't say, "Oh, make a part of your class service learning."

Loss of Champions Among High-Level Administrators and Faculty

Participants from institutions across all three levels of sustainability also reported that turnover among high-level administrators and faculty members who were champions for service-learning was a major challenge for sustainability. They described how the loss of champions among decision-makers, such as academic deans and department chairs, could lead service-learning, or community engagement more broadly, to be de-prioritized at the level of the school or department. This could result in the elimination of service-learning from courses, or reductions in the number of hours reserved for service-learning in students' schedules. For example, one participant described how the appointment of a new course director at her school led to the elimination of service-learning from a core course:

> In an institution like a medical school, course directors have a lot of power. … If you get a new course director who doesn't understand [service-learning], and who isn't willing to listen, a lot of damage can be done. And that's how some things disappeared.

Another participant from an institution that once had very strong service-learning activities, but now had only the lowest level of sustainability, described how new leadership at the top redirected the focus of the institution from teaching to research. This resulted in the departure of a whole cohort of faculty members who were involved in service-learning, and dramatically reduced service-learning opportunities: "There's a new dean. And a lot of the faculty that were involved in this have moved on. It was a new

day at the school." Other participants described how the loss of faculty and administrators who were champions for service-learning could lead to a significant drop-off in faculty and student participation in service-learning. One participant said, "I can tell you that you can draw a direct correlation between when that physician champion … resigned and left the institution [and] the drop-off of not only physician participation, but medical student participation."

Competing Educational Priorities

Another major challenge to sustainability described by participants was competing educational priorities, which were identified as a cause of reductions in both time and resources for service-learning. Participants reported that in the face of competing educational priorities, service-learning was removed from some courses, the number of hours students spent in service-learning was reduced, or service-learning was changed from a required to an elective experience. Notably, this challenge was reported only by participants from secular schools.

Participants identified two main educational priorities that posed challenges to the sustainability of service-learning: technical clinical care skills and skills for bench science. They described how a major challenge was that service-learning was not seen as a method to teach these skills.

In addition, participants described how, as decision-makers directed their support as well as institutional resources to these competing priorities, there were disincentives for faculty members and students to participate in service-learning. For example, one participant described how her institution had created generous stipends to incentivize student participation in bench science, making it difficult for students to choose to participate instead in service-learning. She said that, as a result, fewer and fewer students were involved in service-learning: "I feel that the whole idea of service-learning, in terms of institutionalizing it and exposing more students to it, has been lost."

A related challenge was that in some health professions, the amount of material considered critical to professional training had grown over the years, and as a result, schedules were so full that choices had to be made about allocating time for service-learning versus other activities:

> The administration was getting a lot of rumbles from students that service-learning just was one more additional thing that they didn't need. And so the task force studied it for two years. And the task force was very supportive of service-learning. Everything they learned about it they liked. [But] ultimately, they recommended that it be voluntary, that there not be courses that require it, so that the students

didn't feel like they were just being asked to do more than they could feasibly do.

Strategies for Success

All of the challenges described above were reported by interview participants across the three levels of sustainability. But a factor that differentiated among schools at the three levels was whether they had been able to respond effectively to these challenges. Participants from schools that had sustained service-learning at moderate and high levels described four key strategies for success at their institutions to address these challenges: a) providing ongoing opportunities for faculty professional development in service-learning, b) articulating how service-learning contributed to achieving both established and emerging educational objectives, c) articulating how service-learning contributed to achieving a wide range of broader institutional goals, and d) engaging in "internal marketing" to publicize the value of service-learning.

Providing Ongoing Opportunities for Faculty Professional Development

Participants from institutions that had sustained service-learning at moderate and high levels described how their institutions had recognized the challenge of faculty turnover, and responded by continuing to offer opportunities for faculty professional development in service-learning during the ten years since HPSISN ended. This was reported by participants from institutions with widely varying levels of resources for service-learning.

For example, at one institution with plentiful resources to support service-learning, the service-learning director for a health professions school combined resources from both the university-level civic engagement center and her school-level service-learning center to support faculty development. New faculty at her school participated in a day-long seminar in service-learning pedagogy provided each semester by the university-level center. She supplemented this experience with specialized resources and technical assistance specific to service-learning in health professions education. Another participant from a high-resource setting described how, after dramatic turnover among faculty participants in service-learning, her school created a year-long initiative to train new faculty in service-learning.

At the other end of the spectrum, the service-learning director at an institution with few resources for service-learning taught a workshop as part of her department's annual faculty retreat. She included faculty currently involved in service-learning and their community partners as co-instructors. While this peer-to-peer outreach strategy was in part a response to limited resources, it was highly effective to help faculty more readily understand that they could integrate service-learning into their courses, and use service-learning to help achieve course objectives.

Articulating How Service-Learning Contributes to Valued Educational Objectives

Participants described how a key strategy for sustaining service-learning was to clearly articulate how service-learning helped to achieve valued educational objectives. Participants from high sustainability schools described how service-learning was identified as a way to achieve specific educational objectives in their core courses, including an attitude of civic professionalism and skills for community-oriented primary care, community-based research, and patient-provider communication.

A number of participants from schools of nursing and pharmacy described how, by linking service-learning to achieving educational objectives created to meet accreditation guidelines, their schools had been able to further solidify the sustainability of service-learning. One participant explained:

> The college [of pharmacy] had to increase their early professional experience and their advanced professional experience … to remain in compliance with being accredited. … The service-learning, I think, lends itself very well to that. … It's not to say that a college of pharmacy couldn't still provide early professional experience and not do service-learning, but we've chosen to use that as a method to train our students, and we've made it work for us.

Another participant related the following story:

> In 1999, part of the criteria for [nursing] accreditation included some things that you had to address, such as your pass rate, and program satisfaction, and critical thinking. But there were some optional outcomes that a program could elect to address, and service was one of those. Because we had the HPSISN grant, we elected service as an optional outcome for part of the accreditation process. As a result of that, we wrote a service outcome within our formalized curriculum. That's a core component of our curriculum.

While some participants described how their schools enhanced the sustainability of service-learning by using it to address established educational objectives, others described a very different approach. They emphasized that a key to sustainability was the ability to adapt service-learning to teach to new and emerging educational objectives, and to address evolving community needs. These participants described how their schools were using service-learning to teach students about electronic med-

ical records, racial and ethnic health inequalities, and skills for cross-cultural communication. One participant described the importance of adapting service-learning in the following way:

> Being relevant is the most important thing you could do. … I mean being relevant in the community, and being relevant with what's going on in the institution, in terms of education. … Everything is changing all the time. So you can't just sit on your laurels. You've got to continue to grow and change if you're going to have a meaningful part in education and in community. … It's an organic process. And I think too many times, we think you develop a curriculum and you get it to work, and then you just sit back and let it continue. And you can never do that with anything if you want it to work.

Finally, some participants described how champions for service-learning at their institutions, in fact, were able to create new educational priorities by demonstrating how service-learning taught important skills that were not being taught elsewhere in the curriculum. For example, one participant described how student evaluations showed that an interdisciplinary service-learning experience was teaching skills for interdisciplinary teamwork among physicians, nurses, physician assistants, and other health professionals. This is an area of increasing national attention that no other training experience at the institution offered. By publicizing this important learning outcome, champions for service-learning created a new educational priority at the institution and a secure niche for service-learning.

Articulating How Service-Learning Contributes to Broader Institutional Goals

Participants reported that another key strategy for enhancing the sustainability of service-learning was to articulate how it contributed to achieving a variety of broader institutional goals.

A number of participants described how they had been involved with strategic efforts to link service-learning to high-profile educational and research initiatives, in order "to get [service-learning] integrated into the academic health center in more meaningful ways that could promote its identity and visibility." For example, at one institution, service-learning opportunities focused on the health of the growing local Latino population, which allied service-learning with a high-profile health disparities center on campus that focused on Latino health, and was a major source of grant revenue and publicity. Another participant described how, at her institution, long-standing community partnerships created for service-learning now also were being used for required internships and community-based fellowships, creat-

ing added value for service-learning as a way to sustain these other programs.

Many participants described how service-learning had been articulated as an effective way to provide service in the local community, and in this way, to repair strained "town-gown" relations. For example, one participant described how her institution created a wide-ranging community-academic partnership to improve relations that had been damaged due to the university's physical expansion into the local community. Service-learning was articulated as a key component of this initiative because it could provide concrete benefits to the community. A number of these participants also described how, through its impact on town-gown relations, service-learning was being identified as beneficial for related institutional priorities, including public relations and fundraising. As one participant explained:

> There's a tremendous need on the part of institutions to eradicate the town-gown conflict. This is one strategy from an institutional level that says, 'We're doing our part.' It [also] had added value because there's a possibility that by promoting the institution as a good community partner, then there could be contracts and different city funding opportunities that come down the pike.

Other participants described how service-learning was identified as compelling to alumni interested in giving to their institution.

Finally, a number of participants reported that, at their institutions, service-learning had been identified as an important draw for prospective students, because students increasingly wanted to incorporate service into their training. A few of these institutions had developed marketing campaigns highlighting service-learning. A number of participants described how, at their institutions, service-learning staff had worked closely with the public relations and marketing offices to more effectively use service-learning to promote these goals.

The importance of appealing to broader institutional goals was demonstrated by a service-learning initiative that carved out a niche as a center of expertise on healthcare for underserved populations in its urban area. At first, the initiative was valued by the institution for the relationship it developed with the local health department. However, a reputation for expertise in caring for the underserved was not an institution-wide priority. In addition, the service-learning initiative was not linked to any other high-value initiatives on campus, but was a freestanding entity. Over time, the service-learning initiative became marginalized due to a competing educational priority—bench science skills—that did appeal to

Vogel, Seifer, & Gelmon

broader institutional goals, including prestige and student recruitment.

Engaging in "Internal Marketing" of Service-Learning

Along with the importance of articulating the value of service-learning to achieve educational objectives and institutional goals, participants emphasized the need to engage in "internal marketing" to publicize these messages. They described how doing so was particularly important to cultivate new champions for service-learning so as to address the challenge of turnover among key decision makers and opinion leaders.

Interview participants described a number of strategies for internally marketing service-learning. One popular strategy was to publicize the benefits of service-learning for both students and community partners in university newsletters and newspapers, and in external local media, such as local newspapers. Another strategy was to identify high-level administrators with a personal or professional interest in community engagement, and have champions for service-learning focus energy on educating them about the benefits of service-learning. One service-learning director described this as "being on their radar screen. … You're always letting them know projects that you've undertaken and the success of those [projects]." A third strategy was to organize public events drawing attention to the value of service-learning, such as symposia where faculty described their service-learning experiences and the

resulting benefits, such as partnerships for research and scholarly practice, as well as end-of-year events where students presented the work they had done with community partners.

Participants from research-oriented institutions identified a fourth internal marketing strategy particularly important for their institutional environments. They described how, to effectively demonstrate the value of service-learning, they needed to conduct rigorous evaluations of the impact of service-learning on participating students, faculty, and community partners. They described how findings from these evaluations provided the evidence needed to cultivate new champions for service-learning. One participant described how eevaluation was used to develop support for service-learning among alumni:

> We wanted to tap into the alumni to help with expenses for the service-learning teams. But when alumni got involved they said, "Well, what are some of your outcomes? Because we want to tell a good story, and the anecdotes are fine, but we would like a little more hard data, more substantive data." … So I started thinking about that, and developing instruments, and asking for help from the assessment and evaluation people. So that's how it started. Now mind you, we have course evaluations from students for every year, but I wanted to hear from [community] partners and faculty as well.

Another participant described how evaluation was identified as a way to effectively demonstrate the

Table 2
Facilitating Factors, Challenges, and Strategies for Success

Facilitating Factors in the Institutional Environment	• A supportive institutional culture • Supportive high-level administrators • A "critical mass" of support for service-learning among all members of the institution
Facilitating Factors in the Design and Implementation of Service-Learning	• Integration of service-learning into the curriculum • Infrastructure and resources to support participation in service-learning • Appointment of a service-learning director who is a strong leader for service-learning at the institution • Investing in creating stable, long-term community-academic partnerships
Challenges	• Turnover among faculty members using service-learning in their teaching • Turnover among champions for service-learning among high-level administrators and highly-regarded faculty members • Competing educational priorities
Strategies for Success	• Providing ongoing opportunities for faculty professional development in service-learning • Articulating how service-learning contributes to achieving both established and emerging educational objectives • Articulating how service-learning contributes to achieving a wide range of broader institutional goals • Engaging in "internal marketing" to publicize the value of service-learning

value of service-learning to senior leadership:

> You have to think about how you sustain a program like [service-learning]. How does it communicate its value to the senior leadership of the school? … When we started this program, we knew we had to evaluate the heck out of it. … We evaluate the student experience: was it valuable for their learning and their professional goals? We evaluate the faculty member experience, the community member experience. We have a curriculum, so we evaluate whether or not the curriculum met the students' needs and objectives. … We try to evaluate the students' knowledge and skills. … We can now demonstrate to the different constituencies from the academic perspective that there are added educational outcomes [from service-learning].

Discussion

Implications for Academic Institutions

These findings provide guidance for how higher education institutions can plan for the sustainability of service-learning, including the institutional conditions they can foster, key factors they can address in the design and implementation of service-learning, common challenges they can prepare for, and strategies for success they can consider implementing. Many of the factors that the literature identifies as important to sustaining service-learning were echoed in the results of this study. In particular, our findings reflect the literature's strong emphasis on organizational conditions as a key influence on sustainability (CCPH, 2001; Furco, 1999; Holland, 1997). They provide significant support for Furco's concept of institutional "hooks" (2001), and Furco and Holland's (2004) recommendation that to promote sustainability, service-learning should be connected to other high-value institutional initiatives where it can contribute to addressing broad institutional goals.

While our findings provide evidence for the importance of the institutional environment to facilitate the sustainability of service-learning, they also suggest that the ways service-learning is designed, implemented, and promoted are critical to sustainability. This is important when considering what champions for service-learning actively may do to encourage sustainability within the context of their current institutional environments. Our findings highlight the importance of having a service-learning champion (preferably a full-time service-learning director) with sufficient status in the institution; skills to work with administrators, faculty members, students, and community agencies; and available time to implement these strategies to promote sustainability.

This research produced two findings we believe add in valuable ways to the literature on sustaining service-learning. One is the important challenge to sustainability posed by competing educational priorities. The other is the importance of adapting service-learning to changing educational priorities and community needs to maintain its value over the long term. The fact that competing educational priorities were identified as a key challenge to the sustainability of service-learning suggests that the health professions skills and knowledge that are best taught through service-learning—including civic professionalism; skills for community-oriented primary care, community-based research, and patient-provider communication; and an understanding of the social determinants of health—are not valued to the same extent as other educational priorities in schools where this challenge occurs. This premise is supported by the fact that the faith-based institutions in this cohort did not report this challenge. Rather, participants from faith-based schools described how service-learning was seen as a way to achieve institution-wide educational objectives around service to society.

These findings underscore the importance of making the case for the value of service-learning to achieve broad institutional goals and valued educational priorities. It also suggests the value of using service-learning as a curricular response to new and emerging educational priorities, and articulating how service-learning is well suited to this task. What is also needed, at a more fundamental level, is to work within health professions education toward elevating the competencies taught best through service-learning to the status of priority learning objectives and core competencies. While this study was limited to service-learning in health professions education, the challenge of competing educational priorities, and these approaches to addressing this challenge, are generalizable. This is particularly true with respect to training programs in other professional fields, which are similarly affected by the rapidly evolving expectations of society and the workplace with respect to the skills and competencies students are expected to attain.

Implications for Funding Agencies

Funding agencies, necessarily, are concerned with the sustainability of the service-learning activities they support. Our findings suggest particular guidelines funders might consider incorporating into future requests for applications for grants to implement or institutionalize service-learning. As related to the institutional environment, funders might require grant applicants to describe how they will link service-learning to the institutional culture and/or mission statement, document existing support for service-learning among high-level administrators

or identify how they will cultivate this support, and describe how they will nurture the development of a "critical mass" of support for service-learning.

As related to how service-learning is designed and implemented, grant guidelines might require funded institutions to integrate service-learning into the core curriculum, and to create full-time positions for service-learning directors. To ensure that institutional resources will be available to sustain service-learning, grantees might be required to provide matching funds that increase with each year of the grant period to prepare them to assume the full cost of service-learning by the end of the grant. In addition, applicants might be asked to describe how they intend to nurture stable, long-term community-academic partnerships, and to earmark a portion of funding to support professional development and capacity building among community partners.

Finally, grant applicants might be asked to describe how they plan to address common challenges to sustainability, including turnover among faculty participants in service-learning, changes in leadership and loss of service-learning champions among administrators and faculty members, and competing educational priorities. The strategies for success described here might be supported through professional development and technical assistance opportunities provided to all grantees.

Limitations

The results of this study should be interpreted in light of its limitations. First, as is the case for all qualitative research, these findings may not be generalizable to other settings, as we did not attempt to create a representative sample. Rather, we purposefully selected the HPSISN cohort to explore the issue of the long-term sustainability of service-learning. As a result, findings may not be generalizable to non-health professions education or to institutions differing in other ways from the groups of schools that participated in HPSISN. Second, using the HPSISN cohort controlled for factors that may have had an influence on sustainability, including outside grant funding at start-up; matching internal support; and a variety of professional development opportunities for participating faculty, students, and community partners. This study, therefore, was not able to explore how differences in these factors might influence sustainability. Third, there was the potential for reporting bias in this study. Only one or two individuals were interviewed on behalf of each participating HPSISN institution. This study also included only the perspectives of faculty and administrators, and did not include perspectives of community partners or students. Finally, recall bias is an inevitable challenge in a retrospective study such as this one.

However, the fact that the study findings closely reflect the existing literature on the factors influencing the sustainability of service-learning provides support for their validity.

Conclusions

A challenge for the research on sustaining service-learning in higher education has been that most studies have been funded concurrent with three- to five-year grants to support the implementation or institutionalization of service-learning. Yet true institutionalization may take five to ten years to achieve. This research involved a retrospective study exploring influences on sustainability over a ten-year period in a cohort of institutions that was ideal to explore site-specific influencing factors, including the institutional environment and the way service-learning was designed and implemented. Our findings confirm many of the themes in the existing literature regarding the factors that contribute to the sustainability of service-learning. They also identify two new themes that may be particularly important for long-term sustainability: the challenge of competing educational priorities, and the need to adapt service-learning to changing educational priorities. These findings about key facilitators of and challenges to sustainability, as well as strategies for success, may provide practical guidance to academic institutions and funding agencies wishing to maximize the return on their service-learning investments.

Notes

[1] HPSISN was a program of the Pew Health Professions Commission and the National Fund for Medical Education, and was supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) Learn and Serve America Higher Education program, and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

[2] Institutions participating in the HPSISN program included: George Washington University/George Mason University, Georgetown University, Northeastern University, Ohio University, Regis University, San Francisco State University, University of Connecticut, University of Florida, University of Kentucky, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, University of Pittsburgh, University of Scranton, University of Southern California, University of Utah and University of Utah/ Purdue University (2 participating programs), Virginia Commonwealth University, and West Virginia Wesleyan College.

[3] For a more detailed description of the study methods, please see Dr. Vogel's doctoral dissertation, available at: www.ccph.info and through the Proquest Digital Dissertations database.

[4] Individuals from the 17th institution declined to participate in the study.

⁶ For a detailed description of how these three levels of sustainability were developed, please see Dr. Vogel's doctoral dissertation.

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