

TOPIC/TITLE: Using the SLQAT to Assess the Quality of Course-Based Service-Learning

FORMAT: Brief presentation, followed by interactive workshop session in which participants apply the tool to a sample course. Participants will receive a copy of the tool and accompanying protocols, along with a sample course and scoring information.

DESCRIPTION:

This interactive workshop will introduce attendees to the rationale, development, and potential uses of the Service-Learning Quality Assessment Tool (SLQAT), a standardized tool for assessing the quality of credit-bearing, academic service-learning courses. The tool was developed by a team of researchers from the United States as part of a five-year national grant focused on advancing community engagement practices in higher education.

As the research literature has long suggested, positive outcomes from service-learning are produced for students and communities when the quality of service-learning is high (Eyler and Giles, 1999). Over the years, many best practices for developing high quality service-learning courses have been identified in the literature, and they continue to be viewed as essential for securing quality practice (Communities-Campuses Partnerships for Health, 1998; Howard, 2001; Porter Honnet, E. & Poulsen, S.J., 1989; Toole & Toole, 1998). However, the field still lacks a consistent, standardized quantitative tool for assessing whether a given course incorporates the essential elements that are associated with quality service-learning practice.

One consequence of not having such an instrument is that researchers who conduct multi-site studies of service-learning have no way distinguishing quality among service-learning courses, and therefore often combine courses into one sample group. This makes it difficult to conclude whether non-significant results are due to the lack of service-learning as an effective pedagogy, or whether perhaps the service-learning courses in the sample were not all implemented with quality and fidelity.

With support from the United States Department of Education, researchers at the University of Minnesota and the University of Georgia have worked for over four years to develop and refine a standardized, quantitative instrument — the Service-Learning Quality Assessment Tool (SLQAT). The SLQAT is composed of 28 "Essential Elements" that promote quality student learning outcomes in academic service-learning courses from any discipline, utilizing either direct and indirect community service activities. These essential elements, which are based on high quality practice components identified in the service-learning literature, are grouped into five dimensions (course design, learning, student, instructor, and community partner/partnership). Each element includes a descriptor and is weighted, based on its relative importance to promoting student learning outcomes. The SLQAT includes a scoring protocol to rate each element based on its level of implementation (baseline, partial, or exemplary), with concomitant changes to that element's base score. By producing a numerical quality score for service-learning implementation, the tool can be used for research purposes by separating out only those courses that qualify as high quality service-learning. The tool can also be used

without scoring for professional development or faculty self-study in course construction or continuous course improvement.

In the session, participants will be introduced to the tool, its structure, and potential uses. Following a brief overview of the process and decisions that went into the development of the SLQAT, participants will use the tool and accompanying protocols to assess the quality of a sample service-learning course. Participants will also have an opportunity to provide feedback on the tool and share their thoughts on the overall scoring process, and the overall utility and applicability of the tool in non-Western global settings.

## REFERENCES

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (1998). Principles of Good Community-Campus Partnerships. University of Washington.

Eyler, J. & Giles, D.E. (1999). Where's the learning in service-learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Howard, J. (2001). Principles of good practice for service-learning pedagogy. Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, Summer 2001, Page 16-19.

Porter Honnet, E. & Poulsen, S.J. (1989). Principles of good practice for combining service and learning. Racine, WI: Johnson Foundation.

Toole, J. & Toole, P. (1998). The Essential Elements of Service-Learning Practice. Minneapolis: National Youth Leadership Council.