Plymouth State University Service Learning Taskforce

PDF Version of Final Report

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Our Charge

The task force will examine the best practices at institutions that are most renowned for their service learning initiatives.

- What innovative approaches are they taking and what institutional structures do they have in place to support service learning?
- Which of these approaches/structures would work best at PSU?
- How could we most effectively implement these approaches/structures?
- How can we better communicate/track/archive-within and without the PSU community?
- What service learning we are doing?
- How should we provide ongoing oversight?
- What structures might we want to put in place? Service learning portfolio?
- Would we want to "transcript" service learning? "John Smith is a Service Scholar, or some such notation?

Work of the task force will entail:

- Seek consultation with experts from organizations like Campus Compact.
- Establish (and communicate) a taxonomy of service learning opportunities at Plymouth State University:
    - o Establish a mechanism for ongoing service learning needs assessment.
    - o Develop recommendations to enhance community engagement opportunities and needs that may be addressed through service learning.
    - o Establish a mechanism for assessing whether service learning projects are high-quality and worthwhile.
- Develop a repository of service learning approaches, assignments, contracts, contacts and artifacts specific to Plymouth State University.
- Establish a mechanism for educating the community about PSU's service learning resources, processes and logistics.
- Investigate the best practices associated with service learning.
- Investigate cross-discipline approaches to service learning.

After reviewing multiple definitions of Service Learning and Community Engagement from other institutions and organizations with expertise in service learning like Campus Compact, we recommend the following definitions be endorsed by PSU faculty as our institutional definitions:

- **Service Learning** is a pedagogical model that provides students with the opportunity to earn academic credit by actively participating in and learning from scholarly activities undertaken to serve community needs.

- **Community Engagement** occurs when institutions of higher education work cooperatively with community-based stakeholders (individuals and organizations) for mutual benefit. This includes, but is not limited to Service Learning initiatives.

The process of creating an infrastructure to support and expand Service Learning (SL) initiatives at Plymouth will require time, resource and a champion.

- Consistently we heard from other institutions that their efforts to create sustainable SL support systems took multiple years. These efforts were likened to a long-distance marathon; not a sprint.

- Most institution representatives we spoke with advocated for dedicated resources to support service learning activities.

<u>Recommendation</u> - In order to create an enduring and scalable service learning infrastructure at PSU we recommend that a position, Service Learning Liaison, be created and funded.

While this task force successfully captured information and formulated a recommended course of action, to achieve the full charge of the task force as stated above we believe that additional resources are required. The position of Service Learning Liaison will:

- Be held by a full-time faculty member, who will be provided a minimum of a 12-credit release over the course of each academic year
- Be provided access to administrative & student worker support.
- Be held for an initial term of no less than 2 years, providing continuity to the project
- Be appointed by the Provost
- Be held by someone with a passion for, and ideally prior experience with service learning initiatives and community engagement.

A more detailed description of duties to be fulfilled by the Service Learning Liaison is attached as Appendix B.

<u>Recommendation</u> - Create a smaller task force comprised of 3 to 5 faculty who will work with the Service Learning Liaison to:

- Refine and implement strategies to encourage the expansion of service learning offerings by faculty;
- Assist faculty with the development of service learning offerings by organizing and facilitating access to service learning best practices;
- Create standardized reporting and assessment mechanisms (leveraging samples provided by comparator institutions) for PSU service learning offerings;
- Create and maintain a portal for Service Learning at PSU using Mahara. The Justification for using Mahara as PSU's Service Learning Portal is attached at Appendix A;
- Assist with other tasks that would benefit from broader faculty perspective, as identified by the Service Learning Liaison.

Recommend Time Line for Implementation:

Time From Launch	Tasks to Be Completed
Fall 2011	• Candidates for position of Service Learning Liaison are identified; faculty member is appointed by Provost to the position.
January – May 2012	• Service Learning Liaison becomes familiar with the findings of this task force; • Reviews best-practices and documents gathered by this task force from other institutions • Launches reflective practice group on Service Learning for PSU faculty • Becomes familiar with PSU Community Service Center activities & relationships • Becomes familiar with existing Service Learning activities and sites currently undertaken by PSU faculty
Summer 2012	• Expand build-out of Mahara Service Learning Portal • Launch site development & documentation activities • Develop promotion & communication plan and copy for Service Learning Portal to build momentum and support for Service Learning among faculty • Work with Office of Institutional Research to develop strategies for surveying faculty and capturing data regarding Service Learning activities on an ongoing basis
Fall 2012	• Work with small faculty task force to implement campus-wide annual survey of Service Learning Activities (suggested survey format is attached to this report as Appendix TBD) • Work with same task force to review, finalize and distribute PSU standard forms to facilitate Service Learning activities (sample forms are attached to this report as Appendix TBD) • Ongoing facilitation of reflective practice group • Increase awareness of Service Learning Portal through networking and promotional efforts internal and external to PSU • Implement assessment protocol for Service Learning courses (sample approaches for assessing Service Learning outcomes are attached to this report as Appendix TBD)
Spring 2013	• Move out of development mode and into 'maintenance' mode • Begin to assess the scope & demands of the job after the initial build-out is complete. • Launch campaign to expand Service Learning activities on PSU campus.
Fall 2013	• Assess & expand Service Learning support activities • Determine & make recommendations for future efforts • Communication intention to stay in the role, or transition the role to a new Service Learning Liaison; if a transition is required, begin the transition process.

Appendix A - Using Mahara as the platform for PSU's Virtual Service Learning Portal & Suggested Portal Components

PSU's Service Learning Portal will:
- Serve as a digital repository of resources for PSU faculty interested in offering service learning opportunities for students;
- Capture, archive and provide access to information about PSU's service learning activities;
- Provide access to information to external stakeholders seeking community engagement with PSU.

We recommend that Maraha be used to create PSU's Service Learning Portal. Now that Mahara has been adopted as PSU's student portfolio platform, it should be integrated into the academic activities of PSU students and faculty.
- Using Mahara as the platform for the virtual Service Learning portal will build upon the growing institutional support and familiarity with Mahara functionality.
- Mahara is a flexible, website development tool with broad functionality and easy user-friendly tools that supports both public and private access.
- No technology investment or PSU IT resources will be required to build the Service Learning Portal.
- Build-out of the initial portal could be executed, under the supervision of the Service Learning Liaison, by a student as part of an independent study or internship.
- As students and faculty use their personal portfolios to capture and share their service learning stories, information will be able to easily transfer their archives of their Service Learning activities having the same platform the ability to capture & archive Service Learning stories by transferring them to the Service Learning Portal.

Suggested Portal Components

Welcome / Landing Page for Faculty
- PSU Service Learning definitions
- Course development resources
- Community needs, inquiries & opportunities
- Sample forms & documents
- Archives of best practices from PSU Service Learning courses
- Archives of best practices from other institutions

Welcome / Landing Page for Community Members & Organizations
- Introductory information about working with PSU on Service Learning initiatives
- Guidelines for getting started
- Contacts & Resources
- Inquiry capture interface

Welcome / Landing Page for Students
- General information about Service Learning courses on campus
- Archives of student stories about Service Learning experiences

Appendix B - Detailed description of duties to be fulfilled by the Service Learning Liaison

Summary Profile

The faculty member who fills this role will ideally be:
- Passionate about Service Learning
- Familiar with Service Learning through some first-hand experience
- Enthusiastic about using technology, and specifically Mahara, to build out PSU's Service Learning Portfolio
- A strong systems-thinker able to integrate Service Learning initiatives into existing systems, processes and policies at PSU

Specific Duties :
- Establish, build & maintain relationships with existing and new sites for Service Learning in our community
- Profile sites & post site information to the Service Learning Portal
- Develop & distribute an annual on line survey to capture information about Service Learning activities from PSU faculty
- Archive survey findings on the Service Learning Portal
- Finalize & post forms that can be used by faculty to facilitate Service Learning Activities (Sample forms are attached as Appendix C)
- Work closely with Office of Institutional Research to develop and implement data capture & tracking systems including, but not limited to time tracking systems
- Work closely with Office of Institutional Research and Vice Provost for Academic Administration to finalize assessment approach of Service Learning courses
- Work closely with the Community Service Center staff to develop systems for single-point of contact and information exchange in response to community requests for assistance
- Work closely with PSU Public Relations to increase visibility of Service Learning initiatives
- Seek opportunities for and obtain grant funding to support future Service Learning initiatives
- Interface with existing PSU offices, committees and future task forces to move Service Learning initiatives forward
- Capture information necessary for future submissions of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification application, and assist with completion of future Carnegie applications.
- Work with Lamson Library to build out PSU's Service Learning Resources
- Facilitate a reflective practice group about Service Learning
- Generally promote, advocate and serve as a resource to the campus about Service Learning, ensuring that Service Learning gains and retains momentum on the PSU campus.

Methodology

The Service Learning Task Force took four specific steps toward assembling the information necessary to complete its charge. First, the group conducted a comprehensive literature review to determine and adopt definitions of the terms "service leaning" and "community engagement." Upon analysis of its findings, the Task Force decided to adopt the existing definitions used by Campus Compact, a national coalition of colleges and universities that promotes community service, civic engagement, and service-learning in higher education. These definitions are included as an appendix in the PDF version of this report, and the link to definitions in the digital version.

The second step was to gather information from a number of comparator institutions similar in size and mission to PSU. This list was compiled through a review of Campus Compact's database of institutions approved for its "Carnegie Elective Classification on Community Engagement." This classification is a voluntary process through which institutions may be recognized for their work in service learning, curricular engagement, and outreach-oriented partnerships. The list of institutions was sorted for size, curriculum, and geographic focus (i.e. rurality). The schools that emerged did not exactly mirror PSU's characteristics, but were good approximations of peer institutions which successfully structured, organized, and enhanced the service learning activities taking place on their campuses. Once the list was established, members of the task force contacted each school and conducted a voluntary interview to learn more about the extent of service learning requirements and how each school had both formally and informally structured the bureaucracy of service learning. The interview guide used during this research is also included as an appendix to this report.

The third step involved Task Force participation in the preparation of PSU's own Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. This entailed a review of existing information regarding previous and current service learning efforts here at PSU. This sources of this information consisted of 1) a 2007 report on service learning at PSU, 2) existing information from prior accreditation efforts, and 3) informal research and requests for information from faculty and students who are currently integrating service learning into their courses. This step was especially important to the work of the Task Force because it quickly became clear that any requirements of the Carnegie Classification that PSU did not meet could easily serve as the basis for the recommendations made by the Task Force. Due to its length, the Carnegie Application is not included in this report, but is available on line.

The fourth and final step involved a full Task Force appraisal of the literature review, the interviews of comparator institutions, and the gaps revealed by the Carnegie application process. The distillation of these three pools of data, done both individually and as a full group, resulted in the emergence of the final recommendations described throughout this report.

Recommendations Generated in Conjunction with the Completion of the Carnegie Application:

·PSU should systematically assess community perceptions of the institution's engagement with the local community.

- o We recommend that that a formal survey of community stakeholders who have been engaged with the university be conducted every other year. This "Biannual Survey of Community Perceptions" will be developed and implemented jointly by PSU's Community Service Center, the designated Faculty Service Learning Liaison1[1] and the Office of Institutional Research. The survey will be designed to capture qualitative feedback from community members regarding their perceptions of PSU's engagement with the community and community-based organizations. The results from this survey will be reviewed by all internal stakeholders involved in community service and service learning. Strategies for addressing issues and leveraging areas of strength can be incorporated into Community Service Center's annual strategic plan and communicated to faculty engaged in service learning for integration into relevant curricula.

·PSU should systematically track and document engagement with the community.

- o We recommend 1) that the Community Service Center develop processes for ensuring the consistent use time sheet tools (e.g. Time Tracker), for non-service learning community engagement initiatives, 2) that annual faculty work plans, used to capture faculty activities, be modified to ensure consistent capture of service learning data from all faculty, and 3) data from both sources be aggregated by the Office of Institutional Research.

·PSU should provide focused professional development support for faculty and/or staff who engage in service learning and community engagement.

- o We recommend the creation of a program to fund faculty participation in conferences, trainings, or other activities specifically related to service learning. We recognize that Faculty Professional Development funds are often allocated to support faculty travel and attendance at engagement-related conferences. Some portion of this support, however, could be re-focused specifically on service learning.

1[1] The Faculty Service Learning Liaison would be a new position, the creation of which will be discussed in the "conclusions" section of this report. This position will be held by a designated faculty member who will be provided with release time in order to fulfill this role.

·PSU should note service learning and community engagement on student transcripts.
- o We recommend that a feasibility report be completed by the Office of Undergraduate Studies to determine what is required to capture and present community engagement information on student transcripts. As part of this report, faculty, students, and potential employers should be asked to address the feasibility and implications of adding service learning information to transcripts.

·PSU should create an advisory faculty governance committee to oversee community engagement.
- o We recommend that a committee be created and integrated into the faculty governance structure to provide theoretical and practical guidance the Faculty Service Learning Liaison position. The Faculty Steering Committee should be consulted to determine where this committee should be located within the current governance structure.

·PSU should adopt institutional (campus-wide) learning outcomes for students' curricular engagement with community.
- o We recommend that the aforementioned faculty governance committee and the Service Learning Liaison work with active faculty, students, and community members to create and adopt campus-wide learning outcomes.

·PSU should provide (receive) feedback and assessment to (from) community partners.
- o We recommend 1) the creation of a newsletter, web-site, or other framework through which students and faculty can systematically communicate the success of service learning initiatives to community partners, and 2) the creation of a "community advisory group" that will provide a feedback loop for the Faculty Service Learning Liaison, and the Community Service Center.