Fresno State Models Civic Learning as a Core Degree Qualification Profile

William Covino, Provost and Lynnette Zelezny, Associate Provost
California State University, Fresno

OVERVIEW

Fresno State has a strong culture of community engagement and service, which is nationally recognized. This year, for the fifth consecutive year, Fresno State was showcased as one of nine finalists for the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll.

Chris Fiorentino, Director of Fresno State’s Richter Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning acknowledged the “thousands of students who have put in over 1.6 million hours of service” this year.

In 2006, Fresno State was awarded the prestigious Carnegie Engagement Classification in the most comprehensive category: Curricular Engagement, Outreach, and Partnerships.

President John Welty affirmed “Becoming a nationally recognized engaged university is the hallmark of our strategic plan.”

Lumina’s Degree Qualification Profile (DQP) frames comprehensive criteria for student learning outcomes that include: Broad, Integrated Knowledge; Specialized Knowledge; Intellectual Skills; Applied Learning; and Civic Learning. Fresno State’s engaged mission aligns well with the the Civic Learning DQP, given that one of the expected Carnegie Engagement outcomes includes civic and academic student learning.

Civic learning, according to Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee (2000) is cultivated by service learning. One of the outcomes of service learning is a cultivation of life-long service and a service ethic.

To advance service learning, Fresno State launched the opening of Jan and Bud Richter Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (2007).

The objective of this presentation is to:

- Examine the impact of the university’s strategic mission to engage students in the community through service learning, and how this engagement improves student learning outcomes related to civic learning.

IMPACT OF RICHTER CENTER ON SERVICE LEARNING

Since the launch of the Richter Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning student interest and involvement in service learning has increased.

Data from the National Survey of Student Engagement administered at Fresno State in 2005 (pre Richter Center) and 2011 (post Richter Center) showed 78% versus 83% of seniors had done or planned to do community service or volunteer work respectively.

NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

In 2011, Fresno State administered the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSEE) to first-year students and seniors. The response rates for first-year students were 27% and for seniors 32%, with respective sampling errors of 3.1% and 1.9%.

Data from Fresno State was compared to other universities in the California State University system and peer institutions in the same Carnegie class.

Results from the 2011 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSEE) showed that first-year and senior Fresno State students led other California State Universities and other universities in the same Carnegie class in community service participation both course-related (see Table 2) and non-course related activities (see Table 1).

OUTCOME ASSESSMENT SURVEY

A 35-item Service Learning Questionnaire was developed and administered as a pretest/post-test to 138 students in service learning courses at Fresno State in fall 2011.

This questionnaire included reliable measures (r’s .757 to .966) to assess: attitudes toward service, social responsibility, expected community service results, and results of participation.

TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Year</th>
<th>Senior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Year</th>
<th>Senior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RELATED CIVIC LEARNING OUTCOMES

The results indicate that students’ attitudes toward community service (p = .19) and their expectations of what will happen as a result of community service (p = .20) don’t change as a result of the service learning class.

However, students sense of social responsibility (p = .01) and their expectations of what they will do as a result of completing the class (p = .04) do significantly change.

Five individual variables related to civic learning that significantly changed after participation in the service learning course included:

- Most social problems could be resolved if people were willing to give of their time in service to others.
- Besides government efforts to address social problems, individuals and non-government groups should be involved.
- University study cultivates many of the skills needed to resolve problems.
- Educated people have a social responsibility to help others.
- Working in the community helps one understand the problems that others face.

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge:

Bud and Jan Richter for their generous endowment, which launched the Richter Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning at Fresno State.

Chris Fiorentino and his staff for their leadership at the Richter Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning.

Fresno State’s Office of Institutional Effectiveness for their NSEE administration and data analysis.

Dr. David Tanner for the development of the Fresno State Service Learning Questionnaire, and data analysis.