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## Assessing the Community Partner in Academic Service-Learning: A Strategy for Capacity-Building

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## **Assessing the Community Partner in Academic Service-Learning: A Strategy for Capacity-Building**

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*Service-learning is an instructional method used by an ever-increasing number of schools in the academic community. This paper is concerned with surveys that have been created to assess the views of community partners who host service-learning students. We describe surveys of community partners found on the websites of 92 Campus Compact members. Eight themes emerged from analysis of survey items: Agency Voice, Agency Resources, Students' Work Skills, Students' Service Skills, Agency Benefit, Communication and Coordination with University Service-Learning, Sustainability of Partnership, and Satisfaction with the Service-Learning Experience. The theme of Community-University Partnership established in extant literature was absent from the online surveys, so this theme was added to the survey themes. In addition, a critical analysis of current community partner assessment practices is offered with suggestions for improvement.*

*Keywords: Service-Learning, Community Partner, Assessment, Survey, Campus Compact*

Community partners are accessible resources that have the potential to transform institutions of higher education and their respective communities into a productive symbiosis. Yet scholarship concerning community partners is limited (Bortolin, 2011; Cruz & Giles, 2000), especially as compared to the scholarship about service-learning impacts on students' grades, civic engagement, or personal development (Bernacki & Bernt, 2007; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Mabry, 1998; Steinke & Buresh, 2002). "We know little about how service learning affects communities" (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009, p. 7). The present research attempts to help fill that gap by assessing available survey instruments that have been used by Campus Compact member institutions with their community partners.

Community partners can have several different motives for working with service learning programs. Bell and Carlson (2009) list four motives for community organizations endeavoring to work with service learners: The altruistic motive to educate the service learner, the long-term motive for the sector and organization, the capacity-building motive, and the higher education relationship motive. The third motive, capacity building, can be developed when organizations use students for outreach activities such as to "promote the organization's image in the broader community" (p. 29); work on pre-established programs, campaigns or events; and work on projects that the organization does not have skills or capacity to accomplish. Community partners have myriad roles and responsibilities when engaging with an instructor and students on an outreach activity. In their role as co-educators, community partners might implement any or all of the following: Providing projects that are meaningful and beneficial for students; discussing the mission, goals, objectives, policies, and guidelines of the organization with the instructor and students; providing training, supervision, and resources; communicating challenges to the instructor when needed (e.g., negative student behavior, attendance or productivity); and providing feedback about the service-learning experience when the project is completed, usually at

the end of the semester.

The types of activities in which community partners engage are varied and depend on an instructor's course needs and an instructor's knowledge of service-learning pedagogy. Campus Compact's annual membership survey's executive summary (2012 c) mentions ways in which community partners can collaborate with the institution/instructor: (1) Come into the class as speakers, 91%; (2) Provide feedback on the development/maintenance of programs, 81%; (3) Provide reflection on site in a community setting, 67%; (4) Serve on campus committees, 51%; (5) Act as uncompensated co-instructors, 39%; (6) Participate in the design and delivery of community-based courses, 31%; (7) Assist in creating the syllabus and designing the course, 20%; and (8) Act as compensated co-instructors, 13% (Campus Compact, 2012c, Figure 2). Major areas of need addressed by engaged campuses in 2011 via community partners were K-12 education, hunger, poverty, housing/homelessness, mentoring, tutoring, health care, environment/ sustainability, reading/writing, senior/elder services, and access and success in higher education (Campus Compact, 2012c, Figure 4).

The importance of a student's service-learning experience outside the classroom, usually involving work with a community agency, is emphasized in *experiential learning theory*. Kolb (1984) devised experiential learning theory, focusing on the individual learning experience. Kolb's holistic dynamic model (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2008) includes the basic concepts of the experiential learning cycle: learning styles, learning space, and the developmental model of learning. Kolb's developmental model has three stages: (1) *acquisition*—birth to adolescence, (2) *specialization*—schooling to adulthood, and (3) *integration*—typically mid-career to later in life. As a person moves through these stages, personal development becomes more complex.

Deep learning takes place when the four modes of *experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting* are completely integrated (Border, 2007), moving from the stage of (2) specialization to the stage of (3) integration in Kolb's developmental model (1984). These four modes create three levels of hierarchical learning as follows: (1) an emphasis on the two learning modes of specialization—reflecting and thinking, (2) an emphasis on interpretation with three learning modes—reflecting, thinking and acting, and (3) an emphasis on integration with all four learning modes represented holistically—reflecting, thinking, acting, and experiencing, the most complex level. An example of level one, integrating reflecting and thinking, is the college lecture course with reflection, with little or no action or personal experience. An example of level two, integrating reflecting, thinking and acting, is the college course that adds classroom practical application to the lecture with reflection creating action. When level two combines fieldwork (e.g., service-learning) and/or internships to lecture accompanied by reflection, thinking, and acting, the third level of deep learning can occur, the most complex level of learning. To have students engage in level three deep learning by means of a community partner is what motivates academics to integrate service-learning in the classroom. Moreover, Kolb maintains learning is a process to engage students with community partners, and includes feedback as a basic mechanism for assessing their learning ventures, concurring with Dewey (1897).

Given their important roles in service-learning, the impact of community partners deserves greater attention. The present study provides a summary of survey questions about community partners found on Campus Compact member websites, offering a snapshot of how colleges and universities assess their community partners. This report first discusses community partners' salience within service learning through a review of the literature.

Second, different methods used to assess community partners from the service-learning literature are examined. Then, publicly available community partner surveys of Campus Compact members are analyzed to see how they reflect themes from the service-learning literature regarding community partners. Finally, we address ways in which educators might build on existing surveys to improve assessment of community partners. Institutions and instructors may develop survey questionnaires from this study's findings that could aid in overcoming obstacles, strengthen knowledge, skills, and abilities of and about the community partners, and thus build capacity.

### **Community Partners' Salience**

Experiential learning theory explains how service-learning engages students in intensive learning through the contributions of a community partner. The value of service to and from the community partner has been addressed by a relatively small number of studies (e.g., Bell & Carlson, 2009; d'Arlach, Sanchez, & Feuer, 2009; Dorado & Giles, 2004; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; Janke, 2009; Kecskes, 2006; Miron & Moely, 2006; Phillips & Ward, 2009; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Schmidt & Robby, 2002; Vernon & Ward, 1999). What is evident in all these studies is that the community partner is central to the service-learning experience.

This literature review recognizes eight general themes emerging from existing service-learning literature: Agencies would like to have an (1) agency voice (Miron & Moely, 2006) in program planning and implementation. Training employees and volunteers is essential for program planning and implementation. Training was found under (2) agency resources provided by the community partner to make the program work. These human, financial, organizational, material and other resources that are required for the agency to function need to be considered (Yarbrough & Wade, 2001).

An earlier study (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000) investigated what community partners thought about (3) students' service skills, assessing work relationship, respectfulness, site sensitivity, and appearance; and (3) students' work skills, assessing attitude, punctuality, attendance, dependability, and work quality. Community partners unanimously ranked students high on all factors, strengthening the partnership and increasing capacity-building of all constituents in the relationship. Conversely, some studies that assessed impacts of community partners found particular challenges to working with service-learning students (Vernon & Ward, 1999) in conjunction with the usual positive perceptions of campuses and their service-learning programs. A few of these challenges were students' lack of long-term commitment, students' work schedules, and the amount of training required for each community partner.

Moreover, agencies would like to understand the (4) agency benefit from having a service-learning student (Miron & Moely, 2006). The agency benefit could be realized by communication and coordination with the university service-learning leaders and faculty, although (5) communication and coordination (Vernon & Ward, 1999) was considered difficult by many community partner respondents to a survey. Here are some examples of communication issues that were cited by the community partners:

- agencies want engaged campuses to be more aware of the agency's needs and mission;
- liaisons between the university and community partners need to be dedicated and responsible;
- agencies would like to speak to groups or classes for recruitment purposes;

- agencies have difficulty differentiating between students participating in internships, community service, and/or service-learning classes; and
- professors need to be more communicative about what the agency director's position is with the students, for instance, "Would she like me to call students in the middle of the semester to see how things are going?" (Vernon & Ward, 1999, p. 34).

When assessing community partners, the themes of (6) sustainability of partnership and satisfaction with the service-learning experience (7) are salient. Basinger and Bartholomew (2006) examined community partners' motivation for participation, outcome expectations, and overall satisfaction of the community partner with the service-learning experience. The researchers received a total of 38 post hoc surveys after mailing the surveys to 98 organizations. They found that community partners were motivated to a great extent to participate by receiving the obvious benefit of free labor and in return, enjoying the satisfaction of participating in the education and training of future volunteers. Staff supervisors were motivated to be community partners by wanting to give to the community, university, and students, creating a reciprocal and mutually beneficial, sustainable relationship between the university, student, instructor, and community partner.

Finally, (8) the community-university partnership theme (Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001) is essential for inclusion of themes needed for a community partner survey. This research investigates Campus Compact member online survey assessments of the service-learning experience specifically from the perspectives of surveys designed for community partners.

### **Methods Used to Assess Community Partners**

Three methods that can be used for community partner research are the following: (1) qualitative research methods, (2) quantitative research methods, or (3) a mixed methods approach. The purpose of qualitative research is to interpret and understand social interactions; the purposes of quantitative research are to test hypotheses, understand cause and effect, and make predictions; and the purpose of mixed methods research is to integrate both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Below, these three methods are defined, and examples of each method from the service-learning literature are presented.

#### **Qualitative Methods**

The first type of method used is qualitative. Qualitative research methods are unstructured and occur in a natural setting which permits little control (i.e., manipulation of variables) or structure to the research (Jackson, 2012), which can limit validity and reliability of the study. However, researchers that use qualitative research consider the spontaneity and open-ended framework as strengths. Some examples of qualitative methods that can be used for assessment research are interviews, focus groups, and case studies.

An example of qualitative research was completed by Sandy and Holland (2006), who conducted 15 *focus groups* to obtain data from 99 community partners that were at the nurturing stage (Dorado & Giles, 2004) from across California campuses. The nurturing stage "involves actions and interactions that can be described using the following verbs: nurture, cultivate, cherish, develop, support, encourage, defend, or related synonyms" (Dorado & Giles, 2004, p. 29). Higher education representatives were not present during the data collection process to control for bias. Some of their findings indicated that community partners value the relationship with the university, communication among partners, being co-educators, direct impact on client outcomes, enrichment of staff, and

social justice motivated by the common good. Additionally, community partners would like faculty more directly involved so as to better understand the organization's culture and practices, and they question the use of mandatory hour requirements for the student by some instructors.

Janke (2009) used the *cross-case study* qualitative approach (Yin, 2009) to examine service-learning partnerships between community partners and faculty. She sampled five partnerships that were ongoing for more than one year and had faculty and community partners working together in a service-learning project. Using in-depth interviews, documents, and observations, the term "*Partnership Identity*" was developed with four key characteristics ascertained between the faculty and the community partner: unified missions, membership in a distinct entity, organizational structures, and expectation to endure. Janke used solid research methods that employed theory as a foundation, a hypothesis about identity as a useful concept, a description of participants and data collection, and clear research headings throughout.

Worrall (2007) used a qualitative research approach by *interviewing* 40 service-learning participants from 12 community-based organizations (CBOs). She examined the CBOs' transcripts from the interviews and identified four themes: CBOs were committed to student education, benefits outweighed the challenges, relationship quality was important, and the university was perceived positively by the CBO from the partnership. This research provides many quotations from the interviews, giving the reader a sense of the richness of the reciprocal relationships that were formed between the university and the CBOs. d'Arlach et al. (2009) also employed qualitative research using *interviews* with nine community partners. To prepare the interview protocol, one researcher used an *ethnographic approach* by directly observing the participants of a service-learning program and writing field notes after each session of the program for nine months. The community partner, of a different background and privilege level in this study, was situated in an expert role or *co-educator*.

Kecskes (2006) used a qualitative approach termed *critical-cultural studies* or historical-critical studies (Reinard, 2001) and conducted a critical postmodern examination. "Cultural studies involve investigations of the ways culture is produced through a struggle among ideologies" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 337). Kecskes (2006) investigated community-campus partnerships diversity using hierarchist, individualistic, fatalistic, and egalitarian cultural frames. He mapped out high-low conformity tendencies and high-low collective tendencies that are possible in partnerships. Partnerships typically use rhetoric like "mutually beneficial" and "all parties are equals" (p. 13), alluding to an egalitarian predilection.

### Quantitative Methods

The second method that is often used is quantitative. Quantitative research methods are "inquiries in which observations are expressed predominantly in numerical terms" (Reinard, 2001, p. 8). Explanation, prediction, and generalizability to the population studied are all goals of quantitative analysis.

An example of quantitative research is a pilot study that used a *scale* to survey relationships (Clayton, Bringle, Senior, Huq, & Morrison, 2010) originally developed by Clayton and Scott (2008) based on Enos and Morton (2003). The *survey instrument* was developed to assess the differences between exploitative, transactional and transformational relationships in service-learning. The Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale (TRES) has nine key attributes: "outcomes, common goals, decision-making, resources,

conflict management, identity formation, power, significance, and satisfaction and change for the better” (Clayton et al., 2010, p. 8). Faculty from four different universities participated in collecting data for the research project. In addition, qualitative measures were applied to find themes from the responses from each campus’s five respondents. This research is the first step in attaining a best practices community partner survey instrument that can be used by instructors and educational institutions.

### **Mixed Methods**

The third research method that is considered is mixed methods research. A mixed method approach would use both qualitative and quantitative methods for a research study. Both *interviews and questionnaires*, a mixed methods approach, were used by Phillips and Ward (2009) to develop a research instrument assessing the degree of transformation and to identify and describe what a transformative partnership would look like from both the community and university’s perspectives. Their questionnaire evolved from existing literature about *transformative partnerships* with stages named *static, alters, expands, and transforms*. They found that a successful transformative partnership has the following factors: *consistency in relationship, proactive pursuit, and campus/community fusion* (p. 118). Their questionnaire is robust and provides an instrument that can be adapted for other studies on transformative partnerships. In another mixed methods study, Dorado and Giles (2004) *surveyed* 99 participants and conducted 27 *in-depth interviews* from 13 service-learning partnerships in a multi-institutional analysis. They coded the participants by age of the partnership, institutionalization of service-learning, and community partners’ familiarity with service-learning. Dorado and Giles found the participants displayed three broad behaviors: learning, aligning, and nurturing that led to three levels of relationship engagement: tentative (i.e., new and short-term), aligned (i.e., negotiated expectations and goals), and committed (i.e., intrinsic value of relationship). Their findings suggest that some service-learning partnerships could remain tentative throughout their time-span and never build to a nurturing relationship.

The present study analyzed scales that incorporated structured and/or unstructured questions found online from Campus Compact members’ websites. Most questions seemed to be more quantitative in nature, yet there were still several that were qualitative, such as “Describe the purpose of your agency/organization,” “Describe the mission of your agency/organization,” “What service-learning opportunities are available at your agency/organization?” and “What are the areas addressed by your agency/organization?”

When analyzing the online surveys, the researchers asked the following questions:

Research Question 1: What themes developed when compiling and categorizing questions found in the community partner surveys?

Research Question 2: What community partner survey themes emerged from extant literature that could frame survey questions found online from Campus Compact members’ websites?

Research Question 3: What important questions and/or themes from the literature are not being represented in the surveys found on Campus Compact members’ websites?

## Methods

### Sample and Procedure

Surveys from 92 schools from 28 states were included in this study. These were all the available online community partner survey tools of Campus Compact members. Although there are over 1,100 Campus Compact members, most members do not post their service-learning assessment tools online for public use.

The mission of Campus Compact is “to advance the public purposes of colleges and universities by deepening their ability to improve *community life* and to educate students for civic and social responsibility” (Campus Compact, 2012a). Campus Compact is comprised of more than 1,100 college and university presidents, involving 6 million students committed to civic education (Campus Compact, 2012a). Integrating service with academic study (ISAS) was begun in 1989 by Campus Compact to promote “community service on college and university campuses – [shifting from] service outside the curriculum – to emphasis on service that is integrally connected to course content in a wide variety of disciplines” (Campus Compact, 2012b, para. 1). This emphasis addresses the concept that the academic institution’s support by an internal structure of community service directors and support staff is needed to assist faculty with making and maintaining relationships with community partners. Without institutional support, service-learning cannot thrive on an engaged campus.

Schools included in this study were Campus Compact members from community colleges and four-year institutions, both primary and satellite. Survey data were downloaded by a research assistant who went online and utilized the alphabetical list of college and university Campus Compact members. He employed search terms such as “service-learning,” “community,” “civic,” and/or “engagement” to find the homepage and subsequently the forms or resources section of the service-learning office on that campus. The research assistant recorded information from every Campus Compact member’s website ( $N = 1145$ ), including the name of the college or university, the URL, and contact information. He sorted the information into one of four categories as follows: (1) “no service-learning information”—meaning the school had no portion of their website dedicated to their service-learning program/department ( $n = 288, 25.1\%$ ), (2) “no online assessment”—meaning the school had a portion of their website dedicated to their service-learning program/department, but no online assessment tools were listed ( $n = 717, 62.6\%$ ), (3) “online assessment”—meaning one or more types of assessment were available online ( $n = 121, 10.6\%$ ), and (4) “website down”—meaning the Campus Compact member’s website was unavailable ( $n = 19, 1.7\%$ ). The researchers found useable service-learning assessment tools from 121 websites; however, only 92 schools had community partner assessment surveys.

### Data Analysis

This study utilized a qualitative content analysis defined by Krippendorff (2013) as follows: “Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.” The content analysis procedures are outlined in this section.

#### **Establishing trustworthiness and authenticity.**

To establish trustworthiness and authenticity of the study, several verification procedures were used in planning the data collection and data analysis. Creswell (1998) described



eight procedures often discussed in the literature: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer reviewing, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checks, rich description, and external audits. He recommended “qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them in any given study” (p. 203). Two of the recommended procedures, prolonged engagement and peer reviewing, were used in this study.

*Prolonged engagement* includes learning the culture and checking for distortions introduced by researcher and/or informants (Creswell, 1998). Prolonged engagement was established by prior contacts, personal experience teaching with service-learning pedagogy and researching service-learning and assessment by both researchers at two universities. As an initial step in this section of analysis, the researchers self-reflect on service-learning, the process of community partnership formation, and maintenance of relationships at their respective institutions. After reflecting on the culture of assessment and checking for distortions, peer reviewing was initiated. *Peer reviewing* provides an external check of the research similar to interrater reliability in quantitative research (Creswell, 1998). The two researchers served as a constant check, or conscience. One researcher utilized the other to listen after each step of analysis, verify conceptualizations, to check for possible researcher influence, and to serve as a checker once horizontalization of the data occurred, meaningful units developed, and a structural description created.

The researchers followed Creswell's (1998) outline of analysis for the phenomenological tradition of inquiry. This analysis included *data managing, reading/writing memos, describing, classifying, interpreting, representing* and *visualizing*. The first step was for the researcher to read through each of the community partner assessments from the 92 schools. Second, after reading through each of the assessments several times, the researcher examined each individual question and gave the question a discrete weight (i.e., its own notecard). Third, writing memos was utilized, which is defined as reading through questions, making margin notes, and forming initial codes. This first round of analysis was done by the researcher with limited knowledge of the community partnership literature to ensure that the data were speaking for themselves. Next, a peer reviewer read through all the questions with the original analyzer's notes written on each page, checking for agreement of analysis. Areas of difference in analysis were discussed by the researcher and peer reviewer, and an agreement was found for those areas of difference.

## Results

This study examined 92 campus compact member schools' online community partner surveys that had a total of 236 questions. These 236 questions were analyzed to group together common themes and eliminate redundant questions.

Research Question 1: What themes developed when compiling and categorizing questions found in the community partner surveys?

The researchers' original themes that developed from analyzing and categorizing themes in the surveys were *Community Partner's Thoughts on Service-Learning* (i.e., Satisfaction with the Service-Learning Experience, Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006); *Description of Students' Service* (i.e., Students' Service Skills, Ferrari & Worrall, 2000); *Student Hours/Responsibility* (i.e., Students' Work Skills, Ferrari & Worrall, 2000); *Community Partner Project Specifics* (i.e., Agency Resources, Yarbrough & Wade, 2001); *Advice/Suggestions for the School Programs* (i.e., Communication and Coordination with University Service-Learning, Vernon & Ward, 1999); *About the Community Partner* (i.e., Agency Voice,

Miron & Moely, 2006); *Students' Impact on the Community Partner* (i.e., Agency Benefits, Miron & Moely, 2006); and *Community Partner's Future with the School Programs* (Sustainability of Partnership, Gelmon et al., 2001).

Research Question 2: What community partner survey themes emerged from extant literature that could frame survey questions found online from Campus Compact members' websites?

The next step for the research examined existing literature on community partners, associating and integrating the emerging data with specific existing literature themes. This final round of analysis documented the thematic associations between the research findings and service-learning literature about community partner assessment (see Table 1). During analysis of the different questions and collapsed groups, eight emerging themes were found that were parallel to existing categories from the literature on community partnerships in service-learning.

Table 1  
*Community Partner Questions Clustered by Question Concepts adopted from Extant Literature*

Question Themes	Question	Schools with Similar Questions
Agency Voice (Miron & Moely, 2006)	Describe the purpose of your agency/organization.	1
	Describe the mission of your agency/organization.	1
	What service-learning opportunities are available at your agency/organization?	1
	What are the areas addressed by your agency/organization?	3
	What is your organizational status? (i.e., public, private, for profit, nonprofit)	1
Agency Resources (Yarbrough & Wade, 2001)	What type of project will be/was completed at the site (length)?	1
	How long have you been a service-learning community partner?	8
	Do/Did you provide training for the student?	2
	How many students do/did you have?	11
	Do/Did students work as a group or individually?	1
Students' Work and Service Skills (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000)	Did the student act professionally while interacting with the organization?*	Question added by researcher
	Was the student adequately prepared?	5
	Were students' hours enough to complete tasks?	1
	Describe the service provided.	14

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Table 1 Continued...

Question Themes	Question	Schools with Similar Questions
Agency Benefit (Miron & Moely, 2006)	How did the work completed fit your agency/ organizational goals?	3
	What are/were the advantages/disadvantages of this project?	2
	How did the student impact your agency?	63
	What was the quality of service you received?	1
Communication and Coordination with University Service-Learning (Vernon & Ward, 1999)	How do/ did you primarily communicate with the student- email, phone, in person?	1
	Any suggestions for improvement?	19
	How can we better prepare students for your agency/ organization?	1
Sustainability of Partnership (Gelmon et al., 2001)	Would you like to talk with someone from the service-learning office?	1
	Would you like to continue having service-learning students at your agency/organization?	41
	What would you do differently next time?	1
	What needs do you have that we could assist with in the future?	2
	Would you be interested in hiring a student as an intern in the future?	1
	Do you have any new or additional placement needs?	1
Satisfaction with the Service-Learning Experience (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006)	Are there additional service-learning courses you would like to work with?	2
	Would you recommend this program?	2
	Do you feel this was a worthwhile experience for the student?	1
Community-University Partnership* (from Gelmon et al., 2001)	Should service-learning be implemented in more classes?	1
	Did the student understand the mission?	18
	Did the instructor understand the mission?	1
	Have your perceptions of the school changed because of the project? If yes, how have they changed?	1
	What should the university do differently next time? (Gelmon et al., 2001, p. 102)*	Question added by researcher
Total Questions		214

Note: \*Questions or themes added by researcher.

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These literature-derived themes replace the researchers' original themes and are as follows:

- (1) Agency Voice (Miron & Moely, 2006) is comprised of five questions that could be asked of the community partner before the intervention after the partnership has been established. Agency voice is community involvement in program planning and implementation, contributing to positive interpersonal relations. The present study's survey questions (see Table 1) about *mission, purpose, interest areas, organizational status, and how service-learning complements the organization* assess students and instructors' understanding of agency voice.
- (2) Agency Resources (Yarbrough & Wade, 2001) is comprised of five questions considered fundamental concepts that could be asked of the community partner before and/or after the intervention. Agency resources are resources that are available and required to achieve the community service program goals. The present study's survey questions (see Table 1) about *the type of project that was completed at site, the length of time the agency has been a community partner, if the agency provided training for the students, the number of students that worked at the agency, and if the students worked as a group or individually* all assess students and student projects as agency resources.
- (3) Students' Work and Service Skills (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000) is comprised of four questions considered fundamental concepts that could be asked of the community partner after the intervention. These are activities or tasks described as important by the agency along with how the students were perceived by the agency. The present study's survey questions (see Table 1) about *if the student was adequately prepared, if the students' hours were enough to complete the task, and for the partner to describe the service the student provided* all assess how the student's work and skills were perceived by the community partner. A new question about the student acting professionally with the organization not found in the online surveys was added to the present survey, "*Did the student act professionally while interacting with the organization?*" derived from the factors of student attitude and student respect from Ferrari and Worrall (2000).
- (4) Agency Benefit (Miron & Moely, 2006) is comprised of four questions considered fundamental concepts that conceptualize the community partner's economic and social benefits of using students for service-learning. The present study's survey questions (see Table 1) about *how the students' work fit the agency goals, what the advantages and/or disadvantages of the project were, and impact and quality of service from the student* all assess the potential benefits the community partner could realize from hosting a service-learning student. The community partner's positive reciprocity and participation in service-learning is crucial to realizing positive economic and social benefits for the agency, contributing to a favorable perception of the University.
- (5) Communication and Coordination with University Service-Learning (Vernon & Ward, 1999) is comprised of three questions considered fundamental concepts that could be asked of the community partner after the intervention. Agencies understand there are both benefits and challenges with hosting service learning students. A few challenges mentioned by Vernon and Ward were that at times students are unprepared, need supervision, and are inconsistent. These challenges can be partially controlled by communication and coordination with the university instructor and student. The

present study's survey questions (see Table 1) about *how the community partner communicates with the student, suggestions for improvement, and what can be done to better prepare students for the community partner's agency* all assess communication and coordination among the constituents.

- (6) Sustainability of Partnership (Gelmon et al., 2001) is comprised of six questions considered fundamental concepts that could be asked of the community partner after the intervention that signify a need to understand the intent and maintenance of sustaining the relationship. The present study's survey questions (see Table 1) about *if the community partner would like to talk with someone from the service-learning office, if the community partner would like to continue having students, what the community partner might do differently next time, what needs the community partner has that need assistance, if the community partner would like an intern in the future, and if the community partner has any new or additional placement needs for students* all assess efforts in maintaining and sustaining the partnership.
- (7) Satisfaction with the Service-Learning Experience (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006) is comprised of the three questions considered fundamental concepts that could be asked of the community partner after the intervention. Satisfaction with the service-learning experience materializes when the agency receives a useful product and outcome from the service-learning intervention. The present study's survey questions (see Table 1) about *if there are additional service-learning course the community partner would like to work with, if the community partner would recommend the program, and if the community partner felt it was a worthwhile experience for the student* all assess an agency's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service-learning experience.
- (8) Finally, a new theme was added to the original seven themes after the theme emerged from the service-learning literature which is Community-University Partnership (Gelmon et al., 2001) comprised of five questions considered fundamental concepts that could be asked of the community partner after the intervention. Examining the community-university partnership highlights insights about "mutual respect and common goals" of the agency and university (p. 88). The present study's survey questions (see Table 1) about *if service learning should be implemented in more classes, if the student understood the mission, if the instructor understood the mission, and if the community partner's perceptions of the University changed* all assess whether the community-university partnership was one of mutual respect and common goals. One question was added to the present study's survey from Gelmon et al. (2001, p. 102), which is "*What should the university do differently next time?*" to complete the theme's survey questions.

Research Question 3: What important questions and/or themes from the literature are not being represented in the surveys found on Campus Compact members' websites?

To answer this question, two survey items, "*Did the student act professionally while interacting with the organization?*" and "*What should the university do differently next time?*" and one theme, Community-University Partnership, were added to the final survey (see Table 1).

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## Discussion

### New Themes and Questions

The results of this study conclude that the 92 universities and colleges who are members of Campus Compact and posted their surveys online assess community partners similarly, but not comprehensively. Eight themes emerged that embody community partner assessment in service-learning courses: Satisfaction with the Service-Learning Experience (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006), Students' Service Skills (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000), Students' Work Skills (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000), Agency Resources (Yarbrough & Wade, 2001), Communication and Coordination with University Service-Learning (Vernon & Ward, 1999), Agency Voice (Miron & Moely, 2006), Agency Benefit (Miron & Moely, 2006), Sustainability of Partnership (Gelmon et al., 2001), and Community-University Partnership (Gelmon et al., 2001).

The theme of Community-University Partnership (Gelmon et al., 2001) was added after a review of literature revealed that this theme was advantageous to constructing a comprehensive survey. All surveys analyzed had overlooked the theme of community university partnership, except for one university that had the question, "Have your perceptions of the school changed because of the project? If yes, how have they changed?" In addition, two new questions emerged to complete the community partner surveys appropriated from existing literature: "*Did the student act professionally while interacting with the organization?*" and "*What should the university do differently next time?*"

### Suggestions for Improving Assessment of Community-University Partnerships

This research found the theme of Community-University Partnership (Gelmon et al., 2001) absent in Campus Compact member surveys. Cruz and Giles (2000) emphasize that assessing the nature of the partnership is essential, not simply assessing outcomes of community service-learning. The limited amount of extant research concerning the community-university partnership has been documented (Bortolin, 2011; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Vernon & Ward, 1999). Kolb's *deep learning* by students (1984) with an emphasis on integrating experience, reflection, thinking, and acting is dependent on the relationship of the student with the community partner. Nonetheless, this relationship is ultimately dependent on the quality of the community partnership with the university. Bortolin (2011) notes much service-learning research views the university as the active agent in the community university partnership, implying that the university has control and power over the community university partnership while service-learning provides enhancement of students' academic work and transforming change within the community. However, the goal in research and practice should be advancing the university as co-creator and co-educator of knowledge for the campus-university partnership with a mutuality of benefits, rather than the university being privileged over the community. The addition of the question, "*What should the university do differently next time?*" (Gelmon et al., 2001, p. 102), to this study's survey could assist the university with becoming a co-creator and co-educator of knowledge with the community partner.

Some additional questions found in the literature for a best practices community partner survey that could be used to address the theme of Community-University Partnership (Gelmon et al., 2001) are the following:

- (1) Did you participate as a co-educator in or out of the classroom? Explain (Sandy &

Holland, 2006).

- (2) Do you serve on campus committees? Explain (Campus Compact, 2012c).
- (3) Do you expect your community university relationship to endure? Explain (Janke, 2009).
- (4) Has your organization changed for the better because of this community university relationship? Explain (Clayton et al., 2010).
- (5) Has social justice motivated by the common good been addressed in some way by your relationship with the university? Explain (Sandy & Holland, 2006).
- (6) Are you committed to your relationship with the university? Explain (Dorado & Giles, 2004).
- (7) Has your relationship with the university been consistent? Explain (Phillips & Ward, 2009).

Furthermore, instructors can guide community partners to becoming involved with the university in the following ways: be guest speakers; provide feedback; serve on campus committees; act as co-instructors; and help with the syllabus, design and delivery of course (Campus Compact, 2012c, Figure 2). More attention could be paid to instilling the social justice or change model of community engagement (Porter, Summers, Toton, & Aisenstein, 2008) with its tenets of community reciprocity and collaboration, as opposed to the charity model which some describe as “victim therapy” (Robinson, 2000). Transformative relationships (Phillips & Ward, 2009) with the objectives of consistency in the relationships, proactive pursuit and campus/community fusion are emerging as the definitive type of relationship for authentic impact on the partnership.

### **Limitations of Study**

Although these surveys were posted online, the researchers do not know how many community partners were assessed with these surveys. The Campus Compact member schools were not contacted to inquire about additional community partners assessments besides those found on the Internet which has the potential to be selection bias. Additionally, the researchers do not have data regarding validity or reliability of any of the surveys examined. Consequently, the themes coded in this study are representative of posted campus compact surveys, but have not been validated.

### **Future Research**

The other three constituents, student, faculty, and institution, will be researched separately, examining current assessment studies of each constituent from the original database as this study has done. Possibly assessment results from these future studies could be employed to create assessment survey tools for a university’s accreditation purposes and for evaluating effectiveness and quality outcomes of service-learning courses on campus. Additionally, a needs-based survey for a university could be developed to capture the needs of potential and existing community partners using the present study’s survey questions, consequently improving the effectiveness and quality of service-learning initiatives.

### **Conclusion**

This study presents a survey instrument for educational institutions to use as a foundation for establishing a best practices model to assess community partners. Strategically assessing the community partner’s perceptions, attitudes, reactions, wants, needs, and satisfaction of the service-learning experience through implementation of this study’s survey assists

the instructor and university in estimating the quality and effectiveness of the service-learning intervention, thus building capacity. Furthermore, some universities have surveys for students, instructors, and community partners that are standard across the campus. This study's survey can be easily modified to be used across any campus as a benchmark research tool for efficient capacity-building. Conducting a survey with the themed sections as presented in this study after the partnership is developed could contribute valuable data for an instructor to share with the university and community partner, strengthening the quality and effectiveness of service-learning courses across campus. The Agency Voice theme section could be used as pre-survey questions for the community partner. The seven themes of students' work skills, students' service skills, agency benefit, communication and coordination with university service-learning, sustainability of partnership, satisfaction with the service-learning experience, and community-university partnership could be used for post-survey questions for the community partner. The Agency Resources theme section could be used as pre- and post-survey questions for the community partner.

Careful preparation and planning before implementing service-learning research is a prerequisite to understanding the relationships between the community, university, instructor, and student. Many types of research could be implemented for a more complete understanding of the community partner; for example, focus groups (Sandy & Holland, 2006); cross-case studies (Janke, 2009); interviews (Worrall, 2007); surveys (Clayton et al., 2010); and discourse analysis (Bortolin, 2011). Rigorous assessment of service-learning and community engagement can assist universities in becoming visibly sustainable in its efforts for community engagement by strengthening productive symbiotic relationships and partnerships between the university, the instructor, the students, and the community partner.

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