Community-Engaged Scholarship: Assessing Levels, Processes, and Impact of Engagement, Transformation, and Reciprocity

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Community University Expo, May 12, 2011
Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON
Who We Are

Centre for Community Research, Learning and Action (CCRLA)

• CCRLA fosters and facilitates community-university partnerships to advance community knowledge, social policy and practice for community wellness and social justice.

Research Team:
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• With the assistance of four advisory groups

Volunteer Action Centre of Kitchener-Waterloo and Area

• Provides resources and supports to the community benefit sector to strengthen their capacity to deliver service through volunteer involvement.

volunteer action centre
Multi-Phase Study

- **Phase I** – Literature review & Preparatory Work
- **Phase II** - Advisory Group Consultation & Reflection
- **Phase III** – Instrument Development & Piloting
- **Phase IV** – Data Collection & Analysis
- **Phase V** – Action & Dissemination
Phase I: Example Background Literature

• Sandy & Holland (2006)
  – Perspectives of community partners

• Eckerle-Curwood, Munger, Mitchell, MacKeigan & Farrar (2011)
  – Are universities truly ready to partner with community?

• d’Arlach, Sanchez & Feuer (2009)
  – Reciprocity in community service-learning
Research Goals

• To conduct research that is sensitive to distinctiveness of community and university structures.

• Learning from community partners:
  – what are the right questions to ask?
  – what are the important domains of interest?

• Gaining insight on structures, processes, tools, and resources that allow university and community partners to address power differentials for effective collaboration.

• Learning how to develop social architecture for equitable, effective and sustainable partnerships.
Objectives

1. To assess the level of community engaged scholarship (CES) that exists at Wilfrid Laurier University.

2. To assess the benefits and challenges that community organizations, faculty & students experience.

3. To develop an understanding of the level of systemic transformation emerging from CES.

4. To assess the level of reciprocity in community-university relationships.
Phase II: Advisory Groups

• Participatory approach
• Provide insights into key issues around CES
• Provide direction re. the research design
  – Helped pilot instruments
• 17 participants in 4 groups:
  - Community: Brantford, Waterloo
  - Faculty: Brantford, Waterloo
Emerging Questions from Phase II

- How ready are universities to truly partner with community?
- Are we prepared to address the power imbalances?
- What structural and institutional changes are needed to facilitate transformative community-campus partnerships?
- What is the community’s role in institutional transformation?
Phase II Learnings

1. Community and university have different contexts and cultures, strengths and needs.
2. Communication and relationships are central to positive partnerships.
3. Power imbalance exists between community and university.
4. University administration should be part of the process.

“I think relationship is so critically important: it builds the knowledge of understanding of what it is we're trying to accomplish and how we're trying to effect change. We've got everybody pulling in the same direction”.

Community Partner
Phase III – Instrument Development & Piloting

Community Organization Community Service-Learning Online Survey

10. How has your organization benefited from its involvement with Wilfrid Laurier University's CSL program? Please check all that apply:

- a. My organization has been able to increase the number of services offered
- b. I have noticed increased community awareness about our organization and our services
- c. My organization has been able to increase the number of community members/clients served
- d. My organization has had new insights about our programs
- e. We have an increased ability to meet our organizational mission
- f. My organization has increased support for our staff
- g. We have received assistance with the completion of projects
- h. We have experienced increased success in grant writing
- i. My organization has an increased ability to meet community needs that would otherwise go unmet
- j. My organization has an increased commitment to, and awareness of, social justice issues
- k. Staff at my organization have developed their leadership skills
- l. Staff at my organization are more appreciative of human diversity
- m. Staff at my organization are able to work more collaboratively
- n. Staff at my organization are better able to clarify their own beliefs & values
- o. Staff at my organization are better able to understand their skills & abilities
- p. My organization has experienced no tangible benefits from its involvement in CSL
- q. Other

Please specify:
Phase III – Instrument Development & Piloting

Impact of Community Service-Learning and Community Based Research:

Laurier Administration Interview Guide

Community engaged scholarship (CES) is defined as “scholarship that involves the faculty member in a mutually beneficial partnership with the community” (Community Campus Partnerships for Health). Community Service-Learning and Community Based Research are two important aspects of CES. Ideal service-learning engages faculty in both teaching and research activities.

Community Service-Learning (CSL) is defined as a program that “integrates meaningful community service with classroom instruction and critical reflection to enrich the learning experience and strengthen communities for the common good” (Laurier Centre for Community Service-Learning Website).

Community Based Research is defined by Community Campus Partnerships for Health as a “collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community, has the aim of combining knowledge with action and achieving social change.”

1. In what way(s) is community engaged scholarship relevant to:
   a. Wilfrid Laurier University’s Values, Vision & Mission?

2. How would you describe Wilfrid Laurier University’s relationship to the local communities of Kitchener, Waterloo and Brantford:
   a. With regard to teaching?
   b. With regard to research?

3. How would you describe the value of community involvement to Wilfrid Laurier University:
   a. With regard to teaching?
   b. With regard to research?

4. Reciprocity in community-university partnerships has been defined as mutual understanding, mutual benefit, and mutual respect. What would a successful partnership between Wilfrid

5. How would you describe the CSL program’s ability to help or hinder Wilfrid Laurier University in achieving its Values, Vision and Mission?

6. The McConnell Foundation, the funder of the Laurier Centre for Community Service-Learning for the past 5 years, “provides a society in which universities, students and community organizations work collaboratively to share and build knowledge and contribute to the well-being of Canadians” (http://www.mcconnellfoundation.ca/en/programs/community-service-learning):
   a. What role might Wilfrid Laurier University play in longer-term systemic community change that could contribute to the well-being of Canadians?
   b. How might Wilfrid Laurier University begin to move in this direction?
   c. What are the obstacles/challenges that stand in the way?
   d. What are signs or indicators that would indicate positive change?

7. Promotion and tenure are issues that university faculty raise in relation to becoming or staying involved in CSL and CBPR:
   a. What do you think are appropriate incentives for tenured or tenure-track faculty to participate in community engaged scholarship?

8. Some of the instructors who teach CSL are Contract Academic Staff (CAS) or are on Limited Term Appointments (LTA):
   a. What special considerations should be available for CAS or LTA instructors who are or want to teach a course with a CSL component?

9. Wilfrid Laurier University appears to be moving in a direction toward continued commitment to, and involvement with, community engaged scholarship:
   a. Please explain if you see this as a valuable direction for the university to be heading in.
   b. Why or why not?
## Phase IV – Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Participants Contacted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Partners</td>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>Brantford (2) &amp; Waterloo (5)</td>
<td>Up to 70 Participants</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>Brantford &amp; Waterloo</td>
<td>120 community organizations</td>
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<td>Online survey for CSL</td>
<td>Brantford &amp; Waterloo</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Online survey/focus group</td>
<td>Brantford (1) &amp; Waterloo (1)</td>
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<td>Focus group</td>
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<td>5 TAs</td>
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<td>Administration</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Brantford &amp; Waterloo</td>
<td>Up to 5</td>
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Preliminary Themes from Phase IV

• THEMES:
  1. Questioning Partnership
  2. Communication & Expectations
  3. Vulnerability & Accountability
  4. Balancing Cost and Benefits
  5. Community Service-Learning
1. QUESTIONING PARTNERSHIP

“Partnership is a word that I don’t think really represents what happens, because it feels more like the CSL office is asking for a service from the community, which also benefits the community, but it’s the CSL office asking for it...they’re partners in helping provide placements for the students, but there’s not a partnership in creating that process”

- CSL Teaching Assistant
“I think it comes down to communication...It’s just knowing where everybody’s at. If the university could provide us with their expectations, we could provide the university with our expectations. I think that that would benefit everybody and then the students could be more prepared”.

- Community Partner
“Recently we have experienced a couple of students who did not fit into our environment, especially working with a very diverse group of people. Their behaviour, their mannerisms, their comments, their language, was absolutely not appropriate. Sometimes when you confront students like that so we can help them, how they will take it will become a challenge for us. Sometimes we are not able to really fire them”.

- Community Partner
“I think it’s a very fast process and that makes it very stressful for the staff of the centre and for myself sometimes, and students because they only do ten weeks. It’s only twenty hours. For the winter session we have march break and then they have reading week. So that kind of thing can be very stressful for them...and I try to be as flexible as I can, but I’m not going to sign-off on their hours if they haven’t done them. So I find that a little tricky, and I find it hard because they’re only there for two hours, it’s really hard to give them objectives. If you don’t give them actual stuff to do, they’re not going to learn as much”.

- Community Partner
“I certainly think that one thing that we’re probably, as with a lot of institutions, good at getting academics, students out into the community. I’m not sure that we do as well at getting the community back into the University and providing the opportunities as much as we could for people to engage in this direction”.

- WLU Administrator

“So for example why not athletics privileges, why not library privileges, what about parking privileges? How serious are we about engaging? You know, what is the mutual benefit?”

- WLU Administrator
“My motivation for doing [CSL] is because I know how important placements are and to give people experience”.

- Community Partner
“I think every time you bring in a guest speaker who can make something real rather than theoretical can be a very important teaching and learning tool. And certainly every time there are opportunities for students to get out into the community I think that that’s great. And I think that the idea is that nobody wants to, this idea that we’re living in an ivory tower and that we’re somehow disconnected and everything is theory. It’s about putting theory into practice and practice into theory”.

- WLU Administrator
Community is providing a service
University is placing demand on Communities
Process of communicating findings needs to bring us to one table (community reps, faculty & administrators) to talk about improving the process and potential of CU partnerships

Community-Centric Instruments developed that can be transferred to other sites
  – Interview guides
  – Focus group guides
  – Surveys
THANK YOU!
References


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

• Community Advisory Groups in Kitchener-Waterloo & Brantford
• WLU Faculty Advisory Groups from Waterloo & Brantford campuses
• Volunteer Action Centre of Kitchener-Waterloo and Area
• Laurier Centre for Community Service-Learning
“Creating healthier communities and overcoming complex societal problems require collaborative solutions which bring communities and institutions together as equal partners and build upon the assets, strengths and capacities of each.”

Source: CCPH Website

“Equal partnerships have yet to be realized on a broad scale, due to inequitable distributions of power and resources among the partners involved. Instead, these partnerships are often driven by the priorities and requirements of funding agencies and higher education institutions. Funding tends to be invested in building campus infrastructure, not community infrastructure”.