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Equity Across Institutions and Cultural Contexts

Global Perspectives on Service-Learning and Community Engagement Research and Practice

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Equity Across Institutions and Cultural Contexts

Global Perspectives on Service-Learning and Community Engagement Research and Practice

Susan Harris and Morgan Lewing

Abstract

Co-Editors Susan Harris and Morgan Lewing introduce Volume 12 of the *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning & Community Engagement*, which emerges during a critical moment for higher education and the field of service-learning and community engagement (SLCE). The collection of articles reflects the increasingly global and transdisciplinary nature of the field and offers insightful analyses of contemporary challenges, including equity in education, institutional transformation, and cross-cultural engagement. By tackling these issues using innovative methods and theoretical frameworks, the research lays the groundwork for future SLCE research that can address key questions in the field.

Keywords: *service-learning and community engagement, theory and methods, student outcomes, community partnerships and impacts, faculty roles and institutional issues, equity*

Equidad entre instituciones y contextos culturales

Perspectivas globales sobre la investigación y práctica del aprendizaje y servicio y la vinculación comunitaria

Susan Harris y Morgan Lewing

Resumen

Los coeditores Susan Harris y Morgan Lewing presentan el Volumen 12 de la *Revista Internacional de Investigación sobre Aprendizaje y Servicio y Vinculación Comunitaria*, que surge en un momento crítico para la educación superior y el campo del aprendizaje y servicio y la vinculación comunitaria (SLCE, por sus siglas en inglés). Esta colección de artículos refleja la naturaleza cada vez más global y transdisciplinaria de este campo y ofrece análisis perspicaces de los desafíos contemporáneos, como la equidad en la educación, la transformación institucional y la vinculación comunitaria intercultural. Al abordar estos temas mediante métodos y marcos teóricos innovadores, esta investigación sienta las bases para futuros estudios en SLCE que puedan abordar preguntas clave en este campo.

Palabras clave: *aprendizaje-servicio en línea, reflexión, resultados de aprendizaje, académicos, experiencias*

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Volume 12 of the *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement* (IJRSLCE) arrives on the cusp of the 25th anniversary of the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE). The field has evolved tremendously in that time, as has service-learning and community engagement (SLCE) research, moving from isolated cases of classroom innovations in the U.S. to more rigorous studies of SLCE around the world. The current issue of IJRSLCE reflects the field's ongoing development as a global, transdisciplinary movement, with 15 superb articles by scholars from more than a dozen countries and five continents.

Advances in Theory and Methodology

Advances in Theory and Methodology is the largest section of this issue and showcases a diverse array of research exploring the latest methodological developments and innovative approaches in service-learning and community engagement. Through six compelling articles, contributors provide valuable insights into advancing both theoretical frameworks and practical applications, offering critical reflections on the methods used to study these areas and their impact on educational and community outcomes.

Ka Hing Lau, Lisa Lam, Robin Stanley Snell, and Carol Hok-Ka Ma developed and validated a shortened version of the Service-Learning Outcomes Measurement Scale (S-LOMS) to facilitate its use in standard quality assurance surveys. The resulting 21-item S-LOMS-SV demonstrated robust psychometric properties comparable to the original 56-item scale, supporting its utility for assessing developmental outcomes in service-learning.

Thomas Dahan provides a thoughtful analysis of the use of causal inference strategies in service-learning and community engagement research that advances our understanding of the method. It introduces key techniques for drawing causal conclusions and offers actionable suggestions—accessible to both practitioners and scholars—for enhancing research designs within the field.

A collaboration between two universities in the UK and US was analyzed by Andy Coppins, Harriet Raby, Becca Berkey, and Patti Clayton using the Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale II (TRES) to reflect on and improve community-campus partnership practices. The authors share key insights and practical outcomes from their practitioner-scholar inquiry, aiming to advance community engagement efforts in higher education.

Tracey L Haselau proposes a critical pedagogy of discomfort, drawing on Paulo Freire and Megan Boler, as a theoretical framework for service-learning in South Africa to address the unique challenges of a context marked by racism, violence, and inequality. By adapting practices to South African realities, the framework highlights the role of power and emotion in creating a more responsive and contextually relevant service-learning model.

Michael Rios and Sally Neas conducted a thematic analysis of articles published from 2005 to 2023, examining the state of community engaged learning (CEL) in graduate education. Their findings highlight trends at various levels, including student outcomes, pedagogical practices, community partner involvement, and institutional factors, while proposing a praxis agenda to address gaps in the literature and enhance CEL integration, especially in STEMM graduate education.

Matias G. Flores, Emily Phaup, Heather Craigie, and Atsuko Kuronuma examined the methodological challenges faced by doctoral scholars conducting community-engaged research, particularly those questioning traditional epistemologies and ontologies. Through a systematic review of 36 dissertations from 2018 to 2022, they identified trends, gaps, and challenges related to research design, cross-cultural studies, and epistemological stances. The authors propose a variety of solutions such as an open-access dissertation repository, formal support for graduate students, and greater recognition of scholars pushing boundaries in community engagement research.

Student Outcomes

The Student Outcomes section of this issue highlights the multifaceted impacts of service-learning and community engagement on student learning, development, and civic growth. The section's four articles

examine the various ways related educational practices enhance students' academic achievement, social responsibility, and engagement with their communities.

Marco V. Martinez and Cynthia Wyels assessed a service-learning program at a minority-serving institution over nine years, focusing on first-year students and transfer students, particularly Latinx/Hispanic and low-income populations. Using propensity score analysis, they found that service-learning significantly improved first-year retention and graduation rates with particularly strong outcomes for Hispanic students.

A study conducted by Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová and a team of colleagues examined the effects of service-learning on secondary school students' social and civic competencies, motivation, and school engagement. Findings suggested that service-learning significantly enhanced students' social responsibility, personal values, academic perseverance, and engagement, demonstrating its effectiveness in fostering competencies and reducing the risk of social exclusion.

In an article by Nikki Matthews, Mary Sweatman, Roxanne Seaman, and Emily Bremer, the long-term impact of service-learning within adapted physical activity was studied by focusing on the Acadia University S.M.I.L.E. program. Findings indicated that service-learning fosters positive attitudes toward individuals with disabilities, contributing to civic responsibility and sustained influence post-graduation.

Teresa M. Camarines, Simon Peter T. Balanquit, and Elmgay M. Valeriano studied the impact of virtual service-learning on students' reflective experiences and learning outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Analyzing reflection papers through reflexive thematic analysis, the researchers identified dimensions such as critical thinking, community responsibility, and personal growth, demonstrating that virtual service-learning can foster meaningful academic and social engagement, particularly in the Philippine educational context.

Community Partnerships and Impacts

Community partnerships are fundamental to service-learning and community engagement discussions. The 2024 issue contains one article centered on the topic of community impact, although partnerships feature prominently in many of the articles in Volume 12. Jessica Jackson, Amelia Woodward, Jennifer Raschbauer, and Sue Dyson evaluated a three-year mixed-method initiative aimed at fostering partnerships between universities and the voluntary sector to achieve mutual benefits. The researchers identified key factors for successful partnerships and emphasized the importance of shared values and ongoing dialogue regarding partnership goals to overcome challenges.

Faculty Roles and Institutional Issues

The Faculty Roles and Institutional Issues section examines the reciprocal roles of educators and institutional structures in advancing service-learning and community engagement. The two articles in this section heavily emphasize alignment between individual and organizational values.

Andi Sri Wahyuni and colleagues examined the roles of boundary spanners in advancing university–community engagement (UCE) within higher education institutions in Hungary, focusing on bottom-up institutionalization in a challenging context. Using autoethnography, the article highlights how boundary spanners navigated multifaceted roles, including building community relationships, addressing technical challenges, and leveraging opportunities within transnational academic capitalism, despite the constraints of limited policy support and an illiberal political environment.

An article by Elaine Ward, Emily Janke, and colleagues attempted to understand faculty members' experiences at a minority-serving university and perceived alignment between institutional support for community-engaged scholarship and faculty expectations. Findings indicated that institutions valuing equity-centered community engagement foster conditions that promote faculty participation and collaboration, enhancing both individual and collective contributions to community engagement.

Book Reviews

The Book Reviews section showcases critical reflections on recent publications in the field of service-learning and community engagement. In the first review, Beth Levinson analyzes *Preparing Students to Engage in Equitable Community Partnerships*, edited by Tryon, Madden, and Sprinkel, by highlighting the authors' emphasis on preparing students for transformative community engagement by fostering humility, cultural awareness, and social justice education. While the book offers valuable strategies and resources, Levinson critiques its focus on theoretical preparation over experiential learning and its primary orientation toward white students, noting the need for broader applicability to diverse student demographics.

Zoe Sullivan provides a review of *Reframing Community Engagement in Higher Education*, edited by Klaw, Tully, and Ikeda, and discusses the text's focus on community engagement as a transformative force in higher education. Sullivan asserts that the book offers frameworks, strategies, and practical tools for educators to promote civic responsibility, critical thinking, and inclusivity, drawing on Freire-inspired pedagogy and practice.

Discussion

Volume 12 of the IJRSCLCE emerges during a critical moment when higher education faces immense pressure to demonstrate its societal value and impact. This collection of articles attends to pressing contemporary challenges, including equity in education, institutional transformation, and cultural contexts for SLCE. By tackling these issues using rigorous analytical and methodological approaches, this research reinforces the role that SLCE can play within higher education to address societal concerns. The international scope of the research, spanning from Hungary to Canada to the Philippines, reflects the global nature of SLCE scholarship today. This geographical diversity brings fresh perspectives to longstanding questions about power, privilege, and partnership and enriches our understanding of how SLCE can be adapted and implemented across different educational systems and cultural settings.

Several articles contribute to the literature by developing, validating, and advancing tools to measure service-learning outcomes. Dahan and Martinez & Wyles make the case for adopting causal inference strategies commonly used in other fields, while Lau et al. adapt a scale to provide a robust yet simplified tool for measuring student outcomes. Several articles use these and other techniques to contribute to the extensive literature establishing the benefits of service-learning for student development; they offer nuance about the impact of pedagogy on secondary students (Camarines et al. and Gregorová et. al), students at Hispanic Serving Institutions (Martinez & Wyels), and students in an interdisciplinary program focused on adapted physical activity (Matthews et. al.).

The articles in Vol. 12 include a significant focus on equity, institutions, and cultural considerations in service-learning and community engagement. For example, Haselau offers a critical pedagogical framework that emerges from the South African experience, while Wahyuni et al. examine strategies for institutionalizing university-community engagement in "hostile" socio-political contexts. A recurring theme is the challenge of integrating SLCE into institutional structures. The work by Flores et al. and Rios and Neas on graduate education, and Ward, Janke et al.'s study of faculty experiences, highlight the

importance of aligning institutional support with educational objectives. These studies collectively point to the need for systematic institutional approaches to support SLCE scholarship that consider the affordances and constraints of the particular context.

The importance of authentic and transformative partnerships emerges as a central theme across multiple studies. The collaboration between UK and US universities using the Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale II (Coppins et al.), and Jackson et al.'s work on university-voluntary sector partnerships, emphasize the critical nature of developing meaningful, reciprocal relationships between academic institutions and community partners, as do the two book reviews in this year's volume, written by Levinson and Sullivan. Collectively, these highlight how successful partnerships require careful attention to power dynamics, shared values, and ongoing dialogue.

The research presented in Volume 12 of IJRSLCE contributes to and reflects a field that is simultaneously becoming more sophisticated in its methods, more global in its reach, and more attuned to its social justice implications. As IARSLCE marks 25 years of supporting SLCE scholars, and as it continues to work on establishing a global research agenda for the field (International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement, n.d.), the IJRSLCE illuminates the path forward for future research while providing practical insights for practitioner-scholars.

References

International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement. (n.d.) *Global Research Agenda for Service-Learning and Community Engagement*. <https://www.iarslce.org/global-research-agenda>

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