

Partner and Process: Conceptual Considerations for Continuous Faculty Development for Service-Learning and Community Engagement at Supportive Institutions

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Partner and Process: Conceptual Considerations for Continuous Faculty Development for Service-Learning and Community Engagement at Supportive Institutions

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Faculty development programs in service-learning and community engagement have received increased emphasis due to the central role of instructors in institutionalization processes. The purpose of this study was to explore preferences for faculty development categories by faculty members experienced in community engagement at institutions perceived as supportive. Developing community partnerships was identified as the most preferred area of programming emphasis, and the findings support the current call for a more holistic approach to related faculty development efforts.

Keywords: *community-based research, co-curricular community engagement, community partnerships, curricular community engagement, professional development, teaching*

Colaboración y proceso: consideraciones conceptuales para la formación continua en aprendizaje-servicio y participación comunitaria de docentes en instituciones de apoyo

Los programas de formación continua en aprendizaje-servicio y participación comunitaria han recibido un énfasis creciente debido al papel central de los instructores en los procesos de institucionalización. El propósito de este estudio fue explorar las preferencias en materia de formación continua por parte de los profesores con experiencia en participación comunitaria en instituciones consideradas de apoyo. El área preferida para destacar en la programación de formación continua fue el desarrollo de colaboraciones comunitarias. Los hallazgos respaldan la necesidad actual de practicar un acercamiento más holístico en relación con los esfuerzos de formación del profesorado.

Palabras clave: *investigación basada en la comunidad, participación comunitaria co-curricular, participación comunitaria curricular, formación continua, enseñanza*

Editors' Note: Translation by **Beatriz Calvo-Peña**
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Service-learning and community engagement (SLCE) faculty development programs provide structured points of entry for unfamiliar and counter-normative practices for many faculty members interested in implementing community-based learning activities (Chism et al., 2013; Lewing & York, 2017). Such professional development efforts introduce faculty to community-based learning and emphasize best practices in SLCE in order to provide a potential bulwark against the negative ramifications that coincide with inappropriately conceptualized courses, research partnerships, and engagement initiatives.

Introductory-level professional development appears to be the predominant paradigm found both in practice and in the existing literature, and substantially less scholarship is dedicated to exploring conceptual considerations for faculty members who are experienced with SLCE. For example, the technical components of SLCE (i.e., course design) are commonly emphasized within existing SLCE faculty development programs (Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2018); however, do faculty members experienced in various forms of community-based learning still prefer programs stressing the technical aspects of facilitating curricular community engagement (i.e., service-learning), or are they more interested in aligning their research agendas with SLCE and conducting community-based research

(CBR)? Conversely, rather than more pragmatic functional elements, would they prefer professional development opportunities which emphasize overarching and holistic development opportunities through the provision of advanced explorations of developing and sustaining community partnerships within their specific scopes of practice?

Furthermore, many programs are developed with the implicit or explicit goal of creating institutional change agents who can advocate more supportive systems and policies (i.e., evaluation and review processes). What if the institution already recognizes and rewards the work of engaged faculty members and could potentially benefit more from experienced faculty members who are expert mentors rather than change agents? Do auxiliary topics such as partnering with Student Affairs or justifying SLCE in review and promotion processes hold significant interest at institutions in which there is currently organizational support?

The purpose of this exploratory quantitative study was to examine professional development preferences of faculty members experienced with the implementation of SLCE at institutions perceived as supportive. As awareness and potential emphasis of community engagement increases at various institutions, results from this study may inform and help advance practice at institutions that have transitioned from the critical mass building stage to sustained institutionalization (Furco, 2009). The results of this study will add to the existing body of knowledge of best practices and add to areas for future research regarding the conceptualization of SLCE faculty development, especially among faculty members already familiar with basic principles of practice.

Background

Faculty development programs can be understood as initiatives that emphasize the instructional role of the individual faculty member and provide support on elements such as class organization, design, presentation, and evaluation (Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education, 2007). While faculty development programs vary greatly, their essential goal is to assist faculty members in improving as teachers and scholars (Eble & McKeachie, 1985) within the domains of professional, instructional, and organizational development (Alstete, 2000).

As a singular category of faculty development, SLCE faculty development programs seek to improve faculty efforts in community-based learning. More specifically, such programs aim to promote the likelihood of faculty choosing to implement service-learning in their teaching, developing reciprocal CBR initiatives, and serving as advocates for developing institutional processes supportive of SLCE on their campuses (Bringle et al., 1997). Community-based learning is often a counter-normative practice for faculty members (Abes et al., 2002; Clayton & Ash, 2004). A lack of institutional support can deter faculty engagement; lead to inappropriately conceptualized partnerships; and present negative outcomes for communities, students, and faculty members (Dennison & Akin, 2011; Houshmand et al., 2014; McBride & Mlyn, 2012; Toms, 2015). Intentionally designed professional development programs provide an institutional mechanism to motivate faculty engagement and also assist with quality control.

Typically, as mentioned above, SLCE faculty development programs serve as an entry point for faculty members attempting to gain an understanding of best practices for community-based learning. Such programs may emphasize the central tenets of course-based service-learning (i.e., designing the course, working with community partners, and guiding reflection) while others may provide a broader overview of SLCE, including information about CBR and institutional advocacy. The delivery methodology of SLCE faculty development is diverse; it includes informal meetings, structured workshops, and—potentially the most effective model—fellowships and learning communities (Chism et al., 2013). In addition, colleges and universities are not the sole providers of educational development programming; national associations, such as Campus Compact and the Association of American Colleges & Universities, provide SLCE faculty development opportunities as well (Jacoby, 2015).

The current study seeks to advance the existing body of scholarship centering upon those faculty members that are experienced with SLCE. These individuals may not necessarily be early adopters at their institutions, and, potentially, may be tasked with sustaining institutionalization efforts rather than

serving as change agents. From a design perspective, quality faculty development programming is contextualized by theories of individual learning and organizational development while being specified to the faculty member's stage of development, interests, needs, and experiences (Chism et al., 2013). As faculty members advance in their practice with SLCE and engaged campuses attempt to sustain institutionalization efforts, intentionally designed educational development programming can provide meaningful support. However, such intentionality necessitates specificity. The aim of this study is to provide an exploration of SLCE professional development preferences among faculty members currently or previously engaged in community-based learning practices at supportive institutions.

Methods

Study Overview

The current exploratory study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. Thirty faculty members experienced in SLCE and employed at institutions they perceived as supportive were asked to rank a list of SLCE development emphasis areas through a web-based survey. Participants were asked to rank the following six options in terms of their preference or area of most need for professional development: (a) Developing Community Partnerships; (b) Facilitating Curricular Community Engagement (i.e., Service-Learning); (c) Conducting CBR; (d) Justifying Community Engagement During Review, Promotion, and Tenure Processes; (e) Developing Partnerships With Student Affairs; and (f) Identifying Professional Networks and Potential Mentors. The survey was developed as part of an initiative to expand faculty development opportunities within a national SLCE-related association, and the professional development categories were developed in partnership with the association's leadership group. The survey questions used for this project are included as an appendix.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was utilized in the current study; potential participants were contacted through the email distribution lists of two national organizations that support community and civic engagement initiatives in higher education. Thirty individuals self-identified as faculty members at 4-year public institutions with experience in service-learning, CBR, and/or co-curricular community engagement. Each participant indicated they perceived their institutions as either supportive or very supportive of community engagement, and 26 of 30 (86.67%) stated their institutions housed a centralized coordinating structure (i.e., center, office) while 4 did not respond to the question. The demographics of the sample are reported in Table 1.

The majority of the faculty members reported current involvement with service-learning and CBR—4 (13.33%) participants were currently engaged with service-learning only, 7 (23.33%) with CBR only, and 10 (33.33%) with both service-learning and CBR. In terms of experience in community engagement as students, 5 (16.67%) reported being very involved as undergraduate students in service-learning, CBR, or co-curricular engagement (i.e., student life); 11 (36.67%) described their undergraduate experiences as somewhat involved; and 14 (46.67%) reported no involvement. A similar distribution was observed for reported graduate student engagement—4 (13.33%) participants reported being very involved as graduate students, 13 (43.33%) being somewhat involved, and 13 (43.33%) being not involved. Eleven participants reported no involvement at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected via an anonymous web-based survey using a secure online survey platform. Institutional Review Board approval was granted prior to starting the research, and participants gave informed consent prior to accessing the survey. Frequency, mean, and standard deviations of the selected professional development variables were analyzed using SPSS software.

Table 1
Sample Demographics

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
<i>Female</i>	18	60
<i>Male</i>	12	40
Race and Ethnicity		
<i>Asian</i>	2	6.67
<i>Hispanic</i>	6	20
<i>Hispanic and White</i>	2	6.67
<i>White</i>	26	86.67
Age		
<36	3	10
36–56	20	66.67
>56	7	23.33
Tenure Status		
<i>Non-tenure track</i>	16	53.33
<i>Pre-tenure</i>	4	13.34
<i>Tenured</i>	10	33.33
Disciplines		
<i>Business/Law</i>	2	6.67
<i>Education</i>	7	23.33
<i>Humanities</i>	8	26.67
<i>Physical Sciences</i>	5	16.67
<i>Social Sciences</i>	10	33.33

The distribution of the data was not normal, rendering most inferential statistical analyses inappropriate. However, a chi-square goodness of fit test was appropriate after categorizing each variable's ranking by an individual faculty member based on whether or not that variable was ranked within their top three or bottom three preferences rather than specifically 1 through 6. chi-square goodness of fit test is a single-sample nonparametric test that can be used to determine whether the distribution of cases follows an expected and equal distribution (Creswell, 2002). For this study, the null hypothesis was that an equal proportion of participants would rank an option in the top three in comparison to the proportion of participants ranking the same option in the bottom three, indicating no overall preference. A significant chi-square would indicate that participants' level of preference for the item did not meet the expected distribution, and a nonsignificant chi-square would indicate no preference for the item.

Limitations

A small sample size was a limitation of the current study. In addition, the participants were relatively racially homogenous. Future studies will benefit from a larger and more diverse sample.

Results

The distribution of participant preferences is demonstrated in Table 2 and Figure 1. The option most commonly selected as the first choice for professional development emphasis was “Developing Community Partnerships” (with 10 selections). Facilitating Curricular Community Engagement (i.e., Service-Learning) was second (n = 8), and Conducting CBR was third (n = 6) in the frequency of first choice. The variables most commonly selected for fifth or sixth were Developing Partnerships With Student Affairs (n = 21) and Identifying Professional Networks and Potential Mentors (n = 15). These two variables also received the fewest first choice.

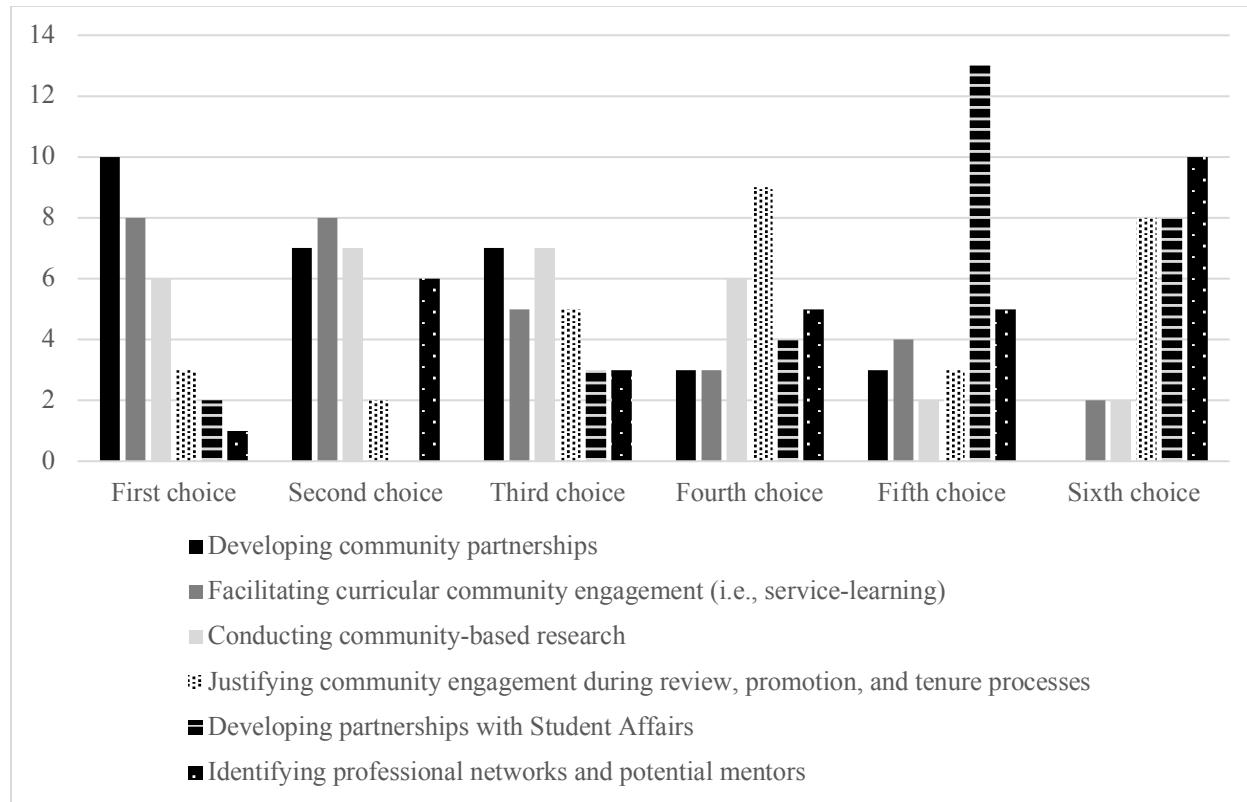
The mean placement of each selection was 2.4 for Developing Community Partnerships; 2.77 for Facilitating Curricular Community Engagement (i.e., Service-Learning); 2.9 for Conducting CBR, 4.03 for Justifying Community Engagement During Review, Promotion, and Tenure Processes; 4.23 for Identifying Professional Networks and Potential Mentors; and 4.67 for Developing Partnerships With Student Affairs.

Table 2
Frequency of Preference Rank

Area of professional development	First choice	Second choice	Third choice	Fourth choice	Fifth choice	Sixth choice
Developing community partnerships	10	7	7	3	3	0
Facilitating curricular community engagement (i.e., service-learning)	8	8	5	3	4	2
Conducting community-based research	6	7	7	6	2	2
Justifying community engagement during review, promotion, and tenure processes	3	2	5	9	3	8
Developing partnerships with Student Affairs	2	0	3	4	13	8
Identifying professional networks and potential mentors	1	6	3	5	5	10

After the chi-square goodness of fit test was performed, the null hypothesis failed to be rejected for (a) Conducting CBR, $\chi^2(1, N = 30) = 3.33, p = .068$; (b) Justifying Community Engagement During Review, Promotion, and Tenure Processes, $\chi^2(1, N = 30) = 3.33, p = .068$; and c) Identifying Professional Networks and Potential Mentors, $\chi^2(1, N = 30) = 3.33, p = .068$. For these three variables, the actual distribution reflected the expected distribution and there was no significant preference given across the group. The null hypothesis was rejected ($p < .05$) for the three remaining variables: (a) Developing Community Partnerships, $\chi^2(1, N = 30) = 10.80, p = .001$; (b) Facilitating Curricular Community Engagement, $\chi^2(1, N = 30) = 4.80, p = .028$; and (c) Developing Partnerships With Student Affairs $\chi^2(1, N = 30) = 13.33, p = .00$. The three variables for which the null was rejected, therefore, did not reflect the expected distribution. Specifically, Developing Community Partnerships and Facilitating Curricular Community Engagement (i.e., Service-Learning) were significantly preferred by participants. Conversely, participants demonstrated a significant lack of preference for faculty development programs that emphasize the development of partnerships with Student Affairs.

Figure 1
Comparison of Preference Rank



Implications

Implications for Practice

The results of the current study indicated that SLCE professional development programs specifically supporting experienced faculty members may benefit from conceptualizations that emphasize community engagement and provide advanced reflections on teaching and scholarship. Partnering With Student Affairs, Justifying Community Engagement During Promotion and Tenure Processes, and Identifying Professional Networks and Potential Mentors were not as highly ranked in terms of preference.

While SLCE professionals have been encouraged to consider the larger context of faculty work (i.e., teaching, scholarship, and service) when designing SLCE faculty development programs, the majority of programs are still technical and place emphasis on the mechanistic and pragmatic aspects of engagement (Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2018). Unfortunately, such an approach may, at times, be difficult in practice for entry point programs in which faculty members bring very little experience or prior knowledge.

Although community partnerships are a common element of even the most basic SLCE-related professional development programming, participants identified partnerships as an area in which continued support and training were needed. Developing and sustaining community partnerships is a complex undertaking (Jacoby, 2015), and institutional support in the way of continued educational development programming can promote faculty members' ability to transition from transactional to transformational relationships. In alignment with calls to frame faculty development more holistically, philosophical and pragmatic components of productive and sustained partnerships can be integrated into faculty members'

three spheres of work and provide a community-based narrative connecting their teaching, research, and service. However, much like the transition from undergraduate to graduate studies, prior experience and reflection may support a deeper understanding of engagement.

It is worth considering the possibility, moreover, that the development of additional programming specifically targeting experienced faculty may be hindered by limited financial and human resources of the organizational units directly responsible for supporting SLCE at some institutions, even those perceived as very supportive. Furco and Holland (2013) recommended framing service-learning, and by extension SLCE faculty development, as a strategy to address overarching institutional goals (i.e., student success, written communication, and civic learning) rather than as a goal in and of itself. Partnering with other offices and centers that offer various forms of faculty development and integrating the concept of engagement into such topics may present a more efficient avenue of providing additional explorations of community engagement for faculty members at various stages of the developmental continuum.

Curricular engagement and CBR were also highly rated in terms of faculty preference, and advanced developmental training in these areas may be effectively supported through external means, especially at smaller institutions in which discipline-specific engagement may be somewhat limited to a single faculty member. Therefore, SLCE professionals and SLCE-based national organizations may promote continued faculty development by attempting to partner and embed community engagement within organizations dedicated to specific academic disciplines. For example, SLCE organizations such as Campus Compact, the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement, and the American Democracy Project could expand efforts to connect with regional and national conferences in various academic disciplines to host preconference sessions and workshops focused on developing community partnerships within the respective discipline. The strategy could also provide noninstitutional support to entry point programs. Rather than hoping currently unengaged faculty members will find their ways to SLCE offices or conferences, partnerships could be presented as a means to pursue accepted faculty functions (i.e., teaching, scholarship, and service), and community engagement could be considered within environments and networks (i.e., their affiliated organizations) in which faculty members are involved. It should be noted that faculty members did not highly rank the identification of professional networks and mentors. However, this may be more indicative of their already becoming fairly entrenched within their current networks and organizations rather than a lack of importance placed upon them. Qualitative investigations could provide more in-depth insights regarding this possibility.

Future Scholarship

Whereas the general order of rank of community engagement faculty development was fairly consistent across groups, an area of continued research should explore the relationship between the student experience and eventual engagement as faculty members. Student experience has been connected to motivations to pursue careers in higher education (Lewing, 2019) and prior experience in SLCE as a student may also lead to more-advanced implementation of community-based learning practices as faculty members (Lewing & York, 2017). In addition to the relationship between student experience and future engagement, future scholarship may also explore best practices for effectively encouraging students as leaders within community engagement initiatives. Considering the observed motivation of faculty members from historically underrepresented faculty to engage in SLCE, such research could provide substantial findings on practices that support diversity and inclusion in the student-to-faculty pipeline.

Finally, for some faculty, there may be a division between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs in SLCE efforts, with one side assuming a perceived academic stance while the other is perceived as focusing on the remainder of the co-curricular. Despite the potential support Student Affairs can provide to faculty members, this area was not highly ranked in this study. This result could suggest that faculty members already felt confident in their ability to develop internal partnerships with Student Affairs, or it could mean that faculty members were uninterested in partnering. Future research could investigate the perceptions and experiences of faculty members who do and do not collaborate with Student Affairs in SLCE initiatives.

Conclusion

The successful integration of SLCE by individual faculty members is a key component of community engagement institutionalization processes (Chism et al., 2013; Furco, 2009). Understanding how to effectively design and facilitate faculty development programs emphasizing SLCE is complex and is dependent on institutional and individual factors (Chism et al., 2013; Lewing, 2018; Stokamer, 2018).

Often SLCE professional development interventions serve as a point of introduction to service-learning for faculty members (Lewing & York, 2017). However, for faculty members who are experienced with community engagement at institutions they perceive as supportive, developmental programs can also promote opportunities for continued improvement and can potentially reestablish a motivation to engage in service-learning. Continued educational development programs for faculty provide an opportunity for instructors to delve deeper into more-advanced practices with SLCE work comparable to a student advancing from undergraduate to graduate studies.

Such integration may still be difficult, even for faculty members currently involved with course- or research-based community engagement at institutions they perceive as supportive. Therefore, based on the results of this study, SLCE professionals tasked with providing faculty development may benefit from a holistic approach in which emphasis is placed on community partnership development as the philosophical grounding for the more-technical functions of service-learning and CBR. While teaching and reinforcing the technical steps of SLCE is important, helping faculty members frame their goals and roles within the context of partnership is paramount for faculty development programs regardless of their experience in SLCE and their perceptions of institutional support.

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Appendix

Survey Questions

How supportive of community engagement is your current institution?

- Very supportive
- Supportive
- Unsupportive
- Very unsupportive

How involved in community engagement were you as an undergraduate student?

- Very involved
- Somewhat involved
- Not involved

Skip Next Question = Not involved

Please identify how involved you were in the following categories as an undergraduate student:

Very involved (1)	Somewhat involved (2)	Not involved (3)
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Curricular community engagement (i.e., service-learning) (4)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Community-based research (5)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Co-curricular community engagement (student organization, campus life, etc.) (6)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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How involved in community engagement were/are you as a graduate student?

- Very involved
- Somewhat involved
- Not involved

Skip Next Question = Not involved

Please identify how involved you are/were in the following categories as a graduate student:

Very involved	Somewhat involved	Not involved
---------------	-------------------	--------------

Curricular community engagement (i.e., service-learning)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Community-based research

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Co-curricular community engagement (student organization, campus life, etc.)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Please identify your institutional type.

- 2-year
- 4-year public (flagship)
- 4-year public (regional)
- 4-year private (non-religiously affiliated)
- 4-year private (religiously affiliated)

Please select the option that most closely reflects your current position.

- Faculty (pre-tenure)
- Faculty (tenured)
- Faculty (non-tenure track)

Please identify your discipline(s). (Check all that apply)

- Arts
- Business and law
- Education
- Humanities
- Physical and applied sciences
- Social sciences

Are you currently involved with any of the areas below? (Check all that apply)

- Curricular community engagement (i.e., service-learning)
- Community-based research
- Co-curricular community engagement (student organization, campus life, etc.)
- None of the above

Please rank the following potential areas of professional development in terms of their interest to you:

- Facilitating curricular community engagement (i.e., service-learning)
- Conducting community-based research
- Developing community partnerships
- Justifying community engagement during review, promotion, and tenure processes
- Developing partnerships with Student Affairs
- Identifying professional networks and potential mentors

How would you describe yourself? (Check all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- Pacific Islander
- White
- Other

Please identify your age.

- Less than 36
- 36–56
- More than 56

To which gender do you most identify?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer

About the Author

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