

Service Learning Annual Report for 2010 (Concised)

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Background

A considerable number of staff members at the UFS regard the community-based experiential pedagogy of service learning as a valuable form of community engagement which actively involves higher education staff, students and a variety of stakeholders in society. Over time these academics have become convinced that service learning can contribute to the transformation of the institution by - as Prof. Michael Gibbons suggests – assisting the UFS in embedding community engagement not just as a ‘core function’ but indeed as a ‘core value’ of higher education - in order for the institution to participate more effectively in the production of knowledge that is aimed at addressing the most urgent challenges of society.

To advance the integration of reciprocal community engagement with teaching and learning, priority was given to the development and implementation of service learning modules. Thus, section 4.2.1 of the UFS Community Service Policy (2006, cf. www.ufs.ac.za/servicelearning) stated that “the inclusion of compulsory community service learning modules **in all academic programmes (at least one per programme)** is a policy priority and will be propagated accordingly”. Specific reference is made in the policy to the ‘proven record’ of service learning as an educational approach that leads, through reflection, to “a deeper understanding of the linkage between curriculum content and community dynamics, as well as the achievement of personal growth and a sense of social responsibility within staff and students involved”.

The Policy also proposed that service learning (SL), like all other forms of community engagement, has to be embedded in a context of continuously negotiated, respectful partnerships that involve relevant community-based organisations, as well as local and provincial triple helix stakeholders. During 2010 the UFS’s Directorate: Community Engagement largely took responsibility for broader partnership formations and community engagement in the more general sense of the concept; the **Service Learning Division** of CHESD focused more on aspects specifically related to SL as a curricular form of engagement and educational approach. The Division (with two staff members only) therefore provides various forms of support for lecturers who offer SL modules. The Division endeavours to liaise closely with the Community Engagement Portfolio Committees in the various faculties and on the Qwaqwa campus.

Key Tasks of the Service Learning Division

The following are regarded as the key tasks of the Division: (1) facilitation of the budgeting process with regard to SL modules; (2) support for sustainable implementation of existing SL modules and strategic development of new ones; (3) liaison with UFS staff and external partners; (4) staff development with regard to SL; (5) working towards the promotion and inclusion of SL in performance management and promotion criteria; (6) developing mechanisms for quality management (including evaluating the impact of SL on students and communities); (7) providing institutional guidelines for risk management and ethical issues regarding SL; (8) utilisation of a web-based database for SL for reporting purposes; (9) national and international liaison; and (10) promoting SL as a scholarly activity.

In addition to the above tasks, the Division has, during 2010, also focused more on capacity-building for some of the Non-profit Organisations (NGOs) that provide SL opportunities for UFS students. Funding made available by a Charitable Trust (through facilitation of UFS Research Development) is currently utilised for the UFS-NPO Research and Development project with the able assistance of Mr Willem Ellis as project manager.

Service Learning as Scholarship of Engagement

Service-learning-related research outputs have been increasing over the past five years (one PhD awarded; several Master's studies completed and underway; a broad variety of scholarly articles were published; and many conference papers delivered). During 2010 I decided to use the funding allocated to me through the UFS Transformation Cluster research initiative for a project entitled "Service Learning as Scholarship of Transformation". This project is aimed at bringing together ten colleagues (one from CUT, one from MUCPP and one from the Department of the FS Premier) in a "learning community" that has met five times during the year in order to work on scholarly papers for publication. Each person who submits a "publishable" manuscript will receive a set amount from the funding as incentive. At this stage two articles have already been accepted for publication, three are ready for submission to journals, and five more are in process. I am providing as much guidance and support as I possibly can and have invited several guest speakers to assist. This social learning process is proving to be a most valuable source of encouragement to participants.

In October 2010 the NRF extended its first call for submission of applications for funding within their new Community Engagement programme. I used the Charitable Trust project as the basis for a three-year research project entitled "Knowledge as enablement – NPO focus". 23 persons from the UFS, other universities and the NPO sector collaborated in developing the proposal and intend to form part of the research team. The proposal was submitted on 27 October 2010. Several participants indicated that they want to continue with the research initiative even if NRF funding is not allocated.

A Snapshot of Service Learning in 2010

Even though not all the SL modules that were offered during 2010 had been captured on the web-based SL database yet the following information may be gleaned from what has been available in November 2010:

- The number of SL modules or modules with a SL component offered has been steadily growing (e.g. from 34 in 2007, to 48 in 2008, and **58 were offered in 2010**).
- The estimated **number of students** who enrolled for service learning modules during the course of 2010 is **3 000**. At a minimum of 10 active hours spent in the community this equals at least **30 000 hours of service and engaged learning**. If each student interacts with a minimum of five community members the number of persons involved in these meaningful service activities is at least 15 000.
- The number of **academic staff involved** was a minimum of **65 full-time** and several more part-time or on contract basis.

- **Partnership formations and sites (over 100)** where SL implementation takes place range from urban (Bloemfontein, Mangaung, Heidedal), peri-urban (informal settlements) to rural (sites around the Qwaqwa campus and in several sites within the Xhariep district). These partners/participants comprise a variety of NPOs; faith-based organisations; municipal health clinics, old age homes; primary and secondary schools; pre-school centres; local libraries; small businesses (SMME sector); and community development sites

The UFS made an amount of R1 000 000,00 available for the implementation of SL modules during 2010 (i.e. R300 000,00 less than in 2009). An additional amount of R200 000,00 was kindly made available by the Director of Community Engagement and this allowed all the lecturers to continue offering the SL modules that form part of their students' academic programmes.

The funding was utilised for transportation of students; hours worked by additional staff on contract basis to accompany students; smaller amounts per student group for community project funding; training materials; refreshments; and a concluding joint celebration ceremony per module. Several of the modules also received smaller amounts of project funding from the business sector as enthusiastic students drew them into their community service endeavours.

Service Learning in the Faculties

The following numbers of service learning modules (or modules with a SL component) were offered per faculty during 2010:

The Faculty of the Humanities

Fifteen modules within various academic programmes, some of which are multidisciplinary. Almost all academic programmes have a SL component, including the programme for the Humanities; Political Transformation and Management; Language Practice; Psychology; Social Work; Art Administration; Drama and Theatre Arts; Music Education; Exercise and Sport Sciences; and Sociology.

Example: In the Study Buddy SL module in Psychology students engage with secondary school learners to enhance their studying and general coping skills.

The Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

Seven modules within different academic programmes, including Entrepreneurship for SMMEs; Industrial Psychology; Accounting for Small Businesses in the Qwaqwa region; Economics; and International Economics.

Example: OBS (Entrepreneurship) students engaged with small business people who are involved in the Hand-in-Hand project of the MUCPP.

The Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

Five modules within various programme, including Consumer Science (community development through sewing project); Architecture (design projects at NPOs); Computer Sciences and Informatics (computer training for community members at South campus); training for emerging farmers (Agriculture); and the Science Education module of the Physics Department.

Example: the elective Science Education SL module, offered on site at Heidedal Schools and the science centre of the Boyden Observatory, is generic and students from any programme can enrol for it)

The Faculty of Theology

Five modules within four academic programmes, including Pastoral Therapy for Offenders; Pastoral Care for the Terminally Ill; Community Development (Missiology); Pastoral Care for the Aged; and Practical Theology students engage with the Two Towers inner city care centre for the homeless.

Example: Students enrolled for the Master's Programme in Pastoral Therapy engage with inmates of the local maximum security facility.

The Faculty of Law

Four modules in addition to the practical work that students do within the ambit of the UFS Law Clinic (i.e. Legal Practice, Law of Procedure and Law of Evidence).

The Faculty of Health Sciences

(Distinct service learning modules have been developed and are offered in addition to clinical practice courses.)

School of Nursing – six modules

(Client Education; Wound Care projects; Nursing Education; Research Project in Post-Natal Care; Early Childhood Community Health; and General Nursing: Community Health projects in collaboration with schools).

School of Medicine – three modules

(Community Health: Concepts of Health and Disease; Health and Disease in Populations; the Doctor and the Environment)

School of Allied Health Sciences

- **Occupational Therapy – six modules** with interlinked SL components and a wide variety of partners.
- **Optometry – one module** offered at various community sites.
- **Dietetics and Human Nutrition – one module listed**, various vulnerable communities served.
- **Physiotherapy - two modules**, various community partners.

The (new) Faculty of Education – three modules

(Dr Jannie Pretorius and Dr Annelie Ferreira offered these modules.)

Student Outcomes of Service Learning

The impact that the SL experience has on students is gauged through the authentic assessment of learning outcomes; by means of the reflection reports that they write; and through the pre- and post-implementation survey questionnaires that all SL students are required to complete. All of the results gleaned through these quantitative instruments and qualitative mechanisms point to the fact that well-structured SL modules are bound to add an invaluable component to the training of our students – specifically regarding the personal meaning that they find when linking theory to real-world experiences, and critically considering their roles as responsible citizens in the lives of local, regional and global communities.

In many instances the creativity and care that students exhibit when they undertake their community-based work are quite breath-taking. For the majority of students these experiences have a profound influence on the meaning-making process with regard to application of theoretical content in real-world contexts. There is ample evidence that most of the critical cross-field outcomes (CCFOs) are enhanced by SL, such as their understanding of the world as a set of related systems, and on the value of working in diverse groups. Through carefully structured reflection many students undergo a transformative learning experience through which they get to appreciate the value of life-long learning through respectful engagement and collaborative meaning-making with others, including the most vulnerable members of society. Opportunities to share an awareness of our common humanity with “clients” are often a life-changing experience for students, especially for those who initially did not want to do SL!

The Impact of Service Learning Modules on Community and Service Sector Constituencies

It will be no mean feat to measure the impact of more than 50 SL modules, involving students from more than 50 disciplines from across the faculties that are implemented at a broad variety of community organisations and sites. However, each module has to be offered according to a set of quality management mechanisms that has been developed over the years and that are reinforced regularly. The outcomes are evaluated in terms of indicators agreed upon between

the UFS staff members and the community partners when the terms of engagement are negotiated before the modules commence. The impact ranges from something as graphic as the size of a wound that might have shrunk from 40cm to 4cm during the wound care projects undertaken by nursing students, to increased levels of awareness about and resiliency in the face of bullying in the school environment.

Examples of the impact of SL abound. One module that has been developed/adapted more recently is the following: Since adopting the SL approach to their community-based education Optometry students have added an invaluable community project component to their regular eye-care-related training, such as finding sponsors to fund the building of proper small toilets at a nursery school that operates from an old bus – in addition to eye-testing for the little ones and training staff in awareness of vision-impaired children. It can be stated categorically that monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of outcomes as agreed upon by participants are key elements of ethical engagement between the UFS and external SL partners.

Service Learning Capacity Building for UFS Staff and Others

In order to equip lecturers with the knowledge, skills and disposition that they require to implement effective SL modules, a specialised 24-credit module in Service Learning (HOS 717) is offered as part of the Master's Programme in Higher Education Studies of CHESD. A considerable number of staff members have already completed this module. Additional staff development activities that were offered included invited speakers who are specialists in relevant fields. The latest person to be invited was Dr Antoinette Smith-Tolken from Stellenbosch University who has recently completed her thesis in which she used Grounded Theory Methodology to investigate service-based scholarly student activities (such as SL). (I was one of the external examiners of this excellent thesis.)

The Division has also developed a UFS accredited Short Learning Programme in Service Learning Capacity Building (SPSLCB). This programme is offered at NQF level 9 and articulates with the MA(HES). During 2010 the SPSLCB was offered at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) to twelve lecturers and two CE administrators. Dr Luzelle Naudé and I presented the programme during three two-day contact sessions on UJ campuses.

International Liaison

During March of this year the SL Division, in collaboration with Appalachian State University (ASU) in North Carolina hosted the very successful "Global Perspectives Forum in Service Learning, Civic Engagement and Community-Based Research" on the main UFS campus. I utilised funding from the SPSLCB for this initiative, in addition to the funding made available by ASU. Prof. Timothy Stanton, a SL expert from Stanford University, was a guest speaker at the Forum.

Dr Luzelle Naudé, one of our most active SL colleagues, is currently on study leave at Cornell University where she work with Prof. Richard Kiely, a scholar who focuses on the transformative qualities of SL as a pedagogy.

The Service Learning Division has a longstanding collaborative engagement with international leaders in the fields of Civic Engagement and Service Learning who are based at the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). In July 2010 I presented a joint paper on SL and the Third Sector (NPOs and civil society) with Prof. Robert Bringle (IUPUI) and others at the annual conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) in Istanbul.

Internationally there is a growing focus on collaborative community/civic engagement as a global strategy in the search for sustainable solutions through local-global linkages. This opens up exciting possibilities for the future of higher education community engagement, and service learning in particular. I am convinced that the UFS needs to make it a priority to be part of the global movement towards increased responsiveness and deeper forms of engagement.

Challenges

Those of us who have first-hand experience of the significant outcomes of SL for students, community members and lecturers find it increasingly difficult to convey the message of the exceptional value of this form of engagement to management and the rest of the campus. This creates frustration and a sense of being marginalised among proponents of SL and CE in general.

Even though it is much appreciated that funding was made available again this year and also for 2011 the fact that a limitation has been placed on the amount allocated over the past three years sends out a message that further growth towards including one SL module per academic programme, as stated in the CS Policy, is no longer important.

The current emphasis on competing with other higher education institutions for world class (mostly research) status does not sit well with my personal conviction that our benchmarking should be deeply embedded in respectful regional and local collaboration and engagement. The “other” priorities that the UFS now has should not diminish an awareness of the public role that the University has to play. Community engagement, also in the form of SL, should therefore not become the lowest on the list of activities worthy of receiving adequate funding.