Program Evaluation Brief

Perceptions of Faculty/Staff and Scholars regarding the Service Learning Assistant Scholarship Program

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Overview

This program evaluation utilized survey data from both interviews and questionnaires to examine perceptions of faculty/staff and students participating in the Service Learning Assistant (SLA) Scholarship Program at Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI). This scholarship program, administered through the Center for Service and Learning (CSL), provides funds to help faculty and staff manage the extra effort associated with community-engaged scholarly practice (i.e., service learning course development, community-based research, community-engaged research).

Program History and Context

The SLA Scholarship Program has a long history under the Sam H. Jones (SHJ) Community Service Scholarship Program. Originally intended just as a resource to support community-engaged scholarship and teaching, this scholarship program now involves opportunities for faculty/staff and student mentoring, student professional development, and critical reflection. The SLA scholarship is unique from the nine other Sam H. Jones scholarships in that CSL makes the award directly to a faculty or staff member via a detailed proposal process. Once funded, the faculty/staff awardee identifies a student as a recipient of the scholarship. It is expected that such support will enhance faculty/staff community-engaged scholarly practice; provide high-quality student mentoring opportunities; build capacity for sustainable, mutually beneficial community-campus partnerships; improve SLA Scholars’ time/project management skills; and build civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions (see Figure 1).

Scope of SLA Program for AY 2015-16

- 92 SLA Scholars (50 undergraduate, 41 graduate) worked with 60 faculty/staff in 30 schools/centers.
- Gender: Female 69%, Male 31%
- Demographics: White 59%, Black 12%, Hispanic 7%, Asian 5%, Mixed 17%
- Average GPA was 3.27 for undergraduates and 3.67 for graduates
- Retention rate was 96% for undergraduates & 97% for graduate students

This report examines the perceptions of faculty/staff and Scholars participating in the SLA program. CSL administered surveys in Spring 2016 to SLA Faculty/Staff and Scholars to learn more about their experiences with the program, perceptions about its influence, and suggestions for improvement.

Study 1 – Faculty/Staff Interviews

Method. CSL contacted faculty/staff who received an SLA award for the 2015-16 academic year and invited them to participate in an interview to learn more about their perspectives of the SLA program. The interviews were approximately 45 minutes long and were audio recorded. Eight faculty/staff participated. These faculty/staff represented the following departments:
DEVELOPING CIVIC-MINDED GRADUATES AND PROFESSIONALS

Figure 1: Service Learning Assistant Program Logic Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Faculty/Staff</td>
<td>- Instructor applies</td>
<td>- Number of Scholar trainings and professional development sessions</td>
<td>- Improved Scholar learning outcomes</td>
<td>- Improved scholarship on teaching and learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Students</td>
<td>- Faculty/Staff selects Scholar</td>
<td>- Faculty/Staff mentor training sessions</td>
<td>- Increased knowledge of best practices for service learning</td>
<td>- Increased knowledge of best practices with community partners</td>
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<td>- Community partners</td>
<td>- Faculty/staff orientation</td>
<td>- Attendance at CSL events</td>
<td>- Improved civic outcomes for community and Scholar</td>
<td>- Improved quality of life in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Scholarship funding</td>
<td>- Faculty/staff workshops</td>
<td>- Number of community partners</td>
<td>- Increased knowledge around best practices for community engagement</td>
<td>- Increase in civic-minded graduates and professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Staff</td>
<td>- Faculty/staff learning communities</td>
<td>- Completed scope of activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Scholar workshops</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Service activity planning</td>
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<td>- Reflection throughout semester</td>
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<td>- Assessment</td>
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</table>

- Faculty/Staff mentor training sessions
- Attendance at CSL events
- Number of community partners
- Completed scope of activities
- Faculty/Staff interaction with Scholar
- Mentoring relationships
- Improved Scholar learning outcomes
- Increased knowledge of best practices for service learning
- Improved civic outcomes for community and Scholar
- Increased knowledge around best practices for community engagement
- Scholar retention or graduation
- Improved scholarship on teaching and learning
- Increased knowledge of best practices with community partners
- Improved quality of life in the community
- Increase in civic-minded graduates and professionals
Developing Civic-Minded Graduates and Professionals

Dentistry, Health and Life Sciences, Medicine, Physical Education and Tourism Management, Polis Center (community informatics), Psychology, and Social Work. The participants included 6 women and 2 men; and 7 Whites and 1 African-American.

The interview data was analyzed using the grounded theory method, which Patton (2002) defines as “theory that emerges from the researcher’s observations and in interviews out in the real world rather than in the laboratory or the academy” (p. 11). Grounded theory holds that the central tenets of experience and phenomenon are retained within the lives of the individuals under study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Qualitative analysis procedures were adopted to facilitate an exploratory content analysis of the 8 interviews of SLA faculty/staff. This study considers an overall view of all SLA faculty/staff interviews. Therefore, the main goal is to understand and describe notable themes and patterns of discussion found across all interviews. Transcripts were constructed by using audio files created during the interview. Due to the constructivist nature of this evaluation, the analysis progressed from more concrete codes to abstract themes that reflect the meaning that the faculty/staff attached to their experiences with the SLA Scholars. A coding process was employed as the primary means of examination.

Results. Several notable themes emerged during analysis of the interview data. These themes are presented below and supported by actual quotations from SLA faculty/staff interview conversations. The names were omitted to promote confidentiality. Results are organized by four main interview topics:

1) Most positive aspect of working with a SLA Scholar
2) Faculty/Staff as a civic mentor
3) Type of project and/or activities completed by the SLA Scholar
4) Impact on Faculty/Staff member’s commitment to community engagement
5) Program improvement

**Topic 1: Most positive aspect of working with a SLA Scholar**

| Theme: Continuing Commitment of the SLA Scholar | “It’s almost like they take ownership of the projects. It has been fabulous.” |
| Theme: Growth of the SLA Scholar | “Seeing their change and how they transformed their way of thinking.” |

**Topic 2: Faculty/Staff as a civic mentor**

| Theme: SLA Scholar Civic Learning | “We talk beyond just the tasks they are working on but also the bigger impact. I kind of ask them a series of questions that helps them think about the connection between the larger community and the work they are doing.” |
| | “One of the things that I do is encourage them to continue to be involved in the service activities through which they find meaning, to which they find relevance.” |
Study 2 — SLA Scholars Questionnaire

Method. SLA Scholars who received an award for 2015-16 had the opportunity to complete an end of the year web-based questionnaire in spring 2016 to provide an understanding about the influence of the SLA program. The questionnaire response rate was 38%. Items reported in this program evaluation include the following:

1) Scholars’ Perceptions of the SLA Experience (i.e., overall, academically, community impact)
2) Connection to IUPUI
3) Continued enrollment
4) Program improvement

Results. The SLA Scholars perceptions of their experience in the program were very positive. Over 85% of the respondents \((n = 24)\) indicated they agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their overall experience as a Scholar, their experiences as a Scholar deepened their academic learning, and their service benefitted the community. See Table 1 for further details of their responses.
Continued Enrollment.

Scholars were asked “how did receiving financial support from the SLA Scholarship affect your ability or decision to remain enrolled at IUPUI?” Fifty-eight percent of the respondents (N=23) reported that the scholarship affected their ability or decision to remain enrolled. Selected responses include the following:

- “100% affected it. I wouldn't have made it this far without it. I don't receive any other aid.”
- “It influenced it quite a bit because it gave needed help in paying for my education.”
- “It was of great help. It allowed me to continue focusing on my education. Making it my only priority.”
- “It helped me pay for my classes more easily and allowed me to go through school with far less stress.”
- “Immensely. One year, my SLA funding was able to allow me to both pay rent and buy food.”
- “The financial aid helps support my schooling very much, which originally made the decision why I came to IUPUI.”

Program Improvement.

SLA Scholars were asked to provide their suggestions for how to improve the SLA Program for future Scholars. The responses (n = 5) affirmed satisfaction with the program. There were only two specific requests for program improvement (see below):

- “I think it would be nice if we got to do poster sessions where we can talk about what we learned. I think that would really expand the skills and things that we learn while doing this.”
- “More workshops or roundtables would be beneficial to furthering the community engagement goals.”
Conclusions and Implications
The findings from both Study 1 and Study 2 indicate that the Scholars and the Faculty/Staff Program Mentors are benefitting from the SLA Scholarship program. Across all interviews in Study 1, faculty/staff conveyed that their Scholars were exemplars and described the SLA program as beneficial to faculty/staff scholarship on teaching and learning, to the Scholars’ civic learning, and to the community. Study 2 indicates that SLA Scholars are quite satisfied with their experience in the program, believing it to benefit their learning and the community. The SLA Scholars further indicate that their experiences in the program helped them to form a connection to IUPUI. This evidence provides a rationale for CSL to further support faculty who engage with community partners to develop service learning courses and conduct community-engaged public scholarship. To that end, CSL has planned the following initiatives:

- CSL is collaborating with Amy Powell, program director for Themed Learning Communities (TLC), to design a service learning institute during the Spring of 2017. This institute will be for TLC faculty familiar with service learning or who have incorporated service in their TLCs in the past but are looking to strengthen their pedagogy. The institute will be open to up to 5 TLC faculty teams and involve a day and a half workshop/conference that includes a session on the DEAL model of critical reflection. Faculty will have an opportunity to design their service learning project and get feedback on how to integrate it across all the classes in the TLC. They will also receive a 5 hour per week SLA for Fall (2017) semester to assist with implementation of their service learning.

- CSL has received funding from Indiana Campus Compact to convene a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) in May, 2017 to apply the newly developed IUPUI Taxonomy for Service Learning Courses (available at https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/handle/1805/10851) to assist instructors in strengthening service learning course design to reach target student outcomes. The FLC model is an avenue for convening faculty in a collegial environment to improve teaching and learning. Over the 2 ½ day FLC, instructors will be asked to assess their current service learning practice to the framework of the taxonomy and identify ways to enhance selected components of their service learning course design.

Additionally, there are specific operational improvements to the SLA program that have been implemented:
  a) The application for faculty has been revised to streamline information needed and shorten the application for returning applicants.
  b) End of semester reporting has been streamlined to obtain necessary information (e.g., all information will be obtained from one online form).

SLA Scholars will have the opportunity to submit a poster presentation application for the 2017 Bringle Civic Engagement Showcase to highlight the project they completed while an SLA Scholar (e.g., reciprocal campus-community partnerships, synopsis of research data collection and/or analysis. See http://csl.iupui.edu/about/conferences/bringle/posters.shtml for additional information.

References
