


Special Issue

Education Technologies and COVID-19: Experiences and Lessons Learned

Reasons Faculty Teach, or Do Not Teach, Service-Learning Courses in a Pandemic: The Role of Faculty Investment and Clues for the Future of Service-Learning


Melissa C. Garvin, PhD

Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California, United States

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9510-5782>

Emily Acosta Lewis, PhD

Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California, United States

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2142-2088>

Contact: *missy.garvin@sonoma.edu*

Abstract

Objectives: Current issues impact the number and type of service-learning courses (SLCs) offered across universities. Our research aims to address the barriers and offer solutions to implementing SLCs.

Methods: Instructors ($n = 117$) in the California State University system, the largest in the United States, who taught SLCs in fall 2019 and spring 2020 were contacted to understand why they chose to continue, or discontinue, teaching SLCs in Fall 2020.

Results: The majority of participants continued to teach an SLC. Those who had more experience teaching SLCs were more likely to continue. Additionally, female participants trended toward being more likely to consider the use of service-learning as a high-impact practice as more important in their decision to continue teaching an SLC compared to male participants. Additional results and further implications are addressed.

Conclusions: While there are significant barriers to teaching SLCs in a remote environment, there are viable solutions.

Keywords: *service-learning, higher education, pandemic, high-impact practices*

Date Submitted: January 14, 2022 | **Date Accepted:** May 2, 2022 | **Date Published:** May 18, 2022

Recommended Citation

Garvin, M. C., & Acosta Lewis, E. (2022). Reasons faculty teach, or do not teach, service-learning courses in a pandemic: The role of faculty investment and clues for the future of service-learning. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, 12(0), 45–58. <https://doi.org/10.5590/10.18870/hlrc.v12i0.1311>

Introduction

Across the world, people are facing unprecedented times as the devastating long-term impacts of COVID-19 are coupled with ongoing issues like climate change and racial inequity. Californians survived the state's most deadly wildfires in 2017, only to have the 2018 fire season be even worse. This pattern has continued to worsen and has resulted in campuses across the state closing for periods of time every Fall since 2017. These experiences, and others across the world, are impacting the number and type of service-learning courses (SLCs) offered across college campuses. Service-learning is a pedagogy in which community engagement is integrated into the learning objectives of the course (Weisman, 2021). Research clearly indicates the importance of SLCs in student engagement, student retention, and faculty satisfaction (e.g., Weigert, 1998). Additionally, SLCs are a high-impact educational practice (HIP), which means these active learning techniques are widely researched and shown to be beneficial to students from many backgrounds (Kuh & Kinze, 2018). This HIP is the one that underrepresented students are more likely to access during their college education, as other opportunities, such as studying abroad, present a greater barrier (Kuh & Kinze, 2018).

Due to the known benefits of SLCs, it is crucial to understand how ongoing challenges have impacted SLC offerings. Once these barriers are more thoroughly understood, this will provide the opportunity for a better-informed discussion of how to minimize these barriers, find ways around them, or allow for alternative possibilities that still meet the criteria for, and benefits of, service-learning.

The California State University (CSU) system, which is the largest educational system in the United States and serves over 481,000 students, moved to primarily remote teaching for the academic year of 2020–2021. While courses were primarily remote, there were no in-person SLCs allowed during this time. Given the rapidity of changes facing the CSU system, there is an urgent need to understand the impact of these changes on SLCs. To this end, the current project investigated the faculty perspective, across the CSU, on factors that impacted the decision to teach an SLC in the remote environment of Fall 2020. The discussion centers on factors that motivated faculty to continue to teach an SLC, as well as solutions to barriers to teaching an SLC in times of community crisis, to further the critical conversation around future directions of service-learning.

Literature Review

Faculty Motivation and Deterrents to Teach Service-Learning

There is a body of literature spanning decades that investigates the motivation of faculty to teach service-learning. One of the earliest studies investigating this question found that the area of greatest significance in influencing the faculty decision to teach an SLC was faculty motivation to promote improved student outcomes (Hammond, 1994). This result has been found time and again across disciplines, study methodology, and institutional type (e.g., Abes et al., 2002; Darby & Newman, 2014; Lewing & York, 2017; McKay & Rozee, 2004). While improved student learning is a robust motivator for faculty initially deciding to teach an SLC, there is less research about the characteristics of faculty who continue to teach SLCs and their motivations in doing so (O'Meara, 2013).

Abes et al. (2002) addressed the questions of what motivates faculty to teach an SLC, as well as the important question of what deters faculty from teaching an SLC. In addition to their finding that enhanced student learning was the primary motivator for faculty, they also found that there were differences by faculty gender in the types of learning that were emphasized. For example, they found that women faculty were more likely than men to indicate the importance of “increased student understanding of social problems as systemic” and “provided useful service in the community” as key aspects of student learning (Abes et al., 2002, p. 9). This finding is supported elsewhere in the literature; for example, Astin et al. (2006) found that female faculty are more likely to express a stronger commitment to civic engagement compared to their male counterparts. Importantly, the

question of why faculty do not teach SLCs was addressed among faculty who had taught an SLC and those who had considered doing so but never adapted the practice (Abes et al., 2002). The primary disincentives for both groups were time, including time not spent on other professional activities, and logistics, primarily relating to the coordination of service, including the efforts involved in working with a community partner.

In a more recent study, Darby and Newman (2014) used a qualitative approach to address not only faculty motivators for teaching an SLC, but also why they persisted in doing so. The authors found that providing real-world experience and teaching civic engagement, especially social justice, were paramount in the decision to teach an SLC. Faculty in this sample reported frustration with negative student responses to the experience of service-learning, problematic relationships with community partners, and a lack of support on the part of their institution. Importantly, the faculty in this study also indicated a strong desire to persevere in service-learning in spite of these frustrations. The implication was that their motivation to teach an SLC outweighed any deterrents. The study highlights the investment on the part of faculty, in terms of time and resources, in promoting student success despite a lack of institutional support or even in the face of institutional hindrance.

Cooper (2014) was the only study found to address persistence in a longitudinal design. Not surprisingly given the barriers to teaching an SLC, Cooper found that not all faculty persisted in service-learning. However, those who did reported that their experience teaching an SLC was a reason that they chose to continue to utilize the pedagogy. Further, the primary motivation to persist was student excitement demonstrated during the service-learning component of the course.

As faculty demographics begin to shift toward more millennial faculty in higher education, it is worth noting the work of Lewing and York (2017) in addressing potential motivators for newer and future faculty to teach SLCs. While they assessed a small sample of eight millennial faculty, their phenomenological study did demonstrate some differences in motivating factors, as well as faculty expectations around service-learning. Interestingly, the researchers found that faculty's own undergraduate engagement with service-learning was a significant indicator of how readily they adapted the practice themselves. Those whose undergraduate experience was rich in SLCs were more likely to teach this way from the outset. Those faculty who did not have this deep experience in their undergraduate experience emphasized the importance of institutional support in their adaptation of service-learning. This highlights the importance of SLCs—not only for current students and faculty but for those current students who will one day become faculty. Additionally, the authors reported a greater emphasis on intrinsic motivation, primarily the personal belief that there is deep value in the connection between university and the broader community, than past studies found. However, the authors also noted the importance of student success to adopting service-learning practices.

There is some research emphasizing solutions to the barriers of teaching an SLC. Hou and Wilder (2015) administered an open-ended survey to 102 faculty teaching an SLC. While faculty's intrinsic motivation to enhance student success was primary among the motivators to teach an SLC, consistent with much of the research on the topic (e.g., Abes et al., 2002; Darby & Newman, 2014; Hammond, 1994; Lewing & York, 2017; McKay & Rozee, 2004), a primary disincentive was a lack of external reward for using this pedagogy. Specifically, this was connected to a lack of recognition in the retention and promotion process, with junior faculty having concerns that the workload needed to teach an SLC would not be considered in the retention and promotion process. Additionally, the authors address the concerns that some faculty perceived overt hostility toward the idea of teaching an SLC, as well as the feeling of being punished for those who do so. More specifically, faculty in this study reported that the work of teaching an SLC was unrecognized among colleagues and that these efforts may even be counted against faculty—both in the retention and promotion process, but also when considering contributions to the department. For example, faculty who spent time creating and maintaining an SLC were seen as doing so at the expense of other work that may be considered more valuable by their colleagues. Additionally, faculty participants noted the challenges of working with community partners in terms of time spent establishing and maintaining these relationships.

The concerns of creating and maintaining community partner relationships are not new to the literature (e.g., Frank et al., 2010; McKay & Rozee, 2004). Recommendations by the faculty regarding ways to surmount the barriers they discussed include the provision of release time for the extra workload, assistance in making and maintaining community partner relationships, and official recognition in the retention and promotion process (Hou & Wilder, 2015).

O'Meara (2013), in her detailed review of the literature, found individual (e.g., demographics, personal commitment, where one is in their career development, and identity) and environmental factors (e.g., community partnerships and academic discipline) to be relevant when considering faculty motivation to teach service-learning. Further, O'Meara called for further studies investigating demographic factors, such as the role of gender identity and faculty service-learning teaching experience, in the role of faculty motivation in teaching service-learning courses.

Overall, there is consistent evidence in the literature that faculty teaching SLCs are highly invested in student outcomes and believe that this pedagogy is an effective means of promoting student success. It is also clear that there are consistent disincentives to teaching SLCs. Primary among these is the time investment in learning and implementing a new pedagogy, as well as the logistical complications of working with a community partner. Further, the institutional disincentives relating to retention and promotion are also problematic.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

While there has been some research investigating the initial motivations of faculty to teach an SLC, and there is a smaller body of research investigating why faculty persist in the use of this pedagogy, there has been less research investigating how a pandemic, coupled with other global and local crises, influences motivation to teach an SLC. Further, the study also includes an examination of the reasons faculty who have experience teaching SLCs desist teaching during times of great challenge. Specifically, the focus of the study addresses the pivot to online learning made by the California State University (CSU) system in the Fall of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The vast majority of classes across the CSU were required to be fully remote. There were a handful of courses across the system that were allowed to maintain an in-person component, but there were no in-person service-learning courses during this semester. The current study addresses research questions (RQ) that remain hitherto unanswered, or incompletely addressed, by the literature.

RQ1: What are the most significant reasons faculty continued or discontinued teaching SLCs in Fall 2020?

RQ2: Are there demographic factors, including gender identity and teaching experience, that differentiate faculty who continued to teach SLCs in Fall 2020 from those who did not?

Methods

Population and Sample

Participants included 117 faculty members who were contacted because they had taught SLCs at one of the 23 campuses of the California State University (CSU) system in fall 2019 or spring 2020. Participants who had recently taught an SLC prior to Fall 2020 were the desired demographic in order to assess whether or not they continued to teach an SLC in Fall 2020 (the first fully remote semester due to the pandemic).

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the authors' home institution, we recruited participants by contacting the directors of community engagement at campus offices responsible for service-learning on each of the 23 campuses of the CSU system. These campus offices were asked to provide a list of all faculty members who taught an SLC in the 2019–2020 academic year. Of the 23 campuses, 14

provided the names of faculty who taught SLCs during this time frame. Two campus offices chose to directly email faculty a message from the authors describing the research project and requesting their participation directly. Three campus offices sent the message to some of their faculty, who taught SLCs during the time frame we requested, but not all of the eligible faculty. Four campuses were not responsive to our inquiries or chose not to participate. Reasons provided for nonparticipation included not keeping records of faculty who teach SLCs and issues pertaining to faculty workload during a stressful semester.

Participants whose names and email addresses were provided to the authors were emailed directly by the authors ($N = 549$). An unknown number of faculty were contacted through their campus Center for Community Engagement (CCE) or its equivalent. A small number of faculty were contacted by colleagues whose names had been provided to the authors by the campus CCE director when the director was unable to contact service-learning faculty directly. We had a total of 148 respondents; however, 18 were excluded from analyses because they did not teach during Fall 2020. An additional 13 were excluded as they responded to less than 34% of the survey questions.

Procedure

Participants received an email (as well as a follow-up reminder), whether from the authors or the CCE directors or staff, that provided a brief overview of the study objectives and asked for participation in an online survey that would take 5–7 minutes to complete. In order to complete the survey, participants agreed to the IRB-approved informed consent. Surveys were administered through Qualtrics and were completely anonymous; no identifying information, including IP address, was collected on any of the participants.

Instrumentation

A survey was designed to assess the research questions. It included several demographic questions, including ethnicity (as categorized by the U.S. Census), gender identification (given a choice of female, male, non-binary, or prefer not to answer), total years having taught in higher education, and total semesters having taught an SLC. For total years of teaching, there was an option for 1–3, 4–6, 7–9, or 10 or more years. The same options were given for the number of semesters having taught an SLC.

Participants were asked if they were teaching a course with an SLC component in Fall 2020. Those who responded “yes” continued to a question assessing possible reasons they chose to continue teaching an SLC in a remote environment. There were 12 statements using a 5-point Likert Scale, such that a “5” indicated a significant impact of the item and a “1” indicated no impact of the item on their decision. Statements included options such as: “The service-learning project lent itself well to an online course;” “I value service-learning as a high-impact practice;” “I was able to modify the service-learning component for an online environment;” and “I have a service-learning component, but I do not engage with the community partner as I would during a face-to-face semester.”

Participants who responded “no” to teaching a course with an SLC component in Fall 2020 continued to a question assessing their reasons for making this decision. This question also used a 5-point Likert Scale, as described above. There were 10 statements, including: “Service-learning project didn’t lend itself to an online course;” “It is too much work to transition to remote teaching, and I did not have the bandwidth to also convert service-learning remotely;” “Community partner closed temporarily;” and “My department or school mandated that I not teach service-learning.”

The survey items were derived from the literature, as indicated above, as well as from the types of concerns that faculty at our own institution were expressing through the Faculty Fellows for the Center for Community Engagement. Knowing that the list could not be exhaustive, participants were invited to share any other reasons for having taught or not taught an SLC during the Fall of 2020.

Analysis

SPSS software (version 28.0.1.0) was used to analyze the data. RQ1 is assessed using mean scores to describe patterns of responses to the questions. The variation in the sample size across gender identification and ethnicity is a sufficient violation of the traditional analysis of variance (ANOVA) assumptions; therefore, ANOVA is not an appropriate test for these data. For this reason, RQ2 was analyzed using Welch's test for unequal variances (two-group comparisons) and Welch's ANOVA for mean comparisons across more than two groups. There is support for the use of Welch's test when comparing means of groups with unequal sample sizes (see Ruxton, 2006; Liu, 2015).

Results

Participants were 80.3% ($N = 94$) female, 14.5% ($N = 17$) male, 4.3% ($N = 5$) prefer not to answer, and .09% ($N = 1$) non-binary. In total, 65.8% ($N = 77$) identified as White, 10.3% ($N = 12$), Asian, 9.4% ($N = 11$) Hispanic or Latino, 7.7% ($N = 7$) multi-ethnic, 6.0% ($N = 7$) other, 1.7% ($N = 2$) prefer not to answer, and .09% ($N = 1$) identified as Black or African American. In terms of teaching experience, the majority (56.4%, $N = 44$) had more than 10 years of teaching experience.

Research Question #1: Barriers to Service-Learning

Of the participants in the study, 33.3% ($n=39$) chose not to teach an SLC during remote learning in Fall 2020 but still taught during this semester. Table 1 provides the mean score and standard deviation for each statement among these faculty. The higher the mean, the more important this statement in the decision-making process. The statement that was most heavily considered to be of some importance is "Service-learning project does not lend itself to an online course."

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Reasons Why Participants Did Not Teach SLCs in Fall 2020

Response	Mean	SD
Service-learning project didn't lend itself to an online course.	3.14	1.82
Community partner closed temporarily.	2.78	1.81
I never intended to teach a service-learning course in the Fall of 2020.	2.72	1.88
I had concerns about student safety.	2.69	1.83
It is too much work to transition to remote teaching, and I did not have the bandwidth to also convert service-learning remotely.	2.60	1.72
My department or school mandated that I not teach service-learning.	1.64	1.38
Community partner closed permanently.	1.44	0.97
Community partner contacts were laid off.	1.39	0.96
Students not interested in doing service-learning.	1.26	0.90
Community partner is no longer in need.	1.14	0.49

Research Question #1: Reasons to Continue Teaching Service-Learning

Overall, 66.7% ($N = 78$) of faculty continued to teach SLCs in Fall 2020 in a remote learning environment. Table 2 provides the mean score and standard deviation for each response.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Reasons Why Participants Did Teach SLCs in Fall 2020

Response	Mean	SD
I value service-learning as a high-impact practice.	4.55	0.83
In the COVID environment, the community is more in need than before.	3.83	1.38
I was able to modify the service-learning component for an online environment.	3.60	1.26
Major/course require a service-learning component.	3.37	1.85
I have a service-learning component, but I do not engage with the community partner as I would during a face-to-face semester.	3.08	1.47
I was able to change the service-learning component, so that it is less involved but still benefits students and a community partner.	2.98	1.35
I found a new service-learning project that worked well in an online course.	2.89	1.61
The service-learning project lent itself well to an online course.	2.79	1.39
I was able to implement an entirely different service-learning project that is better adapted to an online environment with the same community partner with whom I worked before.	2.56	1.49
I was able to implement an entirely different service-learning project that is better adapted to an online environment with a community partner with whom I have never worked before.	2.49	1.55
I did not need to modify the service-learning component of my course.	2.05	1.25
I am able to have students participate in in-person service-learning.	1.87	1.34

Research Question #2

Group Differences in Teaching SLCs in Fall 2020

There was no difference based on gender or total teaching experience in whether or not participants chose to teach an SLC in Fall 2020. However, a one-way Welch's ANOVA revealed a significant difference between experience teaching SLCs, specifically, and the decision to teach one in Fall 2020, such that those with more experience teaching SLCs were significantly more likely to teach an SLC in Fall 2020, $F(114, 1) = 14.37, p < .001$.

Differences in Reasons to Teach, or Not to Teach, SLCs

Of those who continued to teach an SLC, 70.2% ($N = 66$) identified as female. Initial cross-tabulations comparing gender with reasons to teach or not to teach an SLC indicated that there may be a relationship between gender and continuing to teach because service-learning is a HIP. A Welch's t -test was run using gender as a dichotomous variable. Gender was dichotomized for this analysis, as all respondents to this particular question identified as either male or female. There was a trend such that participants identifying as female were more likely to report that they continued to teach an SLC because it is a HIP, $F(71,3) = 2.634, p = .056$.

In terms of ethnicity, Table 3 indicates the percentage of participants identifying as various ethnicities for those who continued to teach SLCs in Fall 2020. There were no significant differences, based on ethnicity, in terms of who did, or did not, teach an SLC in Fall 2020.

Of those who continued to teach service-learning courses in Fall 2020, 46.2% ($N = 36$) had been teaching service-learning for more than 10 semesters, 23.1% ($N = 18$) had been teaching service-learning for 7–9 semesters, 14.1% ($N = 11$) had been teaching service-learning for 4–6 semesters, and 15.4% ($N = 12$) had been teaching service-learning for 1–3 semesters.

Additionally, the relationship between total teaching experience and continuing to teach service-learning in Fall 2020 because a new service-learning project was established, also demonstrated a significant relationship. The more total teaching experience a participant had, the less likely the participant was to develop a new service-learning project with a new community partner ($r = -.26, p = .026$).

Discussion

It is quite encouraging that the majority (66.7%) of participants continued to teach SLCs, despite the pandemic, remote learning environment, and other difficulties experienced in spring through fall of 2020. Though most of the barriers expressed in the survey are specific to the fast move to online learning and the overwhelming nature of the experiences of 2020, some are related to the nature of service-learning in general. For example, in the open-ended question related to other considerations regarding teaching service-learning, one faculty member noted that the additional work that service-learning entails for students is unacceptable, and they would not teach another SLC because of this. The assessment that teaching an SLC is a heavy workload—and that this is a barrier to teaching an SLC—is in line with much of the literature (e.g., Cooper, 2014; Hou & Wilder, 2015). This view that the workload also burdens students is an interesting one. Further, our survey indicated that some faculty were mandated not to teach SLCs by deans, schools, or department chairs. This administrative barrier may be connected to the underappreciation of service-learning as a pedagogy that Hou and Wilder (2015) addressed in their research.

Other respondents reached out to convey that some of the controversy surrounding risk management and service-learning was repelling faculty from utilizing the pedagogy. An example of the type of risk management issue that arose in the open-ended component of our survey related to the issue of student waivers. Some faculty viewed these as too restrictive and infringing on the rights of students to voice concerns over practices they felt were unsafe (for example, the situation in which an SLC was required for graduation and the service-learning component was required to be in person at a time when many students felt unsafe gathering with unfamiliar people due to COVID-19). These concerns are not dissimilar to concerns addressed by Jacoby (2015), indicating the importance of assessing risk unique to various types of service-learning courses. Indeed, the issue of risk management is a complex one requiring much more unpacking than can be done with the data of this study. It is crucial, however, to find solutions to overcome these barriers in order to encourage faculty to teach SLCs and continue to have students participate in this HIP even during remote learning.

In addition to concerns surrounding risk management and student workload, the barrier most reported to actually have a strong influence on a faculty member's decision to not teach an SLC is that the project did not lend itself to remote instruction. One innovative example of how this could be addressed comes from Sonoma State University, where the CCE, a campus office, connected with a community partner and facilitated the continuation of SLCs through a single, open-ended project that was suitable across disciplines. In fact, there was participation in this project from all of the academic schools on campus (Weisman, 2021).

One area in which our data do not indicate much difficulty was with the community partner. Faculty were able to navigate the transition to remote learning with the community partner, or this relationship was not a

significant factor in the decision-making process. This finding is somewhat surprising given the hardships of the pandemic, but also the findings of Darby and Newman (2014) indicated that the relationships with community partners were a note-worthy barrier to teaching an SLC among their sample.

While it was a trend, it is interesting to note that faculty identifying as female were trending toward considering service-learning as a HIP as more important in their decision to continue to teach an SLC than faculty identifying as male. This provides some continued support for the research indicating gender differences in faculty motivation to teach an SLC (e.g., Abes et al., 2002; Astin et al., 2006).

It is compelling that both total teaching experience and specific experience teaching SLCs each correlate uniquely with outcomes pertaining to the teaching of these courses. Our data demonstrate that it is the specific expertise in the area of service-learning that made faculty more likely to continue to engage in this practice. There are many potential reasons for this, including familiarity or comfort with the pedagogy (Cooper, 2014). Our data do not indicate that these faculty are any more or less likely to teach an SLC due to a course or department requirement, however. This may seem like a simplistic perspective, but it may be indicative of a deeper truth. Faculty who are newer to service-learning may feel less comfortable with the overall pedagogy, but they may also feel a sense that it is an “all-or-nothing” proposition and may not have the experience to lessen certain components of the service-learning experience while enhancing others.

It is also of interest that rather than expertise in service-learning that relates to the development of a new community partnership, it is having less teaching experience overall that relates to this outcome. It is possible that faculty who have less teaching experience are more eager to maintain the service-learning component of their course. It may also be that less experienced faculty are less likely to be tenured full professors and feel less secure making a potentially risky decision to remain with a current community partner and upend an existing project. Rather, it may be a more fruitful decision to begin with a new community partner. Alternatively, it could be that these faculty do not yet have deeply established relationships with their community partners due to their relative recentness to teaching and are therefore more likely to change partnerships until they find a partnership that is more effective.

While the nuances of faculty expertise are intriguing, so is the gender difference of note. As previously discussed, the most significant contributor to faculty continuing to teach an SLC in Fall 2020 is that it is a HIP. Further, service-learning is a HIP that is more accessed by underrepresented students (Kuh & Kinzie, 2008). Faculty identifying as female were trending toward being more likely to consider this of greater importance compared to those identifying as male. This finding may relate to service-learning being a pedagogy utilized more by female faculty in our data. Interestingly, there is a dearth of research more broadly regarding who provides HIPs, compared to research indicating who accesses them.

These findings, when taken together, suggest that service-learning is a pedagogy that relates to individual faculty values and passions surrounding teaching. Indeed, the second strongest motivator for faculty to teach an SLC in Fall 2020 was the greater need within the community. This is further evidence of the role of faculty investment in service-learning, and is in line with the finding of O’Meara et al. (2008) that faculty commitment to community engagement is one of thoughtful consideration and is followed by the intentional action of contributing to the community. This makes mandating the teaching of SLCs more challenging unless there is explicit education surrounding the teaching of service-learning across campuses and teaching an SLC is viewed positively from an institutional perspective. For example, it is plausible that the first time faculty teach an SLC, they may experience a decline in student evaluations of the course (Darby & Newman, 2004). Or new faculty may fear this repercussion, particularly if they are not yet tenured (or are not on the tenure track). This may make a shift to utilizing a well-studied, effective pedagogy less likely to be incorporated into early career faculty courses, as faculty may be fearful they will be less likely to advance toward tenure. Rather, if there were explicit conversations allowing for support of faculty, who are enhancing their teaching through the utilization of service-learning, there may be fewer gender differences, as well as differences pertaining to

service-learning experience, relating to the dedication to continue to teach an SLC in a more challenging environment.

It is also possible that some faculty are concerned that teaching an SLC requires that every component of service-learning be addressed at the deepest level from the start, rather than allowing themselves to grow into the pedagogy, one step at a time. Mentorship around teaching service-learning could be effective in ameliorating this tension (e.g., Abes et al., 2002; Derby & Newman, 2014) and could foster the creativity and flexibility that faculty are likely to continue to need in our rapidly changing environment. One model for such mentorship involves faculty fellows who are experienced in teaching SLCs and can help guide other less experienced faculty on their journey from planning to executing an SLC.

Limitations of Current Study

Though every effort was made to contact all CSU faculty who taught an SLC during the 2019–2020 academic year, the authors were unable to access every qualified faculty member for reasons detailed in the Methods section. Related to this, our recruitment method varied by campus, such that some faculty were emailed directly, others were contacted through their CCEs, and some were recruited by colleagues based on personal knowledge of their history with SLCs. These variations could have led to a bias in our data. Further, it is possible that faculty who chose to participate were more likely to be those who held strong opinions on the matter of service-learning. However, our data do not indicate (based on the means of responses) that those who chose not to teach an SLC in Fall 2020 felt particularly strongly about their decision.

While the authors conducted analyses designed to account for unequal variance, there was still very low representation from some groups in the survey response. Groups with low representation include those identifying as male and non-binary, as well as those from ethnic groups other than those identifying as White. It is important that future research investigates these differences more thoroughly and with a larger sample.

In addition to these potential issues, faculty were particularly overwhelmed in the fall 2020 semester. Given the pandemic, the issues surrounding racial inequity being brought to the forefront of our national conversations, the move to online learning, the election, and California wildfires—in addition to myriad personal stressors—our response rate may have been lowered.

Implications for Future Research

There is a continued need to identify means of effectively institutionalizing the teaching of SLCs. It will also be crucial that institutionalization means that administrators and faculty continue to unpack the issues relating to risk management during more difficult times. Institutionalizing SLCs may decrease the concerns around risk management, as there will need to be clear protocols in place for the protection of students and faculty. While institutionalization does not change the workload associated with teaching an SLC, it should allow for the “counting” of this work toward professional responsibilities. This institutionalization should address the flexibility that may be necessary on an ongoing basis as campuses continue to experience shutdowns for periods of time due to natural disasters that are increasing in frequency.

As a means of institutionalization that may mitigate the barriers addressed in this article, administrators are going to need to support faculty in creating and maintaining service-learning courses through the campus support center; alleviating the issues pertaining to the increased time it takes to design and implement an SLC; and addressing concerns relating to funding needed to support these initiatives. When done properly, service-learning is beneficial to the campus, student learning, and community partners, who are often a forgotten part of the equation. It creates connections between the campus and community that cannot be replicated in other settings. It allows students and faculty to work together with a common goal of providing services to a community partner for the common good.

Conclusion

While there were a number of barriers to teaching service-learning present in the literature before the pandemic, these barriers may have been exacerbated during remote learning brought on by the pandemic. There was the additional barrier of remote education that was also addressed in the data. However, the majority of faculty teaching SLCs continued to do so in the face of remote education. Faculty continue to cite the value of service-learning to student education as the primary motivator to continue using this practice. Those who chose not to teach an SLC cited the difficulty of transitioning their service-learning projects to a remote environment as the most significant barrier. Examples from the literature of solutions to address barriers were provided, highlighting the importance of continuing to make SLCs accessible to students and solutions to barriers accessible to faculty who want to engage their students in this very important, high-impact practice.

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