

An Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model for Service-Learning in Philippine Christian University

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Abstract—The study dealt with developing an interdisciplinary curriculum model for service-learning in Philippine Christian University [PCU]. It attempted to determine the needs of the community which can be addressed in interdisciplinary curriculum, to determine the extent to which the present PCU curriculum responds to the identified needs of the community, how the PCU students could be involved in service-learning activities, and the interdisciplinary curriculum model that can be developed for students on service-learning.

This research utilized the qualitative approach and specifically followed the exploratory phenomenological design.

A community situational analysis was conducted in the four barangays in the City of Manila where PCU has a mutual understanding. The Community Situational Analysis Tool has

2 sections: Key Informant Interview and Focus Group Discussion.

After in depth interviews with the barangay officials and the members of the community, the researcher was able to identify the needs of the community such as health and welfare, basic education and literacy, livelihood projects, disaster preparedness, and waste management.

To address the needs of the community, the researcher proposed discipline-specific projects.

Since service-learning is curriculum-based, the researcher conducted a curriculum review by interviewing 9 (nine) PCU administrators and reviewing 18 (eighteen) syllabi. Results show that there was not enough evidence of service-learning in the instructional design. In order to involve students in service-learning activities, the syllabi should be redesigned.

In response to the institution's commitment to serve and make students learn in order to make a difference, the researcher was able to develop an interdisciplinary curriculum model for service-learning in PCU.

Keywords—service-learning, interdisciplinary curriculum, interdisciplinary curriculum model.

I. INTRODUCTION

In line with the advocacy of the International Commission for the 21st century which was published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] in 1996 that “education must contribute to the holistic development of the learner”, institutions of higher learning are expected to provide students with experiences for their total development. This is what one of the four (4) pillars of education which is learning to be hopes to achieve – the development of a person's mind, body, intelligence, creativity, personal and civic responsibility and spiritual values (Delors, 2013).

The ASEAN 2015 is one with the UNESCO in engaging students in local and global communities through its 4th blue print on a socio-cultural community which pushes for the promotion of people's welfare and the uplifting of human dignity (Tirona, 2015).

The mission of the Commission on Higher Education [CHED] lends itself to the goals of service-learning. CHED's call for quality education to meet the diverse needs of the students and the society is manifested in the accreditation requirement to meet the standards for the various programs of colleges and universities. In fact, one of the areas in the accreditation instrument of the Association of Christian Schools, Colleges, and Universities Accrediting Agency Incorporated [ACSCU-AAI] being examined is social orientation. It is in this area where the institution's programs and resources must be responsive to the needs of the learners and the community.

According to Bringle, Gang, and Malloy (1990), “when institutions connect with their communities to share resources and to respond to their needs, the nature of faculty work becomes different, student learning is enhanced, and the quality of life in the community is greatly improved.”

The idea of service as an integral part of a pedagogical approach originated with John Dewey (Rocheleau, 2004, Saltmarch, 2011). According to Dewey, “education should involve students' active participation of engagement in solving social issues through collaboration with others by way of experiential education.”

Despite the fact that a number of high schools and higher education institutions have incorporated service in their curriculum, the implementation of service-learning remains a challenge (Gates, 2012).

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To address this concern, Repko (2009) asserts the use of interdisciplinary instruction, an instructional approach which involved the use and integration of methods and analytical frameworks from more than one academic discipline, in order to develop meaningful connections (Jacobs, 1989), deepen the learning experience (Appleby, 2015), promote student engagement for greater and significant learning (Fink, 2003), and help realize the vision-mission and goals of an institution (Newell, 2007).

Philippine Christian University [PCU], an institution of higher learning prides itself with its core values of faith, character, and service. PCU’s mission statement is congruent to service-learning which motivated the researcher to develop an interdisciplinary curriculum model for service-learning in Philippine Christian University.

Specifically, this study attempted to answer the following questions: 1. *What are the needs of the community which can be addressed in interdisciplinary curriculum?* 2. *To what extent does the present PCU curriculum respond to the identified needs of the community?* 3. *How can the PCU students be involved in service-learning activities?* 4. *What interdisciplinary curriculum model can be developed for students on service-learning?*

II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the qualitative approach and specifically followed the exploratory phenomenological design because the actual experiences of people were examined in describing a phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007).

A four-step procedure was utilized in developing an interdisciplinary curriculum model for service-learning in PCU:

Phase 1: Community Situational Analysis

First, the researcher created a community situational analysis tool which is a modification of existing situational analysis tools (Tremblay, 2012) and which was validated by an expert. The tool is composed of semi-structured questions that served as guide for the discussion. The tool is divided into 2 (two) sections:

The components of Section 1 are as follows:

1. Information about the barangay official and the barangay
2. Strengths and weaknesses of the barangay
3. Key opportunities and threats facing the barangay

The components of Section II are the following:

1. Basic needs of the community
2. Possible measures that can be taken to meet the needs of the community
3. Additional comments that will help the community

Prior to the administration of the situational analysis tool, the researcher coordinated first with the External Affairs Office of PCU regarding the communities where the university has mutual understanding.

These Barangays are:

- Barangay 890 Zone 98 Panaderos St. Sta. Ana, Manila
- 891 Zone 98 Panaderos St. Sta. Ana, Manila
- 702 Zone 77 San Andres, Malate, Manila

All these barangays are located in the City of Manila that is why the researcher requested permission from the Honorable Mayor of Manila, Mayor Joseph E. Estrada to conduct situational analysis to the four barangays. The letter of request was turned over to the Manila Barangay Bureau which gave the researcher a go signal to administer the tool.

The researcher first went to each of the four barangays for a courtesy call to the Barangay Chairman or the Barangay Officer of the day. The researcher introduced herself and explained the reason for the study being conducted. The Barangay Chairman/Officer of the day agreed for a key informant interview which lasted for an hour each and which took place at their respective Barangay Hall. After the interview, the researcher requested for an audience whit at least 10 (ten) community members for the Focus Group Discussion. The Barangay Chairman/ Officer of the day scheduled the session date, time, and location.

The researcher conducted four key informant interviews and three focus group discussions.

A total of 42 participants including 36 women and 6 men participated in the three Focus Group Discussions [FGD]. The first FGD was in Barangay 890 which had 17 participants, 2 men and 15 women. The second focus group from Barangay 891 had 10 participants, 2 men and 8 women. The third focus group was from Barangay 702 which had 15 participants, 2 men and 13 women. All the FGD were held at their respective barangay halls.

At the start of each of the FGD, the researcher introduced herself and explained the reason for the visit and the purpose of the on-going study. The discussion lasted for almost 1 ½ hours. Data were collected through audio recordings, observations of non-verbal communications and note taking (Calandro, 2011). Before each interview began, the researcher first set the mood by spending around 5 minutes by having a relaxed conversation with the participants in the community. This allowed them and the researcher to be more comfortable and to develop a positive rapport (Gatto, 2009).

Before the discussion ended, the researcher provided a summary of the important points of the discussion and gave the community participants an opportunity to comment on what had been discussed. This technique of giving a summary, according to Lewis, et al (2007) made the participants feel that their voices were heard and interpreted properly by the researcher. The researcher thanked the members of the barangay for their hospitality and for their time, effort, and feedback.

Data Analysis

Upon the completion of the Key Informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings and reviewed the notes and other observations.

Phase 2: Curriculum Review

First, the researcher developed a curriculum review instrument which was adapted from existing curriculum review tools (Tremblay, 2012). The developed tool was subjected to validation by an expert. It is composed of semi-structured

questions that served as a guide for the interview. The tool is divided into 4 sections.

Section A: Strengths, weaknesses, constraints, and opportunities

Section B: Students learning and levels of satisfaction

Section C: Curriculum alignment

Section D: Assessment of learning

Before the curriculum tool was administered, the researcher requested from the Acting Registrar the curricula of the different academic programs offered at PCU-Taft and syllabi from the Deans and Department Heads. Then, letter of requests were sent to the Deans and Department Heads for interview regarding their curricula.

A total of 9 (nine) participants were interviewed; 5 (five) Deans and 4 (four) Department Heads, while a total of 18 (eighteen) syllabi were reviewed.

At the start of each interview, the researcher introduced herself and explained the purpose of the study. The researcher also gained consent for the use of an audio recorder during the entire duration of the interview and assured the participants of the confidentiality of their answers. The interview lasted for 30 (thirty) minutes to 1 (one) hour. Data were collected through audio recordings and notes taking (Calandro, 2011).

Before the interview ended, the researcher summarized the key points of the discussion since it provides the participants with a chance to expand and make some clarifications regarding some points and to find out if the researcher was able to interpret what transpired during the interview properly (Evaluation Toolbox, 2010). The researcher thanked the participants for their time despite their busy schedule, for their effort and for their support.

Data Analysis

After the interview, the researcher transcribed the audio recording and the notes.

Document Analysis

The undergraduate curriculum documents requested from the different academic units of PCU, the data gathered from the Key Informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions were subjected to document analysis. Document analysis was the main method of data collection and analysis of this study (Owen, 2013). Aside from documents mentioned, the researcher considered the participant's body language while conducting the interview in the community, the presence of materials like plaques of recognition hanging on the barangay hall, books and the well-organized arrangement of furniture despite the limited space and the area itself. These observations were recorded as field notes and served as additional data for this study (Pritchett, 2014).

A total of 34 (thirty-four) documents were analyzed by the researcher; 18 (eighteen) of which were course syllabi; 7 (seven) community situational analysis after transcribing the four key informant interviews and three FGDs; and results of interviews with five Deans and four Department Heads of PCU. After checking and re-checking, these documents were coded in order to organize relevant ideas and concepts for the emergence of themes or patterns and contrasts (Bowen, 2009), which eventually made these documents important aspects of the "study's total body of data" (Saldana, 2009).

The researcher created and assigned codes using the community situational analysis tool, curriculum review instrument and the research questions.

The data gathered were categorized into themes and sub-themes which enabled the researcher to give meaning to the "whys" and "how" of this study (Charmaz, 2006).

Phase 3: Service-Learning

Findings from the community situational analysis, review of the curricula specifically the course syllabi, and the data gathered from the analysis of relevant documents became the foundation for developing an interdisciplinary curriculum model for service-learning in PCU.

For a meaningful integration of service-learning in the curriculum, the researcher suggested the following:

- a) identify the service-learning project
 - b) develop goals/ objectives for the service-learning project
 - c) choose a community service activity that best meets the needs of the learner and the community
 - d) decide where the student will serve and learn
 - e) coordinate with the student or Department Heads as to the potential year level, the discipline and the course in which to infuse service-learning
 - f) determine the number of hours required
 - g) determine the expected outcomes and forms of the assessment
- finalize the syllabus (include discussion on service-learning as a philosophy and as a pedagogy).

Phase 4: Develop an interdisciplinary curriculum model for service-learning in Philippine Christian University

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Themes generated from the in-depth key informant interviews, focus group discussions and document review were used as bases for explaining the following questions:

A. What are the needs of the community which can be addressed in an interdisciplinary curriculum?

As a result of the Focus Group Discussion, the following needs of the community were identified.

Health and Welfare.

Basic Education and Literacy.

Livelihood Projects.

Disaster Preparedness.

Waste Management.

From the identified needs of the communities, possible service-learning projects were recommended, the academic discipline/ college that will study and implement the project, and the description of the project.

B. To what extent does the present PCU curriculum respond to the identified needs of the community?

During the in-depth interviews with the 9 administrators of PCU, they expressed their commitment to provide quality education to the students and to provide quality education to the students and to integrate new approaches to learning. One

such innovation is the integration of service-learning into the curriculum.

The researcher reviewed 18 syllabi based on the alignment and consistency with:

- 1) PCU’s core values of Faith, Character, and Service
- 2) PCU Mission which is “be responsive to Philippine needs and conditions”
- 3) One of the Institutional Learning Outcomes which is “Practice servant leadership”
- 4) Program Learning Outcomes
- 5) Vision-Mission/ Objectives of the College
- 6) Course Learning Outcomes

In total, eighteen (18) syllabi were examined for the presence of text phrases about “service-learning” or statements implying “service-learning”. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 1.

Summary of numbers of syllabi with text phases regarding “service-learning” or statements implying “service-learning”

Syllabi	Program Learning Outcome (PLO)	Courses Learning Outcome (CLO)	Vision-Mission of the College (VMC)
1	1	0	1
2	1	0	1
3	1	0	1
4	1	0	1
5	1	0	1
6	1	1	1
7	1	0	1
8	1	0	1
9	1	1	1
10	1	0	1
11	1	1	1
12	1	1	1
13	1	1	1
14	1	0	1
15	1	0	1
16	1	1	1
17	1	1	1
18	1	1	1
TOTAL:	18	8	18
Legend: 1 – text phrase or statement implying “service-learning” is present 0 - text phrase or statement implying “service-learning” is absent			

All the 18 syllabi examined had text phrases or statements about service-learning in the Program Learning Outcomes and in the Vision-Mission of the five (5) Colleges, while only eight (8) in the Course Learning Outcomes. Despite the fact that the PCU Vision-Mission, Vision-Mission of the colleges, Institutional Learning Outcomes, Program Learning Outcomes, and in some Course Learning Outcomes are congruent with service-learning, yet there are not enough evidence of service-learning in the instructional designs. While it is true that they talk about this pedagogical approach, it is not documented.

C. How can the PCU students be involved in service-learning activities?

PCU students should be given the privilege to be of service to others by applying what they have learned in the classroom to real-life situations. This can be done by integrating service-learning into the curriculum. The syllabus, which is the roadmap to the course, should reflect clear and concise definitions of service-learning (Allen, 2014) and well-planned service-learning activities. Therefore, the “traditional” syllabus will have to be redesigned to include opportunities for students’ community engagement.

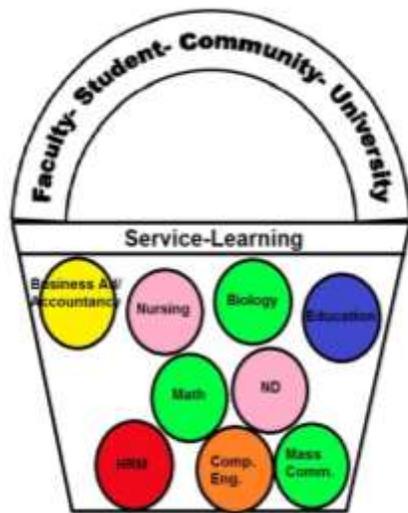
In redesigning the syllabus (Northeastern University, 2016), (a) the course description should include service-learning and the role it plays in the course. The “enhanced” course description to become official should be submitted to the registrar’s office so that the students will know that service-learning is really part of their course. (b) One of the course learning outcomes should be the benefits of service-learning to students’ academic performance while serving the community. (c) During the Orientation Week (Week 1), the concept of service-learning should be introduced and explained to the students, and provide a description of how it will enhance the teaching-learning process. The faculty should also explain the policies and expectations, the number of hours out of class, the issue of academic honesty, attendance and the assessment. Examples of service-learning completed projects could be provided to the students (Chen, 2004). (d) Decide when and where to integrate service-learning into the curriculum taking into consideration the knowledge level of the students (Stewart, T. & Wubbena, Z., 2014). (e) Determine the learning content and the specific learning outcomes then choose a service-learning activity that best meets them and that of the community (f) Discuss the specific steps needed to complete the service-learning activity. (g) Explain the method of assessment and the grading systems.

D. What interdisciplinary curriculum model can be developed for students on service-learning?

The interdisciplinary curriculum model for service-learning developed by the researcher resembles a bucket. The Bucket Concept was conceived by the researcher to empower students by providing them transformative experiences and to engage faculty in order to address the identified needs of the marginalized community. The bringing together of students from different disciplines improves their academic performance while providing quality service to the community.

Embracing this concept is not without uncertainties. But, according to Madsen and Turnbull (2006), these uncertainties should not be considered a failure but an opportunity for a new level of exploration on the concept.

For as long as Philippine Christian University has committed administrators, faculty, staff and students, the service-learning program is assured of a sturdy foundation.



IV. CONCLUSION

Philippine Christian University, an institution of Christian higher learning, prides itself with its core values of faith, character, and service. In keeping with the university’s mission to “promote academic excellence and the highest quality education” and “be responsive to Philippine needs and condition”, the integration of service-learning to the curriculum is a realization of PCU’s Vision and Mission.

Service-learning as a pedagogical approach motivates students to go to school because they are given the responsibility for their own learning and participate in school activities (Pearson, 2002). Lessons are applied to “real-life” situations, thus, giving students a sense of fulfillment. This form of experiential education develops critical thinking, analysis and synthesis (serc.carlton.edu., 2015) and the most important about service-learning is it gives students a rare opportunity of giving of themselves unselfishly for others.

In a service-learning approach, the students, the community, the faculty and the university all contribute to the service-learning experience (Smith, J. & Shaw, N., 2012). The identified individual and collective needs of the communities could be best addressed through an interdisciplinary approach. The students serve the community by performing tasks or projects related to their discipline. This interdisciplinary approach to service-learning challenges students’ thinking, creativity and greater awareness for the plight of others (Smith, J. & Shaw, N., 2012) because they are able to connect their own lives with those in the community (Mitchell, T., 2008). For Smith, J. and Shaw, N. (2012), it is TRUE LEARNING.

The interdisciplinary curriculum model for service-learning developed by the researcher, the commitment of the university administrators, the faculty, the staff, and the students are vital for the future of service-learning in Philippine Christian University.

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