

Uniform Assessment of Community Engagement: *A Preliminary Analysis* in the Development of the **B**enefit of **A**cademic **C**ommunity **E**ngagement (BACE) Scale

“Education is not about filling a bucket but lighting a fire” William B. Yeats



Academic Community
Engagement

Drs. Sanjay S. Mehta & Gurinderjit B. Mehta
Sam Houston State University (SHSU), Huntsville, Texas, USA

Definition of ACE



Community Engagement

“...working to make a difference in communities (local, regional/state, national, global) through individual or collective actions designed to improve the quality of life. Community engagement requires **collaborative, reciprocal** processes that recognize, respect, and value the knowledge, perspective, and resources shared among partners.”

Ehrlich, 2000

Academic Community Engagement (ACE)

“...a teaching method that combines *community engagement* with *academic instruction*.”

ACE courses are intended to prepare students for a life-long commitment to community engagement

National Survey of Student Engagement, 2003

History of ACE Courses in General

(Kendall et. al., 1990; Putkus, 2000; Gujarathi et. al. 2002)

- ACE pedagogy **began in the 1960's**
- It was originally called **experiential/service learning**
- Types of experiential/service learning pedagogies included
 - **Internships** (paid, unpaid, for profit, not-for-profit)
 - **Extra credit options** (volunteer for extra credit)
 - **Class projects/activities**
 - Published case studies, field work, simulations, hypothetical problems of established companies in back of chapter exercises, *consulting projects for actual clients.*



Theoretical Reasons for using ACE Pedagogy

Social Interdependency Theory (Johnson et. al. 1989)

Positive interdependency (*cooperation*) leads to positive interaction (*learning*)

Negative interdependency (*competition*) leads to negative interaction (*obstruction*)

○ Fleming's Model

- Visual learners – learn best through *seeing*
- Auditory learners - best learn through *listening*
- **Kinesthetic** learners – learn best by *experiencing*



○ Model of Experiential Learning (Kolb 1981, 1984)

- Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created by the **integrating** of *Concrete experience, Abstract conceptualization, Active experimentation, Reflective observation* . ACE course integrate these.

○ Blooms Taxonomy (Madsen et. al. 2006)

- ACE pedagogy can **develop higher order thinking skills rather than lower level memorization skills**

All ACE Courses at Sam Houston State University (SHSU) Must Include

- **Classroom instruction** (teach theory, ideas, concepts, etc.)
- **At least Nine** (9) documented hours of the community engagement that is tied (*relevant*) to classroom instruction (*what they learnt*) per semester
- **Feedback** from the community partner(s)
- **Three statements in the syllabus** about community engagement:
 - The **value of community engagement**
 - How it is **linked to a course objective** and part of a grade
 - A written **reflection** about the experience
- Currently, there are 104 courses at SHSU using ACE Pedagogy
 - Instructors wanted to measure the **benefits of community engagement**





Benefits of ACE Pedagogy to Students

(Eyler et. al. 2001; Razzouk et. al. 2003; Madsen 2006 ; Tucker 1998; Astin et. al. 2000; Michaelsen 2000; Munter 2002; Gujarathi et. al. 2002; Smith et. al. 2005; Parsons et. al. 2009; Godfrey 1999; Skolnokoff et. al. 2010)

○ Academic and Career Development

- Mastery of course material (*content*), ability to translate course material to *real world*, learn *problem solving* and *decision making* skills, *critical thinking* skills, *cognitive development* skills, relevant to career, future job prospects, *learn how to learn*, *presentation* skills, more motivated, creates active (versus passive) and collaborative *learning*

○ Personal Development

- Improved *self efficacy*, *leadership* skills, *communication* skills, small group *collaboration* skills, *teamwork*, *time management* skills, *networking* skills, *synthesis* and *analysis* skills, *conflict resolution* skills, *writing* skills, faculty serve as mentors

○ Social Development

- *Social responsibility*, *citizenship*, understanding *diversity*, personal satisfaction, moral development



Literature Review:

Scale to Measure the Benefits of Community Engagement

- **S**ervice **L**earning **B**enefit (SELEB) scale

Toncar et. al. 2006

- *Twelve item* self assessment scale
- *Four factors* - practical skills, citizenship, personal responsibility, and interpersonal skills
- SELEB was validated using a small sample (42) of students in two business courses.

- Challenges (why not SELEB)

- SHSU faculties across multiple disciplines wanted to include specific items
- While the term Service Learning is widely used, SHSU uses the term Academic Community Engagement (ACE)
- SELEB scale had not undergone extensive re-validation and not received widespread scrutiny



Pilot Study One

- Using Churchill's (1979) recommended procedure
- Started with the SELEB scale
- Added additional items
- "Important scale" (from 1-7) was replaced with a "Likert scale" (1-5 point)
- *Face* validity of the scale was assessed by faculties teaching ACE courses.
- A convenient (diverse) sample of nine course with two hundred and twenty one students participated
- *Content* validity of the scale was assessed by asking students (in an open-ended format) to indicate their perception of the benefits they received from their ACE course



Pilot Study Two

- Primary purpose to revalidate and measure reliability of the newly developed scale
- Secondary purpose was to determine if any differences existed across the various demographics variables

- A convenient (diverse) sample of sixteen course with three hundred and fifty students participated
- *Construct* validity was assessed using factor loadings (using the eigenvalue > 1 criteria) on a rotated factor matrix using maximum likelihood extraction method with varimax rotation
- Several ACE faculties were requested to label the factors

BACE Scale

Items	Internal	External
Participating in the community helped enhance my <i>leadership</i> skills.	0.741	
<i>The community service I did in this course helped me to analyze problems and think critically.</i>	0.720	
The community service in this course helped me to develop <i>workplace skills</i> .	0.716	
The community service in this course has made me <i>more employable</i> .	0.712	
The community service in this course assisted me in defining the <i>type of work</i> I want to do in the future.	0.705	
Participation in the community helped enhance my <i>communication</i> skills.	0.701	
The community service in this course helped me to develop <i>organizational skills</i> .	0.684	
The community service in this course helped me to <i>connect theory with practice</i> .	0.612	
Working in the community helped me to define my <i>personal strengths and weaknesses</i> .	0.608	
<i>The community service in this course helped me to apply the subject matter in a “real world” situation.</i>	0.572	
Conbach’s alpha	0.936	
This course helped me understand my <i>responsibility</i> to serve the community and develop my <i>citizenship skills</i> .		0.775
This course helped me understand that I can <i>make a difference in my community</i> by being involved.		0.740
The community service aspect of this course showed me how I can become <i>more involved</i> in my community.		0.729
This course helped me understand the <i>differences</i> (i.e., cultural, racial, economic, etc.) that exist in our community.		0.668
The community service aspect of this course helped me to become <i>more aware of the needs in my community</i> .		0.667
Conbach’s alpha		0.895

Additional Benefit to Students and Community

Items	Mean
At the <i>beginning</i> of the semester I was uneasy about the community service component of the course.	2.82
At the <i>end</i> of the semester I thought that the community service aspect of this course was valuable.	4.37
t-value = 16.919; degrees of freedom = 347; p-value = 0.000	

Items	Mean	St. Dev.
The community service I did through this course <i>benefited the community</i> .	4.23	0.912
I probably will <i>continue to serve the community</i> after this course.	4.22	0.982
I would <i>recommend this course</i> to a friend.	4.22	1.065
On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is a bad experience and 10 is an excellent experience, I would rate my community service learning experience in this class/course as a ___.	8.41	1.784



Demographic Analysis

- Female respondents were higher (larger mean) on all responses when compared to male respondents
- Non-commuters tend to rate the items significantly higher (larger mean) than commuters
- Non-whites tend to consistently rate higher (larger mean) on the BACE scale items than whites
- We believe that these difference were primarily dues to a biased sample (more non-whites, non-commuters, females)



Conclusion and Future Research

- **SELEB scale** has 4 factors **BACE scale** has 2 factors – smaller factor structure
- BACE scale was developed and validated using a larger number of courses across several disciplines and a larger sample of students than SELEB scale
- Pilot study III is necessary for further item refinement
- A representative (probability) sample of courses is necessary to re-validate the scale
- Additional demographic questions (income) to identify group differences
- Development of a self assessment scale to measure benefits to other stake holders



Benefits of ACE Pedagogy to Other Stakeholders

- **Faculty** (Easterling et. al., 1997; Cooke et. al. 2004)
 - Develops contacts
 - Research or consulting opportunities
 - Faculty development (*keep current*)
- **University** (Astin et. al. 1998, 1999)
 - Social commitment (*provide service to constituencies*)
 - Image, positive publicity
 - Producing socially responsible graduates
 - Increases retention, better prepared for graduate school
- **Community Partner** (Jacoby 1994)
 - Fresh approach to solving problem



THANK
YOU

Questions/Discussion

“Students are not just informed but transformed”
(Waddock et. al., 2000)

“Tell me I will forget; show me and I remember; involve me and I will understand”
(Chinese proverb)