Service Learning Advisory Committee Meeting

2/18/2016

MINUTES

Members present: Amy Boren (Ag Education & Communications); Erika Brooks (TLPDC); Mark Charney (Theatre and Dance); Erin Justyna (CALUE); Tanja Karp (Electrical & Computer Engineering); Charles Klein (Landscape Architecture); Micah Logan (TLPDC); Bob McDonald (Business); Stacy Poteet (Honors College); Debra Reed (Human Sciences); Marcus Tanner (Integrative Studies); Jon Thompson (Chemistry)

Members absent: Meryl Benham (Law); David Driskill (Architecture); Katie Langford (Media and Communications)

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 pm. Vice Provost Munoz welcomed committee members and expressed thanks for their willingness to serve. He explained the institution’s goal of significantly increasing the number of service learning courses available to students. Dr. Munoz discussed the unique aspects of Service Learning as well as its lasting impact on the lives of students. The transformative experiences offered through “S” designated courses could become a unique aspect of Texas Tech’s curriculum that could set the institution apart from other universities. Dr. Munoz noted that there are currently only 44 “S” designated courses out of several thousand courses offered at Texas Tech. He asked the committee for help in identifying ways of increasing the number of “S” designated courses and, thereby, providing greater service learning opportunities for students.

Dr. Green then opened the discussion by asking whether the low number of “S” designated courses could be attributed to a lack of awareness and understanding of the “S” designation among faculty, or whether the current process of getting courses designated may be a barrier.

Attendees commented that there currently are not enough incentives for faculty to engage in service learning. Incentives in the area of tenure and promotion and/or release time could be motivating factors. In addition, funding for projects to cover, for instance, transportation needs or supply costs would also be important.

In terms of the designation process, members’ opinions were divided. Some noted that the current process provides important guidance to faculty members for designing the service learning experience and ensures its integrity. “S” designated courses, for instance, require faculty to incorporate student reflections about their learning experience, which are not
necessarily components of traditional courses. Alternatively, members discussed whether there could be a simpler process put into place that would not compromise the integrity of the learning experience but would entice more faculty to submit their courses for the “S” designation.

The committee agreed that it would be useful to examine Service Learning models from other institutions to help weigh options for the submission process. Dr. Green will undertake the review and provide a summary of findings at the next meeting. She will further examine internal financial incentives that TTU entities such as eLearning currently provide to faculty members as potential models for enticing more service learning course designations.

In terms of non-monetary incentives, NSF’s Career Service Awards Programs and Texas Tech’s Integrated Scholars Awards Program were mentioned as potential models for creating a “Service Learning Faculty Awards” program.

Dr. Green asked whether consideration should be given to providing the “S” designation at the course level versus the section level. Currently, designations are provided at the section level and are specific to the faculty member who applies for the designation. An “S” designated section falls off the Service Learning inventory of courses as soon as it is taught by a different instructor or not taught at all during a particular semester. The “S” designation at the course level would also allow students to more easily recognize Service Learning courses during the registration process and intentionally enroll in these courses (the comment was made that, currently, 2/3 of students sign up for Service Learning courses accidentally).

The committee suggested to table this discussion and to focus first on developing a stronger university wide culture of Service Learning. Success stories of various departments could be widely communicated to develop a better understanding and commitment to Service Learning.

There was consensus that there should be a clear message communicated from the Provost to all deans regarding the importance of Service Learning to Texas Tech’s future. Deans could then communicate this message to their Department chairs who would be the best source of encouragement for faculty get courses “S” designated. Other proposed ways of disseminating information on Service Learning included presentations at faculty meetings as well as the Faculty Research Club. It was noted that Research Club members may be interested in the “S” designation as this would enhance their chances of attracting state or federal funding for projects that include service learning components (based on NSF broader impacts requirements).
Committee members concluded that the current offering of 44 “S” designated courses could easily be increased tenfold without the creation of new courses by simply persuading faculty whose courses include components of service learning to have their courses formally designated.

As a means to this end, the committee suggested that a short, three-question survey be developed to gain a better understanding of the number and types of “service-learning-like” courses that are currently offered at Texas Tech. Dr. Green said that she would draft the survey and send it out to the committee for review and feedback. Committee members suggested that the final version should be sent out through the Provost’s Office to obtain a higher response rate.

With respect to student participation in “S” designated courses, the committee identified a need to clearly communicate the benefits and attributes of “S” designated courses in particular during Red Raider Orientation. It was further noted that Service Learning courses would be a draw for graduate students, giving them opportunities to serve as mentors or facilitators. It was recommended to advertise these types of opportunities to graduate students.

There was consensus to move forward with the following action items prior to the next committee meeting:

- Develop and administer a brief survey to all faculty to identify existing “service-learning-like” courses;
- Investigate service learning models at other institutions;
- Explore ways of incentivizing service learning among faculty.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 10, at 4:00 p.m.

02/23/2016
BG

Attachment
2014-2016 Service Learning Trends