Chapter 9

Structures, Practices, and Policies to Support Community-Engaged Scholarship at the Community College

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ABSTRACT

This chapter illuminates the ways in which community colleges can develop and enhance their community-engaged scholarship (CES) to ensure they meet the needs of the local communities they are a part of. Indeed, community-engaged scholarship (CES) has been seen as a vehicle to support local communities by creating partnerships with postsecondary institutions to ensure research is conducted in a way that is mutually beneficial. The authors first explore the large corpus of literature regarding undergraduate research and then present a select number of community colleges that have been successful in incorporating undergraduate research projects. They then present how CES has been defined and how it has been implemented within a higher education context. They then proceed to introduce a CES conceptual model and explain how community colleges can utilize the model to support the institutionalization of CES programs. They conclude with recommendations for future research.

INTRODUCTION

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2019), more than 12 million students are enrolled in community colleges this year. Unfortunately, few community colleges are able to provide adequate opportunities for their students to participate in undergraduate research (Hess, Fortner, &
Chowdhry, 2017). Providing students the ability to experience first-hand research techniques and other scholarly activities is crucial to both their academic and professional careers. Part of the challenge is often a lack of resources, time, and financial support (Williamson, 2019). Moreover, community colleges have yet to fully institutionalize community-engaged scholarship (CES) into their culture, mission, goals, and vision. Therefore, this chapter seeks to address ways in which community college faculty and administrative leaders can institutionalize needed structures, practices and policies for the promotion of CES.

Review of the Literature

CES is a vital asset to students’ academic journeys. It involves community and faculty members working in a mutually beneficial relationship in order to produce scholarship for the public good. Particular to the community college, CES provides an opportunity for students to participate through the curriculum, in research, creative initiatives, and other forms of service in preparation for both their academic and professional journeys. In the following sections, we analyze the literature, looking at current undergraduate research initiatives, resources, and other scholarly opportunities that are currently available at the community college level, as well as the benefits and barriers found in implementing CES, and the importance of moving from undergraduate research opportunities to true community-engagement.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

Cejda and Hensel (2009) conducted a yearlong study involving participants from 27 community colleges, 13 four-year institutions and 8 outside entities from across the nation in order to better understand the status of undergraduate research within the public two-year sector. In total six large group discussions were held across the nation that included faculty members, administrators, representatives of business and industry, governmental agencies, and non-profit organizations. Students were included only in the last three conversations held. The goals of these conversations were to discover: 1) the current state of undergraduate research at the community college; 2) what research activities community colleges would like to involve their students in; and 3) how the Council on Undergraduate Research (CRU) and the National Council of Instructional Administrators (NCIA) could help.

There were four pertinent observations made from this study (Cejda & Hensel, 2009). First, community colleges have various definitions for community-engaged scholarship, which include preparing students for independent research, applied research – to address a specific problem, and/or original intellectual contributions to a specific discipline of interest. Second, undergraduate research at the community college level was seen more as an enhancement to the curriculum than as part of a research agenda. Third, though students were engaged in research activities, faculty often steered clear of the term research and opted for terms such as projects or assignments, because they believed using the term research might scare some students from participation. Finally, individuals as opposed to an institutionalized initiative often lead undergraduate research at the community college level. Cejda and Hensel (2009) thus concluded, “The greatest challenge facing undergraduate research in community colleges is institutionalizing comprehensive programs” (p. 4).

Cejda and Hensel’s (2009) study also noted that funding for research was a challenge along with a lack of laboratory and research facilities needed for research activities. In addition, due to high teaching loads, faculty often had limited time and resources to dedicate to mentoring undergraduate researchers. Students