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IMPACT OR IMPASSE: HOW TO MEASURE COMMUNITY IMPACT

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Impact or Impasse: How to Measure Community Impact

Joel McReynolds | Graduate | Mentor: Dr. Michaelene Cox | Politics & Government

The Approach

- Project uses Five-Step Applied Research Process (Graph 1)
- Applied research develops practical solutions to real world problems faced by organizations. This approach contrasts with "basic research."
- Basic Research advances and expands human knowledge about the world by answering fundamental questions pertaining to the nature of the universe, society, organisms, etc.¹
- Applied Research helps clients make a decision about a particular situation, problem, or opportunity.

Step 1

Joel McReynolds is working with ISU's Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (CESL) to investigate:

What measurable impact does student engagement have on community organizations partnering with Illinois State University?

The Client

- The Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (CESL) works to create, coordinate, and expand programming that helps ISU students interact with, learn from, and support the community.
- CESL published their *Community Partner Survey Report* in 2018, which primarily measured relationships and experiences community organizations have with ISU.
- CESL asked Joel to design an instrument to:
 - 1) measure how operations and accomplishments of community partners have been impacted by ISU student engagement
 - 2) be convenient and simple enough to be used every several years

Student Engagement

- Any activity where university students are involved with the greater community through scholarship or service.
- Includes: community-based participatory research, service-learning, community outreach, internships, and volunteer activities.²



Graph 1: Five-Step Framework for Applied Research Process¹

Step 2

Past research has measured the impact of student engagement in a variety of ways.

- *Economic Value* – Hours of service, financial benefit of student engagement, etc.³
- *Student Focused* – How student engagement affects the students⁴
- *Institution Focused* – How student engagement affects overall university⁵
- *Relationship* – How is the relationship between the university and the community partners?⁶
- *Quantitatively* – Measuring inputs and outputs⁷
- *Qualitatively* – Measuring impacts and underlying themes⁸

Few studies have focused on the perspective of the community partner organizations and the long-term impacts of student engagement.

Step 3

Based off previous literature, the instrument will contain two parts: first, an online questionnaire, and second, a short interview.

Mixed Methods

- Quantitative methods measure the "what"
- Qualitative methods measure the "how" and "why"
- Together they can paint a full picture

Survey & Interview Questions

- In what capacity have most ISU students engaged with your organization over the past 3 years?
- To what extent have each of the following been a benefit or difficulty of ISU student engagement with your organization over the past 3 years?
- What are some examples of how ISU student engagement has been a benefit for your organization in the short and long-term?
- What are some examples of how ISU student engagement has been a challenge for your organization in the short and long-term?
- How is working with ISU students different from working with your typical non-student volunteer?
- Are there any other comments you would like to make about the impact of ISU students on your organization?

Steps 4 & 5

- **Select the Sample** - Choose community organizations that have had 5 or more years of ISU student engagement
- **IRB** - Receive IRB approval
- **Collect the Data** -- Administer the survey and conduct the interviews
- **Analyze** - Use grounded theory to analyze the interview data
- **Write & Deliver Report** - Provide CESL the findings and instrument so they can use it in the future
- **Timeline** - Completed by October 2019

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