

## Collaborative Faculty Assessment of Service-Learning Student Work to Improve Student and Faculty Learning and Course Design

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*This paper illustrates an approach for using university-wide service-learning student outcomes to assess student work for the purpose of improving service-learning student and faculty learning and course design. The author and a colleague used this approach to study the author's service-learning course. The results of this study generated an accessible and engaging assessment framework that integrates basic quantitative analysis of collective student performance, Polin and Keene's (2010) ethnographic sensibility, and Cooks, Scharrer and Paredes' (2004) social approach to learning from a faculty learning perspective.*

Service-learning in higher education is becoming more common, with the Association of American Colleges and Universities now promoting service-learning as 1 of 10 High Impact Practices (HIPs) that engage students in meaningful college learning (Kuh, 2008). Reflecting this trend, service-learning theory and research is moving beyond questioning whether service-learning should be a standard component of higher education curricula (e.g., Eyler & Giles, 1999) to determining best practices (e.g., Holt, 2010; O'Meara & Niehaus, 2009). One area of best practices needing attention is outcomes-based faculty assessment of student learning. Although assessment approaches have been developed (Maki, 2010), engaging faculty in such work is a significant challenge (Driscoll & Wood, 2007; Wood, 2006).

This paper presents and illustrates an outcomes-based assessment approach and framework that can engage faculty in collaborative assessment and improvement of service-learning courses and student learning. The first part of this paper describes the approach, the second part presents a collaborative study of the author's service-learning course using this approach, and the third part describes the assessment framework that emerged from the study.

### University-Wide Service Learning Outcomes

California State University, Monterey Bay, where this study was conducted, is a relatively new, four-year public university first admitting students in 1995. The University has a guiding vision statement (California State University Monterey Bay, 1994) emphasizing social responsibility, social justice, and a commitment to serve the local community. Students are required to take two service-learning courses: a lower-division introductory course and an upper-division course in the major. Each course

requires 30 hours of service with a local community partner. The lower-division course introduces students to the University's service-learning philosophy and approach (California State University Monterey Bay, 2010). The upper-division course has students apply skills and knowledge introduced at the lower division in a context relevant to their major. To support service-learning, the University has a Service Learning Institute that provides administrative support to students, faculty and community partners; helps build course-community partnerships; develops and disseminates University-wide student learning outcomes; oversees all service-learning courses; and provides faculty development opportunities.

Because the University was mandated to be outcomes-based at its inception, all general education requirements, including service-learning, have university-wide student learning outcomes developed by faculty learning communities (Driscoll & Cordero de Noriega, 2006; Driscoll & Wood, 2007). Service-learning is considered more than just a pedagogical approach, but also "a knowledge-base that examines the complex intersection of justice, compassion, diversity and social responsibility with the technical, conceptual and theoretical world of the academic disciplines" (Cordero de Noriega & Pollack, 2006). Not only is educating about and preparing for civic engagement (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007; Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003) a key component of the University's service-learning vision, but in addition the University also emphasizes a social justice framework that aligns with Mitchell's (2008) "critical approach" to service-learning that is "unapologetic in its aim to dismantle systems of injustice" (p. 50).

Faculty learning communities composed of service-learning instructors developed and revised

lower- and upper-division student learning outcomes through an iterative process of identifying student outcomes, using student outcomes to assess student work, and then revising student outcomes in response to assessment results (Driscoll & Wood, 2007; Wood, 2006). The lower- and upper-division service-learning student outcomes were significantly revised in 2010 when the University revised its general education curriculum. These student outcomes incorporate Furco's (1994) six educational domains: academic, career, social, personal, ethical, and civic responsibility, and include the following: (a) self- and social awareness, with a focus on social identity, power, and privilege; (b) an understanding of service and social responsibility, with a focus on long-term, as opposed to short-term, contributions to societal well-being [see Morton's (1995) social change vs. charity distinction]; (c) an understanding of the local community in a social justice context; and (d) multicultural community-building and civic engagement knowledge and skills. The upper-division service-learning student outcomes (California State University Monterey Bay, 2012; see Table 2) are distinct from the lower-division student outcomes in requiring a deeper level of understanding and analysis and an ability to contextualize these outcomes in students' areas of disciplinary study. For example, students majoring in education are expected to understand and know how to work toward mitigating social inequities in our educational system; students majoring in Environmental Science, Technology, and Policy are expected to understand and know how to work toward mitigating social inequities in developing and implementing environmental policies.

### Collaborative Faculty Assessment of Embedded Student Work

Although collaborative faculty assessment of student work for improving teaching and learning is well developed at the K-12 level (e.g., Bella, 2004; Blythe, Allen, & Powell, 2008; Langer, Colton, & Goff, 2003), with the exception of institutions such as Alverno College and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), collaborative assessment in higher education is less advanced (Driscoll & Wood, 2007; Maki, 2010). The collaborative assessment approach described in this paper emphasizes the building of what Alverno College calls a "community of inquiry" in which faculty engage in extended, assessment-generated dialogue about teaching and learning (Rogers, 2003, cited in Driscoll & Wood, p. 31). Blythe, Allen, and Powell identify three different processes and the following associated purposes for collaborative assessment of student work: (a) enhancing assignments, assessment

standards, and instructional practices; (b) understanding and meeting the needs of individual students; and (c) resolving specific pedagogical challenges. The approach and study described in this paper align most directly with the first of these purposes, but are relevant to the other two.

Service-learning researchers have proposed and evaluated alternative methods for assessing student performance (i.e., how well students complete particular course assignments or tasks, which may or may not be attributable to prior learning) and learning (i.e., learning as a direct result of participating in a particular course or experience as distinct from prior learning) using various forms of evidence including course evaluations, self-assessments, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and ethnography (Billig & Waterman, 2003; Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001; Polin & Keene, 2010). The study described in this paper used embedded written student work (i.e., work completed for course assignments) to assess student performance (Ash & Clayton, 2004, 2009; Driscoll & Wood, 2007). While there are disadvantages to using embedded written student work to assess university-wide student learning outcomes, including difficulties comparing student work from different classes in response to different assignments designed by different instructors as well as the inability to assess for particular student learning outcomes if students were not given relevant assignments (Sternberg, Penn, & Hawkins, 2011), embedded student work was selected for this study for reasons articulated by DeZure (2002, p. 77):

Initial assessment efforts often emphasize self-report measures because they are relatively easy to develop, administer, score and interpret; are relatively low risk to participants; and can often be disseminated to large groups with consistency, enabling comparisons among cohorts over time. But the lessons learned at institutions like Alverno College, which have been engaged in assessing student learning outcomes for decades, suggest that assessing student work integrated into courses offers a more valid, reliable, and sustainable approach to assessing impact. Such measures move beyond self-report, providing direct evidence of student cognitive skills and insights. These measures can also readily accommodate artifacts of student work produced for their community placements, course assignments that demonstrate mastering academic course content, and metacognitive tasks and reflection about their achievements and learning experiences.

In addition, Cone and Harris (1996, p. 39) note that written assignments help students "[weave] together

the two abstract worlds of theory and community-based observations,” a fundamental service-learning outcome and a task incorporated into assignments used for this study.

## Method

### *The Course*

This study focused on the author’s upper-division service-learning course, Social and Ecological Justice, designed for students majoring in Environmental Science, Technology, and Policy. Service-learning is integrated into the course in ways intended to meet Howard’s (2003) essential elements of service-learning: students (a) provide service in the community in response to needs originating in the community, (b) demonstrate enhanced academic learning, and (c) demonstrate a commitment to civic participation, active democratic citizenship, and social responsibility. Course-specific student learning outcomes include the abilities to: (a) analyze relationships between social and environmental problems, (b) analyze such problems using a social justice framework, (c) identify strategies for simultaneously responding to social and environmental problems, (d) analyze connections between grassroots organizing and public policy development and implementation, (e) communicate one’s own personal and social responsibilities, and (f) apply this learning to a local issue addressed by their service-learning organization.

All University-wide upper-division service-learning student outcomes (California State University Monterey Bay, 2012; also, see Table 2) were used to assess four writing assignments (Shapiro, 2012a): (a) a response to an article about positionality by Takacs (2003) assigned to help students examine the relative privilege and marginalization of their social and cultural identities, (b) an essay applying a social justice framework to an issue introduced in a course case study and a local issue addressed by their service-learning organization, (c) an essay identifying strategies for promoting justice (informed by course case studies and service-learning) and their responsibility for implementing those strategies, and (d) a letter to their service-learning site supervisors explaining what they learned about the local community and social justice from their service.

Nineteen students enrolled in the course. Of those, one dropped mid-semester and another did not grant permission to use her written work. Of the remaining 17 students, 15 were majoring in Environmental Science, Technology and Policy, 1 in Biology, and 1 in Psychology. All 17 students were seniors, 10 were male, and 7 were female. The majority of students were White and the remainder Latino/a, Black,

Native American, and bi-racial. Because all students are required to take an upper-division service-learning course, they were not self-selected service-learning students.

### *Norming and Rubric Development*

Two service-learning instructors, Evaluator #1 and Evaluator #2, assessed all student work. Evaluator #1 is the article author and course instructor with five years of service-learning teaching experience at the time of this study. Evaluator #2 is a colleague at the same university, a faculty member in the Service-Learning Institute, has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology, is the coordinator of the university’s lower-division service-learning faculty and courses, and had 11 years of experience teaching service-learning at the time of this study.

Student work was assessed using a process and rubric modified from Maki (2010) by the University’s Director of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment. To develop a shared interpretation of the student learning outcomes, norm expectations, and refine the assessment rubric, two sets of student work were assessed, one produced by a student who had received an average grade in the class and a second produced by a student who had received an above average grade in the class. Working independently, each evaluator scored for each outcome (California State University Monterey Bay, 2012; see also Table 2) the work produced by the student who had received an average grade in the class. The evaluators then compared and discussed their scores. Initial discussions focused on identifying alternative interpretations of the student learning outcomes. Although course assignments were developed to address specific student learning outcomes, after reading the first set of student papers, it became clear that student work often addressed outcomes other than the ones the assignment was designed to address. Consequently, all four assignments were assessed holistically for all student learning outcomes. To norm expectations, each evaluator independently scored the work produced by the student who had received an above average grade in the class and then compared their scores. Discussions this time focused on identifying qualities that differentiated levels of student performance and led to the following three general assessment criteria:

- **Comprehensiveness:** the extent to which the student explicitly addressed all components of the outcome. For example, for outcome 1a (see Table 2), did the student explicitly address social group identities, cultural group identities, social privilege, and social marginalization?
- **Depth:** the extent to which the student demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of course

concepts. For example, for outcome 1a, did the student demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of social privilege?

- Detail: the extent and specificity of descriptions and evidence provided by the students to support ideas. For example, for outcome 1a, did the student provide specific examples to illustrate social privilege?

These criteria were assessed using the following scale:

- 5 (low), 6 (high) = exceeds minimum expectations: addresses outcome comprehensively, in depth, and with illustrative detail.
- 3 (low), 4 (high) = meets minimum expectations: addresses outcome partially, unevenly, and/or in a general manner.
- 1 (low), 2 (high) = below minimum expectations: does not address outcome or addresses outcome in an overly simplistic and/or superficial manner.

Descriptions and excerpts of student work assessed at below, meeting, and exceeding minimum expectations are available online (Shapiro, 2012a).

One important question raised during the norming session concerned whether student work should be assessed more leniently if they had not received adequate course instruction in support of particular student outcomes. In response, it was agreed that assessments would be independent of the quality of instruction. Decoupling student performance from instruction quality is necessary if the goal is to improve instruction by highlighting outcomes the course does not adequately support.

#### *Assessment for Collective Student Performance*

After norming, the remaining 15 sets of assignments were scored for each outcome. The two sets of assignments used for norming were not included in the overall analysis. Quantitative scores were compared as follows. The two mean scores, one for each evaluator, for each individual outcome across all students were compared using a two-tailed *t*-test. The two mean overall scores (i.e., the sum of scores for all outcomes for each student) were also compared using a two-tailed *t*-test. The two rankings of student performance for all outcomes combined were compared using Spearman's rank-order correlation. To determine the proportion of student work scored below minimum expectations, meeting minimum expectations, and exceeding minimum expectations, the mean of the two individual scores given to student work for each outcome was used to categorize student work for each outcome as follows: 1.0 – 2.5 = below minimum expectations; 3.0 – 4.5 = meets minimum expectations; 5.0 – 6.0 =

exceeds minimum expectations.

## Results

Because none of the assignments directly addressed outcome 3b, “examine the demographics, socio-cultural dynamics and assets of a specific community through a social justice framework,” student performance on this outcome was not assessed. Of the remaining 10 outcomes, Evaluator #1's mean scores for five of the outcomes were significantly lower than Evaluator #2's scores, and, although not statistically significant, Evaluator #1's scores for the remaining five outcomes were lower than Evaluator #2's scores as well (see Table 1). Similarly, Evaluator #1's mean scores of student work for all outcomes combined (the sum of the scores of all outcomes) was also significantly lower than Evaluator #2's. However, the Spearman rank-order correlation test indicated that the evaluators agreed on the relative ranking of student work for all outcomes combined ( $r(s) = 0.65, t = 3.08; d.f. = 13; p < 0.01$ ).

Table 2 presents the proportion of student work scored below minimum expectations, meeting minimum expectations, and exceeding expectations for each outcome and overall.

Table 1  
*Means and Standard Deviations for t-test Analysis Comparing Evaluators' Ratings of Student Work for Each Outcome and Overall*

Outcome	Mean (SD)		<i>t</i> -value (d.f. = 28)
	Evaluator 1	Evaluator 2	
1a	3.00 (1.69)	3.67 (1.54)	1.13
1b	2.93 (1.67)	3.70 (1.31)	1.40
2a	2.47 (1.13)	4.93 (0.88)	6.68**
2b	3.20 (1.08)	4.93 (1.03)	4.49**
2c	3.67 (1.18)	4.73 (0.96)	2.72*
3a	3.00 (0.53)	4.20 (1.37)	3.15*
3c	2.43 (1.59)	4.33 (1.23)	3.65*
4a	2.60 (1.68)	3.67 (1.35)	1.92
4b	2.67 (1.68)	2.80 (1.26)	0.81
4c	2.93 (1.75)	3.60 (0.74)	1.36
Overall	28.90 (11.27)	40.57 (8.50)	3.20*

Note. \*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table 2

*Distribution of Students Rated Below Minimum Expectations, Meeting Minimum Expectations, and Exceeding Minimum Expectations for Each Outcome*

Outcome	% Below Minimum Expectations	% Meets Minimum Expectations	% Exceeds Minimum Expectations
1a: Define, describe, analyze and integrate the concepts of individual social and cultural group identities and the concepts of social privilege and marginalization.	40	40	20
1b: Demonstrate critical analysis of their own assumptions, values, and stereotypes, and evaluate the relative privilege and marginalization of their identities.	40	40	20
2a: Articulate the relationship between individual, group, community and societal wellbeing.	13	80	7
2b: Analyze how individual and professional actions contribute to short-term well being and/or greater long-term societal wellbeing.	7	80	13
2c: Develop a critical understanding of ethical behavior in the context of their profession or discipline with regard to issues of societal wellbeing.	7	73	20
3a: Evaluate how the actions of professionals and institutions in their field or discipline foster both equity and inequity in communities and society.	13	87	0
3b: Examine the demographics, socio-cultural dynamics and assets of a specific community through a social justice framework.	n/a	n/a	n/a
3c: Analyze a community issue(s) in the context of systemic inequity, discrimination and social injustice.	33	53	13
4a: Demonstrate intercultural communication skills, reciprocity and responsiveness in service work with community.	33	53	13
4b: Enter, participate in, and exit a community in ways that are sensitive to systemic injustice.	53	40	7
4c: Develop and implement personal, professional and institutional strategies, policies and/or practices that work towards creating greater equity and social justice in communities.	40	47	13

*Note.* Student work was categorized using the mean of the two scores for each outcome as follows: Below Minimum Expectations = 1 – 2.5; Meets Minimum Expectations = 3.0 – 4.5; Exceeds Minimum Expectations = 5.0 – 6.0. Outcome 3b was not assessed because no assignment explicitly addressed this outcome.

## Discussion

As a result of this study, an assessment framework emerged for engaging faculty in the collaborative study of service-learning for the purpose of positioning an instructor to improve a course in terms of course design and student learning outcomes. This assessment framework consists of three interwoven components: (a) basic quantitative assessment of collective student performance, (b) ethnographic sensibility (Polin & Keene, 2010), and (c) a social approach to learning applying Cooks, Scharrer, and Paredes (2004) work to faculty learning (as opposed to student learning). The following sections develop these components in more depth and illustrate how they can be

used to improve service-learning courses (see the Appendix for a generalized outline of the approach).

### *Basic Quantitative Assessment of Collective Student Performance*

Quantitative assessment results, including scoring used for norming, constitute a starting point for faculty learning by revealing general patterns. For example, examining how student work was distributed with respect to falling below, meeting, or exceeding minimum expectations for each of the four sets of outcomes (Table 2) generated several insights. For the Self and Social Awareness student outcomes 1a and 1b, 60% and 60% of the students met or exceeded minimum expectations, respectively; for the Service

and Social Responsibility student outcomes 2a, 2b, and 2c, 87%, 93%, and 93% of the students met or exceeded minimum expectations, respectively; for the Community and Social Justice student outcomes 3a and 3c (3b was excluded because it was not addressed by any course assignment), 87% and 66% of students met or exceeded minimum expectations, respectively; and for the Community Building/Civic Engagement student outcomes 4a, 4b, and 4c, 66%, 47%, and 60% of the students met or exceeded minimum expectations, respectively.

The following three examples illustrate how such results can be interpreted. First, very few students (7-13%) produced work that fell below minimum expectations for the Service and Social Responsibility student outcomes (2a, 2b, and 2c). This was not surprising because the course includes a unit and reading (Miller, 2008) that breaks down the concept of social responsibility in detail, in fact, in much finer detail than in my colleague's service-learning courses, likely explaining why my colleague's assessment of student work for these student outcomes were significantly higher than my own.

Second, for six of the student outcomes, a third or more of the students produced work that did not meet minimum expectations, prompting discussions about why expectations were not met and how to improve future student performance. For example, with regard to outcome 3b, "examine the demographics, socio-cultural dynamics and assets of a specific community through a social justice framework," engaging in this work brought attention to the fact that even though course readings and classroom discussions addressed connections between demographics and social justice in other communities, none of the assignments explicitly prompted students to discuss connections between demographics and social justice in local communities. As a result, the following semester, two new directed reflection assignments (Ash, Clayton, & Atkinson, 2005; Correia & Bleicher, 2008; Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthiah, 2004; Mills, 2001; Strouse, 2003) were added to help students meet this outcome. First, students were asked to compare demographic data for low-, average-, and high-income local communities and then connect observed demographic patterns to those provided in an analysis of environmental racism in Southern California (Pulido, 2000). While the local demographic patterns had been obvious to me, I was surprised by how many students admitted to being unaware of those patterns locally until explicitly asked to examine them. Second, later in the semester, students were asked to revisit this earlier assignment and then use a social justice framework to examine the demographics of the community served by their service-learning organization.

The third example pertains to outcome 4b, "enter, participate in, and exit a community in ways that are sensitive to systemic injustice," for which a majority of the work produced by students (53%) did not meet minimum expectations. In this case, an existing assignment, the letter to the service-learning site supervisor, had been intentionally designed to help students meet this outcome. Yet the majority of students either did not respond to this part of the assignment or responded in a way that fell below minimum expectations, again stimulating discussions about possible reasons why expectations were not met and how to improve future student performance. Because the intended audience for the letter was each student's service-learning site supervisor, the students may not have been as candid had the course instructor been the sole reader. Second, students may have lacked the instructional support needed to develop competency in this outcome. As a result, two new assignments were added the following semester to help students better analyze their participation with the local community using a systemic injustice framework. First, students were assigned a new reading—Jurin, Roush, and Danter, 2010—to help them see and compare their own and others' macro-cultural and micro-cultural norms and values. Second, students were asked to describe micro-cultural norms at their service-learning sites and hypothesize relationships between those norms and systemic injustice. Although not based on a systematic analysis, in addition to helping students more successfully meet outcome 4b the following semester, these new assignments also appeared to help students more successfully meet outcome 1a, "define, describe, analyze and integrate the concepts of individual social and cultural group identities and the concepts of social privilege and marginalization," and outcome 1b, "demonstrate critical analysis of their own assumptions, values, and stereotypes, and evaluate the relative privilege and marginalization of their identities," both outcomes for which 40% of the student work analyzed for this study did not meet minimum expectations.

### *Ethnographic Sensibility*

While effective for identifying general patterns, quantitative data used alone often fail to capture the individual variation and complexity of learning outcomes service-learning instructors find powerful. As Polin and Keene (2010, p. 23) note, quantitative results,

cannot communicate the compelling nature of the quality of students' experiences, illuminate the internal struggle around class and race that students work through, or tell us what students have learned about community entry or reciprocity or about resources and power.

Waterman (2003) also draws attention to students' individual qualities and experiences that affect student learning in ways that quantitative data cannot capture:

The diversity of students in a service-learning program includes differences in gender; cultural background; cognitive ability; prior school record; developmental readiness; the child-rearing practices with which students were raised; the extent and quality of peer relationships; and personality traits, goals, values, beliefs, and motivations for participation, among other factors. Given such differences, it is not plausible to expect that every student in any educational program will be affected by it in similar ways. (p. 77)

These kinds of observations underlie Polin and Keene's (2010) call for an "ethnographic sensibility" that considers each student's individual "story" as legitimate evidence for service-learning assessment. Waterman's (2003) "n = 1" approach to service-learning assessment in which "each student serves as the unit of analysis" (p. 88) applies the same logic.

Polin and Keene (2010) present a rich and multifaceted assessment method that incorporates ethnographic sensibility to service-learning. They refer to their method as an "approach" rather than an "assessment" because it does not involve formal ethnography. Yet, even as an "approach," Polin and Keene admit that "[t]he approach presented in this paper is time consuming" (p. 30) as it involves participant observation, focus groups, stories of the self, final reflections, exit interviews, and critical incident analysis. Thus, for faculty lacking both time and formal disciplinary training in ethnography and other forms of formal qualitative assessment, full implementation of Polin and Keene's approach might deter them from seeking the insights this approach offers. Nevertheless, explicitly and systematically complementing quantitative data with an ethnographic sensibility, as well as embedding tasks into course assignments that allow students to share "stories of the self" can provide critically important insights for understanding and enhancing student learning and the assessment thereof.

Although my colleague and I did not enter this assessment work with the intent of analyzing characteristics of individual students, the importance of students' personal backgrounds, social identities, values, and service-learning experiences quickly became obvious. Students in the course included: male and female White students pursuing traditional "environmental" careers focusing on the protection of non-human animals and natural ecosystems; Latino and Latina students, some of whom were children of farmworkers, interested in biomedical careers and community organizing; a Native American student interested

in pursuing a career in environmental toxicology; a Black student interested in pursuing a law career; an Asian-American student interested in habitat restoration; among others. Further, students worked with very different kinds of service-learning partners, including large, national organizations focused on social justice (e.g., the United Farm Workers), and small, local environmental organizations focused on traditional environmental issues such as the protection of whales in ways that connect to social justice by involving and serving diverse communities.

We realized such factors were important for understanding variation in student performance and improving the course. For example, the first assignment on positionality (Shapiro, 2012a) asks students to explore their own values and positionalities in ways that invite an ethnographic approach. One student wrote:

Ecological justice is more personally interesting for me [than social justice] due to my ecologically diverse and rich upbringing in the northern area of California in the county of Humboldt. In Humboldt County there are many beautiful resources such as Redwood trees, rivers, and beaches that are protected by the local government from destruction by the local and visiting population. I have come to appreciate the local ecological resources for their esthetic values as well as their usefulness. For example, in high school me (sic) and some friends went camping in the wilderness and survived only on local resources such as fish and berries for three days. This was a great experience for learning some of the many values that a healthy ecology brings with it.

Another student wrote in response to the same prompt:

I was born in a ranch in Mexico where there was no access to clean water and no proper sewage. Education at that time for me and all of the children was poor. Utilities for school were minimal; I only had a pencil and a plastic bag as a backpack with a notebook in it. When I was nine my dad got us paper to come to the United States. For me my life was about to change, but for the children whose parents were unable to apply due to capital were left behind in a world where they were going to struggle for their rest of their lives. I had arrived to this country with little knowledge and realized how much stuff was out there that I didn't know it existed. My dad works in the fields not by choice but by necessity and my mother in a cannery standing next to a belt just separating products for eight hours. Here I grew up in the ghetto because that was what my parents could afford. Obviously my life here was a lot better than what it used to be when I was back in Mexico. Later on in life I realized that here people also struggle but in a different way. Here

people experience inequality and that's one of the things you constantly hear a lot when you live in poor communities.

The first student worked with learning-disabled adults through Return of the Natives Restoration Education Project (RON), a social-justice-focused community restoration organization that involves diverse communities in the restoration of degraded open space within and adjacent to urban areas. The second student worked with Latino and Latina community organizers and farmworkers through the United Farm Workers. That students with such different value priorities and backgrounds working with such different community partners would interact with course assignments and student learning outcomes in very different ways is not surprising. For example, this first assignment on positionality was designed to address, in part, outcome 1b, “demonstrate critical analysis of their own assumptions, values, and stereotypes, and evaluate the relative privilege and marginalization of their identities.” While the first student’s response emphasizes the personal values component of the outcome, the second student’s response emphasizes the social privilege and marginalization components in ways that more closely align with the general intent of the outcome. Additionally, the first student, who worked with learning-disabled adults may be less likely to connect his service-learning experience with his own racial and ethnic identities. In contrast, the second student, who worked primarily with Latino farmworkers, may be less likely to question his own privileges with regard to cognitive abilities. Both contexts involve social privilege and marginalization, but in different ways.

Helping diverse students working with diverse community partners meet the university-wide student learning outcomes highlights pedagogical challenges and solutions not necessarily surfacing when reviewing the quantitative data alone. Using an ethnographic sensibility to better contextualize quantitative results enhances analysis of assessment data. For example, outcome 1b, “demonstrate critical analysis of their own assumptions, values, and stereotypes, and evaluate the relative privilege and marginalization of their identities,” stands out because a high proportion of student work exceeded minimum expectations (20%) and an even higher proportion of student work fell below minimum expectations (40%). One hypothesis explaining why this distribution was observed rather than the more bell-shaped distributions observed for most of the other student outcomes is that the course did not do a good job teaching to these outcomes. Consequently, as suggested by the quotations above, students may have been relying on prior experience and knowledge

rather than new learning. The same distribution was observed for outcome 1a, “define, describe, analyze and integrate the concepts of individual social and cultural group identities and the concepts of social privilege and marginalization,” which serves as a foundation for outcome 1b. These quantitative results combined with an ethnographic sensibility have the potential to suggest ways to better teach to these student learning outcomes so student performance is less dependent on prior experience. For example, the following semester new readings (Bennett, 1998; Jurin, Roush, & Danter, 2010) were added that more explicitly defined and contextualized complex terms like stereotypes, additional examples of social privilege and marginalization were added, and these concepts were revisited repeatedly throughout the semester to help students better contextualize social privilege and marginalization in their own and their classmates’ complex lives and experiences.

A better understanding of students’ personal histories, experiences, and values can help identify specific examples that better contextualize abstract concepts for students. For example, the following semester these examples were incorporated into the course: ways that social privilege creates opportunities for one to care about and learn how to protect the environment while also making it harder to see ways that actions intended to protect the environment can negatively impact marginalized communities (e.g., promoting food-based biofuels that drive up food prices and create food insecurity for low-income communities); ways that social marginalization creates opportunities for one to care about and learn how to promote social justice, while at the same time fostering negative stereotypes of environmentalists that alienate potential allies [e.g., Allen, Daro, and Holland’s (2007) ethnographic study of inter-racial environmental activism]; and successful movements that integrate environmental and social justice goals [e.g., Wangari Maathai’s (2006) Green Belt Movement and Pulido and Pena’s (1998) analysis of the United Farm Workers’ Organizing Committee’s early pesticide campaign].

### *A Social Approach to Faculty Learning*

Cooks, Scharrer, and Paredes (2004) define a “social approach to community service learning” as learning that emerges in the context of relationships and communication with others. Their theoretical framework for this approach, grounded in social constructionism, critical pedagogy, and community service learning, provides “a foundation for raising questions that place communication as central to learning and situate CSL [community service learning] projects in their social, political, and moral context” (p. 53). A social approach to service-learning

views learning “not simply as individual activity but as a communicative process...which cannot be separated from the experience of its occurrence” (p. 44) and assumes that “we can and should use interaction as the basis for how people make meaning of their world, and thus learn from it” (p. 47). While Cooks, Scharrer and Paredes’ theoretical framework focuses on *student* learning stemming from their interactions with other students, community members, and the course instructor, the approach described in this paper applies this framework to *faculty* learning stemming from their interactions with other service-learning faculty. This extension is not beyond the scope of Cooks, Scharrer, and Paredes’ theoretical framework, as they note, “we must also account for the ever-shifting social, relational, and cultural meanings which construct *our own* (as *pedagogues, practitioners, and scholars*), our students’, and our communities’ frames for making meaning of education and the educational process” [italics added] (pg. 44).

Instructor positionalities are central to teaching as highlighted by hooks (1994) in her inter-racial, inter-gender dialogue with colleague Ron Scapp, and also by Takacs (2003) in his discussion of his positionality in the context of his teaching. Instructor positionality can be particularly important in the context of a service-learning course, as this study revealed. I am a White male and my colleague is an Asian-American female. Having engaged in many diversity trainings, I have an awareness of social privileges associated with my race, sexual orientation, and gender, yet understanding how my social identities influence my teaching is an ongoing effort that collaborative assessment of student work promotes. For example, when discussing student work, my colleague asked if I shared my personal social identity with students, something she shares with her students to model what she wants them to do and out of a sense of reciprocity (i.e., doing what she asks her students to do). I explained that I do not do this because of the power I hold as the assigner of grades. My concern is that the more I explicitly reveal about myself and my opinions, the more likely students will feed back what they believe I want to hear or uncritically adopt my views rather than developing their own. hooks (2004) raises a similar and paradoxical concern when she describes herself as “dictating that [her students] engage in a liberatory practice, so they complied” (p. 147). Further, I try to remove myself from the center of the classroom so that students learn more from their peers than from me. My efforts to diminish my influence are connected to my awareness of my privileged social identities and how they might influence how students consciously or unconsciously respond to me. Yet the merits of my colleague’s approach are significant, and I continually question my own approach. Both approaches undoubt-

edly have different impacts on the classroom and student learning, and questioning these approaches opens opportunities to study the impacts of instructor self-disclosures on student learning.

My colleague and I also differed with regard to prior experience teaching service-learning which likely influenced our assessments of student work. At the time of this study I had been teaching a single service-learning course for just 5 years while my colleague had 11 years of experience not only teaching service-learning courses, but also serving as the coordinator of the University’s lower-division service-learning faculty and courses. Although my colleague and I generally agreed in our overall ranking of student performance, our expectations of student performance differed significantly. My assessments of student performance were lower for all student learning outcomes individually, and significantly lower for five of those outcomes as well as for overall student performance (see Table 1). However, during our initial norming discussions, the reverse was true for many of the student learning outcomes: I generally assessed student performance higher. This was particularly true for outcome 1a, “define, describe, analyze and integrate the concepts of individual social and cultural group identities and the concepts of social privilege and marginalization,” and outcome 1b, “demonstrate critical analysis of their own assumptions, values, and stereotypes, and evaluate the relative privilege and marginalization of their identities.” That is, my colleague’s expectations for student performance on these outcomes were initially higher than mine. As a relative newcomer to service-learning struggling to teach to the university-wide outcomes, I am continually in search of strategies for teaching concepts and skills that I understand on an intuitive level. In other words, understanding concepts is different from knowing how to effectively teach those concepts. Additionally, as a White male with academic training in “value-free” science, my personal and academic understanding of social privilege and marginalization is less developed than many of my more experienced service-learning colleagues, and particularly colleagues of color who have been cognizant of and studying social inequities for a longer period of time. These factors undoubtedly influenced my expectations for student work and may be one reason why in the norming process my colleague assessed student work lower than I did for these outcomes. Then, when scoring the remaining 15 students, I scored student work lower, perhaps overcompensating for what I realized might be overly lenient initial expectations. At the same time, as my colleague learned more about my course and how I interpreted and contextualized the student learning outcomes, her understanding of student work shifted as well, leading her to raise her

assessments.

A narrow implementation of collaborative assessment views the differences illustrated above as problems to overcome stemming from the normative assumption that faculty should all have the same expectations. In contrast, in the context of a social approach to faculty learning, such differences are expected and welcome opportunities because they prompt conversations that facilitate collaborative faculty learning. That is, faculty learning is more likely to occur when the goal of dialogue is to understand rather than resolve difference. This is not to deny that resolving difference is a valuable goal. The point is that resolving difference need not be the primary goal; sometimes it may not even be a desirable goal.

### *Engaging Faculty*

An overarching characteristic of this three-part framework is its accessibility to faculty who may lack experience and disciplinary training in quantitative and qualitative outcomes-based assessment of student performance. The accessible characteristics include a manageable number of student learning outcomes, an assessment rubric with a limited and general set of criteria and standards, and an easily interpreted quantitative analysis. More elaborate and finely delineated student learning outcomes than the University-wide student outcomes used for this study have been published in the literature (e.g., Giles & Eyler, 1999; Polin & Keene, 2010). Further, the rubric used for this study is less detailed than published rubrics such as that of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Rhodes, 2010) and other published service-learning rubrics (e.g., Ash, Clayton, & Akinson, 2005). Additionally, the quantitative analysis is less precise and sophisticated than typically used by those with disciplinary expertise in assessing student learning (e.g., American Educational Research Association, 1999). These limitations, however, must be weighed against advantages that come from the approach's accessibility to faculty who lack disciplinary training in outcomes-based assessment of student learning which, in turn, makes it more likely more faculty will engage in and learn from this kind of work.

Driscoll and Wood (2007) present common faculty concerns about outcomes-based assessment: "It's inflexible, mechanistic, and reductionistic. It privileges lower-order, measurable knowledge and skills. It is unresponsive to multiple intelligences and diverse learning styles" (p. 8). These are real obstacles, but not insurmountable. Assessment is not inflexible if student learning outcomes are collaboratively developed and applied to student work with the understanding that student learning outcomes are open to interpretation and revision. For example, outcome 2a,

"articulate the relationship between individual, group, community and societal well-being," prompted discussions about the meaning of the words "relationship" and "well-being" in the context of this outcome, how they might be interpreted in different but equally legitimate ways, and what kinds of evidence could be used to assess whether students were meeting this outcome. We also questioned whether additional student learning outcomes might be missing or should be more explicit. For instance, should engendering feelings of empowerment, efficacy, and hope be an explicit outcome? Further, the student learning outcomes are written in ways that emphasize analytical skills more than feelings, raising the question of whether student learning outcomes should include the ability to acknowledge and communicate feelings and respond appropriately to feelings expressed by classmates and individuals at their service-learning sites (O'Brien, 2006; Shapiro, 2012b). Such questions can be raised with the University's service-learning faculty and potentially lead to the revision of the University-wide service-learning student outcomes. While stable because the University has officially adopted those outcomes, they are nevertheless open to interpretation and revision.

Incorporating ethnographic sensibility can prevent assessment from feeling mechanistic, reductionistic, and unresponsive to multiple intelligences and diverse learning styles. The explicit incorporation of students' past and current personal experiences and stories prevents assessment from feeling mechanistic and draws attention to multiple intelligences and diverse learning styles. An ethnographic sensibility also complements Cooks, Scharrer, and Paredes' (2004) social approach to student learning, as developed in their paper, such that "the depth and richness of the experience of CSL [does not] get lost in a focus on outcomes" (Cooks & Scharrer, 2006, p. 53).

The issue of reductionism is more complex. All of the student learning outcomes used for this study have multiple and individually complex components, which is why "comprehensiveness" was used as one of the assessment criteria. This, in turn, raises a challenging question: Should student work be assessed at "meeting minimum expectations" if it does not explicitly address every component of the outcome? If yes, then assessment could become overly reductionistic. If no, then assessment could become overly imprecise.

### *Limitations*

There are several limitations to this study's approach and framework beyond those associated with using less sophisticated quantitative and qualitative analyses already mentioned. First, the exclusive use of embedded student work makes it difficult to distinguish between what students actually believe

from what students think their instructors want them to believe. This limitation could be addressed through a more rigorous application of Polin and Keene's (2010) ethnographic approach and by considering additional forms of evidence other than embedded written work. For example, exit interviews or focus groups facilitated by an independent party could ask students to comment on what they learned in the course. Second, this study assessed student performance, not student learning. Because assignments were not structured for detecting changes in student attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge over the course of the semester, this study was not able to distinguish what knowledge and skills students had before entering the course from what students learned from the course and their service-learning experiences. This limitation could be addressed by assessing a sequence of assignments designed to detect changes in student performance. For example, Ash, Clayton, and Atkinson (2005) assessed a series of reflection drafts. Additionally, Waterman (2003) suggests various pre-tests that would allow one to assess diverse forms of learning. Third, because the course instructor was involved in the assessment of student work, this study does not present an independent assessment of student performance. Had service-learning faculty other than the course instructor assessed student work, results and insights may have been different, as Cooks, Scharrer, and Paredes' (2004) social approach to learning might predict. However, results and insights might not necessarily have been better, just different. Finally, this study did not explicitly and systematically incorporate an ethnographic sensibility at the start. Rather, the importance of applying an ethnographic sensibility emerged during the study. A stronger application of this approach would incorporate ethnographic sensibility in a more systematic manner, for example, by following Blythe, Allen, and Powell's (2008) "Collaborative Assessment Process" for assessing student work. This method focuses on student responses to open-ended assignments and emphasizes students' strengths and areas for improvement on an individual basis.

### Conclusion

In describing the challenges of using research to improve service-learning practice, Billig (2003, p. x) notes that on one hand, "too often results are published using sophisticated research jargon that is not easily assessed or decoded by practitioners," while on the other hand, "[p]ractioners sometimes do not see the need for research because they are 'true believers' and are concerned that research will undermine their ability to do their work." The assessment approach and framework presented in this paper can help bridge this gap by engaging more faculty in system-

atic outcomes-based service-learning assessment and study. While some researchers may legitimately view the assessment methods used for this study as imprecise, for many service-learning practitioners, and particularly those with limited experience and expertise in outcomes-based assessment, engaging collaboratively in such work can produce valuable insights. This, in turn, can generate questions for researchers to investigate with greater precision. At the same time, as more faculty become familiar with outcomes-based assessment, they will begin to implement more precise assessment techniques, for example, by refining student learning outcomes rubrics. Further, although this paper describes the study of a single course by a faculty dyad, larger faculty groups can use this approach to assess student work randomly sampled from multiple courses as has been done for other general education requirements at the University (Driscoll & Wood, 2007) and elsewhere (Bresciani, 2007). Results can then be shared broadly with service-learning faculty for the purposes of building a community of service-learning instructors, promoting curricular coherence, identifying best practices, improving courses and student learning, and, ultimately, promoting a more just society.

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## Appendix

This appendix provides a protocol for implementing the assessment approach and framework developed in this paper.

1. **Assessment scope.** Determine what course or university-wide outcome or outcomes to assess.
2. **Body of student work.** Determine the body of student work to assess. Options can include a single assignment from a single student, a set of assignments from a single student, a single assignment from all students in a class, a set of assignments from all students in a class, a single assignment from a random sampling of students in different classes, and/or a set of assignments from a random sampling of students in different classes.
3. **Decouple assessment from instruction.** Instruct evaluators that their assessments should not be influenced by the effectiveness of the instruction a student might have received. Instead, assessments are to be based on course or university-wide expectations of student work.
4. **Quantitative assessment.** Introduce evaluators to the six-level assessment rubric.
5. **Qualitative assessment.** Introduce the evaluators to the concept of ethnographic sensibility and instruct them to highlight passages from each student's work used to determine scores for individual outcomes as well as passages demonstrating important student learning not explicitly addressed by the learning outcomes.
6. **Social approach to faculty learning.** Introduce the evaluators to the concept of a social approach to faculty learning and the idea that differences in how they interpret outcomes and assess student work are opportunities for faculty learning rather than problems to avoid.
7. **Assess first sample of student work.** Read a sample of work produced by a student who received an average grade on the assignment and have all evaluators independently assess the work quantitatively and qualitatively, using an ethnographic sensibility. When finished, evaluators take turns sharing their quantitative and qualitative assessments. At this stage, evaluators should just listen to each other and ask questions to understand without comparing, contrasting, or challenging perspectives.
8. **Norm outcome interpretation.** After all evaluators have shared their assessments, identify similarities and differences in how each interpreted the outcomes and explore any differences. At this stage it is important to identify alternative faculty interpretations of the outcomes and consider how those might reflect alternative student interpretations of the outcomes. Each group aims to come to a consensus about what interpretation(s) to use to assess subsequent student work.
9. **Norm expectations.** Evaluators share their rationale for their level of assessment with the understanding that differences are opportunities for faculty learning and not necessarily problems to be resolved. Evaluators then work toward a consensus about what constitutes minimum expectations with regard to depth, detail, and comprehensiveness. Additional criteria can be added as needed.
10. **Assess second sample of student work.** Repeat steps 7 – 9 for a sample of work produced by a student who received an above average grade on the same assignment or a different assignment designed to address the same outcome(s).
11. **Assessment.** Assess the remaining body of student work as above.